

The construction of an online community through advertisements:  
the case of the *Tiny Meat Gang* podcast

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## **Abstract**

Community construction in an online setting has been researched to some extent before, using discourse analysis, and this thesis takes inspiration from the previous studies conducted in this field. Advertising has developed in modern era, with advertisers moving increasingly to social media and using different ways to advertise, and podcasting has offered a good medium for marketing. This thesis provides a new research medium, as the advertisements present in social media have not previously been examined as a way to construct a community, connecting advertising to community construction.

This thesis examines how the in-podcast advertisements of the *Tiny Meat Gang* (TMG) podcast construct the community of its listeners. This is done using discourse analysis, utilizing Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019) as the guideline for the discourse analytic examination of the data. The concepts of *authenticity* and *sense of community* (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) are applied in the analysis. Different studies on constructing communities as well as advertising and authenticity in media are also consulted in the process.

The data for the thesis was collected from episodes 161-172 of the freely available episodes of the TMG podcast, constructing a corpus of 38 advertisements of 19 different brands. In addition to this every episode had a sign-on and sign-off advertisement, promoting the podcast's Patreon account. The advertisements were transcribed, focusing on the level of word choices.

The results indicate that the advertisements in this podcast construct the community, some of this in purpose but otherwise it might be accidental. The data shows certain reoccurring elements in the advertisements, in terms of community construction. Although this thesis has certain limitations, it offers a lot of interesting findings. This field of researching community construction in connection to modern advertising offers a great deal of research possibilities for the future.

## Tiivistelmä

Yhteisön luomista internetissä on tutkittu jonkin verran, käyttäen diskurssianalyysia, ja tämä tutkielma ammentaaakin inspiraatiota aihepiiriin aiemmista tutkimuksista. Mainostaminen on myös kehittynyt modernina aikana ja siirtynyt enenevässä määrin sosiaaliseen mediaan ja käyttäen erilaisia mainostamisen tapoja. Podcastit ovat antaneet mainostajille hyvän vaihtoehdon mainostaa tuotteitaan. Tämä tutkielma tarjoaa uuden tutkimussuunnan, sillä mainoksia ei ole ennen tutkittu yhteisön rakentamisen keinoina.

Tämä tutkielma tutkii sitä, miten *Tiny Meat Gang* (TMG) -podcast rakentaa podcastin kuuntelijoiden yhteisöä siinä esiintyvissä mainoksissa. Tämä tehdään diskurssianalyysin avulla, käyttäen Pietikäistä ja Mäntystä (2019) ohjenuorana analyysissä. *Autenttisuuden* sekä *yhteisöllisyyden tunteen* (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) määritelmiä hyödynnetään myös analyysia tehdessä. Erilaisia tutkimuksia yhteisön rakentamisesta käytetään myös hyödyksi analyysissä, kuten myös tutkimuksia markkinoinnista, sekä autenttisuudesta mediassa.

Tutkielman aineisto sisältää TMG-podcastin ilmaisten jaksojen 161–172 mainokset, joita on yhteensä 38. Näiden mainosten lisäksi jokaisessa tutkitussa jaksossa oli podcastin oman *Patreon*-tilin mainos jakson alussa sekä lopussa. Mainokset litteroitiin, keskittyen tutkielman kannalta tärkeisiin elementteihin, kuten sanavalintoihin.

Tulokset osoittavat sen, että podcastissa esiintyvät mainokset rakentavat yhteisöä, osa tarkoituksella, mutta osa saattaa tehdä tätä tahattomasti. Aineistosta paljastuu joitain toistuvia elementtejä, jotka rakentavat yhteisöä. Vaikka tällä tutkielmalla on tiettyjä rajoitteita, voidaan tuloksia pitää mielenkiintoisina. Yhteisön rakentuminen ja sen liittyminen moderniin mainostamiseen tarjoaa paljon mahdollisuuksia tutkimuksille tulevaisuudessa.

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## 1. Introduction

Podcasts are gaining in popularity, especially among younger people (Novaceanu, 2020). Podcast as a genre of media has allowed especially comedians to express themselves more freely, and different comedy podcasts have gained a significant following, partly because of the format allowing natural and casual form of discussion, creating a more “authentic” output than TV or radio (Meserko, 2015; Symons, 2017). Since increasing number of people consume podcasts and are frequent users of social media, brands have been able to capitalize this advertising environment, sponsoring variety of podcasts and using them for marketing (Haygood, 2007).

Different podcasts, similar to other forms of entertainment, can create their own niche audience (Symons, 2017). This audience can be considered as an online community, especially during the time of social media. Online communities, like traditional communities, form in certain environments, around certain people (Bird, 1999). Certain linguistic elements in discourse can increase the sense of community and thus construct these communities.

This thesis investigates the comedy podcast *Tiny Meat Gang (TMG)* and aims to find out how the discourse in the podcast advertisements construct the online community of its audience. There has been some research on advertising in podcasting and the construction of an online community, for instance Kemppainen (2018) and Martinviita (2017), have studied the construction of communities in online setting in their theses. These elements of advertising and community construction have not been combined in the same study. That in mind, this thesis aims to fill the gap of research and contribute to previous research on this topic.

Even though some research has been conducted relating to constructing an online community, this thesis differs from these by the fact that it focuses on advertisements of a podcast and also discusses the concept of authenticity and its connection to community construction. The personal interest of mine in the podcast in question provided motivation to conduct research related to the podcast. Moreover, personal interest in podcasting and marketing, as well as the personal comedy style of TMG podcast and the advertisements in the podcast, were motivation to conduct thesis on this topic.

The framework of this thesis is discourse analysis, and Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019) will be utilized as a guideline in the research process and previous research about constructing communities will be consulted. The concept of authenticity, and especially the concept’s connection to community

construction. The main research question is: how does the TMG podcast construct their audience as an online community with the discourse in their in-podcast advertisements?

