

I'm Sorry You(Tube) Feel That Way: An Introduction to the YouTube Vlogpology Genre

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Abstract

In 2016, a digital genre dubbed the *vlogpology* began to emerge on YouTube, a year before Time magazine declared 2017 *The Year of Apology*, in reference to the influx of public apologies occurring during that period. Vlogpology combines the words *vlog* (video blog) and *apology*. The vlogpology is a form of crisis communication that attempts to relay and repair a situation between a vlogger (a person who creates vlogs) and the public viewing their video. Vlogpologies are known for going viral, often garnering far more views than a vlogger's regular content does. They are also known for their ability to be transformed into memes across social media platforms and have received extensive mainstream media coverage. Despite being labelled a genre of videos in the scholarly literature, there has been little evidence offered that focuses sufficiently on what links vlogpologies together when it comes to generic features.

This study investigates the vlogpology as a digital genre drawing on Benoit's IRT – image repair theory. I apply a mixed method approach to my analysis of vlogpologies using three different methods for analysis. Firstly a move/step analysis is conducted to create a typography for the vlogpology. Secondly, a corpus software-assisted lexico-grammatical analysis is conducted on fifteen vlogpologies transcripts to examine the lexical patterns and potential ideologies within the texts. Finally, a visual analysis of features drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar examines the vlogpology thumbnails to see what is communicated visually when it comes to the image of the vloggers and how they wish to represent themselves. Through these methods, this study identifies the communicative goals of the vlogpology, how the vlogpology is structured, and discusses what the broader societal space around the vlogpology may be that continues to facilitate its success as a genre.

The key findings of this study reveal that a range of communicative techniques are used both visually and linguistically in vlogpologies. Vloggers use this genre to make a concession to their

audience when their misdemeanour or inappropriate behaviour has been exposed. This occurs from the moment the vlogpology's thumbnail is viewed through to the vlogger's entire performance on the YouTube video. I argue that a vlogpology enables a vlogger to repair their image and maintain their brand and online identity, which they may be reliant on to attract advertising and financial benefit, i.e. monetization. My findings also show that vlogpologies are often created when the vlogger is under extreme duress and may be uncomfortable with being told to apologise, which can result in non-apologetic language and seem insincere. The pressures of severing the unique parasocial connection formed between audience and creator, reputational damage, and loss of financial opportunity are just a few of the pressures that these creators face. The vloggers' standard content is often centred on themselves, so naturally, their crisis is also related to them. The heavy use of personal language that has been mocked in online coverage is not narcissistic; rather, it is on brand for a vlog, which serves as a snippet of their own life. With that being said, stylistically, the vlogpologies in my dataset were shown to share visual design features, unique lexical patterns and similar structures that identify them as a genre indicating that vloggers may study each other's work to meet the most effective criteria when it comes to seeking forgiveness. Ultimately the vlogpology may continue to be the primary method for vloggers to journey through times of personally-created crisis on YouTube - as long as the audience collectively demands it. The purpose and effects of this symbiosis are worthy of future discussion.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which, to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 22/11/2022

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Overview, rationale and significance

On the 26th of January 2016, a YouTube channel created by brothers Beni and Rafi Fine released a vlog (video blog) that included an announcement of their intention to trademark the word *react* and the genre of react videos. React videos are reaction videos where someone provides commentary on their impressions pertaining to some form of content. This style of video is a concept used by other YouTubers from as early as 2008. The brothers created their channel in 2010. The idea behind trademarking was that channels creating react-style videos and using the word react in their title would have to share some of their earnings with the brothers. Essentially, profiting off competing channels for an idea that was not theirs. The announcement was received poorly. Within 48 hours, the channel had lost 400,000 of its 14 million subscribers (Abad-Santos, 2016).

On 2nd February 2016, the brothers published what is thought to be the first *vlogpology*. Vlogpologies are known for going viral, garnering more views than the vloggers' usual content does. They were recently parodied on Saturday Night Live (2021) which has an audience demographic of 18-49-year-olds. Vlogpologies are often covered by mainstream media and are known for their ability to provide content that can easily be manipulated to form memes suitable for sharing on other social media platforms (Jennings, 2021). The most prominent vlogpology has 61 million views, and the most prominent creator made a vlogpology has 111 million subscribers.

Interestingly, the vlogpology is currently an under-researched area. The digital space is known for its demand for new or fresh content, this need seems to be accelerating each year. A study of popular memes found that in 2010 the average length of a memes relevance, which was

equated through google and Reddit results, had a lifespan of relevancy that lasted an average of 2000 days. This lifespan had dropped by 85% by 2020 (Ford et al., 2021). Yet, the vlogpology has remained a popular text in the digital space since 2016. Xia (2020) believes that digital genres with longevity must be studied, as they reflect not only the creators of the genre but the space surrounding it.

Current research focuses heavily on the public relations aspects of the vlogpology, how the vloggers maintain their relationships with their fans and the relationships between the vlogger and brand partnerships before and after a vlogpology (Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2018; Bhatia, 2018; Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019). Vlogpologies also have a variety of sentiments placed upon them, with studies by Lawson and Woods (2020, 2021) who in discussing it as a genre, reduce the vlogpology to only belonging to beauty YouTubers. New research from Cui (2022) also states the vlogpology is a genre, although their work focuses on the memes that have emerged from the vlogpology from 2016-2021 and their continued popularity. Other articles like those by Makalintal and Sung (2019, 2021) suggest that the vlogpology is delivered to grow one's audience through the extra attention a scandal and vlogpology bring. These authors also refer to vlogpologies as a genre, as something every successful YouTuber should have in their catalogue of content. This is an interesting idea, although current research suggests that vlogpologies can fail if not delivered in a way that is deemed inauthentic to the audience (Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019; Lawson, 2020; Sng et al., 2019).

A failed vlogpology can result in significant damage to one's reputation, career, relationships and future. If a vlogpology is received poorly, the creator can lose a significant amount of subscribers, and business partnerships can be cancelled due to their unfavourable reputation. A change.org petition was created in 2018 after a particular vlogpology was released,

asking YouTube to delete a vlogger's channel, as the offensive incident that prompted the vlogpology and the performance of the vlogpology itself were deemed disrespectful. The petition asked for 200,000 signatures and received 720,000 within 36 hours.

Although these studies refer to the vlogpology as a genre curiously, it appears that a true and robust description of what constitutes it as a genre is lacking. Rather there are contrasting generalisations of what it is and why YouTubers make them. This, therefore, provides the rationale for this research that seeks to identify the specific characteristics from a linguistic and visual perspective that contribute to making a vlogpology a specific genre. The significance of this is that people need to understand how authentic a vlogpology is - stemming from what a vlogger is apologising for, how they express their apology, and what their motivation might be. In a world where social media influencers have so much 'influence' - particularly on young people and their behaviour - and where misinformation and disinformation are rife - understanding the meaning of the vlogpology by the way it is constructed may well assist their critical reflection on its authenticity. Equally, the vloggers too should have an understanding of their vlogpologies as a genre which is explained later in this chapter. Anecdotal evidence, for example, has pointed towards issues with their mental health and burnout - particularly through the pressure from their fans and their expectations where they might demand a vlogpology in certain situations.

In the proceeding sections of this chapter, I briefly introduce the vlogpology by identifying it first as a genre and then as a digital genre and discussing its relevance in genre-based studies. I position the vlogpology by discussing other forms of digital apology-based genres or approaches by public figures, as well as explaining the digital landscape that existed around the time the vlogpology emerged. In the second part of this chapter, I present the aims of

this study and my research questions. Finally, I lay out the organisation of this thesis with a brief description of the content of chapters two to seven.

1.1 Social media public apologies and the digital landscape

The year before vlogpologies emerged, The New York Times dubbed 2017 *The Year of Apology* due to the overwhelming amount of public figure apologies. To contextualise this, the #MeToo movement and hashtag dominated social media, Pepsi apologised for an advertisement that trivialised the black lives matter movement, comedian Kathy Griffin apologised for a photoshoot where she was holding a former president's severed head - and then rescinded her apology. There were many more public figure apologies and social movements in 2017, to the extent that the public felt overwhelmed by the media saturation.

The following year, the Facebook Cambridge Analytica scandal dominated headlines as founder Mark Zuckerberg testified in congress for data breaches. This trend continued each year, with an overwhelming amount of apologies across social media. Specific styles, like the Twitter Notes app apology (Raymundo, 2016), emerged; which is a style of apology where a user screenshots the Notes app on their iPhone, which features a lengthy typed apology that exceeded Twitter's limited 140 characters per tweet. Bypassing this limitation by displaying the apology in full length, either through one long note in a photo or multiple photos. The Instagram Story apology is said to have eclipsed the Notes app apology in popularity, as the video clips are thought to be more personal and delivered at the moment. These apologies are delivered through Instagram's story feature, which allows users to post multiple fifteen-second-long videos. The stories are available to the figures' audience for 24 hours and cannot be viewed or saved after this period (Diop, 2020).

This transition between platforms and delivery styles indicates the authors' desire to have their apology and the crisis addressed and navigated through in a shorter time frame, as the Notes app post is intended to stay on one profile indefinitely. It also indicates that despite the diary-like quality the Notes app apology has, as the app itself is intended to be filled like a personal notepad, it can still feel manufactured. Whereas the video style lets an audience see and analyse the figure through verbal and non-verbal communicative cues, such as body language, expression, tone, pace, eye contact and the language used. This may be a contributing factor to the vlogpologies longevity, the vlogpology like a Notes app apology remains on the creators' page amongst their other content.

1.2 Vlogpologies and YouTube

The prevalence of vlogpologies has significance, particularly since the parasocial relationship between a vlogger and their viewers has been a growing area of academic interest for several years now (de Bérail et al., 2019; Rihl and Wegener, 2017; Tarvin, 2021; Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). A vlogger can be very influential on others, especially young people. This relationship, due to the intimacy expressed in vlogs, makes fans feel like they are interacting with a close friend.

Interestingly, a recent study found that a third of children aged eight to twelve want to be YouTube creators when they grow up (Dzhanova, 2019). Many of the children expressed idolisation for certain creators, sharing that they wanted to be just like them. What is notable about this is that, unlike traditional idols for young children, for instance television or film characters; the YouTuber often works without a publicity team, writers or guidance regarding the content they publish. The 'character' they idolise is a real person, who may not be creating their content with a younger audience in mind. It is thought that children between the ages of eight to

twelve often watch the adult side of YouTube for entertainment, advice, company and comfort. They're vulnerable to adopting harmful ideologies from creators as well as mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, sleep issues and negative body image (Bila, 2018; Reding, 2021). That's not to say, that all creators will have this effect on their audience, many will not. But the freedom to publish almost anything on YouTube, to a large audience, without a moderator, raises ethical questions for freedom of speech versus responsibility. Of course, YouTube has a children's platform, but the content there has also been labelled problematic. Since 2017, countless stories of *YouTube Kids* videos that featured violent and sexualised versions of beloved cartoon characters, and people enacting gore scenarios have been discussed in the media (Heilweil, 2021). Many of these videos had millions of views, with parents sharing their horror upon finding their toddler watching such content. The switch from children watching television to unregulated content on TikTok and YouTube is concerning. Naturally, television can also be problematic – but the sheer volume of content on YouTube, with an estimated five hundred hours uploaded every minute (Statista, 2022), and an algorithm that recommends trending content even when it is harmful, leaves much to be desired. What is clear, is that young children wish to emulate their role models, whereas their role models in many instances are not actively trying to fulfil that particular role, they are just trying to make content. As seen by the emergence of vlogpologies, vloggers appear to be fallible. While this study will not delve into the complexities of moderating such a massive volume of content or what young children watch, it is interesting to note that some of these younger viewers who idolise YouTubers and who want to be them when they are older, may also see vlogpologies during their time on the platform. Which, to a young person who idolises the creator, may be quite distressing to witness.

Vloggers often have fan names for their followers that are related to their name, for instance, JoJo Siwa's audience is greeted as *Siwanators* in each video JoJo publishes, and the audience refers to themselves as such. They may join other social media platforms such as Twitter, Discord or Reddit and take pride in identifying themselves as a Siwanator or greeting other Siwanators' (Alexandra, 2017). They share a sense of belonging to a community and a bond with the vlogger. The vlogpology, however, represents that some disruption occurs in the relationship and is an attempt by the vlogger to repair it. The question, of course, is raised, what necessitates the vlogpology - and perhaps it has something to do with the demands on vloggers to meet the expectations of their followers.

YouTube vloggers often express burnout, presumably because of the demands placed on them to meet the needs of their fans. Many vloggers film their videos, edit them, promote them across social media, write the scripts for the videos, edit thumbnail images for the video, brainstorm ideas for the videos and interact with fans across social media (Yurieff, 2019). Vloggers craft an identity that their fans often find relatable (Smith, 2014); the homemade production of the vlogger doing all of these roles makes an audience member feel as if they too could pick up a camera, film, edit and contribute their interesting content. They can self-insert or feel a kinship with the vlogger. Smith believes that this puts the vlogger in a stressful position to continue to create interesting content whilst maintaining the identity their fans have grown to love. This pressure of creating new content, which by some may be interpreted as bigger or crazier, can lead to controversial situations that can damage a vlogger's reputation, hence the need for an apology. The demand from the audience and the absence of specific guidelines, rules, or an advisor to guide them in how to respond may be contributing factors to the rise of the vlogpology to the extent that its consistent growth now classifies it as a genre. It seems that the

vlogpology has become a *rite of passage* for any *prominent creator* (Haylock, 2020) and therefore calls for greater scrutiny and study.

1.3 The Vlogpology as a Genre

The vlogpology has already been dubbed a genre in mainstream media by authors like Douglas (2019) and Sung (2021), suggesting that vlogpologies have visual similarities and seem to have a script that can be seen across the vlogpology genre. Yet specific examples of these visual or scripted connections have not been given. Studies like Sandlin and Gracyalny (2020) and Afriza and Rusadi (2021) also state that the vlogpology is a genre. They do not offer a connection between videos, aside from stating their shared use of apologetic language and crisis management strategies. Abad-Santos (2018) suggests the genre features non-apologetic apologies that are performative rather than sincere. Abad-Santos suggests that vloggers use apologetic phrases such as *sorry* or *apologise* in their vlogpologies (An et al., 2021) but use techniques such as vague language in reference to what their apologising for or say they are sorry *for* people's reactions rather than their actions. Abad-Santos believes there is a detachment in these apologies because the vlogger is performing the apology to meet a need the audience has rather than to make amends with those who are watching.

For clarity of this thesis which seeks to explore the vlogpology as a genre and identify its characteristics, it is important to understand what is meant by a genre study, and indeed there are many definitions. For genre studies, Swales (1990) believes a genre consists of a collection of communicative events that share communicative goals or purposes. These purposes can be recognised by expert members of the discourse community and constitute the rationale for the genre. Genre theory views genre as a way to engage with or reflect on a collection of occurrences (Miller, 1984, p.156).

A genre is more than patterns of vocabulary or structure. Genres are influenced by the expectations of the audience and discourse community, their relationship with other texts, the socio-cultural context of production and the interpretations of a text. The writers of a genre are subject to manipulation through established expectations for the genre, assumptions, beliefs and values (Devitt, 2008, p.162). Due to these influences, genres are subject to change through time to meet evolving expectations or demands.

They are said to be bound by three specific processes (Martin, 1984; Eggins & Slade, 2004):

Staged: Genres are staged in that the meaning can be discovered through multiple steps participants must follow to achieve their goals.

Goal-oriented: Genres are goal-oriented in that the texts move through the steps to the point of closure and may be considered incomplete if this closure is not attained.

Social process: Genres are negotiated through some interaction and are a realisation of a social purpose.

Genre theory and analysis, which will be discussed more in forthcoming chapters, are often applied to traditional texts such as newspaper articles or job acceptance letters. This is due to the linguistic and rhetorical focus, whereas digital texts have other communicative features that may add further character to a genre.

Traditional genre theory has been applied to genre-based studies that examine written or printed texts. Paltridge (2007) states that traditional genres are often performed by a particular person and are aimed at a specific audience. Recent work in digital genre studies has introduced the idea of a layered audience (Xia, 2020; Luzon and Pérez-Llantanda, 2022). Xia discusses the layered audience as a feature that must be calculated in digital genre-based studies, as the writer of a digital text is aware that anyone may become the reader of their text by randomly finding it.

They may consume the work for many reasons that extend past the more purposeful relationship traditional genre writers and readers have.

Luzon and Pérez-Llantanda (2022) expand on this idea, applying the layered audience of digital genres to academic writing. They believe that when writing an academic text that will eventually exist in the digital space, where people in their field, those in other fields, and those outside of academia may read their work; an understanding of this layered audience must be incorporated into the writing process of the genre. Making their work as accessible to all layers as possible through the writing of the digital genre, by identifying and considering the layers of the audience during the construction of the text. As the vlogpology is known for its reach, often achieving viral views that surpass a vloggers average viewership, this study will consider whether the vlogpologies acknowledge this layered audience through the move/step analysis and lexical patterns. These patterns may indicate that the vlogger is using particular language to greet their familiar subscribers and different language to contextualise themselves to new viewers who may know nothing about the vloggers previous work.

Genres exhibit patterns of similarity that can be seen through their structure, style, content and the intended audience. Genres also have a minor task of overcoming a contingency and facilitating communication (Lüders et al., 2010) through interpretative, recognisable and flexible frames of reference. They are also influenced by the socio-cultural context for production, expectations of the discourse community, interpretations of the text, and relationships to other texts. Xia (2020) believes that when investigating a digital genre, it is necessary to investigate not only the audience and longevity of the genre but also the construction process. To my knowledge, the vlogpology as a genre has not yet been studied. This thesis will present a genre-

based discourse move/step structure for the vlogpology, to allow for the construction of the vlogpology to be analysed.

Traditional genre theory can be limited in that too much focus is put on similarities at the expense of differences (Frow, 2014). Smaller communicative events that will soon be core to the evolving genre may be missed due to the emphasis on other features. Additionally, minor occurrences, such as a single text in a sample, may indicate a genre stage trialled by the particular text and has not been followed due to its poor reception within a discourse community.

Genre analysis involves identifying the organisation, language, intended audience and pattern (Swales, 1990). Swales developed the Creating a Research Space (CARS) model to illustrate the structural organisation and purpose for the introduction of academic articles by identifying moves and steps that were key to the genre. A *move* can be considered a genre stage or rhetorical unit, which has a particular minor communicative purpose to achieve which serves the major communicative purpose of the genre (Swales, 2004; Dos Santos, 1996). A *step* is described as a *sub-move* as it belongs under the label of the associated move. Individual steps have a communicative purpose that supports the goal of the move, but that can be combined with other steps, skipped or performed alone to reach the ultimate goal of the move (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1999).

