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Kjærbeck, Susanne; Nielsen, Niels Møller

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Communicative problems in Boeing's advertisement campaign for the combat aircraft Super Hornet

Susanne Kjærbeck & Niels Møller Nielsen
Roskilde University

This article focuses on an advertisement campaign run in Danish national newspapers promoting Boeing's combat aircraft F 18 Super Hornet. The campaign received extensive media attention due to its scale and unconventional methods. On the basis of pragmatic text analysis we describe three features in the advertisements: Genre problems, a controversial depiction of sender and recipient, and problems relating to argumentation. We conclude that (1) the analyzed text is predominantly commercial in intent, although framed as information by a sender position that is partly ambiguous in terms of identity, and (2) the campaign's main arguments are flawed, since decisive justification is not accessible. Based on the findings, the conclusion suggests that the campaign is best understood as a hybrid between public relations and public affairs.

Keywords: advertisement campaign, genre, argumentation, reframing, public relations, public affairs

1. Introduction

In the Spring of 2016, the American aircraft company Boeing launched a controversial advertisement campaign promoting their combat aircraft A/F 18 Super Hornet, one of the three aircraft types that were in the final leg of the competition for the Danish Department of Defense's replacement of their outdated F 16 aircraft.

Owing to its scope and budget, the campaign received considerable media attention: it ran in all the national newspapers and was supported by posters in public spaces, by radio spots; it even had a website. Moreover, the campaign used non-traditional communicative methods, and critical voices accused it of being unethical. In particular, critics have pointed to the campaign's intent to derail a legitimate political process by postulating that (1) the choice of combat aircraft

should be made on the basis of an 'open debate', and that (2) the advertisement campaign, with biased evidence presented by a party hawking its own aircraft, should constitute an informed basis for such an open debate (e.g. Andersen 2016).

In this article, we will pragmatically analyze some of these advertisements in an effort to explain why many people reacted critically to Boeing's campaign.

2. Public relations as rhetorical communication practice

In everyday speech, the term 'PR' (for 'public relations') is often used as synonymous with 'advertising'; 'doing PR for something' is often understood as another term for 'marketing something'. In academic research, however, the field of public relations is quite distinct from that of marketing, and can be taken literally as dealing with an organization's relations within the public sphere. Consequently, PR involves practices that are regulated by the public's implicit norms of civility, while the term itself is rooted in the private/public distinction, according to which the private sphere is internally regulated by the forces of the market. Whereas the market allows a company to generate economic value, being constrained in its practices only by the concept of *legality*, the company's public face, on the other hand, operates in an interplay between complex normative systems such as politics and ethics, and thus is constrained not just by legal criteria, but also by *legitimacy*.

Behind the distinction between private and public lies a theoretical understanding of the concept of *publicity* (Habermas 1962). The bourgeois public sphere, which as based on the ancient ideal of the *agora* as a forum for rational conversation on common affairs, had been declining during the period of modernity; in Dahlgren's words, it had been transformed into a "destabilized political communication system" (2005:150ff; see also Blumler and Gurevitch 2000). Other commentators (e.g. Susen 2011) pointed out that the complexity of late modernity involves a host of alternative public spheres, overlapping only to lesser degrees – something which essentially limits the descriptive force of Habermas' original theory. Whereas the factual existence of the public sphere is a sociological matter which does not specifically require a humanities-oriented approach, in a linguistic or rhetorical perspective it may be more pertinent to explore symbolic representations of an 'idealized publicity' (Nielsen 2013), rather than diagnosing the current state of the various public spheres. The present contribution will therefore operate with the ideal criteria of the classic concept of publicity, as they appear as presumed representations of self and otherness; consequently, the discipline of public relations is seen as dealing with the maintenance of legitimacy in the public sphere by means of communication (see Nielsen, forthcoming, for an updated overview of this relationship).

From the early 1990s on, this theoretical understanding of the discipline has caused a number of scholars to approach public relations primarily as a rhetorical communication practice (early key texts here are Toth and Heath 1992; Heath 1992; Elwood 1995, and Toth 1999; more recently, one should mention Heath's several editions of his authoritative *Handbook of Public Relations* (2001, 2010).

In terms of rhetoric, the central tenets of the public relations discipline are:

1. PR is practicing persuasion. The recipient must be reached, not through deception or propaganda, but by appealing to the potentially persuasive aspects of a case, as in the famous Aristotelian definition of rhetoric (see Ihlen 2010, which deals thoroughly with the Aristotelian rhetorical definition as a model for rhetorical public relations practices).
2. While the dissemination of information predominantly pertains to *logos*, just as marketing does to *pathos*, in PR the main appeal stems from *ethos* (Geist 1996). If an organization is to gain acceptance for its views and practices in the eyes of the public, it must above all appear trustworthy.
3. To avoid obvious criticisms, the discipline of PR needs to strike an uneasy balance between nurturing special interests (such as an organization's economic sustainability) and honoring the public concern for the common good.
4. Since public relations are based on trust, confidence is not only a goal, but a necessary condition for successful PR efforts. The relationship of trust can therefore be explained rhetorically by appealing to the ancient Greek concept of *pistis*, in particular Aristotle's potent merging of rational justification and communicative trust (Nielsen 2003; Hoff-Clausen 2010).