In this particular thesis the concepts of podcasts and TMG podcast are introduced first, and after this the analytical framework of the thesis, discourse approach to constructing the sense of an online community is introduced. The term of authenticity in a media environment and as a way to construct the community is discussed as well as the role of discourse as a way to construct a community. Additionally the definition of sense of community is introduced to the reader. After this the data and ethical considerations are discussed, after which the data is analyzed in detail. The thesis ends with discussion and conclusion, considering the limitations of this thesis.

## 2. Podcasts

In this section podcasting as a modern media medium is discussed, as a platform and a way to advertise. The Tiny Meat Gang podcast is also presented, and some basic information is told about the podcast.

### 2.1. Definition of podcast

Podcasting has become more popular, in the midst of both makers and consumers, partly due to the increasing availability, the format has allowed a lot of podcasters to find their own niche, thus gaining their own specific following (Novaceanu 2020; Symons, 2017). In this thesis the main focus is on comedy podcasts, since the *TMG* podcast can be categorized as one. Comedy is one of the genres of podcasting, challenging the traditional forms of comedy media, some comedy podcasts using *authenticity* as a way to build an audience, a concept defined in section 3.2. (Symons, 2017).

Podcasts do not only give more freedom to the creators of podcast but also to the consumers; “Podcasts, defined as digital files containing audio or video content, allow consumers to both timeshift and place-shift their listening and viewing habits through the downloading of content onto a personal computer or a portable media player for immediate or future viewing” (Haygood, 2007, p. 518). From 2007 to this day podcasts have moved increasingly to streaming services, such as Spotify or YouTube, but the main function has remained the same, they are not time nor place dependent (Novaceanu, 2020).

The format of podcast is different from live radio shows: the consumption of them is easier for the consumer, the act of listening is not time and place dependent, it allows the consumers to narrow the media they consume to data that interest them (Novaceanu, 2020). Novaceanu (2020) also notes that younger audience has transformed from radio to podcasting, partly because of the increased freedom of choice. It can be stated that one of the main advantages of the podcast as a genre is the authenticity and freedom it provides to the creators and the audience. Furthermore, it also allows the consumers to choose a distinctly themed podcast to listen to. In the following section the *TMG* podcast is introduced.

## **2.2. Tiny Meat Gang**

The duo hosting the Tiny Meat Gang podcast is known as the *Tiny Meat Gang (TMG)*, consisting of Cody Kolodziejzyk (better known as Cody Ko) and Noel Miller (YouTube, n.d.). In an interview conducted by Ward in 2019 Cody says that the duo met by chance, working in the same software company, both having their own YouTube channels. After becoming better acquainted and figuring out a good chemistry between them, they eventually formed the *Tiny Meat Gang* (Ward, 2019). The popularity the duo has musical aspirations as recording artists and host the popular TMG podcast, and even touring as a duo doing shows that mix stand-up, the duo's personal commentary style and answering fans questions (Ward, 2019). In the Ward (2019) interview Cody told how the podcast evolved after the duo did comedy YouTube-videos together, receiving popularity and positive feedback.

The podcast publishes two approximately 1-hour episodes every week: one free episode on YouTube and other and one episode on their Patreon website account where individuals can subscribe to creators for a certain fee. Different subscriptions include different amount of content. In May 2021 according to Patreon (n.d.), the TMG Patreon account has approximately 19,000 members, who are referred to as "patrons", and according to YouTube (n.d.) the duo's YouTube channel has approximately 1 million subscribers. Even though the podcast can be described as a comedy podcast it also has some serious discussion and the topics vary from episode to episode, often focusing relevant topics in social media at that time.

## **2.3. Advertising in podcasts**

Similar to other media platforms, podcasts can be utilized for marketing purposes. Advertisements in general as a genre of discourse is difficult to define exactly, but the main purpose of advertisements is to persuade consumers, and advertisements often have features from other genres of discourse (Cook, 2001). Cook (2001) notes that the genre of advertising has developed throughout the years, and it is moving increasingly to online platforms.

As stated earlier, podcasts often have a more niche audience compared to TV or radio. This can be considered as one of the distinct advantages of podcasts, also in terms of advertising; the marketing

can be directed to a certain audience of a certain podcast and the products can be chosen to match the themes and topics of the podcast (Haygood, 2007). Haygood (2007) also mentions that podcasts have gained increasing attention from brands in terms of marketing purposes, since advertisers can use a podcast with a target audience related to their products, and thus target an audience of their interest. Even though this article is relatively old, it applies in terms of this study, since it is shown that most of the sponsors examined in this thesis match the demographic audience of TMG.

Podcasts have different types of advertisements, Nguyen et al. (2010) categorize the different types of advertisements present in a podcast as *sign-on* and *sign-off advertisements* that are at the beginning and at the end of the podcasts, respectively. Nguyen et al. (2010) state that sign-on advertisements are often some kinds of advertisements from the publishers of the podcasts or the brands sponsoring the podcast, and sign-off advertisements can be used to promote the podcast, some brand or it can be just a full stop while *service advertisements* are often used to promote the sponsor brands of the podcast and are positioned in the middle of the podcast episodes (p. 3.). It should also be noted that podcasts often refer to the advertisers as sponsors and implicate some type of gratitude towards them, which can create a more positive response to the advertisement from the listeners (Haygood, 2007). Overall, it can be stated that advertisers and brands can utilize podcasts for marketing purposes, by this they have an opportunity to target their audience of interest.

### **3. Discourse approach to constructing the sense of an online community**

This section presents the important analytic concepts of this thesis, all related to the discourse approach to constructing the sense of an online community. 3.1. focuses on how the community construction and how it is done via discourse, while 3.2. introduces and discusses the concept of authenticity.