Genre-based research allows for the meaning and purpose of a collection to be discovered, it involves picking apart multiple features of texts to understand their individual and collective purpose. Naturally, this intensive practice also allows for surrounding features to present themselves, such as the author's ideologies, what the audience expects to receive from the genre, the sociocultural space that surrounds the genre or how the genre has been constructed and why it was organised in a particular way. Genres reference each other; by understanding one,

you have an initial blueprint to understand the next or to expand and perform more in-depth research. Traditional genre studies and genre analysis focus on traditional texts, such as letters or recipes. The favoured methods focus on the organisation of the texts, rhetorical structure and linguistic features, as these traditional texts communicate primarily through written text.

Move and step identification is a popular approach for examining the structure and purpose of more traditional genres, as it allows for the genres defining features and patterns to be displayed in an organised manner that illustrates the major and minor purposes of each section. However, when it comes to studying digital genres, researchers believe that the study's design must be more flexible, designed for the genre and its prominent features, as the texts often have multiple modes of communication. They suggest focusing on a sole area, as traditional genre studies can do, provides limited insight (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005; Benson, 2019; Miller & Kelly, 2018).

Considering genre studies and the emergence of digital genres and their various modes of communication, the study of the vlogpology as a genre will require examining its features on several levels drawing on this existing literature for inspiration.

1.4 Aim of study and research questions

This study aims to examine the vlogpology as a genre and to identify its generic characteristics on both a macro and micro (linguistic) level, as well as determine the communicative goals and purposes. With the dearth of scholarly research in this area, this study requires me to determine my own model to typify the vlogpology features, but one that I will draw on from the field of genre studies that has looked at apologies in general as a speech act.

The research questions for this study have been selected to allow for the primary purpose of this study to be addressed, which involves creating a specific framework for the vlogpology

genre and a foundational understanding of its characteristics that will inform future work.

My overarching research question is:

In what ways can the vlogpology be classified as a genre?

To investigate, I ask the following two questions:

Research question one:

What discourse moves and steps commonly occur in vlogpologies?

Research question two:

What are the linguistic and visual communicative characteristics that have established it as a new genre?

In the next section, I present the outline of my thesis chapters and indicate their content, including the literature review, the design and method used to analyse a selection of 15 vlogpologies, and the findings and discussion resulting from the study.

1.5 Organisation of Chapters

This chapter has introduced vlogpology as an internet phenomena worthy of study. Here I present a brief description of the subsequent chapters and what they will provide.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature, beginning with looking at apology-based literature - from the everyday apology as a speech act through to public apologies by elite individuals such as politicians and celebrities. I then highlight the advent of social media, which provides a new space for apologies and the possibility for digital genres to emerge. I briefly look at work dedicated to YouTube creators to contextualise the unique job and journey the contributors to this genre may experience.

Chapter Three explains the design of this study, including an explanation of my mixed methods approach and why this approach was most suitable to answer the questions for this study. I cover the first and most crucial analytical approach I apply in this study - a genre-assisted move/step analysis - which will rely on my proposal of an original model for the vlogpology, discussing each move and step, as well as the communicative goals and functions. Then, I explain the second approach I apply - a corpus-assisted lexico-grammatical analysis – to identify the language unique to the genre, ideologies, patterns, and unusual or interesting features. The final method I describe is a multimodal approach to conducting a visual design analysis of vlogpologies, specifically the thumbnails, representing a condensed version of the vlogpology and its primary communicative intentions. I also explain the data selection, collection and tools used to perform this study.

Chapter Four presents the findings from the analysis using a new move/step model for the vlogpology genre, which may be used in future vlogpology research or for similar genres. The model incorporates an investigation as to whether the moves/steps are *obligatory* or *optional* to determine whether they are a major or minor feature within the genre. Each move and step from the model are described and discussed, with some examples.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the analysis of the lexical patterns identified within the vlogpology genre. Using a corpus-assisted approach, it begins with a keyword analysis to gain a preliminary impression of the language most important to the vlogpology. To expand upon these findings, four keywords of interest to the study (*video*, *sorry*, *don't* and *didn't*) are examined through collocations and concordances.

Chapter Six presents the findings of the analysis of the vlogpologies visual design. Beginning with a description of thumbnails and contextualising the significance of their design,

which aims to condense the vlogs' primary purpose into a single image. Throughout this section, modes within Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2020) visual grammar will be discussed, with examples as to how they are used in the thumbnails of the vlogpology. Additionally, minor visual features within the genre will be briefly examined to see what these features communicated and why they are anomalous or less prominent within the genre.

Chapter Seven concludes this study, discussing the overall findings from my research and three key observations that contribute knowledge to the understanding and identification of the vlogpology genre. I reflect on the complexities of the vlogpology as a genre that expands past the general and simplified interpretations that were found during the research process of this study and that may deserve its own more specialised studies in the future. I discuss the implications of this study, its limitations and potential area for future research.

1.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the topic of this thesis - the vlogpology and highlighted its origins. I have argued that the rationale and significance of this study lie in the pervasive and persistent infiltration of vlogpologies into the YouTube community of vloggers and influencers, which attracts thousands of viewers - particularly young people. I discussed that to gain a greater understanding of vlogpologies - their purpose and impact - requires a close analysis of them as a digital genre and therefore necessitates the need to consider genre theory. The research questions were presented that seek to understand vlogpologies rhetorical organisational features, as well as the lexical and visual design characteristics, and at the same time, consider the ideologies and beliefs expressed through these communicative choices and patterns. The chapter concluded with an outline of the chapters in this thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a review of the body of literature relating to apologies, first in relation to the broader literature surrounding the speech act of apology, which has been studied extensively in recent decades. I will then narrow my lens to bridge the gap between literature relating to the public figure apology before and after social media. Tracing the literature to the emergence and growth of the social media apology, the digital platforms and the suggested purpose or power, other studies have suggested contextualising the space that may have been created for the emergence of the genre and what may have influenced it. Following this, I will examine the limited research surrounding vlogpologies and will discuss genre theory.

2.1 Apologies general

Apologies are the act of expressing regret, remorse, or sorrow, for having insulted, failed, or wronged another party. Apologies are a common feature of everyday communication, they help with the maintenance of social relationships (An et al. 2021). The need for an apology or ways of approaching an apology can vary across cultures. In Britain and Canada, the act of *over-apologising*, which refers to issuing apologies multiple times a day for minor inconveniences, a singular event or even events outside of one's control, like the weather; is well a documented phenomenon (Geddes, 2016; Battistella, 2014; Broster, 2019). Whereas in Germany it's uncommon for people to *over-apologise* or to not speak directly when addressing a crisis (Schweitzer et al., 2004).

The earliest published use of the word *apology* is believed to come from social philosopher Sir Thomas More in his 1533 work (Oxford University, 2022). *Apology* is believed to have been a word in circulation amongst the British Court. A note dated ten years previous

also features the word apology in an appropriate apologetic circumstance (Merriam-Webster, 2016). Although other texts afterwards mention *apology* after More's work, the word is believed to have entered the public sphere of the times lexicon through Shakespeare's play Richard the Third, with the line "My Lord, there needs to such apology" (1592/2018, 3.7.191).

Although the word *apology* is relatively new, the act of apologising or reconciling is vital for community living, even within the animal kingdom. A large ornithological study illustrated that crows will reconcile with their 'flock mate turned adversary' after a fight (Kouner, 2018). Dogs will apologetically bow to humans and dogs if they have misbehaved, which is a behaviour that their ancestors in the wild today also demonstrate (Lents, 2017). Primates also express a range of apologetic actions and behaviours throughout their complex group dynamics (Sapolsky & Chamberlain, 2013). The sentiments of apologising, repenting or reconciling are also central themes within many ancient and modern religious texts.

Many authors have attempted to divide the apology, to state the specific meanings, prompts, or what the maker could gain or lose from this. Yamamoto et al. (2021) propose that apologies can be split into two distinct categories:

Firstly, the *sincere* apology, which is made from the heart, is inspired by the recognition of a fault, implies guilt, expresses remorse, and accepts responsibility.

Secondly, the *instrumental apology* is made to achieve a specific purpose or goal. For instance, avoiding rejection or punishment from peers. It does not involve the recognition of guilt or responsibility. Their work expanded upon a similar hypothesis from Nakagawa & Yamazuki (2005).

Nakagawa and Yamazuki tested their dual apologetic types by examining 84 children between the ages of five and six and their motivations for apologising. They also examined their

emotions and whether or not they could identify whether a received apology felt sincere or instrumental. The study relies on the unabashed honesty of children, which delivered mixed results. They also noted that around half of the five-year-old children felt responsible for their behaviour in the studies conditions, but did not feel guilty. Which produced an inconclusive result. They also noticed the children were likely to repeat the coordinator's prompts for their answers regarding feelings.

Yamamoto et al (2021) built on the idea of the two distinct apologies by examining the relationship between a server and a customer apologising, in a sample randomised role-playing experiment. They assessed whether they could identify the sincere or instrumental apology types through non-verbal communication, such as gaze or lack of, expression, and body language. With all 53 they managed to correctly identify which apology was which, suggesting that a sincere apology delivered face to face would hold more gaze avoidance than an instrumental one. They differentiated between one on one situations and *public performing*, noting that public performing had less of their prescribed non-verbal communication markers, making it harder to establish whether or not an apology was *sincere* or *instrumental*. These studies had intriguing concepts and very different testing groups that provided similar results. Schoenewolf (2015) suggests there are seven kinds of apology that have specific meanings attached to them. They are: apologising to appease, apologising on demand, apologising out of expediency, apologising without apologising, apologising from guilt, apologising to be polite and apologising from a place of love. The psychoanalyst published this proposition in a blog, providing his credentials to support this theory.

Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory/Image Restoration (IRT) model goes further than the former two, proposing five general approaches to image repair, as well as 14 strategies to

respond to an image-threatening crisis that can be combined in any manner. Benoit developed this model for his extensive work on public figures' image repair and crisis communication. His work often focuses on a public figure issuing an apology and what strategy or strategies they used during this process (1997, 2017). A common theme in apology literature seems to be that apologies are for either oneself, which is the ground image repair is built from, as well as to solve a relational or social issue between parties or businesses. Benoit's model is widely acknowledged as the most encompassing one present and is heavily utilised within crisis communication/Public Relations strategies and studies. It also becomes a key part of my research when it comes to understanding vloggers and why they apologise.

2.1.1 Public Apologies

It would be difficult to declare when the public apology came to be; presumably, for as long as we have had the structure of a leader or someone held higher within a group setting, there has been the need to apologise or to rectify a situation in some manner for the group. Dominant gestures may have been a popular choice for earlier ancestors, and whilst some of that remains today, it is rarely deemed an acceptable solution in societies where individuals have autonomy. It is worth noting, however, that public apologies differ, in that they're made to a broad audience, often by a well-known figure such as a celebrity or politician, or a representative of a known company acting as the face of the act. When the face has been threatened, face work, that is to say, recovery efforts must be done (Goffman, 1982).

Public apologies often have a high-stakes outcome resting on whether or not the apology is accepted by the right people. For instance, the future of a figure's career or a company's reputation and ability to continue to be profitable. Public relations experts heavily suggest that the general public prefers an apology from public figures rather than dismissing or ignoring the

issue (Chung & Lee, 2017; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Goodwin & Ross, 1992). Specifically, an admission of fault, acknowledgment of impact, and some form of reparation or steps for going forward, if applicable.

A general apology often has a small target audience. A public apology generally has a layered audience, often with a few primary target layers to reach, so public figures often employ experts to help them deliver an apology that appeases as many as possible. It is understood within public apologies that whilst *all* may not accept the apology, which is a desired outcome in the often smaller standardised apology, certain groups should ideally accept it, followed by as many people as possible outside of the target group (Austin & Urmson, 1962).

Rushdy (2018) states that there are six primary forms of public apology. These are *celebrity apologies*, *corporation apologies*, *diplomacy apologies*, *regime apologies*, *court apologies*, and *apologies for the past*. His work offers a broad historical analysis of moral teachings and opinions in three distinct sections. Beginning with the idea of *forgiveness* in the biblical relationship between Jesus and Paul, and Paul with the public via the teaching of forgiveness for sins, and how this impacted earlier texts and moral society.

The second part of Rushdy's work examines *resentment* through the Greek myth of Philoctetes and his punishment by the gods for betraying them. The British moral philosophers of the eighteenth century and their ruminations on resentment from injury and the potential moral degradation. As well as continental 19th-century philosophers such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard the idea that resentment is a cultural and collective malaise. The final section examines private and public apologies, providing a range of ways to categorise them through others' work, as well as his proposed models for apology analysis. The public apologies section

argues that the public apology as we understand it today emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century due to the shifting nature of publicity and public moral consciousness.

All six of Rushdy's public apology forms are expanded upon with contemporary and notable examples of positive and negatively received ones through media headlines. As well as the space surrounding them. Rushdy examines fictional cinematic portrayals of each, how sociologists perceive them and modern philosophers. The public apology section poses an intriguing closing thought, Rushdy wonders why public apologies often fail or produce counter-intuitive effects, suggesting they may no longer meet the needs of the public.

Following this idea, the final chapter proposes empathy may form the fourth section in future editions. He had noted a call for digital public apologies to showcase empathy, or for rude commenters to have some empathy for the crisis communicator.

Rushdy's approach to examining how the apology or moral practices for a harmonious society throughout history was thorough. It provided an examination of the space created for and in need of these evolving practices throughout time. The observations regarding empathy and the audiences shifting needs in the age of social media were particularly interesting.

This section has highlighted apologies, the reasoning behind them and the different forms they take. The next section looks at research that considers social media apologies that have arisen as a result of advances in digital technologies.

2.1.2 Social media apologies

Cerulo and Ruane (2014) suggest that public figure apologies, especially celebrity ones, are *first and foremost, media events in the age of social media*. An apology is performed, offered to a large audience, and redistributed across other platforms either in entirety or segments. Opinions can form from primary or latter-tier audiences on platforms like Twitter or Facebook.

Journalists, bloggers, other public figures, or those involved with the apology can also share their voices and help reshape the narrative with addition, subtraction, reflection, or comparison before offering it up to their audience.

In 2017, the New York Times compiled an end-of-year video called *2017: The Year in Apologies*, in which they sampled 29 notable public apologies from many different areas, including government departments, world leaders, actors, directors, comedians, sportspeople, and influencers. Whilst approximately a quarter of these incidents were concerning the *Me Too* movement, which gained significant traction in 2017, there were also many other reasons that varied in importance to specific groups. The video highlighted public awareness of the growing social media trend of public apologies.

With the emergence of social media apologies, it has become significantly more difficult for crisis response experts and crisis communicators to anticipate the reactions from the *layered audiences* receiving the apology. Whilst they can attempt to predict what the audience desires, they have no way of knowing what other information the audience has accessed (Stephens & Robertson, 2022, p.156). Whether the apology can just be for the sole act, or whether a pattern needs to be addressed. Although the communicator has a large audience and platform to address, their audience often also has the power to contribute either directly through the original post, or to add their influence to the content; however they so desire (Jin et al., 2014; Lachlan et al., 2018).

Social media has been shown to advantage elite groups such as politicians, celebrities and corporations. Naturally, these public figures and companies were early adopters of the widespread social media apology to protect their brands. Preferring to address their audience on all of their platforms, to reach as many audiences as possible, and with as many styles of apology

as possible, to minimise the potential financial loss and damage to their image. Seward (2011) looks at ten examples of CEOs who have apologised through YouTube videos, as well as through other social media platforms such as Tweets on Twitter. He notes a casual dress code and attitude throughout the YouTube apologies and suggests the CEOs may have discounted the platform, assuming few would see this particular apology. He likens their videos to a combination of apology meets ‘David after the dentist’; the latter refers to a viral video of a child babbling after a dental treatment.

At the same time, however, some researchers have gone on to discuss how social media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter have widened the public sphere so that many others - not just these powerful, elite individuals and organisations - can communicate widely with others by uploading comments and videos, and use these to apologise if necessary.

2.2 YouTube and Vloggers

In February 2005, YouTube was launched (Hosch, 2022). The platform was intended to make videos more accessible. It should be noted that Vimeo was created in October 2004, although still heavily in development at the time. With YouTube, any user with an account could upload a video, share it with their friends through a link, and find the video or other content easily with the search bar. Despite anyone being able to access the videos uploaded, the idea of creating video blogs or gathering a large following wasn’t an intentional part of the initial site design. In October 2005, the subscribe button was added so that users could access their friends’ content easily. In April 2006, YouTube began to feature its ‘most-subscribed’ members on the front page (YouTube, 2006).

In 2011, the YouTube creator Charlie McDonnell, known by his channel name ‘Charlieissocoollike’ became the first vlog channel to reach a million subscribers in the U.K.

(Smith, 2014). He started his channel early in 2007. The *Vlog Brothers* Hank and John Green also started their YouTube channel in 2007. They aimed to exchange video messages daily between themselves to improve their bond as brothers; their vlog exchanges were intended for each other but soon became a popular channel on the platform. They continued to begin their videos by addressing each other by name in a greeting and would finish their videos by addressing or including the audience as an additional viewer. In doing so, they divided their audience into ‘sibling’ and ‘other viewers’, creating a layer past the traditional genre text relationship of ‘writer’ and ‘reader’. They would encourage the viewers to participate in the comment section so they could receive feedback.

What both their channels were doing at the time, two years after the inception of the platform was different to the mass of cat videos or television clips that overwhelmed the platform. Viewers were acknowledged, and figures (or what have become known as vloggers) talked to them via the camera, sharing their lives in varying levels of detail. As indicated by McDonnell’s 2011 milestone, vlogs were not an instantaneous success on the platform. The site had a reputation for funny viral videos, like *Charlie bit my finger*, which amassed an impressive 65 million views within a year in 2008 (Moore, 2008). YouTube offered a lot of variety across its content, and vloggers existed. Still, their personality or unique voice was not marketed as belonging to the YouTube brand or *community* as it is now with their exclusive partnership programme (Howell, 2022).

The success of YouTube videos has continued to grow. In 2016, there were already 2,000 channels that had achieved over a million subscribers. As of January 2022 (Funk, 2022), there were over 29,000 YouTube channels with over a million subscribers. Seven hundred channels

have over 10 million subscribers, and approximately 50% of the channel owners who have over ten million subscribers reside in the United States of America.