3. From public relations to public affairs

This understanding of the public draws on an ideal concept of the public sphere, and it explains why there have been negative reactions to Boeing's advertisement campaign. However, the idealistic aspect is only one among many. Modern organizational rhetoric occurs in an area of conflict between classical idealistic expectations and an awareness of current reality, in a destabilized and functionally changed public sphere, exposed to a profound politicization of business. Viewed in this realistic light, the advertisement campaign's context provides extended freedom of political action to business – a context in which companies are viewed as political actors in a dynamic and fluid network together with other actors.

As to politicization, Frankel (2004) mentions three types what he calls 'explosions': (1) the institutional explosion; (2) the explosion of responsibility; and (3) the explosion of sense-making. The *institutional* explosion refers to the fact

that “formal political institutions are no longer homes of political decision making” (Frankel 2004: 9); in a so-called polycentric society, the State is considered to be one center among others, and the complexity of this circumstance can be conceived in terms of governance, negotiation-based economy, and networks (Holmström 2013). The explosion of *responsibility* refers to the increasing demand that companies take on social responsibility with regard to the environment, the climate, and the socially disadvantaged (Frankel 2004; Holmström and Kjærbeck 2013). And lastly, the explosion of *sense-making* is caused by the weakening and partial abolition of traditional, established relations in an ever more fluid society (Frankel 2004: 10). The meaning of acting rationally, legitimately, and responsibly is constantly being negotiated in an ongoing, sometimes hostile, political process (Frankel 2004; Holmström and Kjærbeck 2013; Holmström 2010).

The Super Hornet campaign instantiates all of the societal developments outlined above. Obviously, the campaign challenges the political *institutions*, and insists that a private company be a *responsible* participant in other- and self-initiated public debates. In terms of *sense-making* in public affairs, it is worth noting that the company's apparent appeal to the public actually represents an indirect form of lobbyism: it frames the electorate as a direct force in the decision-making process, whereas in fact its ultimate goal is to indirectly influence the political system as such.

In the following, we will mainly address three problems with the text of the advertisement under consideration; each of these discusses, in different ways, the campaign's persuasiveness and the relations of trust between the company and its stakeholders.

Expectations of genre are exploited in order to mislead the recipient

The company presents the campaign as an act of public relations, i.e. addressing common interests. But at the same time, there are obviously special interests at stake. In other words, a latent problem of genre can be observed: the reader's profound expectation that a campaign having to do with economic special interests would reveal its affiliation with the commercial text type 'advertisement' is not met. Here, we see the text's problem number one: Blurring of the advertisement's categorization as regards genre.




Unclear presentation of sender and recipient

Another social and cultural expectation in public debate concerns, first of all, the unambiguous indication of the sender position; the recipients have the right to know who is communicating. And secondly, it concerns the recipients' ability

to recognize themselves as the addressees, based on the markers employed in the text. Here, we may identify the text's problem number two: Unclear sender-recipient relations.¹

Evidence is not provided

Finally, it is essential that decisions in the public sphere are made on the basis of 'sufficient reason'. Good reasons are expressed in arguments with a clear structure, such that the recipients' acknowledging the presented premises implies their acknowledgment of the presented conclusion. This expectation underlies problem number three: The argumentation of the advertisements is biased, and no conclusive evidence is provided.


In order for the campaign to succeed in its persuasive efforts, it would need to make a commercial ad appear as neutral information. In order to do this, it must  have the ordinary citizens identify with their recipient roles,  and inspire them with confidence in the role played by the sender.  In other words, it needs to have loosely connected claims form an apparently coherent, sound chain of reasoning. As the following analysis shows, this is clearly not happening.

4. Genre is exploited in order to mislead

The present analysis (along with the discussion of the sender-recipient relation in the following), is based on the two-page advertisement "The choice of combat aircraft is not only about defending Denmark", dated April 14, 2016, which constitutes our primary empirical data (see text 1 in the Appendix). Another, one-page advertisement, dated April 27, 2016 "Thanks for an open debate" (text 2 in the Appendix) and the text "Why are we approaching you?" from the campaign's website will be used as secondary data.

In order to shed light on the currently advertisement's genre characteristics, and to show how these characteristics have been blurred, we will apply Togeby's (2014) pragmatic-rhetorical genre analysis. This model is primarily based on Searle's (1965) 'constitutive rules' for speech acts; it is also influenced by rhetorical genre theory (Bazerman 1988; Miller 1984, among others). In the following, we will briefly introduce central points in Miller's and Togeby's notions of genre and present a few insights regarding the hybridization of genres.

1. For the sake of brevity, this problem is discussed below together with the other genre related problems.

Miller's (1984) rhetorical approach to genre theory defines genre as social practice and typified action; here, she draws on Schutz's insights into social action and typification processes as central for the construction of meaning (Schutz and Luckmann 1973).  Compare also: "It is through the process of typification that we create recurrence, analogies, similarities. What recurs is not a material situation (a real, objective, factual event), but our construal of a type" (Miller 1984: 157).

Through social action, discursive conventions and patterns of behavior are created that guide our understanding and meaning construction – patterns we orient towards as social actors when communicating. For Miller, genre is a rhetorical tool that communicates private intentions and social problems; it connects the private and the public and the specific communicative situation (its participants and context) with the recurrent pattern. Genre can be conceived of as a 'rhetorical circumstance', both for the sender and for the recipient (Miller 1984).