#### **3.1. Community construction using discourse**

*Communities* can be formed in variety of settings, locally or online; Bird (1999) notes the following about communities: “Internet communities, like place-based communities, do not just happen. They develop in response to particular circumstances and to the needs of a particular set of individuals.” (p. 62.). These online communities can be built upon the following of certain brands or fan bases like the audience of the TMG podcast, becoming emotionally attached to the brand, a phenomenon called brand loyalty (Obiegbo et al., 2019). Brands and different organizations use variety of ways to create a bond with the consumer. Latimer and Schembri (2015) discuss how brands and organizations can create a loyal online following, in which the people are emotionally attached to the brand. They continue that these brand communities can be created online or offline, with the interaction between the brand and the community being an important aspect.

Colombo and Senatore (2005) identify that the discourse in a certain community strengthens the community identity and creates the feeling of belonging to the members. Discourse approach to community construction focuses on the discourse of the community. These discourses are dependent on the situation they are used in, they vary depending on the social situation and culture, different social and cultural groups often use different discourses, and because of this discourse analysis is closely connected to ethnography (Taylor, 2013). Taylor (2013) also notes how these groups often influence the concept of one’s identity, “The group might also share discourses as language practices, such as ways of speaking, which mark them as members, to each other and outsiders.” (p. 21). For these reasons, discourse approach can be applied to the research of community construction, as it examines the discourse in the context of the social setting it is used. No matter whether discussing local or online communities, the creation of feeling of belonging or the sense of community is an essential factor in constructing those communities, and thus is an important notion for this thesis. The concept of *sense of community* is discussed in the following paragraph.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined that the *sense of community* is constructed of four elements: *membership, influence, integration of fulfillment and needs, and shared emotional connection* (p. 9). Membership is created by universal boundaries and system of symbols and communication, which create emotional safety for the members, creating an emotional connection and the feeling of belonging, and the concept of influence can be described as the feeling of that the members can have an influence on the community and vice versa (McMillan & Chavis. 1986, p. 15). The integration of fulfillment and needs is created by the satisfaction of the needs of the members, and shared emotional connection is created for example by the shared history or spiritual connection of the community and the members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, pp. 14-16). This theory of sense of community has been applied to different online communities and discourse, for instance by Martinviita (2017), connected the sense of community and other theories about constructing communities to discourse analysis in an online setting, or Kemppainen (2018) who in their thesis examined the creation of the sense of community by YouTuber BlogiLates, from discursive perspective.

### **3.2. Authenticity**

Podcasting has allowed entertainers to express themselves more freely; for example, comedians who can be considered outsiders in the traditional comedy industry have been able to find their medium in podcasting (Symons, 2017). Symons (2017) also mentions that the partly scripted but partly natural format of the podcast increases the feeling of authenticity to the listener. Both Meserko (2015) and Symons (2017) discuss authenticity as a complex concept to define, but it can be described as being “real” and in media, it can be simply something outside of the so-called mainstream. Although the concept of authenticity is built around the notion of being real and authentic, the authenticity is partly altered for entertainment purposes in the podcast setting, thus in this case being partly real and partly artificial (Meserko, 2015; Symons, 2017). Authenticity can also be viewed as a way to build the online community of viewers or listeners in media. García-Rapp (2017) states that an online community, for example in the YouTube beauty community, can be built upon the authenticity of the YouTuber or in this case the podcast, and this authenticity sets them apart from TV or movies.

Symons (2017) and Meserko (2015) discuss how the format of podcast does not only allow the comedians to joke and make comedy on their own terms, but it also allows them to talk about the intimate things happening in their lives. Meserko (2015) introduces the concept of *authentic selfhood* and how comedian Marc Maron’s *WTF* podcast has allowed the host and the guests to discuss very

personal things, something they might have not been able to discuss in media before. Symons (2017) also concludes that the free format of podcasting has emerged as a challenge for the traditional media platforms, partly because of the concept of authenticity and the natural form of the discussion. It can be argued that the concept of authenticity is present in the TMG podcast. Even though they do not regularly discuss particularly painful topics, the discussion in the podcast and in the advertisements between the two hosts can be described as being real or natural. This sort of discussion and the authenticity in the humor is one of the reasons the listeners listen to the podcast.

Authenticity can also be used for marketing purposes, and brands might try to build *brand authenticity*, partially by using social media influencers as a tool to do so (Yang et al., 2021). Yang et al. (2021) also discuss how social media influencers can often be considered as being more real and authentic than other celebrities, thus seem more reliable to the public, in terms of advertising: it is proven that the more authentic social media influencers advertise a brand, it adds to the brand's authenticity as well. Authenticity is something that can create and maintain an audience and thus a community, and this authentic image can be utilized for marketing purposes by different brands.

## 4. Data and methods

In this section the data used in this thesis is introduced, including reasons and ways of collecting and using it and the ethical considerations involved. After that discourse analysis as a method of analysis is described.

### 4.1. Data

The data of this thesis are the in-podcast advertisements of the TMG podcast, from the episodes 161-172 of the free episodes. These episodes were published between Nov 13, 2020 - Jan 29, 2021. These episodes were the 12 newest episodes at the time of data collection. In these 12 episodes, there were 38 service advertisements and 19 different brands in total. The brands in question include different delivery services, health and hygiene related products, some of which aimed to male audience. All the episodes, advertisements and the duration of each advertisement can be found in Appendix.

All of these advertisements have been individually recorded for the episode. The hosts Cody and Noel are speaking in all of these, while parts of the advertisements are scripted by the sponsors. Only exception to this is their self-advertisement of their Patreon at the beginning of each episode, this short speech is always the same. The podcast makes a short reference to the Patreon episode right at the end of each episode, but it is much more subtle and not in the form of a structured advertisement. These are also considered in the analysis.