Amongst the extensive range of content in the early days of the platform was corporate apologies. Companies utilised YouTube, amongst other platforms, whilst in crisis management. In 2011, the Wall Street Journal created a top 10 list of CEO apologies posted on YouTube, with the earliest example coming from 2007 (Seward, 2011). The following year, Business Insider published an article titled ‘How to make the perfect grovelling YouTube apology and rescue your company's image’ (Correa, 2012).

Public apologies have demonstrably been present on social media for a long time. However, these corporate apologies are not vlogpologies, for a few crucial reasons. The companies are not *vloggers*, the apologies are not vlogs, and their use of the platform is simply as a video-sharing medium - rather than where their audience primarily is. Their apologies are likely crafted by an experienced team, and the video is often intended to serve as one of many apologies across platforms rather than simply sharing a link to the sole apology across platforms. Each apology for corporations is crafted to suit the intended audience on that platform. Their YouTube apologies are also less likely to go viral, as the audience does not have the same *personal* connection with a CEO, as they do a vlogger they have watched for hundreds of hours (Afriza & Rusadi, 2021).

Smith (2014) suggests that most creators are a product of their own making. Their brand is themselves and the identity they have shared online. His research centres on the idea of identity in the context of YouTube, specifically chronicling the career of *Charlieissocoolike*, who joined the platform before monetization was a feature and as a teenager. Essentially, Charlie

became a vlogger without incentivisation or other figures to mirror. Vlogging was a new style of content on the platform, an afterschool hobby for the teenager to show whatever he desired.

Smith suggests that the creator journeys from an average person, sharing their voice/interests/skills or hobbies – some part of themselves; audiences notice this and enjoy seeing parts of the creator's life. The creator often grows when their audience like their content and subscribes through algorithm pushes or word of mouth, and their job suddenly becomes to manage this *real* style that originally drew in fans whilst managing their celebrity-like status. But he also examined the relationship between the audience and creator, applying Gell's (1998) speculative theory over YouTube vlogs to suggest the relationship between positive video performance, subscribing to a creator to indulge in more content or inspecting the creators' library for another video before committing to a subscription is *captivation*. He suggests that what keeps the viewers' interest piqued is the intimacy displayed by the vlogger and the performative agency. Viewers may feel they could create vlogs, too; Smith believes it is important for viewers to feel as if they could partake in the vlog.

Whilst there are celebrity vloggers, vlogging commonly involves sharing a lot of oneself online, and subscribers expect consistent content, which can be tough to incorporate for those who already have a large following and lengthy working hours for their usual job. Posting a branded selfie on Instagram or a sponsored Tweet takes less effort and is often as or more financially beneficial.

As vloggers often begin their channel alone, their filming techniques, scripts, content, editing and stylistic choices like wardrobe or aesthetic shots are decided upon and crafted together through a self-made process. This often continues until the vlogger is successful enough to hire additional staff. By this point, they are likely to have developed their knowledge and

preferences for their vlogs' signature voice. There is also an established character. In the case study, Charlie, notes in distress that he organically met his hero, who recognised him, referring to the vlogger as a scramble of his channel name *Charlie is cool he is like* rather than by his actual name; Charles McDonnell.

The study from Smith (2014) explores one of the founding YouTube vloggers and their relationship to their authentic selves, their unintentionally projected identity, their reaction to being treated as the identity rather than themselves, the cult of self-style vlogging encourages and the complicated relationship between feeding fans what they want and fulfilling their own creative needs or ambitions. It suggests a complicated relationship with success, growth, authenticity, interaction, branding and creating that is an integral part of many vloggers' experience on the platform.

This paper explained the vloggers' identity shifts through the lens of psychology. This study thoroughly examined the single creator, it would be interesting to examine a range of vloggers in an interview format to see how typical this experience is.

2.2.1 Twitter & the Notes app Apology

For public figures, the social media platform Twitter has been a convenient tool for addressing their audiences directly and quickly. When a gossip site tags them in a story via the @ feature, for example, public figures (which includes politicians, celebrities and the like) can be notified enabling them to directly respond to their large following. They can also see what the discourse is around them through the search function or comments. As well as address their fans in a succinct manner, due to limited characters. Many celebrities have their accounts controlled by a social media manager. When in crisis, these managers can issue a statement that seemingly

comes directly from them through Twitter. Twitter allows them to control their narrative or to take back power from earlier tabloid culture.

From 2006 to 2016, if public figures wanted to issue a substantially worded statement, as Twitter confined them to 140 characters per tweet, a link was often added, to direct an audience to a lengthier public statement or apology on another platform, such as a blog post. Although, for app users, this meant a new web page window would open up, which isn't always how users want to navigate. Following the link to view, the apology was not guaranteed.

In 2016, Twitter's option to upload a photo was utilised as another mode for public statements or apologies. Dubbed the *Notes app apology* (Diop, 2020), it was a combination of a statement written on the Apple Notes app that was screen-captured and then uploaded. The Notes app is a personal application where users scribble down short notes, grocery lists or thoughts like a diary (Weber, 2019). Part of the appeal is thought to be that the images can be screen-captured from Twitter to be redistributed on other platforms like Instagram or Facebook. There is little room for misinterpretation or being taken out of context, especially for entertainment reporters, as a large audience has seen the original Notes app statement. Up to four screenshots can be taken to post in a single tweet, which allows for a lengthier message.

Its personal nature and character expansion ability are thought to be why the Notes app approach is still a common style of apology used on Twitter, despite the character limit being doubled from 140 to 280 in 2017 (Benoit & Glantz, 2019).

The Notes app apology, when coming from the account of a public figure, is thought of as a statement crafted by themselves. It's deemed more authentic than a brief statement. Weber implies that the spelling errors within Notes app apologies may be perceived as a positive, as it

shows the poster is not pretentious but fallible. Also, other writers have not corrected this, which feels more genuine.

Twitter would display the entire image, and public figures would often header the image with a tweet that had an interesting but vague thought. Such as *I just wanted to address this in my own words* without mentioning what *this* was. Diop suggests that vague phrases are an integral part of the social media apology. Statements like *I'm listening* or *learning*, without further elaboration or follow-up, are common. This apology format is still utilised by public figures, yet it is not a one-size-fits-all solution.

2.2.2 Vloggers vs Notes app

In 2017, popular YouTube creator Logan Paul attempted to issue a Notes app apology on Twitter and was met with backlash. As his content style was *daily vlogging*, he shared much of his life online with his audience, specifically on YouTube. To direct his apology to a limited audience on another platform, in a style of communication that was less intimate than his normal style, was deemed disingenuous and as if he was hiding.

His audience demanded an apology in his usual communication style, a Vlog. Burch (2018) states that Paul's natural medium is video. His instinct to hide behind a written statement is particularly strange, as he had built his career by speaking directly to his fans when vlogging. They feel a connection with him due to his open nature. Paul issued a first vlogpology, which was widely viewed as an unacceptable apology, as it was very short, and took minimal accountability. A second, more thoughtful vlogpology was issued, which was viewed as a significant improvement.

A similar situation emerged in 2018, when popular vlogger Laura Lee, attempted to issue a Notes app apology and was met with similar backlash and demand for an *authentic* apology

(Abad-Santos, 2018). Like Paul, Lee issued a first vlogpology, which was brief and received poorly. Also, like Paul, Lee returned to the platform despite her cancellation and crafted a second vlogpology. On the first day her original vlogpology was issued, she lost 160,000 subscribers. Within a week, she had lost 500,000. Her emotional response was the subject of many memes, as was her victim-led position for controversial tweets (Weiner, 2018). Lee deleted this vlogpology, before issuing a second vlogpology. This vlogpology acknowledged the errors in the first, yet because Lee had taken the initial vlogpology down, she faced further criticism for attempting to distance herself from the initial vlogpology; which meant the secondary vlogpology ultimately received fewer views. The deletion of the first is thought to have indicated a lack of accountability, something the initial vlogpology was made to counteract her past controversial opinions. Although Lee maintains a high subscription count on YouTube, almost four years later, her viewership figures are a quarter of what they were pre-scandal (Dodgson, 2021).

The theme of authenticity seems to be heavily linked to vloggers, as first suggested in Smiths' (2014) study of one of the first vloggers and the pressures they faced throughout their career development. To be seen as authentic is essential for vloggers if they are to maintain the trust and support of their audience. So it is perhaps unsurprising to note that many of the following studies on vlogpology that are included in the next section aim to answer questions about whether vlogpologies they studied were authentic or sincere, and whether the public perceived them this way.

2.3 The Vlogpology

As I argue in this thesis, only a small amount of research has been done on vlogpologies - presumably because it is a recent and emergent phenomena. However, those existing studies are worthy of mention for what they have contributed and are outlined in this section.

The vlogpology, presumably, should have an apologetic element. Yet, in a study done by Binraya and Panjaitan (2019), they indicate that some vlogpologies may not feature an actual apology. This idea is offered in additional studies by Berryman & Kavka (2018), Lawson (2020) and Woods (2021). Binraya and Panjaitan's study examined a Notes app apology and two vlogpologies created by a single YouTuber to compare the Image Repair (IRT) strategies used between them; they also performed a discourse analysis to analyse the lexical patterns between creator vlogpologies and Notes app apology. Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory (IRT), as mentioned in Chapter one, has been featured within vlogpology research to analyse the crisis communication techniques used and to attempt to understand sincerity through this (Berryman & Kavka, 2018; Lawson, 2021; Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2018., 2020; Woods, 2021) and becomes significant to my research as Benoit states that there is no one size fits all combination of his techniques to repair one's image (1997). As such, my study will not examine how sincere or authentic the vlogpology is because that is outside the scope of this thesis; certain communicative characteristics or structural pieces may indicate authenticity, or the opposite will be noted.

Lawson's (2020) and Woods's (2021) studies investigated the vlogpology in terms of community to the extent that they labelled it community-specific. They suggest that the beauty community on YouTube predominantly post vlogpologies. Lawson's study examines two vlogpologies and their response on a range of social media platforms, performing a discourse analysis on 21 Reddit posts, 2000 random tweets and 57 video comments to assess the IRT strategies used in the vlogpology, the online sentiment surrounding them through the platforms discourse analysis and the analytical features such as subscription counts. Woods also applied IRT and looked at two vlogpologies, as well as the online sentiment through 1000 social media

comments and news articles from online media. Both approaches are interesting, although some social media users are passive in that they do not comment when they like or dislike something. The inclusion of online media articles in Woods's study was interesting, as writers may be writing towards a specific angle that aligns with popular public opinion or provides coverage of the tone the vlogpology is presented to the public. However, the articles are limited in that both only examine two vlogpologies, and they are beauty community specific. Something that both studies believe is indicative of the whole genre.

Sandlin and Gracyalny (2018, 2020), in conducting two studies on public figure apologies, included some vlogpologies within their first sample of 32 apologies. Their second study showed a randomised selection of two vlogpologies out of four possible videos to a survey group of 403 participants. The first study examined 1496 comments on social media to understand the connection between the apology issued, the sincerity of the apology and the fans' feelings. They noted that this method neglected passive viewers' opinions. The second study also aimed to understand how sincere an audience found vlogpologies, making up for the passive voice by having survey participants answer specific questions. The second study anticipated a *sameness* link between viewers, where some participants may be more forgiving or have a favourable opinion of a specific vlogpology due to a shared quality like ethnicity, gender identity or personal style. They also expected pretty privilege to sway results. They noted that these were not shown to be relevant to their sample. Both studies also examined the IRT strategies present in vlogpologies and public figure apologies. The progression between studies of attempting to understand audiences' mindsets through such a large sample, noting the potential adjustments needed for data due to the passive audience being unaccounted for, and then researching

potential biases a surveyed audience may have, was a really thorough and cohesive approach to solidify their study and results.

Another angle for vlogpology-based studies has been the effects on brand partnerships. Sng et al. (2019) also applied IRT to their study, firstly examining the crisis communication methods used from Benoit's model and then looking at the effects vlogpologies may have had on five creators' brand partnerships during and post the vlogpology. A three-month afterwards window was added to assess whether or not the vlogpology kept the brand partnership alive. This was an interesting angle, as previous studies positioned a vlogpology as successful through the viewer or fan sentiment (Sandlin and Gracyalny, 2018, 2020; Lawson, 2020; Woods, 2021). Brand partnerships refer to brands reaching out to a vlogger and paying them a sum of money to include a small advertisement or feature of their product during a video. Their video is sponsored, meaning they will earn their standard monetisation fee, as well as the agreed-upon fee from the brand. YouTube can demonetise videos if a copyright claim is made, say for using an artist's song during a video. The artist, rather than the vlogger, earns the revenue for that video.

So, brand partnerships provide a steady income for vloggers. Brands have been known to sever connections with vloggers involved in controversy, as it looks like they support the act if they continue to sponsor the creator. Afriza and Rusadi (2021) also looked at the brand angle with five creators. They suggested that vlogpology-based study needed to be more robust, noting a pattern I had also observed, in that vlogpologies have been labelled as community-specific but are incredibly diverse. They looked at creators from five different communities (gaming, beauty, travel, trend and fashion), and applied a new theory, Murdoch's (2011) political economy theory model to specifically view the vlogpology as a business. They examined the creator's brand partnerships six months before the vlogpology, during the crisis and six months afterwards. Both

studies had small sample sizes, but the business angle was an interesting approach that helped solidify Smith's (2014) suggestion that the vlogger creates a specific branded identity that, amongst its many functions and roles, should be a product brands want to partner with.

While these studies represent a scholarly interest in vlogpologies - as can be seen - there is little that focuses on it as a genre - and thus indicates a gap in the research which I intend to explore further in terms of a genre study within YouTube.

2.4 YouTube Genre Studies

YouTube genres have become a growing area of focus for research papers. An early addition to the field of study from 2012 (Werner) examines four YouTube vlog genres and four videos from each genre (confessional, reaction videos, ranting videos and witness videos), as well as the rhetorical strategies present in the sixteen videos, in their genre groups and as collective members of the overarching vlogging genre. The study explores how and why the unrehearsed and unorganised videos found in the vlogging genre had become such a 'magnetic and beloved' form of content. Discussing the relationship between the vlogger and the audience through the diary personal confession format that is vlogging. Werner also examines the emotions the vloggers express through tone, facial and gestural movements. They discuss what the four vlogging genres share collectively, and what marks them as individual genres. Stating that their strongest connection is that in every vlog genre, the personal element of the vlogger sharing their thoughts, emotions, and connecting with their audience is apparent. This study observes that vloggers are vulnerable because of this, Werner believes there is a risk in exposing themselves to the complex and unforeseeable rhetorical environment of YouTube and the digital space.

This study predates the vlogpology, yet suggests that vloggers may soon find themselves in a crisis due to their unique positions as public figures who manage their own content and careers without a team to help guide them. Like Smith (2014), this paper was also published in the field of psychology. Smith also noted the self-made element for vloggers that Werner (2012) focussed on. Werner believes that because of this, they are more vulnerable to making an error and are more susceptible to online rhetoric, as they often also manage all of their social media and thus are more likely to see negative comments; than other celebrities who have a team in charge of managing their social media. This self-made and self-managed position many vloggers hold may be a contributing factor to the creation of vlogpologies.

Mowlabocus (2020) examines the narrative tropes found in the ‘unboxing genre’ of videos, the camera shots used in the vlogs and what emotions viewers may feel when watching an unboxing video. The method for this study was quite similar to a more generalised YouTube-based analysis of the *vlog genre* by Pihlaja (2018). Pihlaja also examines the narrative of vlogs and camera shots used. Pihlaja’s study assesses two videos by the same YouTuber, whereas Mowlabocus examined 60 videos. Pihlaja’s study aimed to discover how intimate the connection was between vlogger and viewer, to assess whether or not a viewer would feel like they were participating in the vlog. Pihlaja also examined eye contact, and the style of address the viewer received. Employing Bamberg’s (1997) concept of positioning between a storyteller and listener. The study suggested viewers would find the content highly engaging and personal, due to the structure of the specific vlogs analysed. The relationship between the audience and the vlogger seems to also be a common theme among vlog-based studies (Smith, 2014; Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2018, 2020).

Cui (2022) also conducted a study related to YouTube, specifically, they studied memes that have emerged from the vlogpology. They believe that apology videos have been identified as a genre, saying they have unique and recognisable features for parody. This in itself was recognisable by the vlogpologies appearance on Saturday Night Live; to understand parody, the exaggerated or imitated features of the source must first be understood. Like previous studies, Cui does not present the defining features of the genre, relying on online commentary articles that surround the genre. They state that vlogpologies feature dramatic acting, sarcasm and non-apologetic language. Their study examines the transcript of two vlogpologies from one vlogger and one rapper who posted an apology video across their social media (Instagram, Twitter and YouTube) and one parody apology video by another vlogger, which seems to draw influence from both vlogpologies in their linguistic choices. Arguably, the rapper's apology is not included within the genre, as it is not made by a vlogger.

Cui's study observes that the vlogpology parody has more direct links to the vlogger's vlogpology and their previous work, parodying various phrases that are present in their usually upbeat vlogs. However, as there are slight links between the rapper's apology and the vlogger's work, it suggests this rapper took cues from the vlogpology genre, despite not being a vlogger. They also briefly discuss other vlogpology memes that were related to their two vlogpologies and a single vlogpology parody video. They mention photograph-based memes, GIFs, TikTok's using the audio from vlogpologies, false WikiHow articles, and tweets. The study discusses the variety, longevity and reach of vlogpology memes and argues that a vlogpology memes can also be classified as a genre. Although, the links they use to tie the genre together are that they all reference the vlogpologies in a manner of imitation or parody. The vlogpologies genre characteristics were not clearly defined.

Together, these studies from Werner (2012), Mowlabocus (2020), Pihlaja (2018) and Cui (2022); show that there is a growing space for YouTube-based genre studies, and indeed that studies launching off the vlogpology genre have begun. Genres borrow from each other and reference each other to understand a neighbouring predecessor genre, allowing future neighbouring genres borrowed and unique characteristics to be distinguished. Cui's study began to establish work on the relationship between the vlogpology and vlogpology meme. However, without a foundation for the vlogpology, the unique genre characteristics of the vlogpology meme genre cannot be typified, as the characteristics of the original genre have not been identified. Their study indicates a need for an introductory vlogpology study to aid future research for the vlogpology and ensuing digital genre relatives.