Furthermore, action-based genre theory considers the communicative purpose and typical forms of language use and topical choices as criterial (Miller 1984; Swales 1990). As social action, genre is conceived of as emerging in, and making sense of, a rhetorical situation and a social context.

In his normative theory of language and communication, Togeby (2014) is influenced by this tradition. He uses the notion of 'text type' as equivalent to genre, and focuses on 'practical' texts with direct reference to reality, thereby defining a practical, pragmatic type of texts in opposition to a literary type. Togeby emphasizes the functional aspects of text types and the dialectic relationship between the rhetorical situation and the text type: "Text types are types of linguistic texts developed historically so that their topics and forms fit their purpose in the rhetorical situations at hand which they also create themselves" (Togeby 2014: 11; our translation)

On the basis of this functional approach and his pragmatic and sociological understanding of speech acts as constitutive of genre and society, Togeby advocates to avoid the mixing of types in practical texts, so as not to cause disorder in the social practice. According to his normative approach, the recipient expects a text to belong to a particular text type that is determined by the sender's communicative purpose and that integrates all parts of the text (Togeby 1993; Rehfeld and Therkelsen 1996). In this line of thought, informative texts are classified by their main purpose of providing information to the recipient, as in a news article; by contrast, argumentative text types such as advertisements and public relations texts share the purpose of persuading and convincing the recipient. Whereas an advertisement is trying to persuade the consumer to buy a certain product, a public relations text tries to convince the recipient that the existence and activities of a particular company are legitimate (Therkelsen 2010).

Even though this basic differentiation of texts in accordance with their overall communicative purpose makes a certain sense, both in theory and from a recipient's point of view, still, hybrid texts with varying degrees of genre mixing are not infrequent. Within applied linguistics, with its more text-focused approaches, a great deal of attention is paid particularly to the hybridization of genres. In his seminal work, Bhatia (1993) analyzes two instances of a promotional genre, namely sales promotion letters and job applications. He concludes that to a great extent the same structural elements can be identified in both text types; and although normally treated as different text types, they share the same communicative purposes (1993: 74). Bhatia's findings raise some fundamental questions concerning the understanding and description of genres and subgenres. Focusing on the hybridization of discourse in a company's annual report, Bhatia (2010) is able to identify two main discourses, with different purposes: the accounting discourse, which "tends to report accurately and factually on the basis of financial evidence" and the public relations discourse, which is "meant to promote a positive image of the company to its shareholders and other shareholders" (Bhatia 2010: 43). Bhatia points to an interesting legitimizing effect of using the two different discourses or genres in the same report, in that it "is likely to lend marketing and public relations discourse the same factual reliability [...] that is often presupposed from the use of numerical data" (Bhatia *ibid.*).

In particular, the hybridization of promotional, persuasive genres and informative genres has received considerable attention. Thus, Connor and Mauranen (1999) show that the genre of grant proposals shares important elements with the two promotional genres studied by Bhatia (1993), namely the sales letter and the job application (Connor and Mauranen 1999: 60). Also Catenaccio (2008) describes press releases as a typical mix of informative and promotional elements (2008: 11). Catenaccio considers this hybridization as constitutive of the genre of press releases, and subsequently, she considers the communicative purpose a composite (Catenaccio 2008, 13). In line with Bhatia (2010), Catenaccio finds that the informative, report-like form of the press release conveys credibility to promotional messages. This strategic use of the two genres combined seems highly relevant in relation to understanding the Boeing advertisement studied here.

5. Description of the advertisement genre

We now proceed to characterize the Boeing text in particular with regard to its properties and problems as a genre. Taking Togeby's model of genre analysis as our point of departure, we will focus on the following problems: (1) the rhetorical context, (2) the positions of sender and recipient, (3) sender's purpose, (4) the

forms of presentation highly relevant to this text type, and (5) whether the text's form and message fit its purpose and the communicative situation.

5.1 *Rhetorical context*

In the Danish national newspapers from April 14, 2016, the reader encounters a giant double-page advertisement (text 1 in the Appendix) that suggests a campaign with an extraordinarily strong budget. While at first glance, the advertisement appears to be part of an information campaign, as per the first part of its headline ("The choice of combat aircraft is not only about defending Denmark"), the last part is more like an argument in a sales text ("It's about being effective from day one"). The sender's name and logo do not appear until page two, bottom right; page two also shows a combat aircraft flying over a characteristic and well-known of the Danish landscape, namely the coastline of the Stevns Klint (the cliff at Stevns, some fifty miles south of Copenhagen). Before the reader finally catches sight of the sponsoring aircraft company's name and logo, the ad could possibly be conceived of as a sales text (a combat aircraft company wanting to sell its product), in which context such a sales argument could be relevant. This interpretation is supported by the reader's likely awareness of the political context, which during the spring of 2016 was extremely focused on a renewal of the existing combat aircraft fleet, with the massive investments involved – likewise an issue that drew intensive attention in the media.

5.2 *Sender and recipient positions*

In the following, we will focus on the advertisement's form of address, in particular its depiction of sender and recipient.

Already in the introduction, the sender is positioned as somebody who cares about Denmark: "Denmark is getting new fighter aircraft [...], this will be a choice with huge consequences. Not just for Denmark's defense, but for Denmark's future economy". In this description, the sender is depicted as economically and socially responsible (see also the analysis of the argumentation, Section 3.1).