All of the advertisements were transcribed following Bucholtz (2000) and focusing on word choices. Examples in the thesis will be revised and polished, focusing on the important parts in terms of this research. Important parts in terms of thesis are word choices that construct the community. The main focus of this thesis is to analyze the different choices of words and not consider gestures or paralanguage so these aspects will not be present in the transcriptions, this decision is based on the fact that according to Bucholtz (2000), during the transcription process it is important to keep the aim of the study in mind. In the examples the most important parts in terms of this thesis were highlighted in order to ease the reading of the analysis.

## 4.2. Discourse analysis

In order to examine community construction via advertisements this thesis utilizes discourse analysis as a method of analysis. Discourse analysis is a linguistic approach that examines discourse. Discourse is a linguistic phenomenon that can be described as the connection between form and function, and it is dependent on the social framework it is happening in (Renkema & Schubert, 2018). Taylor (2013, p. 2) defines that in discourse analysis, the analysis does not only examine the speech or the linguistic features of the text or other forms of language, but the main focus is also to include the full social framework of the speech action, the meaning and reasoning for words and phrases is reliant on the context they are presented in.

Discourse analysis acknowledges that discourses happen all the time in our lives and environments, they can be in textual or speech form, and these discourses can be categorized into different genres (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). Podcasts, comedy podcasts and advertisements can also be considered as one of the genres. The features of a certain genre affect the expectations of the person reading a text from a certain genre (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). Taylor (2013) also states that in discourse analysis the data can be gathered by the researcher or previously recorded data and material can be used. It should also be acknowledged that discourse analysis only examines the data at hand at the time qualitatively and does not try to make universal assumption from it (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). Taking these factors into account, and the genre of the podcast, this approach is appropriate for analyzing the data in this thesis and the phenomenon of constructing the community.

Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019) discuss the terms of intertextuality, indexicality and polyphony in terms of discourse analysis. Polyphony means that texts have multiple voices in them, not just the speaker's or the authors; intertextuality is when a text is used within a text, with some kind meaning; and indexicality in intertextuality points to the earlier context of the reference, requiring a certain level of knowledge of the context the reference has been used before in order to fully understand it (pp. 287-290). All of these terms support the analysis of how the language of these advertisements construct the community, since the advertisements use a lot of these, and using these discursive elements construct the community.

### **4.3. Ethical considerations**

Using YouTube-videos as data and in this case the TMG podcast, since the data is mainly collected from the YouTube-episodes, requires some ethical consideration. Hu (2019) discusses the ethical aspects to consider when using YouTube videos as research data. Even if they are legally available for academic research and might fall under the term of “fair use”, it might not be ethical to use them without consent (Hu, 2019).

Hu (2019) also notes that it is important to estimate the sensitivity of the data and the subjects. In this case the subjects of this thesis, the hosts and podcasts are very popular in social, so it should not be harmful to the subjects to analyze this data. They are also very aware that this podcast is public, and even embrace it since it is uploaded to multiple platforms every week. The subjects have been informed about this thesis, the research questions, and the analytic framework via multiple platforms to ensure their visibility for the podcast hosts. Because of the public nature and the social status of the podcast, the usage of this data for this thesis without the written consent of the publishers of the podcast can be justified. Also considering that the topic of this thesis is not sensitive, and this thesis should not cause harm to the podcast or either one of the hosts, in this thesis the usage of social media data should not be controversial and can be justified.

## 5. Analysis

The phenomenon examined in this thesis is how the in-podcast advertisements of the TMG podcast construct the community of its listeners. The analysis is divided into three different sections: first, an overview of the different advertisements is presented, discussing the general features of these advertisements. After that the analysis focuses on the different ways the community is constructed in these advertisements, focus being especially on the concept of authenticity, and how the sense of community and the feeling of belonging are created in the examples.

### 5.1. Overview of the advertisements in the podcast

Nguyen et al.'s (2010) categorization of podcast advertisements to *sign-on*, *sign-off* and *service advertisements* is utilized in this thesis. As stated, before all of the advertisements are recorded individually for each one of the episodes, and even though the same brand re-appears, the main framework of the advertisement might be the same but there are often at least some minor differences in the delivery of the advertisements. The general tone of these advertisements is partly a reflection of the general discussion of the podcast, authentic, natural and comedic. In the analysis only the numbers of the episodes will be used, and the hosts will be referred to as *Cody* and *Noel*.

#### 5.1.1. Sign-on advertisement

The sign-on advertisement is same for each one of the episodes, and the podcast self-advertises at the beginning of each episode examined. They advertise the Patreon site of the podcast the advertisement focuses on the availability of a weekly bonus episode and the free episode without the advertisements from their sponsors. The duration of this advertisement is 23 seconds. Transcript of this advertisement is illustrated in Example (1). Transcript conventions used: “[ ]” indicating overlap, “-“ a cut-off, “...” a considerable pause, and “(( ))” is reserved for transcriber's comments. The most important elements of the examples will be highlighted.

Example (1)

Cody: **What's up guys**, welcome to the TMG podcast, this is actually

[today's episode]

Noel: [today's episode]

Cody: today's free episode.

Noel: ah.

Cody: **But if you want the uh bonus episode** that went up today as well, you can find that on our patreon. That's **patreon.com/tinymeatgang** and uh the free episode will be ad-free as well on there so-

Noel: **and if not thanks and enjoy this one, peace.**

Cody: **peace.**

In this case Patreon offers an opportunity to also interact with the podcast and the possibility to be more part of this community and listen to exclusive content. One of the main features in the Patreon is the possibility to message the creators and in the case of TMG, it also offers the possibility to join an online community in the form of a TMG members-only discord server (Patreon, n.d.).

The delivery of this advertisement is not forced, the information is delivered in a very casual manner. They emphasize that even if the listener does not subscribe, they hopefully still enjoy the free episode. Both the beginning and ending of the advertisement are very casual, as if the hosts are talking to a friend.