2.5 Summary

Although vlogpology and vlog-based studies are still emerging, this chapter has focused on the wider field in which this study can be situated, graduating from research into the apology as a speech act and the roles of public apologies (commonly enacted by politicians and celebrities) through to social media apologies. I noted Benoit's theory of image repair to indicate the reasoning and intent of many apologies that are performed either in person (face to face or through the media) and in writing. I highlighted social media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter as offering new ways to apologise through digital technologies, which offer a range of affordances and enable interaction with and participation by viewers. Finally, I concluded that a particular form of online apology through social media videos has arisen - the 'vlogpology' - and argued that its repeated use by vloggers and particularly social media influencers with extremely large fan bases and viewership has led to it being considered as a genre. As indicated in my introductory chapter, a genre analysis has not yet been applied to the vlogpology, which has

resulted in my research questions looking to identify the characteristics that serve these social media apologies by vloggers. While this chapter has provided the scholarly backdrop for this study - the next chapter provides details of the design and method of my research that will answer these questions.

Chapter 3: Method and Design

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the literature relating to apologies from their earliest definitions to their more recent application when used by vloggers, commonly known as the *vlogpology*. I noted that vlogpology is a more recent phenomenon that arose from the introduction of digital technology and the participatory influence of social media platforms' audience and public figure dynamic. During my research process, I noticed that although some studies and media texts had stated that vlogpology was a genre, they gave sparse information on how it might be classified.

Given that genre is influenced by the socio-cultural context of production, interpretation by an audience, expectations, and their relationship with other texts (Swales, 1990, p.58), I was therefore keen to seek a greater understanding of what constituted a vlogpology – by identifying its parameters, influences, and original features through genre analysis to answer my research questions (subsequent to my main question about the vlogpology as a genre) which I repeat here.

Research questions:

1. What discourse moves and steps commonly occur in vlogpologies?
2. What are the linguistic and visual communicative characteristics of the vlogpology that have established it as a new genre?

This chapter, therefore, presents the design of my study to answer these questions which involved selecting a data sample of fifteen vlogpologies and combining a number of methodological approaches to identify their generic features. The chapter is divided into four sections to explain the research design:

- (i) overview of methodological approaches – that is, genre analysis, corpus linguistics and multimodal analysis;
- (ii) data selection of vlogpologies and collection process, including the criteria used to ensure a varied group of vlogpologies for the corpus;
- (iii) detailed description of the three analytical frameworks – a genre-informed move/step analysis, a corpus-assisted lexico-grammatical analysis, and multimodal visual design analysis;
- (iv) discussion of the limitations, as well as strengths of my chosen methods.

3.1 Methodological approaches

The methodological approaches are briefly introduced here before I expand on their analytical frameworks later on in the chapter.

3.1.1 Genre Analysis

The first approach used for this study is a genre-informed move/step analysis. Traditional genre analysis (Swales, 1990) was designed for written genres such as the CARS research, college acceptance letters or newspaper articles. In a genre study that examines a non-digital text, using a genre-informed move/step analysis alone can provide meaningful insight into the genre, due to fewer modes of communication. As vlogpology might be classified as a digital genre with multiple modes of communication, there are features that this single analytical approach is vulnerable to missing, that may be salient to the genre.

The genre-informed move step vlogpology model and analysis will be the primary focus of this study, supported by an analysis of lexical patterns and minor visual features.

3.1.2 Corpus Linguistics

The second analytical approach that I draw upon is corpus linguistics, as this will provide insights into common linguistic features in my sample of vlogpology data. Bennett (2010) states that a corpus is an expansive, principled body of texts of naturally occurring samples of language that are stored digitally. Corpus linguistics involves using computer software to rapidly search and analyse a large database (corpora) of natural language (Vaughan & O’Keefe, 2015). Sinclair (1991) believes that a lone word cannot carry meaning for a text, however, meaning is often made through a sequence of words. The connections, or lexical patterns, can show the unique textual characteristics within the target corpus. As well as potential information on the ideologies of the creator/s of the text, and the intentions or purpose behind the text.

Corpora can comprise any designed collection of transcribed spoken language or written language. Corpora are often assembled to provide comprehensive information about a language or an area of a language’s usage. The target corpus, which represents a smaller but also designed corpus, consists of a sample of texts within the same genre or that share some qualities. The target corpus is then analysed against the reference corpora. For this study, the reference corpora will be the American National Corpus (ANC). The ANC consists of 14.5 million words of everyday American English; it has samples from a large number of spoken and written texts, that reflect the *everyday* language used by the average speaker of American English. This was chosen as many of the vloggers in this study live in The United States of America. The target corpus for this study has transcripts from 15 vlogpologies.

For this study, the latest version of the free-to-download corpus analysis software AntConc version 4.0.11 (Anthony, 2022) will be used alongside the ANC reference corpora and vlogpology transcripts. I will be investigating a variety of lexical features and patterns in the vlogpology corpus, as opposed to everyday expected speech patterns of the broader public found

within the ANC. This will include aspects such as collocates and concordances, which will be explained under the section on analytical frameworks.

3.1.3 Multimodal analysis

As this study aims to examine multiple communicative characteristics found within the vlogpology, a multimodal genre analysis is a way to identify common visual features.

Multimodality analysis examines the interplay between multiple modes of communication present in texts. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) state there are five modes of communication within a text: *textual*, *visual*, *aural*, *gestural*, and *spatial*.

Visual communication and design are incredibly important to YouTube, which is the largest video streaming platform on the internet. YouTube is a business, with the platform earning \$19.7 billion in 2020 and \$28.8 billion in 2021 (Iqbal, 2022). YouTube encourages creators to think about their visual design from the moment their video is uploaded. YouTube ultimately wants more views on its platform, as its primary source of revenue is through advertisements. To attract advertisers, they need to illustrate their ability to garner a certain amount of viewership or exposure on videos, for advertisers to place their work on. The thumbnail prompt is helpful for creators, 90% of the platform's best-performing videos feature a customised thumbnail (YouTube, 2021). A video only needs to be clicked on and watched for thirty seconds to be considered as a view on the platform. This small timeframe means a click almost guarantees YouTube will gain the view count statistic.

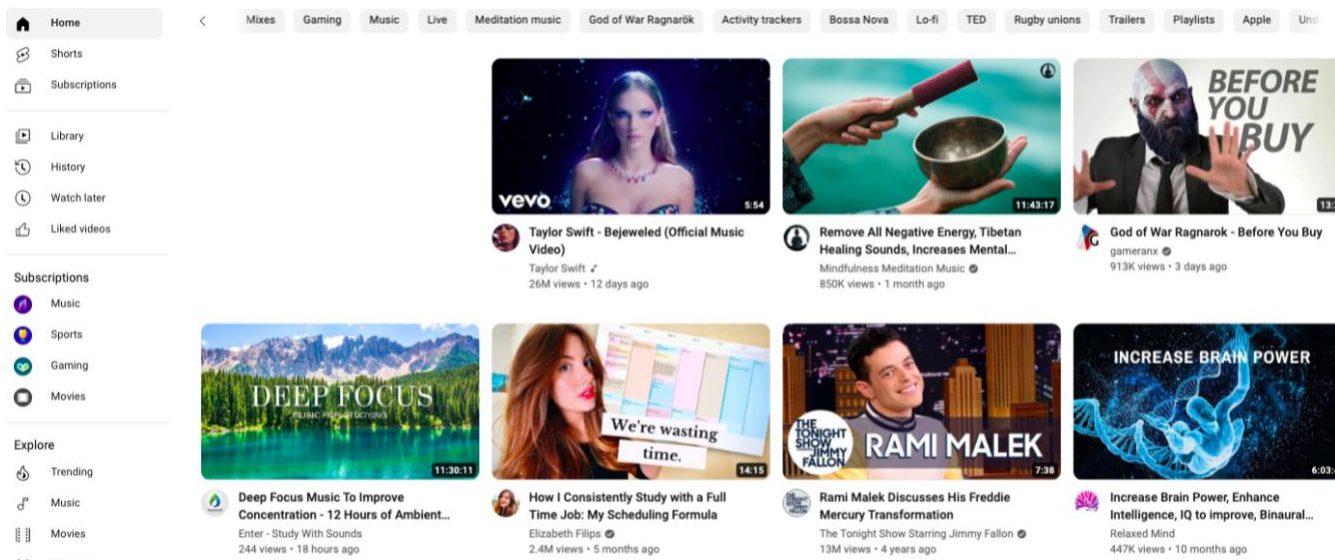
Because this study is already looking at the linguistic features in the corpus-assisted analysis, the textual and aural modes will have already been examined. However, the scope of this research does not enable an analysis of all of the visual aspects of every video in the sample due to time restraints. This would be overwhelming. Therefore it was decided that the primary

focus would be on the multiple modes of visual communication in the vlogpologies thumbnail design.

A thumbnail is a concise description, representation or summary (Oxford Dictionary, 2022), but in computing, it refers to a small image. The YouTube thumbnail is a preview image for a video, it represents the content of the video and is the first image a viewer will see before watching the video (Hanna, 2022). The YouTube (2022) prompt for creators states: “A good thumbnail stands out and draws viewers’ attention”.

These are often displayed amongst neighbouring images, either on the home page, search results, or recommended videos; choosing or designing an image that attracts attention against the competing images is important. The thumbnail itself is a billboard or film poster, representing the video’s subject and tone. It is for these reasons that thumbnails will be examined as they present a condensed version of what the vlogpology represents or is trying to communicate.

A thumbnail is an image that represents or previews a video on a social media site such as YouTube. They condense the content or tone of the video into one image as a way to elicit feelings of curiosity or intrigue for viewers (Brown, 2018). They are designed for video optimisation and ranking of content on YouTube by getting as many people as possible to click on the video – especially when it is competing with so many other videos, as can be seen in the screenshot below in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1*YouTube Home Page*

Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar analysis framework as to how the vlogpology thumbnails are designed will be examined. As well as the other analytical frameworks for move/step and lexico-grammatical aspects will feature later in this chapter. First, it is necessary to describe my data collection.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Building the corpus

Identification of vlogpologies in the first instance was problematic as these videos are not necessarily referenced by this label as a category on YouTube. I also needed to keep the amount of data I selected for detailed analysis a manageable size, especially since I would be needing to view the videos multiple times and also analyse the structure, language and visual features. Therefore, the process of building the corpus required several stages.

(i) Apologetic language

To gather data, I searched common apologetic terms and phrases. As even if the vlogpology did not feature these specific words in their title or description, YouTube's video *tag* feature would allow for vlogpologies that had been tagged with these phrases on the creator side to appear in a viewer's search (Locke, 2019).

I drew on a notable study on finding apologetic language by An et al., (2021), which focussed on the genders' approach to apologetic spoken language and associations, found within the British National Corpora between 2015-2016. Drawing on previous studies regarding apology structures and patterns (Aijmer, 1996, 2019; Deutschmann, 2003; Jucker and Taavitsainen, 2008), they ascertained that each of the following words is an integral part of apology speech: *sorry, pardon, excuse, afraid, apologise, apologize, regret, forgive, apology* and *apologies*. Each term was typed into the YouTube search bar.

(ii) Identifying the 'most viewed' videos with apologies

For the second stage, I decided I wanted to gather vlogpologies that were created by the most popular vloggers. To achieve this, I used YouTube's award-based system, which divides the creators and their number of subscribers into value-specific categories of success.

YouTube does this by giving creators a *Play button* award each time they reach a certain follower count; this is accompanied by a congratulatory letter signed by the CEO of YouTube. The play button is a physical award shaped like the YouTube logo, a triangle in a rounded rectangle. The awards name and triangle take inspiration from the universally recognisable right-facing triangle found on devices with buttons such as television remotes and applications like YouTube or Spotify to fulfil the *play* command.

These awards are YouTube's versions of creator milestones or levels of influence on the platform. The first award is the silver button, which requires 100,000 followers. As of January (Funk, 2022), there are approximately 306,000 channels that have reached this milestone. Which makes up approximately 0.28% of the platform's user base. The rest of the play button requirements and recipient statistics are listed in table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1

YouTube Play Button Details

Award	Follower count	Buttons Awarded
Silver play button	100,000	306,000+
Gold play button	1,000,000	25,000+
Diamond play button	10,000,000	700+
Ruby custom play button	50,000,000	35
Red diamond play button	100,000,000	4

As this table shows, the top tier awards become more difficult for people to achieve, and the idea of using the most popular YouTubers' vlogpologies was adjusted to popular rather than most popular. This study requires a broad sample of vlogpologies to avoid falling into the community or creator-specific area laid out in studies before (Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019; Lawson, 2020; Woods, 2021). If this study had only featured the red and ruby play button recipients, there would only be 39 vloggers to choose from. A particular community may make-up half of this group, which could lead to community-specific languages, like video game terms disrupting the lexical data.

For this study, I decided that the vloggers need to be at least established enough to have received the first tier of the play button award, which serves as a marker of platform success and

influence. As the silver play button still has a large sample of creators, I decided that the minimum follower count would be 500,000. Also that the minimum views number would be 300,000. As vlogpologies are described as going more viral than a creator's other content, having a figure that represents over half of their subscribers watching a single video is significant. This number suggests their channel is growing and that they have a significant level of reach on the platform. Therefore the next step was to use the YouTube search filter option and set it to display videos that matched each word, from the most views to the least.

I clicked through the videos on the apology word search results and noticed a trend of the word *accountability* in titles. Paik (2021) suggests that accountability is a buzzword in the vlogpology genre, tying its usage to punishment or apology. She suggests that true accountability is not something that can be done to a person, it should be a continuous process with multiple steps that are done for their improvement and are driven by their own volition. Paik believes vlogpologies collectively share a narrative where the creator feels sorry others are offended by their actions rather than sorry their actions harmed someone. This seems like an extreme stance. I do not know if the vlogpology frequently uses or misuses the word accountability throughout the texts, but what I did notice, was a pattern of the word accountability coming up in the titles during my apologetic word search. Meaning the video tags or description may have contained apologetic words while the title used accountability, linking them both to the concept in search results for vlogpologies. So, the word *accountability* was added to the search list. This was the only adjustment to the initial search process.

(iii) Refining the corpus

Initially, 156 videos that could be vlogpologies were collected and saved to a playlist on YouTube. To narrow down this selection to the fifteen vlogpologies required for this study, a range of criteria was then weighed against each video to ensure it was suitable for this study.

The remaining criteria for inclusion in the corpus needed to be:

- People using the apologetic language noted by An et al. (2021) within their videos, explaining a situation of crisis and/or addressing their audience to ask for understanding or forgiveness were identified as vlogpologies.
- That the vlogpologies were on the channel of the original vlogger. I noticed during my search for vlogpologies, that there were a few that were re-uploaded by other channels. Although this is within the platforms' fair use, it felt wrong to include material the creator would not want to be displayed on their channel or was trying to distance themselves from.
- The channel also needed to be at least a year old, so that the creator was familiar with the platform and was likely aware of other vlogpologies their peers had put out. This period of time is indicative of a creator who would understand the potential benefits or ramifications that could arise from publishing a vlogpology. This study examines fifteen vlogpologies from 2017-2021.
- A minimum time for the vlogpology to be up on the platform of four months. This seemed a suitable amount of time for the crisis to settle or for the creator to remove or change the privacy settings on their vlogpology if they found it distressing.
- To ensure a diverse range of vlogpologies, I ensured I had no more than three creators with a channel that specialised in a specific topic or area, such as gaming or beauty. This was done to minimise community-specific language such as referencing gaming terms or

a make-up product at such a frequency, that it interfered with the corpus-based linguistic analysis. It was also done to avoid categorising the vlogpology as belonging to a specific community or type of vlogger, as suggested by other studies (Lawson, 2020; Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019; Woods, 2021 etc).

After the criteria had been thoroughly examined against the vlogpology playlist, fifteen vlogpologies remained for the study's sample and are listed in Table 3.2 below with details of the vloggers' names, links to their collected vlogpologies, details of views, date uploaded and length of the videos:

Table 3.2

Vlogpology Sample Information

Vlogger	Channel type	Link	Views as of 10/08/2021	Upload Date	Length
Alfie Deyes	Lifestyle and relationship	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLLwNBG1ang	1,765,194	19/6/2018	8:14
Callux	Challenges	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtvnaBZ8-N8	1,819,597	20/6/2021	8:27
Colleen Vlogs	Family	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5AsmKUSaQg	3,456,659	13/5/2021	13:24
Cozy Kitsune	Craft	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zluEUZmECBs&t=607s	810,137	11/8/2017	20:08
David Dobrik	Comedy	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IB734hc89x8&t=3s	16,642,473	23/3/2021	7:17
Doctor Mike	Medical	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAQkXN7aXxg	1,812,276	28/11/2029	4:45
English With Lucy	English language teaching	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=au_0R4bYe1w	929,503	3/6/2020	3:26
Faze Jarvis	Gaming	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN3ttHug-BU	21,966,924	4/11/2019	6:48
Hungry Box	Gaming	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYNZJDt5mvc	353,775	6/6/2020	7:31
Jatie Vlogs	Relationship	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62MLsFiVwOs	665,644	20/5/2021	8:14
Jeffree Star	Beauty	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOuwNiCa-zU&t=51s	13,440,366	19/7/2020	10:37
Logan Paul	Daily vlogs	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwZT7T-TXT0	60,106,827	3/1/2018	1:45
Olivia Jade	Beauty and fashion	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAJArLC6v70&t=135s&ab_channel=OliviaJade	1,028,596	17/08/2018	3:15
Tana Mongeau	Story time	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwLiy4ti9is&t=48s	2,154,641	5/9/2020	14:46
PewDiePie	Multiple genres: primarily Commentary and lifestyle	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cldxuaxaQwc	16,052,312	13/9/2017	1:36

(iv) Storing the data

The fifteen vlogpologies were downloaded and saved as .mp4 files. Each was individually viewed, and the words spoken by the vlogger were transcribed into individual Microsoft Word documents. The transcription process was done in two ways:

- Nine vlogpologies were transcribed manually.
- The remaining six videos had YouTube transcriptions available, so these were copied and pasted into a word document.

To ensure the transcript was correct, each vlogpology was then viewed closely and cross-checked with the transcription document, and corrections were made where errors occurred. To aid the viewing of the vlogpologies, the speed of the video could be altered, varying from the 0.25 to 1.25 seconds setting on YouTube, depending on the vlogger's speech speed and clarity of speech. Each video was viewed a minimum of three times, pausing and rewinding a few seconds when needed. Once the transcripts were completed, the Word documents were converted to .txt for AntConc, as the software will not read Word files.