Another interesting feature is the delayed revelation of the sender's identity (the Boeing logo appears as late as possible, at the very bottom of the advertisement's second page). This is apparently a strategic choice on the part of the sender, meant to preserve the reader's lack of bias with regard to the text: had the reader at an early stage been presented with the fact that the sender is an American combat aircraft company, he or she would possibly have taken a more critical stance to its depiction as a responsible sender.

Still other features blurring the sender's identity can be found in the text. In the next sentence, the sender uses the personal pronoun "we", including both the Danish Department of Defense and sender and recipient of the ad in a common 'Danish' position, whereas the possessive pronoun "their" is linked to "the Americans": "With Boeing's Super Hornet the Danish Defense will already be several years ahead from day one. And *we* will remain that way. In fact, *the Americans* are so enthusiastic about the Super Hornet that the aircraft will still be the backbone of *their* navy in 2040".

Clearly, while American Boeing's presentational choice of "we" in the advertisement has no basis in the actual facts, it is to be interpreted as a strategic blurring of the sender-recipient relation, which, in turn, points to the American company's difficulty in attempting to ensure trustworthy communication in the Danish context.

The ad's target group can be defined as the Danish readers of newspapers (printed or online); it includes politicians and people with political influence. The qualification "It is also a choice many people care about" addresses the readers as a political public and suggests that the advertisement communicates with the public in general. But while so far, the text has exhibited the clear features of a public relations text with regard to topic, purpose, and ways of addressing the reader, in the next long passages a major shift in language and style occurs: the Super Hornet's outstanding qualities are celebrated, just as if the text were a regular advertisement. (This form of presentation is analyzed more thoroughly in Section 4).

The shift of genre constitutes a major dilemma for the text. A sales text addresses its readers as potential consumers and requests them to buy a certain product; however, in the current context the recipients would probably not find such a request appropriate, as it is not the citizens/readers themselves, but the politicians who are supposed to reach a decision on investing billions of dollars into a new combat aircraft.

The phrase "It is also a choice many people care about" is followed by the puzzling statement: "Naturally, because after all, it is about fighter aircraft". This casts the recipients as having an interest in combat aircraft – which, for the great majority of the readers, probably is not the case. Nevertheless, this depiction is continued throughout the advertisement's technical descriptions: "The Super Hornet is already equipped with the latest technology, e.g. stealth, network connections to other planes, integrated sensors, and the most advanced radar in use today". Here, a technical knowledge far beyond that of many citizens is presupposed, as the level of descriptive detail most likely surpasses the recipients' understanding as well as their need for information: technicalities remain unexplained, and in addition clash with the other textual resources designed for a broader audience.

A logos-based communication of technical specifications such as the one above also contributes toward establishing the sender's position as an expert – a position which is further supported by military-type assessments such as “For although test flights are fine, there is a whole different pressure on both equipment and pilots when things are for real.” A statement such as this builds on sender experience, in particular on knowledge about serious situations in which a combat aircraft has to stand its ground in contexts of practice. This recipient positioning as a potential expert is completely in line with the sender's positioning of the Boeing F 18 as an *effective* aircraft. Right from the start, the ad underlines its effectiveness as its most important quality: “It's about being effective from day one”, a point that is also suggested by the final statement: “1 million hours of flying and more than 300,000 hours of combat” – a strong and very relevant point in a Danish context where a recent controversy about steeply escalating costs and continuing delays in the delivery of a new generation of the high-speed IC-4 intercity trains (often referred to as the so-called IC4 scandal), is still fresh in public memory.

5.3 *Sender's purpose and the macro speech act of the text*

When Boeing launched its advertising campaign, their position was one in which they could easily miss out on a sizable order from the Danish Department of Defense; so naturally, the purpose of the campaign is to persuade the recipients to prefer Boeing and choose their aircraft. However, it is less clear what the readers could actually do. As we saw above, while initially, the advertisement encourages people to form an opinion, most of the remaining text (paragraphs 2–5) is formulated as an advertisement. On this basis, we can classify the text as primarily an advertisement, even though it seeks to establish a public relation with its readers. This classification obviously is based on the sender's purpose of selling the aircraft; consequently, the text's macro speech act (Bazerman 1994) is a request to buy the aircraft in question, even if it is impossible for the recipient to carry out this action. Hence, our classification runs counter to Boeing's own comment on the campaign in the April 27 advertisement (text 2 in the appendix): “Thanks for an open debate”, in which they frame the advertisement as an “informative campaign”, even while mentioning their main interest, viz., “we are here to sell our airplanes”. This framing reveals the advertisement's effort to strategically mix informative and promotional elements, where in line with the findings of Bhatia (2010) and Catenaccio (2008: 15), the informative elements make the promotional aspect more readily accepted.

5.4 *Forms of presentation*

The advertisement offers strong evidence supporting the final conclusion in text 1: “That is one of the reasons we are saying that the Super Hornet is a responsible choice for Denmark”. Part of the evidence is presented in superlative mood, e.g. “The Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornet is the most thoroughly tested modern fighter aircraft in the world”, “without losing a single aircraft”, “equipped with the latest technology”, “the most advanced radar in use today”, and so on. In commercials, technical details function as grounds for buying the goods; here, information such as “stealth, network connections to other aircraft, integrated sensors” and “twin-engine design and the capability of mounting two seats in the cockpit” refers to familiar details of equipment. Furthermore, the price is presented as an incitement to purchase: “in comparison with its competitors, the Super Hornet costs up to 20 billion kroner [DKK; around USD 2 bill.) less to keep in the air”. These kinds of reasons are characteristic of advertisements and can be described as ‘private arguments’.