### 5.1.2. Sign-off advertisement

At the end of the episodes, the hosts reference the bonus episode available in Patreon, it is not as scripted as the opening speech of the episodes about the exclusive episodes and content on Patreon. These are not structured advertisements like the other advertisements from the episodes, the self-advertising at the end is much more subtle, and they are positioned right at the end of each episode. In the 12 episodes examined, in ten there was a direct reference to the bonus episodes and in the two that did not have it, the hosts said: "see you next week". Below are some examples of the sign-off advertisements:

Example (2) E170

Cody: See **you guys** in the **bone zone**.

Example (3) E169

Cody: Alright see y'all in the **bone zone, love you!**

The term *bone zone* is frequently used by the podcast when referring to the exclusive bonus episode. This term is familiar to the active audience of the podcast and can be considered being a part of the common symbol system of the online community that the members of the community can understand. They also talk to the audience as “guys” and emphasize how they will see them there.

### 5.1.3. Service advertisements

This podcast has two to four service advertisements in each episode from sponsor brands of the podcast. Even though some of the sponsors appear several times, the advertisements are always recorded separately. The main function of these advertisements, similar to any other advertisements, is to persuade the consumers. The brands sponsoring the podcast are presumably directed to the demographic audience of the podcast: some of the brands are aimed at young males, such as *Manscaped*, *Meundies* or *ForHims*. Cody also discussed in a Ward (2019) interview how the podcast has more male than female listeners. This is one of the facts that indicate that the advertisements construct the community, the brands are chosen considering the demographic audience.

The concept of *authenticity* is a term that characterizes the discussion in the advertisements examined, even though they are partly scripted. The advertisements often have a certain structure and certain information is presented by the brand, and outside of this information, the hosts use language that constructs the community and authenticity is one of the constructing elements.

The advertisements use *polyphony*, *intertextuality*, and a lot of *indexicality* to popular culture or reoccurring topics of the podcast. Often advertisements for the same brand have some reoccurring speeches or phrases, for instance some new products of that brand, or some catchphrases for the brand, but always have some minor changes. This an example of the polyphony: in the advertisements both the brand and the podcast hosts speak. The advertisements reflect the style of the podcast, Cody and Noel often use their typical humor in them, and they are often untidy, i.e. not very edited or polished.

The structure of these advertisements is almost always the same. Right at the beginning of each one of the advertisements, the podcast hosts speak directly to the community of listeners. The hosts often

use the term “guys” or something else casual to refer to the community and might start the advertisements with a question directed to the audience. These greetings are demonstrated in the following Examples (4), (5) and (6):

Example (4) E169

Cody: **Guys**, we want to take a quick quick break to remind you that between never-ending laundry cycles and incoming emails you’ve got plenty on your to-do list. We wanna just interrupt this just to remind you you have a lot to do. **How’s that for stress ((Noel laughing)) huh?**

Example (5) E166

Noel: **Hey guys**, I know that none of you watch porn but just in case you have any friends that do, **you’ll** wanna pay attention to this.

Example (6) E169

Noel: **Ladies and gentlemen, I just wanna interrupt and you know ask you guys a question.** How often do you shop online? Because I shop online literally all the time, okay?

In Examples (4) and (5) the greeting is very casual, referring to the listeners as “guys”, creating a feeling of casual interaction between the hosts and listeners. In addition to this in Examples (4) and (5) demonstrate the overall humor of the podcast, since they make comedic remarks such as sarcastically refer that none of their listeners watch porn, assuming that some of them really do. This is one indicator of the demographic audience of the podcast. Also, the humor on tone of the podcast can be seen in example (4) in which they joke about giving the listeners additional stress in the speech. Example (6) on the other hand is a good example of the feeling of interaction created in the beginning of the podcast, the listener is asked a question, in this case about their shopping habits.

At the end of each of the service advertisements the viewers are presented with a promo code or some other form of discount they get from advertisement, two of which listed below. This creates the feeling of getting something from the podcast to the listener. This is demonstrated in Examples (7) and (8):

Example (7) E161

Cody: **For listeners of this show** calm is offering a **special limited time promotion** of 40 % off calm premium subscription at **calm.com/tmg that’s c-a-l-m.com/tmg.**

Example (8) E166

Noel: Uh so go to **hellofresh.com/80tinymeat** and use the code 80tinymeat to get 80 dollars off including free shipping, that’s **hellofresh.com/80tinymeat** and code 80tinymeat to get 80 dollars off including free shipping.

These promo codes and benefits are repeated in the advertisements multiple times in order to highlight them to the listener or viewer. The discounts such as how much is saved when using the discounts, in Example (8) it is emphasized how the offer is for the listeners of the show.

When presenting these promo codes, the duo often emphasizes the positive influence of the usage of their promo codes. By using their links and codes the listener influences the podcast in a positive way, which is a good thing for the community. This is demonstrated in Examples (9) and (10):

Example (9) E163

Cody: Make sure to use the code TMG to get 100 dollars off your first month. That's a hundred bucks and **also show support for the show as well.**

Example (10) E169

Cody: by getting it you'll be doing yourself and **supporting this podcast**...uhm you'll be doing yourself a solid is what I meant.

In both of these examples, it is emphasized that in addition that using these codes, the listeners help benefit themselves but also support the show.

Hence, the basic structure of the advertisement is: a brief greeting to the listener, an introduction of the brand and their products, and presenting some promo code or discount to the listener at the end. In the midst of this structure there are natural parts of conversation, authentic discussion between the hosts. In the next section the authenticity is discussed as a way to construct the community in these advertisements.

## 5.2. Authenticity

The advertisements use different ways to construct the online community. One way is the authentic conversation within them. As discussed in earlier research this type of authenticity has caused some comedians to gain a significant niche following (Meserko, 2015; Symons, 2017).

Authenticity can be demonstrated by being open about one's personal life, being real and natural. This show in a variety of ways in the advertisements. This can be a way to construct the community as García-Rapp (2017) discussed, as an online community can be built partly upon authenticity.