3.3 Analytical frameworks - Building a new model for Vlogpologies

In this section I provide more detail about the new model that I developed for this research on vlogpologies based on relevant works by Swales (1990), Benoit (1994) and Chang and Huang (2015), as referred to earlier. A new model was necessary because there was no existing one that entirely suited vlogpology research. First, I describe how I used Swales' notion that a text is constituted of different linguistic moves and steps as it progresses. Second, I explain how I drew on Benoit's model relating to image repair theory which is generally applied to crisis communication and, in my case, is relevant to influencers wishing to rebuild their reputation with their followers after a negative event or misdemeanour. The third model I refer to is that of

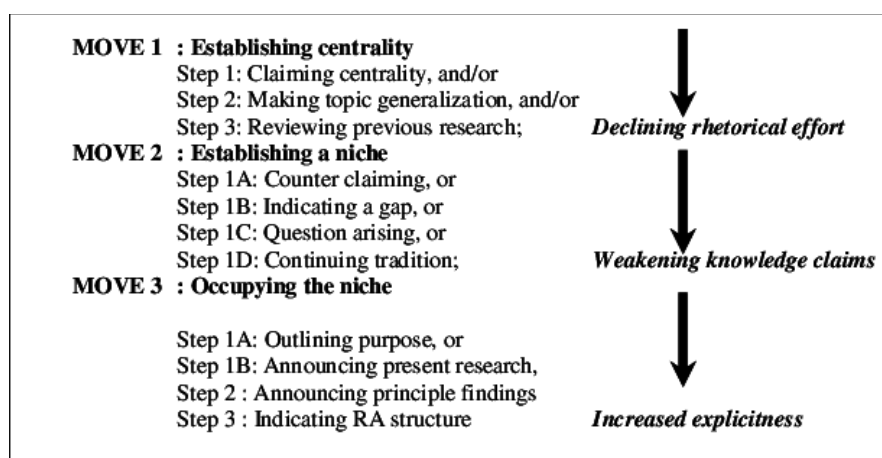
Chang and Huang, who analysed TED talk videos that are commonly found on YouTube. This enabled me to incorporate the social media aspect into my model.

3.3.1 Generic structure - Move/step analysis

For this section, I explain the move-step analysis that will be conducted to identify generic moves in my dataset of vlogpologies.

Table 3.3

Swales CARS model (1990)



Note. Table from *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings* (p.8) by J. Swales, 1990. Copyright 1997 by Public Relations Review.

The moves and steps categorisation introduced by the CARS model has been a popular approach to creating a framework for genre-based analysis. Genres share patterns of similarity through structure, style, content, intended audience and purpose (Swales, 1990). The move-step structure helps to illuminate shared qualities for analysis. The CARS model is not directly applicable to vlogpologies; studies that create move-step structures often utilise existing models of similar genres.

As emerging genres reference previous ones, it is useful to acknowledge a pattern of moves and steps that belong to a similar genre to see where the new genre diverges or exhibits

different patterns that serve its own goals. During my research process, I could not identify a move/step model for a vlog or a social media apology genre. So, to inform the creation of the vlogpology move/step model, two works that aligned with things that may be found within the vlogpology were examined.

Benoit's Image Repair Theory - IRT (1994)

As noted in the literature review, the few studies that feature the vlogpology incorporate Benoit's Image Repair Theory, or IRT. This model involves a move-step-like structure where there are categories that indicate a major communicative approach similar to a move, and associated strategies within that function-like steps, as seen in the table below:

Table 3.4

Benoit's IRT typology

Categories	Strategies and Explanations
Denial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple denial • Stating that the organization or individual did not perform the act in question
Evading responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting the blame • Provocation • Scapegoating, claiming the actions were provoked by the actions of another person or organization • Defeasibility • Claiming the action was provoked by lack of information or misinformation
Reducing offensiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accident • Good intentions • Bolstering • Stressing the positive traits of the organization or individual • Minimization • Claiming the crisis is not as serious as the public or media perceives • Differentiation • Making the act seem less offensive than the public perceives • Transcendence • Places the crisis in a more favorable context • Attack the accuser • Compensation
Corrective action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrective action • Promising to correct the problem
Mortification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mortification • Admitting the crisis was the organization's or individual's fault and asking for forgiveness

Note. IRT = image repair theory.

Note. Table from *Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication* (p.179) by W. L. Benoit, 1997. Copyright 1997 by Public Relations Review.

Although Benoit's model draws on the major and minor goals framework, there is no exact structure to crisis communication. Benoit states that any combination can be used in any order when trying to repair one's image. The two fundamental assumptions of Benoit's IRT are:

1. Communication is a goal-oriented activity: communications may have multiple goals. People may try to achieve goals that are most important to them at the time at a reasonable cost.
2. Maintaining a favourable reputation is a key goal of communication: because the face, image or reputation is valuable. Individuals are motivated to take action when it is compromised.

The vlogpology exists to communicate with multiple levels of audience, vloggers' peers, their sponsors, and waves of viewers who may not know them. They may have various goals for each level of the audience to produce a meaningful message and navigate out of their crisis. Maintaining a favourable reputation is also a key goal, as the vlogger could lose their career, reputation and more. Benoit's work has previously been applied to the vlogpology, to assist in examining the sincerity of the apologetic sentiment within the texts. Focusing on which strategies were successful through a variety of metrics such as comment sentiment, test groups, likes, subscription numbers and future brand partnerships (Afriza & Rusadi, 2021; Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019; Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2018).

Benoit (1997) states that there is no winning combination of IRT techniques for any group of people. So the approach of evaluating the IRT technique combinations was not included in

this study. Instead, IRT is used as a base level for anticipated features within the vlogpology and any other genre that features crisis communication. This expected communication or strategy base level allows for any unique features to be identified by contrasting expected base-level communicative features.

Ted Talks (Chang and Huang, 2015)

The final model and body of research that informed the creation of my vlogpology model was one created for the social media video genre; TED Talks by Chang and Huang (2015). The purpose of their study was to create a structure for knowledge-transferring digital presentations, as research suggests they are an engaging format with a high likelihood of attention and information retention. They state there was no previous research available relating to the TED Talk genre's structure or a neighbouring social media video genre structure. This model (as reproduced in Table 3.5 below) was useful due to also sharing traits with the vlogpology. Both feature a speaker and a presumed audience; both have a body of information or a perspective that the audience does not have access to. There are also features such as the opening greeting and closing message that may be found within the structure of the vlogpology.

Table 3.5*TED Move Steps*

Move	Step
Listener Orientation	Greet audience
	Engage in meta-level discussion
Topic introduction	Set the scene
	Announce the topic
	Outline structure
Speaker presentation	Introduce oneself
	Establish authority
	Show stance/position
Topic development	Present an argument
	Offer an explanation
	Describe a process/set of events
Closure/ Concluding messages	Call for action
	Make generalizations/offer speculation
	Acknowledgements/gratitude

Note. Table from *Exploring TED talks as a pedagogical resource for oral presentations:*

A corpus-based move analysis (p.32). by Y. Chang & H. Huang, 2015.

These are the moves and steps identified by Chang and Huang. There are many moves and steps that can be identified within a genre. The authors suggest that the goal when typifying these features is to create a genre model that has moves that have the most important communicative purpose to the genre's overarching goal. They also follow the genre theory limitations based on advice by authors such as Frow (2014) and Kwasnic & Crowston (2005), where too much focus is placed on similarities at the potential expense of differences. Smaller features can be important to the genre in that their occurrence is unusual and is not replicated frequently due to the poor reception of the thing, or an emerging trend can be noted. New media genres are constantly evolving, so leaving room for smaller parts is also essential.

To narrow down the moves and steps within the genre, and to value their importance whilst leaving room for relevant minor steps, they incorporated an *optional* and *obligatory* category that was measured with a statistic. Chang and Huang had a larger sample of 58 TED videos and identified 437 moves and steps in their sample. *Obligatory* moves were deemed as key genre structural moves and steps, for their study anything that was featured in over 60% of their sample was deemed *obligatory*. *Optional* was valued at 20%.

I incorporated this approach into my study, as it is a useful tool to quantify the major and minor significance of the feature and narrow down the moves and steps identified. As this study is introducing features and structures of the vlogpologies through a range of analytical methods, the sample size is smaller to accommodate the research requirements. The statistics were adjusted to 3 occurrences for *optional*, which is still 20%, and *obligatory* will have at least 7 occurrences, which is 46.6% of the sample, just under half.

I created an Excel document with all of Benoit's IRT categories and strategies, as well as Chang and Huang's moves and steps marked vertically, whilst each vlogger in this study was marked in a parallel cell line. There were 48 anticipated moves and steps from this combination of Benoit and Chang and Huang's previous work. Each video was carefully watched twice to identify where vlogpologies used these anticipated 48 steps. They were then watched again to identify new moves and steps, or steps that would fit under existing moves. These were added to the table and assessed as to what their purpose may be for the genre. 83 individual moves and steps were identified, meaning the corpus had 131 potential moves and steps.

To narrow this down to a model that best represented the vlogpology, a combination of statistical worth to the genre and research was utilised. Firstly, by applying Chang and Huang's *obligatory* and *optional* statistics to the assembled moves and steps to numerically value each

move and step's contribution to the genre. Then utilising my understanding of the vlogpology through the research that was gathered for this study surrounding previous vlogpology literature, the multiple viewings of apologies during the selection and data collection process, Benoit's work applying IRT to public figure video apologies (1997, 2017), as well as Chang and Huang's (2015) process of finalising their move-step structure to best represent the genres major and minor communicative purposes; to eliminate, retain or adjust moves and steps.

3.3.2 Lexico-grammatical analysis

For the lexico-grammatical analysis of the vlogpology corpus, the latest version of the free-to-download corpus analysis software AntConc version 4.0.11 (Anthony, 2022) will be used, alongside the ANC reference corpora and vlogpology .txt file transcripts. To see a variety of linguistic features and patterns in the vlogpology corpus, as opposed to everyday expected speech patterns of the broader public found within the ANC.

A keyword list, collocations and concordance lines are looked at for this study.

Keywords

A keyword is a word (token) that appears more frequently in a designed target corpus, such as the vlogpology corpus than it does in a reference corpora, which for this study is the ANC reference corpora. Keyword lists are different from frequency lists, in that they weigh the occurrences against the reference corpus to see what words are salient to the text. Rather than solely assessing how frequently words occur in just the target corpus as is done in a frequency list. Frequency lists allow for common filler words such as *and*, *the*, *in* and *a* to achieve high scores without illuminating what is key to the text. Keywords lists are ordered by their keyness score.

The keyness score is determined by weighing the frequency of words in the target corpus against the everyday representation of language in the reference corpora. This is used to illustrate what words are unique to the vlogpology corpus and may illustrate the authors' ideologies or the aboutness of the genre (Bennett, 2010). The keyword list for this study will consist of fifteen words.

Collocations

Collocations are lexical and grammatical items that naturally and frequently pair together. Like *fast food* rather than *rapid food*. To expand on the keyword findings, two primary keywords and two minor keywords will be assessed at a closer range through collocation tables. To develop an understanding of the values placed on those keywords and what role they play in the vlogpology.

Mutual Information for Collocates

To further separate the collocation from everyday usages, such as *fast* and *food* having a common relationship, a Mutual Information (MI) score will be used, which evaluates the words association in the larger reference corpora through the statistical score, a higher statistic indicates it is rarely paired with the word in the everyday vernacular of the reference corpora but is within the target corpus.

To gather the MI collocations, the four keywords chosen will be organised by frequency first, to ensure the collocations gathered occur often enough within the texts to be relevant to the genre. As the vlogpology corpus contains fifteen texts, there may be collocations with high MI that only occur once or twice, which would not indicate a lexical pattern or lexical characteristic belonging to the genre.

The span will be set to four words to the left and four to the right, to provide a few neighbouring words in the smaller corpus to collocate with, whilst still having a relevant relationship to each other e.g. directly next to each other, within the same sentence or leading the following. Having this span means filler words such as *and* as well as *the* will not get in the way of significant collocations for the study.

The word list will be manually checked to find collocations with a frequency of over five occurrences, as the target corpus has 15 texts. The collocations will also have an MI statistic above 4. This statistic and method will show the strongest relevant collocations, the relational characteristics between the keyword and collocates within the genre.

Concordance

A concordance is a specific word or phrase that is presented in context. The word or phrase is placed in the centre of the concordance line, and on either side of it are a few words that came before or after it to show the specific usage in the text (Baker, 2006).

By evaluating the words in their intended context, with the words that come before and afterwards, richer patterns can emerge than those found within the collocation and keyword analysis. The concordance lines can serve as evidence for previous sections' proposed purpose or meaning to the genre, they can refute a belief, or they can contribute new information.

3.3.3 Visual design analysis of vlogpology

Finally, to examine how the vlogpology represents itself through thumbnail design - with some reference to the vlogpologies' actual design for comparison where relevant - I apply a visual grammar multimodal analysis.

As pointed out earlier a well-produced thumbnail is regarded as an essential part of an influencer's branding (Brown, 2018). YouTube has a feature that allows creators to choose from

three preselected thumbnails that the algorithm recommends. Creators can also upload their thumbnails. Experts and YouTube themselves, recommend that users create their own thumbnails; as they can control things through editing software like their expression, the contrast, they can create a new background, and add texts or other graphics. Below in Figure 3.2 is a screenshot of a thumbnail for a YouTube thumbnail tutorial video (Brown, 2018) which represents the type of data I collected for my visual analysis.

Figure 3.2

Example of a Thumbnail Visual on YouTube



In this thumbnail, several visual strategies are combined to attract the attention of the viewer. There are three small images of previous thumbnails, a paintbrush near them, and a YouTube logo graphic, the YouTuber is also in the image, pointing to text, which explains what the video will be doing. There is also a blue background that creates a block of colour effect, making the edited graphics of the small thumbnails, logo, paintbrush, text and figures the most important parts of the text. This is an incredibly clear representation of what the video is about, the images and words both illustrate what the video will teach.

A thumbnail does not necessarily require this amount of detail for the meaning to be understood. The vlogger may just use a still image from the video itself, displaying a key moment as seen in Figure 3.3:

Figure 3.3

Screenshot with Example of a Key Moment in Thumbnail



(Trisha Paytas, 2022)

A couple is looking happily at a pregnancy test, which suggests the video will feature something related to whatever the pair's desired result is. The thumbnails in Figure 3.2 and 3.3 , and in general, can be viewed as a film's poster or trailer that will encourage viewers to click on the video to view. Alternatively, vloggers can take a photograph separate from the actual video so that they can ensure their pose in the thumbnail or items in the thumbnail are portrayed to the audience in a way that a screenshot was not communicating. This approach is apparent when videos have a cover image with differences from the actual video design. Such as a different background in the thumbnail than the one/s featured in the video, the vlogger wearing a different

outfit, or a different camera position or angle. The difference can be subtle, but it indicates that YouTubers are aware of the power and purpose of thumbnails.

For my analysis of the thumbnails of the vlogpologies, Kress and Van Leeuwen's *visual grammar framework* (2020) will be applied to the texts to analyse multimodal communicative elements and their purpose. The framework proposes three metafunctions for a visual text: representational, interpersonal/interactive and compositional.

- (i) Representational is related to parts of the text that communicate a message or reality through elements in the text interacting, speech thoughts or bubbles, or actions within a text such as a waving gesture.
- (ii) The interpersonal or interactive metafunction covers the relationship between the viewer and the audience. Elements such as gaze, the social distance through image size, and the angles used can communicate relational meaning between the parties.
- (iii) The compositional metafunction examines the image and the organisation. Assessing the information margins may give the framing.

Elements of this framework can overlap. For instance, an image could feature a pointing hand that is both representational due to the action represented through the gesture, as well as interactive/interpersonal due to its relational connection to the viewer if the gesture is aimed directly at the audience. As such, the various elements will be discussed throughout the visual design chapter rather than in three distinct metafunction sections.

The following visual grammar modes will be the focus of analysis in this study:

(i) Body Language

According to Pease and Pease (2017), expressions, subtle gestures and movements are strong forms of nonverbal communication. The placement of a hand on a chin or slightly over the

mouth communicates different messages. Using their diagrams and information regarding their meaning (see Figure 3.4 below), the potential meaning of their expression, gestures and hand placement will be examined specifically for thumbnails.

Figure 3.4

Representation of Pease and Pease's (2017) Body language diagram



Note. Reproduced from *Definitive Book of Body Language* (p.34) by A. Pease & B. Pease, 2017. Copyright 2017 by Orion Paperbacks.

(ii) Gaze

In an image, if there is a direct gaze from the represented image participant directed toward the viewers, the image subject is *demanding* something from the viewer. They are establishing an imaginary relationship with the viewer as the vectors of their gaze align with their audience, a connection, although imaginary, is established. A lack of gaze *offers* the image participant to the viewer as an object of contemplation or as an item of information (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2020, p.124). Gaze will be used in this study, to see if the vloggers are demanding

or offering in their thumbnails, which is the initial transactional information supplied when one encounters a vlogpology.

(iii) Social distance

Camera shots are a clear way for visual images, whether still or moving, to establish the distance or intimacy between the viewer and the subject. If a person speaks to another from a few metres away, the conversation can feel less intimate. Being very close to a person physically when talking is often reserved for close friends, family or partners. The further a subject is on camera, the further an audience feels from them. Typically, a vlogger encourages a close relationship with their audience, which has led to a mass of studies concerning YouTubers and the parasocial relationship with their viewers (de Bérail et al., 2019; Rihl and Wegener, 2017; Tarvin, 2021; Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). However, as the vlogger may be apologising to their audience during their vlogpology, the anticipated intimacy may be lessened. The social distance vloggers use in their thumbnail, may illustrate how the vlogger feels about their audience at that moment, or how they want their audience to view them.

(iv) Angle

Audiences can develop information from the figure they are looking at, through a variety of relational design tactics. A figure above looking down, or a low-angle camera shot, makes the viewers feel small as if the figure depicted is far larger than them. It's an easy comparison to childhood, where adults were viewed from this angle and held clear power and authority. The figure looking down in visual media also appears to have this power (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2020, p.379).

(v) Framing and Positioning

Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that when reading an image, the eyes are naturally drawn

to the centre of the image. Then, further information can be gathered from the four corners of the image. These are the upper left which represents the *ideal given*, the upper right side which represents the *ideal new*, the lower left side which is *real given* and the lower right which is the *real new*. If a figure or object in an image is positioned in one of these areas, information about this placement is relayed to the viewer.