Another type of reason rests on the so-called ‘legitimacy argument’ (Therkelsen 2013); it plays an important role on the campaign’s website (superhornet.dk). In the web text “Why are we approaching you?”, we find the legitimacy argument “choosing Super Hornet will create 10,000 Danish jobs”; similar legitimacy arguments are prominent in the website videos. (This argumentation will be analyzed more thoroughly in Part 3 below).

5.5 *Is the text appropriate to the situation?*

The analyses in Sections 2 and 3 above suggest that the advertisement text is not appropriate for the situation. It approaches the readers with a request to buy, in spite of their inability to comply with this request. Also, it pretends to contribute to an “open debate”, as if the primary recipients were decision makers; off-hand this indicates that this communicative manoeuvre intends to obscure the strategic objective of having the recipients/the public increase their pressure on the political process of purchasing the combat aircraft.

In particular, the observation that the recipient is unable to actually act in response to the call to buy is crucial for characterizing the campaign as a hybrid between public relations and the typical lobbyist perspective of public affairs. As we have discussed above, the genre of marketing text prototypically aims to persuade the reader to buy something; but we have also seen that in this case, the request to buy is clearly self-contradictory. Albeit clearly signalling the genre features of marketing, the texts in fact prefer the verb “choose” to the verb “buy”. The recipient is encouraged to “make a choice” – which is a lot vaguer than the

prototypical marketing 'request to buy'. This vagueness indicates that while the recipient does not have a direct say in the matter which combat aircraft should be purchased by the Danish government, he or she does have the right to choose his or her political representatives. Thus, the request to make a choice is an indirect way of putting pressure on the political representatives, by influencing the electorate upon which their political tenure ultimately depends.

The fact that the untraditional advertisement campaign discussed here has triggered many critical reactions provides support for Togeby's claim that mixed genres may be seen as based on "lies, deception, or misunderstanding" (Togeby 2014: 65).

6. When rational justification fails: 'Reframing'

The April 27 text (text 2 in the Appendix) marks the end of the campaign; it is key for understanding the advertiser's argumentative strategy. An important insight here is that during the campaign, meaning structures have been changing in five ways, mediating a number of subtle linguistic choices. We refer to this process as 'reframing', since a range of semantic adjustments are used to put the issues treated in the text into a 'frame' other than the default one. First, the campaign itself is meta-discursively reframed as a *debate*; second, the arguments are reframed as *points of view* in a debate; third, the reader is reframed as a *participant in a direct democracy*; fourth, the company itself is reframed as a *socially responsible participant*; and fifth, the process that the campaign claims to be part of is reframed as a *legitimate political process*.

6.1 Five acts of reframing

Reframing of the campaign as a debate

Text 2 is entitled "Thanks for an open debate". "Openness" seems to be a prominent virtue of the "debate", as it is emphasized in two other instances in the text: "... not as a hidden agenda but in the form of an informative campaign presented in broad daylight", and (in the closing passage) by expressing the hope that the recipients will continue to "discuss their choice in public". Hence, we are expected to understand that the company's debate initiative presents us with something that otherwise would have remained "hidden". Another example of reframing the communication situation as a debate is evident from the wording: "We have spent our allotted speaking time...", which seems to assume that the sender had been assigned a limited time slot, the way it is usual in political debates. Insofar as the

sender succeeds in this meta-discursive move, the PR-theoretical setting for the text has undergone a transformation. The scene changes from the special interests of the private sphere to the common interests and democratic obligations proper to the public sphere.

The ad's commercial arguments are reframed as attitudes in a debate

Continuing the above-mentioned PR-theoretical transformation, the text emphasizes that the arguments put forward in support of the choice of the F/A 18 Super Hornet are merely "points of view": "It remains our conviction that...". With this wording, the justifications underlying the text's commercial regulative to purchase a specific commodity are reframed within a context where they appear as speaking points in a debate. Below, we will look into the quality of these argumentative justifications.

The reader is reframed as a participant in a direct democracy

One of the most conspicuous passages here is where readers are encouraged to continue "discussing your choice"; the obvious presupposition is that the reader is about to make, or has made, a choice. We have addressed this issue above, where we dealt with the campaign's sender-receiver relationship; the blatant fact that the reader does not actually have any option to make a 'choice' is ignored, as the wording suggests that the choice of combat aircraft is put before the electorate in a direct, democratic electoral process.

The company is reframed as a responsible agent in the public sphere

Reframing 'choice' helps create the company image as that of a socially and democratically responsible agent. Arguably, the text does anticipate critique of the company's self-positioning as a business with a private purpose ("we are here to sell our airplanes"), but it apparently does so only to stress that the business agenda is pursued with due regards to social and democratic responsibility: "Not as a hidden agenda but in the form of an informative campaign presented in broad daylight". As we have discussed earlier, an information campaign is by definition quite far removed from marketing campaigns and other forms of propaganda. Here, as the company portrays itself as merely launching an informative campaign, it also indirectly positions itself as a neutral party.

The company also poses as having been "delighted to have contributed to this debate", and as "look[ing] forward to the further developments". The claim of being satisfied with merely 'contributing' conveys considerable modesty, just as the voluntary retreat to the sidelines not only seems appropriately disinterested but also quite respectful of the unwritten rules of the process. The wording

serves as an ethos-building, self-characterizing indexical of the company's democratic virtues.