### 5.2.1. Openness about personal life

The podcast in question includes uncensored discussion between two friends, with discussion about the duo's personal life. Even though the discussion is mostly in a happy tone, they have also openly discussed therapy and mental health. The openness about one's personal life is one of the main aspects of authenticity. This is demonstrated in Example (11):

Example (11) E163

Cody: Yup, I mean **therapy seems like it's helped you a lot** and uh-

Noel: Yeah yea-

Cody: **I know that it would help me as well** and so I'm looking forward to starting it, and the bottom line is that **we all** need someone to talk to.

When authenticity in a comedy podcast is discussed, the openness of mental health and personal struggles is mentioned. Example (11) is a good example of the authenticity and "realness" of the hosts, they are open about their personal lives and possible struggles, even in the advertisements. The fact that Cody discusses openly that therapy would benefit him personally is a sign of being open about personal matters even in the advertisements.

The openness about the hosts personal lives does not only limit to discussion about the duo's mental health, but they also discuss a lot of their previous personal experiences related to the brands. After assuming the listeners of this podcast being fans of the hosts, it is no wonder that some of the advertisements use the personal experiences of Noel and Cody in their advantage to promote the brands they advertise and persuade the listener or viewer, but also construct the community. This can be seen in several advertisements, for example in Example (12):

Example (12) E171

Noel: **I've played a ton** of uh world series of poker on Facebook, **I've had** many of you know victories on Facebook. **I've sent many people packing** on Facebook, let me tell you that right now.

With this statement he does not only state that he has played the game, but he implies that he has also won using this app. In this example, Noel also uses his typical sarcastic humor when Noel implicates how he has won many people in the app and "sent them packing", which is said in a sarcastic tone. This humor and the tone are understandable to active listeners and fans of TMG podcast. This kind of self-irony and sarcasm is one of the defining features of their comedy and this podcast. This can

be defined as authenticity since the style of the discussion stays similar in the advertisements as it is in the podcast.

In addition, this is usage of positive personal experiences is present in Example (13):

Example (13) E171

Noel: **We** also used to watch a lo- a lot of **Love Island** doing that.

Cody: That's true **I did**

This also expresses the positive personal experiences of Noel and Cody related to this particular brand. In addition to this, Love Island is a series that Noel and Cody are fans of and have discussed in their podcast. This is one example of a remark in the middle of the advertisements, a remark to a something known by the online community of its fans. So, this advertisement does not only use the personal experience of the product, but they also make a reference to one of their past topics of the podcast, directed to their fanbase and audience.

All in all, the personal experience and the hosts' personal lives are present in the advertisements and can be argued as an authentic feature in these advertisements, and at the same time as they persuade the listeners, they also construct the community.

### 5.2.2. Uncensored discussion

Authenticity can be seen in the discussion about the duo's personal lives, but also in the casual tone and the untidy structure of the speeches, uncensored advertisements including some cursing, which differs from "traditional" advertisements which are very much thought out in terms of language and script. As authenticity can be described as being real and out of the so-called mainstream, the untidiness is demonstrated in these segments of profanity, which creates the feeling of authenticity to the listener. This is demonstrated in Examples (14) and (15):

Example (14) E165

Cody: ...ball deodorant which in the name speaks for itself, **your shit stinks**  
okay?

Example (15) E168

Noel: Happy New Year to **your balls!**

Cody: That's right. You can only see the top half of me right now while I'm standing, I don't have pants on and or I'm **free balling** right now.

Noel: Completely.

Cody: I only have a shirt on. And **I have no hair on my balls** thanks to manscaped and feels fantastic.

Noel: **Winnie the Pooh style?**

Both of these examples use very profound language to advertise the products. This cursing present in these advertisements can be described something outside of the so-called mainstream of advertising, and thus, authentic. This uncensored discussion also is something not to expect from a traditional advertisement but is familiar to the audience of the podcast. Again, this constructs the community. It is something familiar to the listeners of this podcast but might be shocking to people who are outsiders.

The out of mainstream advertisement discourse is demonstrated in Example (16) as Cody uses so-called *fuckboy*-voice:

Example (16) E169

Cody: **so why not change something else other than you, like your undies drawer ((fuckboy-voice)),** uh man I felt weird about saying that in a **fuckboy-voice. change your- I wanna change your undies ((fuckboy-voice))**

The usage of the term fuckboy, mostly known from social media, is very frequent in this advertisement and the term usage is in line with the theme of the podcast.

The usage of cursing and profanity is also mixed with polyphony in some of the advertisement. As stated before, the advertisements have a script and the sponsors give some frames for the advertisements, but in some of these advertisements Cody and Noel acknowledge the scripted parts and the authentic discussion of the advertisements. This is demonstrated in Example (17):

Example (17) E165

Cody: I love it, **I love this shit**, I drink it every single day. I seriously do. Uhm what is it dude, tell us. What's liquid-IV?

Noel: **They're going to be pissed** you said "**I love this shit**".

Cody: No. I do? How they can they be pissed at that? **I fucking love it.**

In this example Cody expresses his feelings towards the product very explicitly, and Noel says that the sponsors might be offended by the way he expresses his feelings. This creates the feeling of an authentic discussion and in a way being real to the community of their listener even in these advertisements, and not changing their delivery even in these sponsored parts.

The hosts also sometimes have authentic reactions to the brands and products, such as in this Example (18) of an advertisement for *Manscaped*, the hosts are surprised by the availability of a feet perfume.

Example (18) E161

Noel: **Feet perfume?**

Cody: Yeah, I guess.

Noel: **Hahah feet cologne dawg?** [tsff tsff tsff tsff] I mean we do live in the modern era.

Cody: Exactly.

Noel: I mean **toe-sucking is a genderless act.**

Cody: Oh yeah, and it's very popular.

In the same advertisement, Cody has an authentic reaction to the script and does not understand the intertextual reference to the TV-series *Game of Thrones* in Example (19).