(vi) Salience

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) use salience to highlight the hierarchy of elements within a composition. These are elements (e.g. objects) that manage to draw the eye or stand out as salient features. This can be things like a mirror, a vase of flowers, a red ribbon, and so forth. It also relates to aspects such as image, colour, or contrast. This will be used to see what the most prominent features of the vlogpology thumbnails are, and to understand what elements the vlogpology thumbnails wish to draw viewers' focus to. As seen in Figure 3.3, the pregnancy test is the most salient feature, it is closer to the viewer and is placed in the centre. The two figures are also looking at it instead of offering the audience their gaze, to highlight it further, which allows the viewer to understand the video is related to the test. Salience will be used in this study, to examine what feature or features the vlogger wishes to draw attention to and what the reasoning for this may be.

Together these frameworks will be analysed to see what the thumbnail design is communicating across texts in the genre. Whether these features complement each other or present layers of information. As discussed, the thumbnail is often intentionally designed to communicate a certain amount of information to the viewer. Similar to the sign-maker example from Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p.16), the vlogger expresses some meaning that they believe can be

interpreted by their audience, through semiotic modes. They generally intend to gather attention from people looking for a specific service or form of content, a new audience and perhaps their regular audience. They have a relatively small canvas to make this work. As the vlogpology is a form of crisis communication, it seems unlikely that the usual design techniques they use for their standard vlogs are used for their apology videos. The stakes on their vlogpology are higher than their usual work, if it fails, they may lose subscribers and struggle to retain viewership in the future (Abad-Santos, 2018; Dodgson, 2021).

So, Kress and Van Leeuwen's multimodal framework will be used in this thesis to examine what the vloggers themselves are trying to communicate through the thumbnail design. By surveying these elements and their purposes, the vloggers intentions for their videos can be understood on a deeper level. By examining the thumbnail, information such as how the vlogger wants to interact with their audience, how they want to represent themselves as a brand and what they are selling at that moment can be interpreted.

As with the other analytical frameworks of this study, minor features will also be considered. All of this information will be presented in a table at the end of the chapter, followed by a brief evaluation of this information and the significance of the findings.

3.4 Design limitations

As this study aims to construct a foundation of the defining features and characteristics of vlogpologies, there are a few limitations. As this is the first study establishing the vlogpologies genre features and is, as such, examining multiple (areas to introduce it for further research, this study is likely to encounter a wide variety of features that go beyond the scope of this research. I position this study as exploratory, given that very little research into vlogpologies has been done.

Therefore, it is hoped that this exploratory stage will enable an important introduction for further research. From this study, focussing solely on visual communication, nonverbal communication like body language cues, sound design, or textual features like the descriptions and titles for vlogpologies can be conducted to garner further meaning or understanding of what the vlogpologies communicate, what their purpose is in the scheme of society, the relationship between creators, brands and the needs of the audience; and will further understanding of the next iteration of social media crisis communication.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have described the design and method for this study. To answer my research questions, I demonstrated the various approaches I will apply to identify an organisational structure model for the vlogpology genre, to discover linguistic and visual characteristics that are present, and to create a foundation for further research in this emergent genre to utilise. The next three chapters present the findings of my analysis.

Chapter 4: Move/Step Analysis

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings following my application of a new move/step genre model I developed for this research to illustrate a genre structure for vlogpologies. My work involved Huang and Chang's (2015) approach that examined whether the various moves or steps would be deemed *obligatory* or *optional*. Each move and step I identified are discussed in terms of their purpose within the genre and whether they are unique to the vlogpology genre or are influenced by other genres.

4.1 Move Step Identification

For this study, I adopted the selection process used by Chang and Huang (2015), as discussed earlier in Chapter Three. They note that there are many moves and steps that can be perceived within a genre and that it is impossible to include all. To narrow down all identified moves and steps, they focused on the communicative purposes of each move/step identified to evaluate its potential to meet the genre's core goals. They then added a statistical element to their move/step analysis to further narrow the selection. Moves and steps that were *optional* and *obligatory* to the genre to ascertain which were salient to the genre and which were interesting features found in parts of the genre.

As their study examines 58 TED talks, they set their lowest frequency at 13% for optional and obligatory was defined as appearing in at least 60% of their sample. For my study of the vlogpology, my sample was smaller. Therefore, the *optional* level is set at 3 vlogpologies to allow interesting moves/steps to be present whilst still relevant to the genre; this sits at a higher instance of 20%. For *obligatory*, an occurrence of 7, or approximately 46.66% is required. The

chosen method of valuing accommodates both major and minor features of the genre and its structure to present itself, which I discuss in the following section.

4.2 Move Steps

The table below shows the perceived six generic moves and fifteen steps that I identified within the vlogpology data. The left column lists the moves, which are orientating, relational repair, the act of the apology, shifting, self and closure. The second column indicates the steps within each move, while the third shows the frequency. The fourth column notes whether the steps were obligatory or optional.

Table 4.1

Move Steps within the Vlogpology

Move/step structure		Frequency of occurrence /15	Percentage	Obligatory /optional
Orientating	S1 Greeting	7	46.6%	Optional
	S2 Signaling content variation	15	100%	Obligatory
Relational repair	S1 Parasocial bond	14	93.3%	Obligatory
	S2 Perspective alignment	5	33.3%	Optional
	S3 Influencing	6	40%	Optional
The apology	S1 Sweeping apology	8	53.3%	Obligatory
	S2 Monetization	4	26.6%	Optional
Shifting	S1 Acknowledging the accuser	6	40%	Optional
	S2 Plea	5	33.3%	Optional
	S3 Warning	7	46.6%	Obligatory
	S4 The “Bigger Picture”	6	40%	Optional
Self	S1 Bolstering	13	86%	Obligatory
	S2 Deprecating	14	93.3%	Obligatory
Closure	S1 Promise	6	40%	Optional
	S2 Thanks	9	60%	Obligatory

The following section describes the moves and communicative purposes each may serve based on my understanding of crisis communication, public figure crisis communication and the vlogpology texts. I also include some examples from the vlogpology texts to demonstrate how the step may be delivered.

4.2.1 Move 1: Orientation

The *Orientation* move aims to serve the communicative purpose of introducing the video whilst preparing the audience for a different type of video. From this first move, the viewer should understand that the vlogger is not going to deliver a positive vlog or that this deviates from the expected character their vlogs typically present. Within the move, two steps allow for this message to be relayed.

Move 1 Step 1: Greeting

The first is the *greeting*; *this* is a common step within vlogs and public speaking but is delivered in a slightly different manner. Viewers expect vloggers to deliver a custom positive greeting to their fandom, making them instantly recognisable when the video plays (Bhatia, 2018). These were notably absent in the vlogpologies greeting step. Rhetorical questions are often also issued to make the viewer feel like they are participating in a conversation, for instance, *hey, how are you?* In the vlogpology, the greeting is often a clipped, short *hello* or *hey guys*. This can be seen in the example below, where the greeting is followed with an indication as to the vlogger's intention:

Hello. I wanted to make a statement on what I said in my previous live stream.

(PewDiePie, 2017)

Move 1 Step 2: Signalling content variation

The second move, which is *signalling content variation*, briefly introduces the topic, the intended purpose of the video or the vlogger's distress. This is done through a brief statement at the beginning of the video. In the following example, the vlogger hints at the topic of the video by saying they have “*overlooked a huge ongoing issue*” that appears in their videos. They also indicate how distressing this is by calling it the “*biggest mistake*” they have “*ever made*”.

I have made many mistakes in my lifetime but overlooking a huge ongoing issue that appears in many of my videos is the biggest mistake that I have ever made.

(English with Lucy, 2020)

The first step *greeting* can be either skipped or combined with the second step *signalling content variation*. The absence of the *greeting*, which is viewed as a step that the majority of vloggers will include in their standard vlogs (Bhatia, 2018) initiates a feeling of discomfort in the audience. Greeting someone acknowledges their presence. Globally, we greet people we interact with even on minor levels. When purchasing a coffee, it is not uncommon to say *hello* or *hi* before beginning to facilitate a positive interaction. It is polite and such a crucial part of daily interaction worldwide that the absence of a greeting in a conversation or interaction creates tension between participants (Petri, 2013). It is interesting that for the 46.6% in the study sample who use the greeting, they use a curt *hello* or *hi* rather than the lengthier friendly greeting that might be expected from them under usual circumstances. The *greeting* conveys respect and acknowledgement to the audience but signals to them that they have more important things to discuss and have deviated from their standard, friendly interaction (Bhatia, 2018).

In the instances where the *greeting* is absent and the *signalling content variation* is used to begin the video, the audience member is assured that the absence of the *greeting* is due to the

vlogger's distressed state (Tolbert and Drogo, 2019). This move and the steps momentarily disturb the relationship between the vlogger and the viewer to ensure the viewer focuses on the subject matter and goals within the video. This shift makes the viewer want more clues as to why the dynamic has changed, as they are used to receiving a friendly and familiar greeting from the vlogger (Smith, 2014).

4.2.2 Move 2: Relational repair

This move – relational repair – has a major function to connect with subscribers, those who have previously watched the vlogger, who have formed a parasocial relationship or have an appreciation for the vlogger. It works to repair any damage caused by the previous move and to provide a positive mindset before delving into the apology move that follows this one. The relational repair can be seen through the three steps indicated next.

Move 2 Step 1: Parasocial bond

According to Douglas (2019), viewers can develop a bond with vloggers, as if they are friends, as they are privy to a large amount of personal content the vlogger shares over the years. The vloggers also use language that suggests they are talking directly to their audience, known as synthetic personalisation (Fairclough, 2014) to strengthen the imagined relationship between viewer and vlogger. Developing this relationship is central to a vlogger's brand, their content and potentially their financial success because, as will be discussed later, there is a monetary component to their work on YouTube (Smith, 2014). This obligatory step in the vlogpology showcases a strong use of relational language, which may be more influential than their usual vlogs. The vlogger expresses how important the viewer is to them to encourage a deeper feeling of connection or acknowledgement within their imagined relationship. The example below

shows a greater intimacy with the vlogger expressing the closeness between themselves and their ‘friends’ which they indicate goes beyond being more than just ‘fans’.

To me, you are not just my fans you are my friends. You know my heart.

(Colleen Ballinger, 2021)

Move 2 Step 2: Perspective alignment

This optional step found in 33.3% of the dataset serves to show that the vlogger has noticed the discussion online that has drawn negative attention to their behaviour. This step could be seen as taking accountability. However, it aligns with the audience's suggested perspective that criticises the vlogger, which is then validated and praised for being *right*. This can be performed by directly noting comments to demonstrate they have taken the feedback onboard, as seen in the first example where the creator mentions being labelled as *evil*. This step can also be performed in a vague manner, where the vlogger avoids mentioning what the specific language commenters used. This approach allows for a broader range of audiences’ varying critiques and perspectives to be addressed whilst avoiding the actual words used. This may be done to stop an audience from expanding or reinforcing their opinions regarding the situation. It manages the rhetoric by simplifying the negativity to simply acknowledging their opinions exist, stating they have seen it - whatever it may be - and that the audience in their range of opinions is collectively and individually *right*. This can be seen in the following two examples, where both vloggers acknowledge the criticism.

You guys have been calling me evil and stuff. I fully get that. Like I one hundred per cent yeah, I get how that came across like that.

(Alfie Deyes, 2018)

I saw what you guys said. You guys are right, I'm sorry I didn't listen to you.

(David Dobrik, 2021)

Move 2 Step 3: Influencing

The third step is *influencing* which is used in conjunction with at least one of the previous steps. Through the power of suggestion, the vlogger builds on the relationship that has been established and uses the emphatic adverbs of frequency *never* and *always*, to suggest the incident is anomalous. Pairing this with statements to the audience about what they know, could be viewed as chiding the audience for doubting them despite their knowledge of the creator. The example below shows a vlogger who has followed all three steps in the move for their vlogpology. They have declared their love for the viewer, “*I love you guys*”, admitted they were wrong and that their audience was correct, thus aligning with their perspective “*I know I'm in the wrong for all of this, I see what you meant*”. Finally, they emphasise that they *never* intended to do what they did and that they *always follow the rules*, despite not having done so in this instance. The always and never statements work together to reassure the audience how extremely out of character this situation was and that it is unlikely to occur again.

I love you guys and I know I'm in the wrong for all of this, I see what you meant and I

hope you know I never meant to do this, I always follow the rules.

(Faze Jarvis, 2019)

4.2.3 Move 3: The Apology

The *apology* move serves the communicative purpose of managing the crisis the vlogger is in; it serves as the climax of the apology. As the IRT Benoit (1997) apology strategies used in the vlogpology have been key elements of previous vlogpology-related studies (e.g. Sandlin &

Gracyalny, 2018; Sng et al., 2019; Woods, 2021), dissecting the apology strategies throughout the vlogpology and weighing their specific worth or success is not a feature of this study. As Benoit states, there is no ultimate apology type or combination of apologies that will be successful for a group of people that share qualities. There is no *one size fits all* apology that guarantees a successful apology or vlogpology. The vlogpology features two distinct steps that diverge from the anticipated apology structure yet aim to present themselves as traditional apologies or expressing apologetic sentiment.

Move 3 Step 1: Sweeping apology

Apologies that feature an *if* or *but* clause are regarded as *non-apologetic apologies*. Forsythe (2021) suggests that the phrasing of these apologies can allow a speaker to issue something that sounds like an apology through the use of apologetic language, which can allow them to end an argument or settle a crisis without taking responsibility for the damage caused. This style of apology can also be issued unintentionally as a way to self-soothe or compromise when issuing an apology they do not want to perform.

It can suggest that the receiver is at fault for interpreting the offenders' behaviour as disrespectful rather than admitting the behaviour or action was at fault and is their responsibility. Perkins & Jason (2022) suggest that this style of apology can be a form of gaslighting, as the speaker is placing the blame on the receiver rather than themselves. This step is obligatory within the vlogpology and can be seen in the example below. The vlogger apologises for *some* viewers feeling *a certain type of way*.

I am sorry that some of you felt a certain type of way.

(Callux, 2021)

Here the vlogger is saying that they feel sorry for the audience members who were offended rather than apologising for offending them.

Move 3 Step 2: Monetisation

This step indicates whether the vlogger will benefit financially from their vlogpology, by the vlogger stating whether or not they will ‘monetize’ their vlog. Vlog monetization can be turned on or off on individual videos by selecting whether they would like advertisements to appear on their videos during the uploading process or in their account page settings (YouTube, 2022). The status of the vlogger receiving or declining money for their vlogpology is thought to indicate how sincere the apology is (Draper, 2018; Rutledge, 2019). This is also important to do, as YouTube may still put advertisements over videos despite the advertisements feature being turned off. A viewer can purchase the monthly YouTube Red subscription service if they would like to avoid advertisements. Otherwise, YouTube is free to place either one or two advertisements before any video for average viewers to watch.

Creators have the ability to place multiple advertisement spots throughout their videos to earn a percentage of the revenue YouTube earns from advertisements when they turn their advertisement feature on. Mentioning whether a video is monetized is not common within a standard vlog, so although this step is optional for vlogpologies, it seems to be a strange choice that may be unique to the genre. The example below indicates that they have left their monetization on, as they rely on it for income.

So, for my livelihood and for my survival, I am going to be monetising this video. But please do not think that I'm only doing it to make money off of you guys because I really, really,

truly am not.

(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

Here the vlogger emphasises that they are not leaving it on to profit from the crisis. In using the word *please* they are making a request or plea to the audience to think a certain way. In trying to reassure the audience that they are not being taken advantage of in a monetary way suggests they are aware that some people might interpret their actions this way which will result in a negative representation of them.

Although the second move is only found in 26.6% of the vlogpology dataset, it is a strange and unique thing to include in the vlogpology. As Smith (2014) discussed, the *real* or *average* character a vlogger embodies is not supposed to discuss elements that move them to become less relatable. The vlogger is a public figure with a large audience who can earn between \$3 to \$18 USD per thousand views based on a variety of factors YouTube (Geyser, 2022) decides when paying creators. This includes the amount of time is spent on watching an advertisement, the amount of clicks an ad receives or how many views on average a creator receives. If a creator's video receives two million views and YouTube pays them \$3 per thousand views, they receive \$6000. The average vlogger posts one vlog a week (Smith, 2014). As vlogpologies are known for going viral, receiving more attention than the creator's other videos, make it tempting to keep the video advertisements feature on. The loss of this revenue is an effective way of showing the vlogger's sincerity or remorse regarding the situation and indicates that they are not creating the video for the increased viewership they are likely to receive.

The sweeping apology was more prevalent in the vlogpology dataset, appearing in 53.3% of it. The idea behind 'sweeping' may be indicative of a disconnect or resentment towards the crisis when creating the vlogpology. Rather than stating that *they* are sorry for doing something,

they move the focus towards how other people have reacted, suggesting they feel sorry *for* them instead of saying sorry *to* them. It suggests a detached *sympathy*, in that they are removed from experiencing the feeling. Rushdy (2018) believes that society is moving towards a space where apologies should be based on *empathy* to be received well, which conveys an understanding or shared experience to the recipient of the apology.

4.2.4 Move 4: Shifting

This move is related to Benoit's (1997) *denial* and *reducing offensiveness* categories for IRT, specifically *shifting the blame* and *transcending* the incident. The vloggers use this move in a slightly different way, their goal is to move out of the crisis situation, although they still keep themselves partially in the frame. There are four steps identified in this move.

Move 4 Step 1: Acknowledging the accuser

This step aims to draw attention to those who 'called out' the vlogger or exposed them. The vlogger shows gratitude to the person directly, or broadly thanks a group that has caused the crisis to emerge. They thank them for *calling them out* as it allows them to better themselves. The step shows the audience that there is some person or group of people that called out the vlogger, which has prompted them to create a vlogpology. Although it may be unintentional, they add people into the situation, crafting a figure or represented other who has caused the vlogger to become distressed as can be seen in this example.

I also want to thank everybody like truly thank you to those who told me that my video is wrong. Whether that was tweeting me, emailing me, I want to thank you guys.

(Alfie Deyes, 2018)

Acknowledging and thanking all those people (accusers) who told the vlogger that “*my video is wrong*” suggests that the vlogger was unaware of any misdemeanour and that they are grateful to the audience for helping them. This is one way for the vlogger to transcend the incident, to try and avoid blame and to repair any damage done to their image by showing their ignorance as to what happened.

Move 4 Step 2: Plea

In the vlogpology dataset, step one ‘*acknowledging the accuser*’ and step two ‘*plea*’ were paired together 83% of the time. The vlogger first thanks a person or group of people for calling them out, as seen in the previous example. To ensure these figures they have mentioned do not receive hate from others, they issue a plea. The vloggers understand that by mentioning someone who has called them out could result in the consequence that their followers may view these people as a threat and therefore harass them. The creator recognises that their fans may feel the need to defend the creator, which is expressed in the example below.