The campaign is reframed as a legitimate political process

The above-mentioned self-characteristic also helps to create the image that the "debate" in which the company claims to be participating is a legitimate political process, leading to a responsible choice of the right fighter plane. Whether the ad aims to convey an implicit criticism of the ongoing efforts of the parliamentary defense policy committee and the ensuing legislative work (actually the current political process) is difficult to determine. But the text quite clearly suggests that Boeing's advertisement campaign is to the best public interest; it is an open democratic debate that engages and involves citizens in a significant decision that they would otherwise have been cut off from: "We are aware that we have approached the Danes in an unconventional manner. It has made many people stop and form an opinion on the matter". The reader is left free to infer that had Boeing not launched its campaign, people would not have stopped up to take a stance.

The key arguments for selectioning the Super Hornet fighter plane are fundamental to the ad's reframing strategy. Next, we will analyze the individual arguments and **showing** that they cannot be credibly understood as contributions to a disinterested and democratically sound, open debate.

6.2 Teleological economic argumentation: Argument fields

In the following, Toulmin's (1958) layout for argumentation is followed, using Nielsen's (2016) interpretation, as being a methodological contribution to a pragmatic *reconstructive* heuristics. While it is generally agreed that Toulmin's work is theoretically contestable, its useful contribution to argumentation analysis is primarily of a methodological nature. The 'working logic' that replaces a deductive, geometrically inspired construction of arguments *from* premises *to* conclusion, by employing an interrogative method, which enables the analyst to reconstruct the argument *from* conclusion *to* premises, is both instructive and fruitful in its effort to investigate the **validity** of the argumentation in a text, inasmuch as it allows for the reconstruction of the argumentation's implicit elements (in the 'argument field'). This reconstructive heuristics can be subsumed as follows: Once one has identified the main claim, one must determine which *data* appear to be given as support for the claim. Then, having identified these data, one needs to determine which *warrant* (i.e. the appropriate licensing reason) must be added for the argument to carry its logos-persuasive force. Finally, the warrant is supported by a *backing* that, with greater or lesser force, inductively lends the warrant its legitimacy by referring to the local rationality in the current argument field.

Looking now at the Super Hornet campaign's argumentation, we must identify the claim of the argument and the way in which this claim is justified by producing supportive data. The relationship between the two elements can then be investigated by introducing a warrant that reflects the logical relation between the two elements by clarifying the rational basis of the argument.

Thus, in text 2, the central arguments of the campaign are centered around the three-pronged claim that "[a] predictable economy, reliability, and a positive influence on the Danish economy should be important factors when making a final choice of fighter aircraft"²

From here, we can reconstruct the argumentative base for the campaign's main request "Choose Super Hornet" along the lines of these three arguments:

1. Choose Super Hornet (Claim)
Super Hornet is cheap (Data)
2. Choose Super Hornet (Claim)
Super Hornet is reliable (Data)
3. Choose Super Hornet (Claim)
Super Hornet is good for the Danish economy (Data)

When investigating the arguments' inherent rationality, one has to reconstruct the warrants that validate the arguments in each case, for instance as, respectively:

1. One should choose cheap solutions.
2. One should choose reliable solutions.
3. One should choose solutions that are good for the economy.

These warrants are pragmatic optimizations of implications (of the entailment type) that one would resort to in a strictly logical analysis in order to validate an argument (e.g. "if Super Hornet is cheap, then choose Super Hornet"). The 'pragmatic optimum' (Nielsen 2016; a term adopted from Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992) of the implication is "one should choose cheap solutions", as this is the maximally generalized interpretation of the implication that is still legitimate in the context.

The next question to be asked in a working logic heuristics is what type of rationality the warrant is rooted in, i.e. which are the argument fields in which backing for the warrant may be obtained. On a closer inspection, it becomes clear that the warrants have many similarities. Common to all is that they are clear specimens of normative, rather than descriptive, argumentation. The arguments as a whole cannot be assessed in relation to an expectation of truthfulness – they

2. That these three points were indeed the main motives driving the campaign is also confirmed on the website www.superhornet.dk.

are normative, and their felicity conditions are neither truth- nor probability-based; their acceptability rests on social norms. One cannot possibly decide whether “choosing cheap solutions” is true or false, as any such decision would not represent a fact, but rather a value-based norm.

As to *normativity* itself, it may be either deontological or teleological. *Deontological* normativity refers to an external authority, such as a sacred text or a common set of moral standards that form the basis of a regulative speech act such as a request. In the current case, however, it seems more likely that we are dealing with *teleological* normativity, as no moral authority is involved, but rather a practical goal-oriented cost-benefit consideration. The rationale for choosing a cheap solution is **not a grounded in sense** of obligation, but in a practical effectiveness towards realizing a goal. The speech act implies the contention that a particular goal is desirable, and that there are certain actions that will help achieve that goal. In the current case, there are several goals: to save money (warrant no. 1), to save labor and hassle (warrant no. 2), and to create growth (warrant no. 3). The warrants confirm that these goals are crucially important and that our actions should be designed towards achieving them.