Example (19) E161

Cody: Nice. Maybe you're on the other side of the wall and you don't know when **your next shower is?**

Noel: **It's a game of thrones- bit.**

Cody: **Oh!** No worries...

These are very authentic reactions and “slip ups” from the script of the advertisements, increasing the feeling of authenticity of these advertisements. These reactions can be considered as being real within the frames of the advertisements, emphasizing the untidiness of the advertisements and the genuine nature of the speeches. Cody and Noel are being themselves and not trying to adjust their personalities for the advertisements, which increases the feeling of authenticity.

All in all, authenticity is one of the reasons the listeners listen to this podcast, so the fact that the podcast advertisements reflect the style and authenticity of the podcast, it can be argued as a way to construct the community. The fact that the hosts are themselves in the advertisements can be seen as a way of constructing the online community of their fans.

### **5.3. The sense of community and belonging**

McMillan and Chavis (1986) presented the concept of sense of community and the factors constructing it, including: membership, influence, integration of fulfillment and needs, and shared emotional connection. Also as Schembri and Latimer (2016) stated, an emotional bond is influential when creating a connection with consumer, in this case the listener. From the standpoint of discourse, especially the common discourse or code used within a group can construct the community. All of these elements are somehow present in the advertisements examined in examples. These are discussed in detail in this section of the analysis.

The creation of an emotional bond is one of the most influential aspects of creating the sense of community, and it is present in many of the advertisements. In the Example (3) the “love you” at the end, is an act of gratitude from the hosts to the viewers which creates an emotional bond between the viewer and the podcast. As stated in earlier research, this type of an emotional bond and interaction between a brand and the members of the community is very important when building a relationship to the consumer (Obiegbu et al., 2019; Schembri & Latimer, 2016).

The advertisements have a certain structure, and they often begin with a casual greeting and the listeners are spoken to in a very casual manner and spoken to as a group. This indicates the emotional interaction and the casual feeling in the discourse between the hosts and the community. In addition to this, the terms such as ‘guys’ ‘peace’ and ‘what’s up’ as greetings in the advertisements add to the casual feeling of the discourse in these advertisements.

In some advertisements it is stated that when the listeners use these codes to benefit themselves, they also can influence this show in a positive way. As stated before, podcasts often receive compensation from the sponsor brands and that is one of the main ways to monetize podcasting. If the listeners are informed that if they use the codes presented in the advertisement the podcast benefits from it. This also creates the feeling of interaction; the listener can feel as they influence the podcast or at least feel as they will show support to them if they use the codes in the advertisements.

Membership in these advertisements is also created in a variety of ways. For example, the common code and the common discourse within the community and group. This is demonstrated by the usage of the term bone zone, or the usage of the discourse familiar in the podcast, such as cursing, or indexical links to some of the previous topics of discussion. Also, membership is emphasized in the sign-on advertisement, you can become a more valid member of the community, if you join the Patreon, you can receive extra content and thus not miss out on any content. The overall humor in the

advertisements can be considered as part of the common code for the group, the authentic and comedic style that is demonstrated in some of the examples, is something that is understood by the members of the community but might seem strange to someone who is not a part of it. This usage of intertextual or indexical links in the midst of the advertisements is something that is a reoccurring element.

Fulfillment of needs is demonstrated in each of the advertisements, all of the service advertisements provide a promo code or some other form of benefit to the listeners of this podcast. It is also often emphasized that the listeners of this podcast get the discount and benefit. Furthermore, in the advertisements for the Patreon or *bone zone* the fulfillment of needs for the listener is emphasized because of the additional podcasts available in Patreon. Because the listeners can be assumed to be fans or at least listeners of the podcast with some kind of an interest in the podcast, so the availability of additional episode can be considered as a fulfillment of needs. They might feel left out if they do not subscribe to the Patreon, or at least missing out on content.

## 6. Discussion

As previous research has indicated, community construction happens in online setting via discourse and by means of authenticity. Podcasts and comedy podcasts are gaining in popularity and have gained specific followings and fan communities that can be formed around the authenticity and natural nature of the discussion in the podcasts in contrast to traditional media (Meserko, 2015; Symons, 2017). This thesis examined how the TMG podcast constructs the online community of its listeners with the discourse of the in-podcast advertisements.

The community examined in this thesis is built around the TMG podcast and since the style of s TMG podcast can be considered quite niche, the advertisements in them can be as well. The advertisements present are for the podcast itself or some other brands. These brands often reflect the demographic audience and the style of the podcast, young people, presumably mostly males, who expect the type of unfiltered comedy the podcast has.

The advertisements present in the TMG podcast can be described as being authentic and personal in terms of style and discourse. The authentic style of podcast episodes is reflected in the advertisements and it can be argued as being one of the main functions that constructs the community of the podcast's listeners. All of the advertisements also use some discourse that increases the feeling of belonging and sense of community to the listeners. This is demonstrated in a variety of examples in the analysis section of this thesis.

The concept of authenticity is present not only in the TMG podcast but also in the in-podcast advertisements. This authenticity can be is one of the factors that constructs the online community. This construction happens mainly through the uncensored and natural discussion style of the interaction between the hosts, Cody and Noel, with some authentic reactions to the scripts they are reading, in the middle of the advertisements. Authenticity is also present in the openness about their personal experiences and lives in the advertisements, making the discussion feel more personal to the listener.

In the advertisements the community is also constructed through other means. Utilizing McMillan and Chavis (1986) and other research about constructing the sense of community and the feeling of belonging, such as using a common code, creating the feeling of influence to the listener and creating the emotional connection between the consumer and the brand. This is done through the discourse used in the advertisements and for example using very casual and friendly style to talk to the listener.

This is demonstrated in variety of ways in the advertisements, using a common code in these advertisements or emphasizing the influence and meaning of the listeners.