But I would like to ask a favour, and that is, please don't send people hate or negativity on my behalf. I know most of the time you guys are just trying to stick up for me, and defend me, and that means the world to me it really does.

(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

In attempting to protect individuals or groups of people who called them out, the vlogger is showing their positive side - their ability to not criticise, but also to avoid any ongoing conflict on their YouTube site, which could result in further damage to their reputation.

Move 4 Step 3: Warning

The warning step serves the purpose of making the incident seem less offensive. In this step, the vlogger suggests that the incident could happen to anyone, and that the viewer should attempt to learn from their mistake to avoid it happening to them. Although the incidents that are included in the warning are often unique or rare. All vloggers in this study are apologising for misusing their platform or for not acting in a manner their audience thinks a public figure should. This, however, does not apply to the wider general public watching their video. The example below features a creator warning people to fact-check information, before calling out someone to an audience of *ten million*.

I just want to say to everyone, make sure you check the facts before putting someone on blast to ten million people.

(Jeffree Star)

Having an audience of ten million is unusual; the advice could be useful for other large creators, but it does not apply to the *everyone* who is being addressed or the average person watching the video. By addressing it to *everyone*, they suggest this is a normal occurrence that people should avoid in their daily lives. However, the warning also infers that ‘blasting’ a person on social media to millions of others, when the information involved is incorrect is an issue to be avoided.

Move 4 Step 4: The “Bigger Picture”

This step of painting a “bigger picture” occurs when a vlogger points out another crisis, scandal, or issue in the world that is unrelated to the content of their vlogpology. It serves as a distraction and minimises their own crisis in comparison to larger issues in the world. It appears

to transfer the focus on the minor details and point to the subject that they claim triggered the video. The issues mentioned are valid; they just do not fit in with the theme of the video and are supplied in defence rather than to draw actual attention to the issue in a supportive manner.

This could be similar to Benoit's (1997) minimisation in the *reducing offensiveness* move. However, within minimisation, a company or figure often points towards a similar situation to make theirs look lesser rather than pointing at an unrelated but larger issue. The example below uses the global pandemic as a way for the vlogger to explain their behaviour. This serves to deflect responsibility away from the vlogger by suggesting there were greater forces at work that led to the behaviour they are apologising for.

We are in the middle of a global pandemic and it is scary I just want to say I am so sorry if this situation made any of you feel more stressed or uncomfortable or sad than you already do.

Because of all the horrible things that are currently going on in our world.

(Colleen Ballinger, 2021)

The *plea* step may also be in place so that if a creator's fans do harass someone, the creator can say they are not responsible, as they have explicitly told their fans not to harass anyone. This can be seen in the example below, where the creator states they *don't feel personally attacked* and tells their fans not to *give grief*.

I don't feel personally attacked by those who called me out – so don't give them any grief for doing so.

(English with Lucy, 2020)

YouTube (2022) has the power to de-platform creators who exhibit or encourage negative behaviour. They save this action for extreme cases; however, the site states in their harassment policy that those who repeatedly *encourage abusive audience behaviour* or *target an identifiable*

person or group can have their channel deleted. This may be why the first step '*acknowledging the accuser*', and the second step '*plea*' are paired together in 83% of the dataset in the vlogpology, as the vlogger identifies either individuals or a group who prompted the vlogpology. By thanking the group, they suggest they approve of this and are not upset. To further emphasise this and ensure they are well within the terms of posting on YouTube, they ask their followers to leave them alone. As YouTube states, they will only de-platform in extreme cases; it seems like the vlogpology includes the thanks and plea steps to be responsible for the crisis while briefly taking the focus off themselves.

The *warning* and *bigger picture* steps also do this effectively. The *warning*, which was found in 46.6% of vlogpologies, seems to be a tactic to make the incident seem like an everyday occurrence, despite the unusual scenarios the audience is warned against. Kampf (2009) has studied public figures' apologies and suggests that an integral element of their apology style, is a variety of creative approaches to minimise the situation. Kampf specifically identified that when a company apologises, they will use the collective pronoun *we* rather than the singular *I*, to avoid personal accountability and spread the area of focus, which can lessen the damage.

Another tactic is *blurring* an event or *shifting* the idea around it, which changes how it is perceived and received. Despite the figure of ten million people being extreme, the vlogger has addressed this advice to *everyone*. Using the power of suggestion (Robson, 2015) to lead an audience towards thinking the incident is 'normal' and could therefore happen to 'anyone' if they do not follow the advice. In this case, it was to *make sure you check the facts before putting someone on blast to ten million people*. Ten million people is an abnormal audience for the average person to have access to, and perhaps not what the average person would use the large audience and platform opportunity for. Therefore, this warning could only apply to fellow

vloggers or public figures. However, it is addressed to *everyone*, to contextualise it as a mistake anyone could make, despite the unique details.

The final step leads the viewer towards something *bigger* than the subject of the vlogpology itself, such as the global pandemic referenced in the last example. This step could be seen as an expression of frustration from the vlogger, as they illustrate the bigger global issues that deserve more attention. The contrast of the weightier scenario effectively minimises the crisis through comparison. There also may be an element of admonishing in this step, as the vlogger implies that there are more important issues to focus on and that the vlogpology itself is insignificant or unnecessary in comparison.

4.2.5 Move 5: Self

The fifth move is *self*, which can be described as drawing the focus back towards the vlogger after their previous crisis management moves. As the vlogger is protecting their brand, the ‘self’ is the product to be promoted. Therefore, protecting the ‘self’ in crisis, they are heavily invested in how their image is portrayed. This move serves the communicative purpose of reputational repair through two distinct steps - bolstering and depreciating.

Move 5 Step 1: Bolstering

Bolstering within the vlogpology is a self-accreditation of one's expansive career. It serves the communicative purpose of displaying how long the vlogger has been working, how hard they work, and often how far they have made it without a scandal. It also makes the scandal seem smaller in comparison, as they champion the extent of their work versus the singular or handful of incidents. The example below shows a vlogger who states that they have made “*over*

two thousand videos” in their decade-long career, without a “*mistake like this*”. It is interesting that they include the *like this*, rather than simply saying mistake.

I have been making YouTube videos now for I mean next month it is going to be ten years

I have made over two thousand videos on this site without making a mistake like this.

(Alfie Deyes, 2018)

This suggests that they might have had different incidents, but none were similar. In a library of over two thousand videos, this could still be viewed as an impressive accomplishment; at least, that is what they would like the audience to think and perhaps be more forgiving.

Move 5 Step 2: Deprecating

The deprecating step is similar to Benoit’s mortification in that the vlogger may confess how shocked, surprised or appalled they are with their behaviour. However, IRT indicates that mortification involves begging for forgiveness and the direct admittance of the fault belonging solely to them, often ignoring the circumstances that led to it and accepting full responsibility. The vloggers approach this in a different manner by directing harsh phrases and labels towards themselves in the past tense. The examples below show a creator who labels their *teenage* self as *stupid*, *ignorant* and *culturally insensitive*, and a vlogger who uses derogatory terms such as *idiot* and *dumbass*.

I was a sheltered teenager who was stupid and ignorant and clearly extremely culturally insensitive.

(Tana Mongeau, 2020)

I was an idiot, I was a dumbass.

(Jatie, 2021)

The effect of using the past tense in both these examples seeks to offer the excuse that this was indicative of past behaviour, which has now been rectified through their own self-realisation.

Bolstering and *deprecating* both had high frequencies for the dataset. Appearing in 86% and 93.3% of the sample, respectively. This suggests the raising and lowering of one's character, and achievements is a salient feature of the genre. Self-deprecation in personal apologies promotes forgiveness and support from the recipient, as the idea of someone else being distressed or putting themselves can be an upsetting thought (Berry, 2012). Bolstering is an effective technique to address viewers who may have found the vlogpology through online memes or elsewhere without prior knowledge of the vlogger. They summarise their achievements and career in a flattering way so the viewer understands that this mistake is out of character and that their achievements prove this point. It also reminds fans of how hard the vlogger has worked, and for long-time fans, it may remind them of the journey they have watched the vlogger go through over this time.

4.2.6 Move 6 Closure

The final move aims to close the video on a positive note given that the vlogpology has involved the acknowledgement and apology for wrongdoing. Through two steps, the creator hopes to close the chapter on this stage of crisis and to ensure not only that their relationship with fans remains intact but that their reputation is restored.

Move 6 Step 1: Promises

The *promise* step steers the audience to look towards the future, with the creator reassuring the audience that they will not make the same mistake again. It is briefer than the

improvement step, which is typically a lengthy tangent. Promises are only a sentence or two long and often followed by a farewell. They serve to reiterate a commitment to change in behaviour before ending the video with a positive sentiment. In this example, the vlogger indicates that a learning process has occurred.

But what I can promise is that I am gonna continue to learn from my mistakes.

(Doctor Mike, 2020)

Interestingly this vlogger promises to make amends, but by stating that they will ‘continue to learn’ also suggests that they are not infallible and may well make other mistakes in the future. This serves to represent themselves as human and having values.

Move 6 Step 2: Thanks

This step of offering thanks to the audience is present in 60% of the vlogpology dataset and is also a way to indicate the end of the video. To do this, the vlogger thanks the viewer for watching the video, rather than their usual practice of asking their audience to select the ‘like’ icon below it and subscribe to their channel. The thanks step serves as a humble note in this example, acknowledging that their audience took the time to watch the video in its entirety which the vlogger appreciates.

I hope you all have a wonderful day,

Thank you for watching this short video.

(Doctor Mike)

In pairing this thanks with the positive aspiration of ‘hoping’ people have a wonderful day, the vlogger brings closure to their vlogpology, inferring that nothing more needs to be said

or done. He has completed what he set out to do and infers that everyone can now move on with their day and put all negativity behind them.

4.3 Vlogpology move/step framework with examples

In the following section and table (4.2), I present examples from the dataset of combinations of all the moves and steps I have identified being performed. I do this to show what a vlogpology with all moves and steps being performed in it may look like, to demonstrate what can be expected of a vlogpologies discoursal structure and how to recognise this. Naturally, in other datasets, the optional moves may be absent or more prominent, and the obligatory moves may also become more important to a differing dataset or slightly lesser. As the vlogpologies in this dataset range from 2017-2021, there may be future discoursal patterns as the genre shifts. This is the discoursal structure of what could be expected from a ‘typical’ vlogpology, with different examples from the dataset than those in the previous sections, to illustrate other vloggers communicating through the framework in their manner.

After this section, I further discuss these new examples; to contextualise each step.

Table 4.2

The Vlogpology in Context

Move 1 Orientating		Vlogger
Step 1 - Greeting	<u>Hello</u> . I know this is not my usual video.	PewDiePie, 2017
Step 2 – Signaling content variation	Hello. <u>I know this is not my usual video</u>	PewDiePie, 2017
Move 2 Relational repair		
Step 1 – Parasocial bond	I love you guys, genuinely you don't understand how much each and every one of you mean to me.	Faze Jarvis, 2019
Step 2 – Perspective alignment	I fully get what you guys were saying, I should have listened to you, you guys were completely right.	David Dobrik, 2021
Step 3 – Influencing	But I always stick up for what's right and I always will when huge corporations have stolen from small brands	Jeffree Star, 2020
Move 3 The apology		
Step 1 – Sweeping apology	I just genuinely want to say I'm sorry for anyone I've offended	Olivia Jade, 2020
Step 2 – Monetization	I am finding the best charity for the money from this video and I am gonna be donating that because I do not want to be earning any money from this	Alfie Deyes, 2018
Move 4 Shifting		
Step 1 – Acknowledge the accuser	To those who have criticised me - thank you	English with Lucy, 2020
Step 2 – Plea	I don't feel personally attacked by those who called me out - so don't give them any grief for doing so	Alfie Deyes, 2018
Step 3 – Warning	If I could give you guys any useful advice, it would be don't make the same mistakes that I did. Don't edit-in art in overlays and don't redraw art from the internet	Cozy Kitsune, 2017
Step 4 – The "Bigger Picture"	Breonna Taylor still has no justice. Elijah McClain has no justice and the countless other people who are murdered every single day while everyone just goes about their business like nothing's happening and I think that drama and the beauty world which I have definitely been a part of it all has to stop now six months ago. Before COVID and everything hit our world it was such a different place for all of us and including myself, it's really time to reflect on the big picture	Jeffree Star, 2020
Move 5 Self		
Step 1 – Bolstering	From the very first ad of my company I have always shown people of colour and anyone no matter what size body you are or what gender you are, you are accepted in Jeffree Star cosmetics	Jeffree Star, 2020
Step 2 – Deprecating	That's how selfish people work that's how people who do not give a shit about other people's emotions function and that was me	Hungry Box, 2020
Move 6 Closure		
Step 1 – Promises	And I promise to be better. I will be better	Logan Paul, 2018
Step 2 – Thanks	Thank you so much for taking the time to watch this and I will see you very soon	Colleen, 2021

4.3.1 Evaluation of framework examples

In this section, I will contextualise and evaluate the steps implemented in the previous section.

Move 1 Orientating

Move 1 Step 1 – Greeting

Hello. I know this is not my usual video (PewDiePie, 2017).

In this example, the vlogger is greeting their audience in a brief manner. The creator is known for starting every video by saying, “*Hey what’s up guys, my name is PewDiePie*”. In 2014 a fellow YouTuber (Roomie Official) uploaded an original song titled “His Name is PewDiePie”, which featured multiple clips of the vlogger saying his standard greeting. The video received 2.6 million views. PewDiePie then collaborated with the creator and published a version of the video where he and Roomie sing the song, which received 32 million views. This familiar greeting was missing in the vlogpology, which would have been an unsettling introduction for the audience.

Move 1 Step 2 - Signalling content variation

Hello. I know this is not my usual video (PewDiePie, 2017).

The vlogger then acknowledges the absence of the expected greeting, by admitting the video is not like their usual style of video.

Move 2 Relational repair

Move 2 Step 1 – Parasocial bond

I love you guys, genuinely you don't understand how much each and every one of you mean to me (Faze Jarvis, 2019).

In this example, the vlogger is declaring their love for their followers. They have used hyperbole in saying that the fans do not know how much “each and every one” means to them. They have not actually met the twenty-three million people who viewed the video or the five million who subscribed to them. It is likely that they appreciate what their following signifies to them and their career and may be truly thankful for what their fans have allowed them to do collectively. They may have positive fan interactions and appreciate this connection, however, it is hard to break up the sheer volume of this number to individually appreciate “each and every” member. This statement seems incredibly heartfelt and is used to encourage a positive sentiment between the viewers and the vlogger.

Move 2 Step 2 - Perspective alignment

I fully get what you guys were saying, I should have listened to you, you guys were completely right (David Dobrik, 2021).

This excerpt shows the vlogger addressing the comments that surrounded their controversy in a vague yet all-encompassing manner. They state that they *get* what people were saying, to show that they understand the viewers. They then strengthen this connection by saying they *should have listened* to the people who commented and that they were *right*. The vlogger

avoids stating what the collective *you guys* they are addressing is *right* about. This is done to make the viewer feel as if they have helped the creator to grow, as the creator supposedly understands their individual perspective. The vlogger is also trying to avoid highlighting specific examples, as they do not want to give the audience more negative points or examples to focus on regarding the crisis.

Move 2 Step 3 – Influencing

But I always stick up for what's right and I always will when huge corporations have stolen from small brands (Jeffree Star, 2021).

In this example, the vlogger uses the word *always* twice to build a foundation for their positive moral behaviour. They align themselves with the idea of understanding what is *right* and *always* lending their voice to this cause. The vlogger had falsely accused a fellow creator publicly without verifying the information. Which suggests that they do not *always* stick up for what is *right*. However, the combination of emphatic statements and repetition suggest to the audience that the things they are saying are true. These rhetorical devices are often found in presidential speeches (Tofel, 2005).

Move 3 The Apology

Move 3 Step 1 - Sweeping apology

I just genuinely want to say I'm sorry for anyone I've offended (Olivia Jade, 2020).

In this example, the vlogger evades accountability by not apologising for the crisis that *offended* people. Vloggers often use ‘you’ to address their audience. By saying *anyone*, they remove the personal connection between *vloggers* and viewers. The word *anyone*, suggests that it is the group receiving the apology. If the vlogger was to direct the apology towards the viewer, they should switch the pronoun and adjective order so that the verb *offended* modifies the pronoun, anyone. They should also change *offended* to *offending*, and *anyone* to *you* so that the statement reads “I’m sorry for offending you”, or something along these lines. The vlogger also uses the adjective *genuinely*, which helps to disguise the sweeping apology. It suggests they are speaking from the heart when realistically they have said they feel *sorry for anyone* who has been offended, rather than that they themselves are sorry for offending.

Move 3 Step 2 – Monetization

I am finding the best charity for the money from this video and I am gonna be donating that because I do not want to be earning any money from this (Alfie Deyes, 2018).

Here the vlogger indicates that they will not profit from the vlogpology. The charity information could be viewed as virtue signalling or an attempt to balance out the impact of the crisis by doing a good deed. However, YouTube will place advertisements at the beginning of the video whether or not the creator decides to turn on the monetization setting for the video. It is necessary to explain that their vlog has “monetization” on to avoid backlash, as viewers may see an advertisement and assume the creator has left it on. A creator in 2018 left their monetization on for a vlogpology that received 61 million views (Rearick, 2018). The backlash for this was so

severe that they went from posting a video every day for three years to taking a break from the platform for six months.

As the vlogpology in the example for this step was posted seven months after the one that received negative attention for monetizing their vlogpology, it is clear that they were aware monetizing for profit or even having an audience assume they had done so, would make the apology redundant. They emphasise this point by saying they *don't want to be earning money from this*. They also highlight the positive intention behind their usage of the money the video will receive by *donating* it to the *best charity* they can find. Sharing that they intend to donate the money to charity is not virtue signalling, as their audience would have wanted to know why they were turning on monetization. This specific YouTuber had done a *living on £1 for a day* challenge video, which viewers saw as trivialising the struggles homeless people or those who are struggling to go through. The decision to find a charity in need of money balanced the mistake.

Move 4 Shifting

Move 4 Step 1 - Acknowledge the accuser

To those who have criticised me - thank you (English with Lucy, 2020).

Here, the vlogger is praising those who have criticised them, implying that without them, they would not have realised they were doing something worth criticism. The YouTuber teaches English and has implied that those who do not pronounce certain words correctly would be less likely to be hired or taken seriously in English-speaking countries, despite there being over 160 English dialects that include differences in pronunciation and delivery (Kortmann et al., 2020).