The above analysis shows that the campaign's underlying argument field is characterized by a teleological, economic logic. By choosing this field as its rational foundation, the campaign has opted out of a number of alternative argument fields that might also have been selected – for example, one might have chosen to construct the argument based on pilot safety, on the reliability of the weapon systems, or on the sustainability of the production process. The choice of economic rationality carries in it a characteristic of the model recipient who is to be convinced: a person or entity predominantly concerned about a possible investment being as economically sound as possible. In the literature, this recipient is portrayed as the typical, down-to-earth *homo oeconomicus*.

While such arguments are readily found in actual political debates, a remaining problem is that the advertisement itself does not afford an accessible space for the debates to unfold dialogically, with the participation of the audience. As we shall argue below, this lack of accessibility is critical, since the argumentation as such is not flawed by its teleological rationality, but rather by the postulated, indeed inaccessible, nature of the very data used. The next section will have more to say on this.

7. The argument data are inaccessible

As we have seen, the arguments supporting the claim “Choose Super Hornet” being based on an easily understandable economic rationality, make perfect sense

taken by themselves. Thus, it is intuitively easy to agree that ‘if something has a positive influence on the economy, it must be a wise choice’.

However, the attentive reader does not look at the arguments in isolation, but puts them into the context of the case at hand. This context includes the fact that the Super Hornet is one of the three competing aircraft; obviously, one cannot decide if, for example, argument no. 3 in favor of the Super Hornet aircraft is sound until we know whether the other two candidates would impact the economy equally, less, or more favorably. However, the innocent presumption that the choice pro or con the Super Hornet is common to all three arguments overlooks the fact that in reality, the decision is based on a *comparative* evaluation, and that consequently one has to weigh the pros and cons of the three aircraft types against each other.

Staying with argument 3, it makes sense **say** that the argument should have contained a data-based comparative element:

Choose Super Hornet (Claim)

The Super Hornet will be *better* for the Danish economy than the other aircraft types (Data)

Only if such an argument had been put forward and substantiated, there would have been something for the reader to consider; such a substantiation, however, would require a comprehensive, unbiased weighing of the economic consequences of the various scenarios. Actually, this kind of preparatory work **should be left to** the experts in the relevant committee, who provide the legislators with nuanced information on the basis of which they are able to make a decision. Such a task is an extremely complex matter, as it involves expertise in technical, economic, logistic and defense-strategic areas; the idea that the required basis could be established via an advertisement campaign is overly optimistic. In other words, the case provides a useful illustration of the reason why a representative democracy, as opposed to a direct one, makes better sense when it comes to highly complicated and sensitive decisions.

In summary, the argumentation outlined here appears credible because it draws on a familiar economic rationality that is hard to refute without going into technical details. Moreover, **the fact that** the arguments have **been** (re)framed **as parts of** the entire communication situation, including all its various elements and determining factors, **makes** the argumentation appear like being part of a legitimate political debate, with open opportunities of participation. However, instead of a debate, we witness a one-way communication through a completely traditional advertising medium whose arguments cannot easily be challenged; rather, they actually obscure the problems that are built into the arguments by oversimplifying a question that requires insight into a

wide range of areas, and the making of a detailed comparison between the three participants in the combat aircraft contest. In other words, the claim that there is no "hidden agenda" and that the decision process takes place "in broad daylight" is not entirely uncontroversial.

8. Conclusion

In this article, we have looked at core texts of the Boeing advertisement in order to better understand the public's unexpectedly strong reaction to this campaign. To do so, we examined a range of textual aspects of genre, including the crucial problem of the sender-recipient relationship, as well as issues concerning the campaign's argumentation strategy.

Regarding the genre, we characterized the texts primarily as commercial advertising aimed to sell a certain aircraft, the Super Hornet; however, these characteristics are blurred when the texts are (re)framed as information. Their macro speech acts request the recipients to make a choice and buy the senders' product, and this creates a dilemma: the recipients do not have the wherewithal for this action. The analysis further reveals how the texts' linguistic choices strategically blur the senders' identity as producers of a combat aircraft, while as for the recipients, we likewise found a certain ambiguity in the texts: they address the readers on the one hand as opinion makers, on the other as technical experts having specialized knowledge about combat aircraft.

The analysis further reveals a (re)framing of the campaign as an "open debate", in that the argument for choosing Boeing's aircraft is framed as an *opinion* by which the company is depicted as an economically and socially responsible actor, while the readership is framed as a participant in a direct form of democracy. Moreover, the analysis shows how the central warrants supporting the arguments are rooted in fields of argument characterized by a teleological, economic rationality – arguments that, due to the lack of a real debate forum and to the inaccessibility of the data, are quite difficult to challenge directly.

Based on these results, we shall now try to determine the persuasive felicity of the Super Hornet campaign in terms of the theory of public relations and public affairs. Obviously, the campaign is an act of public affairs, the discipline that focuses on influencing political actors through *advocacy*. The current campaign thus instantiates the "institutional explosion", the "explosion of responsibility", and the "explosion of disputes" defined by Frankel (2004; see Holmström and Kjærbeck 2013). This form of advocacy, exercised by a private actor, is not too common in the Danish context, and the critical reception of the campaign is quite possibly due to the population's clashing social and cultural expectations with

respect to private enterprises and their actions (in particular those performed by Boeing in the case at hand). In fact, the field in which the campaign is playing out is already rife with potential cultural clashes: Boeing, being a US- based corporation, presumably takes its bearings from the American, rather than the Scandinavian public debate; there is little doubt that in contrast to Denmark, the public in the US is more accustomed to the bold usurpation of the public sphere by private stakeholders – which accounts for a further complication of the various multi-contextual and multi-cultural aspects of the campaign's reception.³