It can be stated that the podcast advertisements use authenticity and other linguistic phenomena to construct the community. Even though the main principle of the service advertisements is to persuade, they still construct the community at the same time with a variety of ways. The sign-on and sign-off advertisements are self-promotion of the podcast, so their main function is to construct the community. It cannot be said how much of this is planned, in terms of authenticity but it can be seen as one of the defining features of the podcast's way to advertise the sponsor brands.

## 7. Conclusion

The field of podcasting is a fairly new one, so it offers interesting phenomena for examination. This thesis uses a variety of previous research about community construction, podcasts, advertising and authenticity to use a guideline to conduct this thesis. As previous studies have shown communities can be constructed using discourse, and the sense of community and belonging can be created in variety of ways. This thesis shows that the advertisements directed to a certain online community can construct the community, with the discourse present in them.

The freedom that podcasting provides is one the most essential advantages of the platform. Podcasting, similar to YouTube, has made it possible to gain a very niche following, for example using authenticity as one of the tools to construct the community, especially when discussing comedy podcasting. Not only podcasts, but also the advertisements in them or YouTube-videos, offer a lot of interesting aspects to examine, including their differences to traditional marketing, especially the easier targeting of audience, using YouTubers or podcasters to market different brands.

The findings in this thesis implicate that the advertisements in the TMG podcast constructs the community using variety of ways. The advertisements reflect the style of the podcast and even though they are partly scripted by the sponsors and thus artificial, they still maintain the authentic, natural and casual tone of the podcast. Authenticity as a way of constructing community is not studied much, but as this thesis implicates, it can be a way of constructing a community. Therefore, it offers a lot of possibilities for future research.

All things considered, this thesis emphasized that not only the podcast discussion but also the discourse in advertisements do not simply persuade the listeners to consume the brands advertised but also construct the online community of their listeners: Hence, it can be argued how much of that is intentional and how much happens on accident. Despite this, most of the advertisements are distinctively targeted to the listeners of the podcast, which is displayed by the sponsors brands and the discourse of the advertisements. The findings are overall interesting, and in that sense add to the research previously done in the field of community construction.

This construction of an online community offers a lot of opportunities and possibilities to researchers, especially when media and advertising are changing all the time, and it could and should be researched in greater detail. This thesis has certain limitations, since it does not take the non-verbal communication in account in the analysis of community construction. The podcast is also presented

in video format and the visual aspects would also offer. This was done in order to keep the scope of this study in control.

The data used in this thesis would have provided material for a broader research, so this topic has a potential for various types of future research. Furthermore, the advertisements examined were collected from recent episodes. If older episodes would have been examined, it would have offered comparative point-of-view to the thesis, possibly providing alternative results. Overall this topic could be expanded a lot and this thesis focused especially on the concept of authenticity and its connection to the construction of the community, thus offers opportunity for future research.

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## Appendix: Episodes used as data and sponsor brands with timestamps

Episode 172 – Next Stop Gamestop <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6lMzpZCJ2w> / Sponsors: Audible (An audiobook provider) 14:45-16:19, DoorDash (A food delivery service) 30:24-31:32, Liquid IV (A sports drink) 47:09-48:33

Episode 171 – Would NELK Post This? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EI0CBJGTW0k> / Sponsors: Manscaped (Male grooming products) 12:18-13:51, World Series of Poker-app (A poker app) 31:17-32:45, ExpressVPN (VPN service) 45:58-47:04, Keeps (a product to prevent balding) 47:04-48:27

Episode 170 – I Am 100% a Cannibal [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I\\_Iu8MwCbIA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_Iu8MwCbIA) / Stichfix (An online clothing provider) 13:00-14:10, Hellofresh 28:20-29:51, Native (a deodorant brand) 38:35-39:56, Stamps.com (Posting services) 52:56-54:35

Episode 169 - Love it or Hate it [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8b\\_HM1mfhlc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8b_HM1mfhlc) / Doordash 15:24-16:36, Meundies (A men's underwear brand) 33:45-36:07, Honey (A tool to find discount codes for online stores) 48:07-50:00, Babbel (A language learning app) 50:01-51:55

Episode 168 – Becoming Joe Rogan [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDFZMUno\\_IY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDFZMUno_IY) / Manscaped 15:52-18:13, Forhims (A website for men's healthcare and hygiene) 31:06-32:46

Episode 167 – The Best of YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYh8Fe1pe6E> / World Series of Poker- app (A poker app) 14:53-16:18, Doordash 30:30-31:41, Babbel 44:42-46:05, Forhims 46:05-47:55

Episode 166 – No More Jake Paul <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVQAloW3WAc> / 3chi (Delta8 products) 17:50-19:09, ExpressVPN 31:01-33:03, Stamps.com 47:31-48:43, Hellofresh 48:44-50:02

Episode 165 – Growth on TikTok [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILGxI\\_BmV2E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILGxI_BmV2E) / Amazon music (A music streaming service) 15:31-17:45, Hellofresh 30:33-32:09, Manscaped 42:33-44:26, Liquid IV 44:27-46:20

Episode 164 – Jake Paul is a Fighter <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prkGA-Zz5p8> / Skylight frame (A digital frame) 15:58-17:37, Babbel 31:48-33:00, Doordash 54:49-56:05

Episode 163 – Buying a TikTok house /w Carrington Rodriguez

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr4YpTGE5k8> / ExpressVPN 16:03-17:57, Hawthorne (A men's fragrance brand) 30:31-31:56, Talkspace (an online mental health service provider) 45:47-47:26, Meundies 47:27-49:23

Episode 162 – We're Dating Elon Musk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj4iT85jGqY> / Honey 15:25-16:38, Hellofresh 28:49-30:42

Episode 161 – Logan Paul Got Scammed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OIwTPFeOzI> / Manscaped 15:48-18:12, Calm.com (a meditation and sleep app) 31:25-33:00, Liquid IV 45:44-48:12, Hellofresh 48:12-49:48