In addition, the Super Hornet campaign seems to be quite different from earlier cases (such as the ones mentioned in footnote 3). In terms of public affairs, the Super Hornet campaign seems to be a not too subtle effort to put pressure on the political decision-making process by falsely introducing the idea of a public process in which to debate the issue, and arrive at a "choice". Ordinarily, a public affairs effort is performed through persuasive actions, nudging the political process in the direction desired. In the case at hand, however, persuasion yielded to a more aggressive approach more resembling a strategy of extortion: 'In case you were to choose another winner, be assured that we have made the public opinion turn against you in advance'. In this way, the campaign has effectively compromised the Aristotelian relation of *pistis* – the communicative trust that is fundamental to successful public relations.

Summing up, the campaign as a whole may be viewed as a hybrid, bridging the fields of public relations and public affairs. By its innovative approach to (indirect) lobbying, the campaign strategy exploits the communicative trust embodied in the *pistis* relation, by drawing on the idealized norms of the public sphere that central to public relations in order to ultimately manipulate the actual political processes involving the choice of the aircraft in question. In this article, it has not been our ambition to develop a major theoretical point with respect to the relationship between public relations, public affairs, and marketing. Rather, it has been our aim to provide a detailed analysis of a particular case in the hopes that the points made can inspire and inform a nuanced understanding of the argument practices mentioned above and their interplay. In addition, we hope that the present analysis will inspire further theoretical developments of this interaction.

3. As an aside, note that in the past, private companies have launched similar campaigns in other countries; see e.g. Crable and Vibbert's (1995) study of Mobil Oil's so called 'Observations' campaign back in the 1970s, by which the company intended to build an alliance with the public in order to fight the government's regulation of the oil market.

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Appendix

Text 1. *The choice of combat aircraft is not only about defending Denmark It's about being effective from day one*

Denmark is getting new fighter aircraft. And when the politicians decide which aircraft is going to replace the old F16, this will be a choice with huge consequences. Not just for Denmark's defense, but for Denmark's future economy.

It is also a choice that many people care about. Naturally, because after all, it is about fighter aircraft. But whether or not the positions are ideological, economic or practical, you need to bear in mind that just beneath the headlines there lurks a situation of considerable gravity.

The Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornet is the most thoroughly tested modern fighter aircraft in the world, and it is already being used by the US Navy and the Australian Air Force. In combat, mind you. For although test flights are fine, there is a whole different pressure on both equip-

ment and pilots when things are for real. So far, the Super Hornet has been airborne for more than 1 million hours, 300,000 of which have been in combat. Without losing a single aircraft.

But why is it an advantage in the long run?

The Super Hornet is already equipped with the latest technology, e.g. stealth, network connections to other planes, integrated sensors, and the most advanced radar in use today. Moreover, the aircraft is flying missions all over the world every single day. This means that the aircraft is being constantly improved based on experience and feedback from American pilots. That is a crucial point, since Denmark's defense can benefit from that knowledge. With Boeing's Super Hornet the Danish defense will already be several years ahead from day one. And we will remain that way. In fact, the Americans are so enthusiastic about the Super Hornet that the aircraft will still be the backbone of their navy in 2040. Benefiting Denmark and Danish pilots.

In addition, the sturdy construction and dependability of the Super Hornet will be an advantage when the Danish armed forces are on missions in Greenland and the arctic area. Among other things, it is an advantage that the Super Hornet has a twin-engine design and the capability of mounting two seats in the cockpit.

And too, in comparison with its competitors, the Super Hornet costs up to 20 billion crowns less to keep in the air over a 30 year period. That is one of the reasons we are saying that the Super Hornet is a responsible choice for Denmark.

Read more at superhornet.dk

[Box:]

1 MIO. HOURS OF FLYING AND MORE THAN 300,000 HOURS OF COMBAT

[Footer:]

SUPER HORNET

A RESPONSIBLE CHOICE FOR DENMARK

Text 2. *Thanks for an open debate*

We are aware that we have approached the Danes in an unconventional manner. It has made many people stop and form an opinion on the matter.

Acquiring new fighter aircraft is an important and complex decision of great economic, political, and operational significance for all of Denmark.

We are here to sell our airplanes. Not as a hidden agenda but in the form of an informative campaign presented in broad daylight. We have spent our allotted speaking time emphasizing the advantages of the F/A Super Hornet. It remains our conviction that predictable economy, reliability, and a positive influence on the Danish economy should be important factors when making a final choice of fighter aircraft.

Hopefully, you will continue to discuss your choice in public. We are delighted to have contributed to this debate and look forward to the further developments.

Read more at superhornet.dk

[Footer:]

SUPER HORNET

A RESPONSIBLE CHOICE FOR DENMARK

[Boeing logo]

Address for correspondence

Susanne Kjærbeck
Department of Communication and Arts
Roskilde University
Denmark
susannek@ruc.dk

Biographical notes

Susanne Kjærbeck is Associate Professor at the Department of Communication and Arts, Roskilde University (Denmark). Her research focuses on strategic communication, social interaction, storytelling, positioning and language use in institutional settings.

Niels Møller Nielsen is Associate Professor in language and communication at the Department of Communication and Arts, Roskilde University. He has published books and articles on argumentation theory, pragmatics, public relations and political communication.

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