In this instance, the people who have criticised them are contributing to the creator improving their approach.

Move 4 Step 2 – Plea

I don't feel personally attacked by those who called me out - so don't give them any grief for doing so (Alfie Deyes, 2018).

In this example, the creator is trying to avoid further controversy, which could stem from fans sending hate towards those who called out the vlogger. They clearly state that they *don't feel personally attacked*, so the people who called them out *don't deserve grief*. This momentarily takes the focus away from the vlogger and the vlogpology, adding an air of mystery as to who *those* is referring to.

Move 4 Step 3 – Warning

If I could give you guys any useful advice, it would be don't make the same mistakes that I did. Don't edit-in art in overlays and don't redraw art from the internet (Cozy Kitsune, 2017).

The vlogger is giving the fans advice, which serves as a warning to avoid the crisis the viewer is watching. They instruct their fans to not make the unique mistakes they made, which makes the mistakes seem as if they are things any average person could do. The average point is made by telling the audience they have *useful* advice for the viewers as individuals *you* and as a group through the collective noun *guys*. They edited *art* to *overlays* and displayed art they had

copied from others' original designs, then claimed them as their own to their viewers which does not seem like something that is common enough to require a warning.

Move 4 Step 4 - The “Bigger Picture”

Breonna Taylor still has no justice. Elijah McClain has no justice and the countless other people who are murdered every single day while everyone just goes about their business like nothing's happening and I think that drama and the beauty world which I have definitely been a part of it all has to stop now six months ago. Before COVID and everything hit our world it was such a different place for all of us and including myself, it's really time to reflect on the big picture (Jeffree Star, 2020).

In this example, the vlogger continuously references the bigger picture, even finishing their monologue with instructions to *reflect on the big picture*. Whilst everything they listed is a big issue in the world that requires attention and action, such as COVID-19 and the murders of *Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain* as well as the countless other incidents that happen daily, they are not relevant to the vlogpology in question. This message could still be expressed in another video; adding them in brevity is using them as props to distract or shame viewers for calling them out. They also suggest that the reason the drama needs to stop is related to these issues. Stating that *six months ago the world was different*, and after COVID happened, they assessed their priorities and realised drama was insignificant. This minimises the harm they themselves had caused.

Move 5 Self

Move 5 Step 1 - Bolstering

From the very first ad of my company I have always shown people of colour and anyone no matter what size body you are or what gender you are, you are accepted in Jeffree Star cosmetics (Jeffree Star, 2020).

The vlogger is highlighting their achievements and the positive elements within their company to make themselves look like a good person who has helped many. It minimises the damage of the incident by putting the focus on themselves and their admirable qualities. This is done to illustrate the positive change they have influenced. Which suggests that they do not deserve negative attention.

Move 5 Step 2 - Deprecating

That's how selfish people work that's how people who do not give a shit about other people's emotions function and that was me (Hungry Box, 2020).

In this example, the vlogger is criticising themselves in a rather detached way. The only pronoun *me* comes at the end of the sentence, and it follows the past tense verb *was* which lacks accountability and emotion. If the vlogger had begun their sentence with *I am* or even *I was*, it would indicate emotion or purpose behind the statement. Instead, they created a blank figure in saying that is *how selfish people work* and that is *how people who do not give a shit about other people's emotions*. Here they describe a certain type of person or people for the viewer to visualise before finally associating themselves with the description by succinctly saying *and that was me*. Self-deprecating is said to garner a supportive sentiment during an apology.

Move 6 Closure

Move 6 Step 1 – Promises

And I promise to be better. I will be better (Logan Paul, 2018).

The vlogger is promising they will improve themselves, without detailing how they will do this or what they will change. It is an empty statement that they can't be called out for in the future, as we do not know what they mean by *better* or by how much they intend to improve themselves. The step intends to show the audience that they have the vlogger's word and that a similar situation will not occur again due to the *promise*.

Move 6 Step 2 - Thanks

Thank you so much for taking the time to watch this and I will see you very soon (Colleen Ballinger, 2021).

The final example shows the vlogger thanking their audience for taking the time to watch their video. Vlogpologies can be quite lengthy and tense as the vlogger is discussing a crisis. They are ending the video politely and may be genuinely grateful that viewers have taken the time to hear their side of the story or apology. As this step was found in 90% of the dataset, it suggests that despite the vlogpology beginning on a tense sentiment between viewer and vlogger, the vlogger still appreciates them. The positive tone, which is a notable shift from many of the steps in the vlogpology, signals the hopeful end of the crisis period.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings from my move/step analysis which sought to identify the common features when it came to the performances of a vlogpology, noting what was obligatory and what was optional. When designing a model for the vlogpology, the combination of the TED talk genre model and Benoit's IRT strategies were useful beginnings to inform some of the structural design of the vlogpology as well as the potential purpose for their incorporation into the genre. I, therefore, developed my own model for analysis, identified the move/steps and explained each with examples from my own data in this chapter. I noted the variety of techniques used by the vloggers to communicate with their audience and highlighted how they labelled and referred to themselves. The introductory move orientating was shown to disconnect the audience and vlogger. The second move *relational repair*, actively worked to undo this and remind the audience of their character and connection. The vloggers set a clear idea of their negative actions being in the past tense, their positive actions and attributes being a part of their current and future selves. They reiterate the positive future ideal with promises.

In the next chapter, I present the findings from the next stage of my analysis, looking at lexical patterns and linguistic features of the vlogpology. Taking a corpus-assisted approach in closely examining the words of the vloggers in my collected data allows me to identify salient lexical items that can present themselves as being more prominent in the vlogpology genre than in everyday language.

Chapter 5: Lexico Grammatical Features

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of my corpus analysis, where I sought to identify the various lexico-grammatical characteristics that contributed to the genre of the vlogpology. This part of the research was done in three stages, beginning with a keyword analysis on the Vlogpology corpus, followed by an examination of collocates with four keywords of interest and concluding with a closer look at the concordance lines for those four words.

5.1 Keyword analysis

To conduct a keyword analysis, I gathered together data from the corpus I had built from the fifteen vlogpologies selected. I used the ANC software to identify words in the vlogpology that indicated the apology as a speech act. Although the vlogpology is separate from the expectations of a standardised apology, it is important to note the anticipated language that classifies words as an apology. For an apology to be classified as legitimate, according to An et al. (2021), it needs to use one or a combination of words which I list here:

- Sorry
- Pardon
- Excuse
- Afraid
- Apologise
- Regret
- Forgive
- Apology/ies

Table 5.1 lists the top 15 keywords from the vlogpology corpus, which emerged from being referenced against the ANC corpora in AntConc 4.0.11. The keywords are ordered by their keyness score in descending order, indicative of how key they are to the corpus.

Table 5.1

Keywords Found in Vlogpologies

Rank	Keyword	Frequency	Keyness	Effect
1	I	1392	3001.1	0.0848
2	I'm	182	1362.28	0.0159
3	video	126	753.64	0.011
4	don't	92	692.7	0.0081
5	I've	83	615.98	0.0073
6	like	257	511.92	0.0208
7	that	731	511.46	0.0409
8	me	235	430.72	0.019
9	my	281	428.56	0.0219
10	know	168	425.63	0.0142
11	that's	53	405.31	0.0046
12	sorry	79	388.68	0.0069
13	guys	79	380.84	0.0069
14	just	182	339.85	0.015
15	didn't	43	328.82	0.0038

This keyword table illustrates that within the vlogpology corpus, the authors centre the language around themselves more than is expected in everyday discourse. For example, the subject pronoun *I* occurs 1,392 times, twice as frequently as the next word, *that*. There are two other *I* words present in the keyword table, *I've* and *I'm*, the combined frequency of the *I* keywords is 1657.

The object pronoun *me* and the possessive adjective *my* also appear with relatively high frequency, at 235 and 281, respectively. In total, this accounts for 2243 statements found in the fifteen vlogpologies. This occurs approximately every 10.1475702th word. For keywords to achieve a high keyness score, they need to have a higher *relative* frequency than the represented average, which for this study is the ANC. The relative frequency divides how often the token word appears in a reference corpus, and target corpus, as well as how many total words are in the reference and target corpus (Biber, 2020). This keyword list suggests that the vlogpology is heavily centred on the vloggers' perspective and their narrative. This may be indicative of a standard vlog language, as vlogging is thought to be a diary-like style of video where one shares their thoughts and experiences (Collins, n.d.).

It is notable that within the vlogpology corpus, only one of the key apologetic words (An et al, 2021) is present, which is *sorry*, and that this is towards the end of the keywords list. This suggests that either the amount of apologising or the relationship of apologetic language with neighbouring words featured in the vlogpology is on par with regular speech patterns recorded in the ANC reference corpora. Or that the apology itself may be a minor genre purpose rather than the primary.

As the pronouns and conjunctions containing pronouns occur so frequently in the corpus, it is unnecessary to analyse them. They will likely appear as collocations or in the lines of concordance due to their salience to the text. They also occur so often, that by examining their pairing there would be a myriad of data available that could be shaped in many directions due to the thousands of pronoun-based statements.

Collocations are words that appear together frequently with a chosen keyword in the text sample. These are valued against everyday language in the ANC reference corpora, to see the

anticipated regular pairings within everyday speech, versus the unique pairings with the keyword and collocates in the vlogpology corpus. Collocations allow for a basic understanding of the keywords purpose or associations within the text. Concordance lines allow for further context to be developed, the keyword is examined as it was originally delivered, with a few words in front and behind, similar to a sentence. With collocations, if the keyword was ‘swim’ and the collocates were *love*, *like* and *to*; one could assume that there were positive sentiments attached to swimming. In the concordance lines, it may become evident that words like *can’t* and *don’t* are commonly found in these swimming statements, for instance ‘*I don’t love to swim*’ or ‘*I can’t swim*’, which would negate the initial interpretation that was established from the collocates. Can’t or don’t, which would have been important contextual words, may have been excluded from the collocation list, due to low scores from their usual high associations with swim in the everyday language represented in a reference corpora. Whereas in the target corpus, their association may be more meaningful to the purposes of studying this examples keyword *swim*.

To get a more accurate idea of lexical patterns in the vlogpology, four words will be examined from the keyword list. The first two - *sorry* and *video* - will be the primary focus in the concordance and collocation sections. As the word vlog is a combination of the words video and blog, and vlogpology comes from the pairing of *vlog* and *apology*; incorporating the apology-related word *sorry* and the medium of expressing a vlogpology *video*, should provide information that is salient to the genre. I also checked the lines of concordance, to ensure a particular vlogger or a small representation of the sample was not excessively using these words. This was done to ensure the words were indicative of the genre rather than an individual or a minor percentage of the sample.

The keywords *don't* and *didn't* will also be examined on a smaller scale, to see what present and past tense negative statements the creators make in their vlogpology. As well as what lexical items are associated with them. These words were selected as they are likely to present more information about the vlogpology. *Didn't*, could contextualise what caused the incident the vlogpology is about, the vlogger's feelings, or something the vlogger did not do. The past tense contraction allows for insight into an earlier moment. *Don't* is present tense; it could be used for the vlogger to share or refute current information or as a command to the viewer. Overall these four words should expand the understanding of both the vlogpology and the vloggers themselves.

5.2 Collocations

This section will examine ten collocations each for the keywords *video* and *sorry*, using the MI statistic with a minimum of four and a span of four words to the left and right of the token. It will then consider six collocations for the keywords *don't* and *didn't*, with the same minimum mutual information statistic and span as the previous keywords. Table 5.2 shows the collocations with the word *video*.

5.2.1 Collocations with Video

Table 5.2 shows the collocations with the word *video*.

Table 5.2

Collocations with Video (pr of 4 words left and right)

Rank	Collocate	Frequency	Stat
2	this	51	5.31308
9	want	20	4.55408
20	don't	10	4.259536
21	apology	10	6.42661

30	watching	9	5.91203
31	one	7	4.19583
32	never	7	4.25996
33	make	7	4.52299
34	made	7	4.8125
42	making	7	4.38152

An initial look at this table suggests that the vlogger, when talking about *videos*, is reflecting on the process of *making* (ranked 42nd) a video or having *made* (ranked 34th) *one* (ranked 31st). The mood of the vlogger can be viewed as displeased or upset about the *video*, through the negative present tense contraction *don't* (ranked 20th) and adverb/auxiliary verb *never* (ranked 32nd). *Never* is an absolute statement, it is the firmest stance one can take. Its use is often hyperbolic, to exaggerate how serious one is about a point. Using *never* allows for a speaker to place themselves on one side of a black-and-white thinking divide, Shulman (2019) is a psychologist, who believes *always* and *never* statements are rarely true, as they leave out many details between the extremes, where reality often lies. The concordance lines should further clarify what the intentions behind these words are.

As discussed in the previous chapter, during the *thanks* step in the *closure* move, vloggers often thank their viewers for watching the vlogpology.

Although *apology* did not make it into the keyword list, it did collocate with *video*. Perhaps through the vloggers describing the video as an *apology video*. This pairing shows that vloggers do express more apologetic language than the keyword list suggested. However, their usage of *sorry* had a higher relevant frequency. Apology (ranked 30th) was paired with video ten times, so it or other apologetic words may present themselves in other collocations or lines of concordance. The vlogpology has been described as having a lack of apologetic language

(Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019) or using clever techniques to deliver non-apologetic apologies (Abad-Santos, 2018). The inclusion of *sorry* in the keyword list with a frequency of 79 and *apology* here, indicates that the vlogpology does contain some of the key apologetic language (An et Al., 2021). This will be discussed in the next section and in the concordance lines.

5.2.2 Collocations with Sorry

Table 3 indicates the collocations for *sorry*.

Table 5.3

Collocations with Sorry

Rank	Collocate	Frequency	Statistic
3	I'm	47	6.21729
4	so	39	5.67454
6	for	36	5.52664
8	am	33	6.64503
9	that	31	4.01365
12	guys	10	4.96671
13	very	9	5.68601
19	sorry	8	4.45168
20	really	7	4.47006
30	truly	6	6.083093

Many of the collocations with *sorry* were anticipated, particularly the high-frequency use of *I'm* and *am* which may function to differentiate the apology. A corpus-based study on American spoken English suggests that saying *sorry* versus *I'm sorry* expresses two different types of apology (Arizavi & Choubsaz, 2018). *Sorry* alone indicates an interruption, self-repair and expressing regret, whereas *I'm sorry* is primarily associated with an actual apology or feelings of regret. This suggests the apologies given within the vlogpology may be genuine,

which strays away from the performative or insincere element suggested in other studies (Abad-Santos, 2018; Afriza & Rusadi, 2021; Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019; Lawson, 2020; Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2018, 2020; Sng et al, 2019; Woods, 2021).

As *I'm* (ranked 3rd) and *am* (ranked 8th) collocate 80 times with *sorry* in the corpus, and *sorry* appears 79 times, it is possible the apologies in the vlogpology are delivered in the manner Arizavi and Choubasaz (2018) describe as being either actual apologies or an expression of regret. This is a surprising finding due to the vlogpology being labelled as performative by previous studies with smaller samples.

The dataset for this vlogpology, which consists of fifteen texts, is larger than previous studies that have examined the vlogpology. Their samples consisted of two to six texts to examine the linguistic patterns (Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019; Sng et al., 2019) and IRT techniques, with some basing their interpretation of sincerity around the reception that was evaluated through online discourse (Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2018; Lawson, 2020; Sng et al., 2019; Woods, 2021). This could explain the discrepancy between this finding and previous works' assertions, as the target corpus has a larger variety of vlogpologies and vloggers and is not correlating IRT techniques with the positive or negative interpretation of comments to value mass opinions on sincerity.

Although the relationship between *I'm* and *am* may not be indicative of a genuine apology, as the full context of the sentence or statement is not available in this section. This will be viewed in the sorry concordance lines. Benoit (1997) states that there are many factors involved in judging whether or not an apology is deemed sincere, including the IRT approach taken, delivery, personal presentation, culture, and relationship with the recipient. This

information can only indicate if lexically the apology is constructed in a manner that seems genuine.

As English does not have a formalised second-person plural pronoun, *you guys* has been described as being a highly productive phrase to cover a group being addressed, as it is used freely in everyday language (Davis, 2021). It suggests a level of familiarity or comfort. Despite the suggested inclusivity of the phrase, it could be said to go against feminist theory, which at its core aims to eliminate gender stratification, increase equality, and end specific harms that come from the current imbalance (Arinder, 2020). Using ‘guys’ to label everyone, even if it is in a friendly manner, still gives power to the men being addressed. If you had an office where ten staff were women and two were men, it would not be wrong to assume that if someone addressed the group as ‘you guys’ that they were talking to those who identify as male in the room. While this may seem like a minor detail, it’s interesting to note – that some of the vloggers in this study may have an audience that is predominantly made up of those who identify as female, and their content may be marketed towards them. However, so as not to exclude any male viewers, they use *you guys* to refer to their audience, as there is no *inclusive* feminine version of this highly productive phrase. Some may say the feminine equivalent of ‘guys’ is ‘girls’, yet ‘girls’ refers to children and pairs with ‘boys’. ‘Gals’ is also incorrect, as it refers to a girl or a young woman, whereas ‘guy’ is defined as referring to an adult male (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Whether consciously or not, vloggers address their large viewership in a manner that accommodates male viewers, even if the content is directed towards women. It is unlikely the vloggers are intentionally doing this, it is just a widely accepted way to greet all in a manner that suggests inclusivity, despite the probable removal of gender identity for some subjects within the *you guys* group.

The inclusion of *guys* as a collocate with *sorry* within the vlogpology corpus suggests the vloggers are addressing their audience in the plural rather than in a more direct manner. A study examining the ‘face-work’ in confessional YouTube vlogs noted that when a vlogger was sharing vulnerable information or was trying to relate to their viewer, they would address their audience as *you* to facilitate the feeling of a direct conversation between just the viewer and vlogger (Dekavalla, 2022). When discussing lighter topics, they would use *guys* or *we* to widen the scope of people being addressed. The casual audience label *guys* may detract from the serious tone some apologies require.

Sorry was also found as a collocate with *sorry* (ranked 19th). This suggests that multiple apologies are present within the vlogpology, with eight of them being issued in a rapid manner according to the collocation table, occurring either four words before or after the present apology. Although, each pairing of the collocate *sorry* with *sorry* is counted twice in the frequency table, due to the relationship of the first instance of *sorry* and the second *sorry* being valued in an example, as well as the relationship of the second *sorry* to the first *sorry*. This means the act of a repeated apology, which can be observed below, occurs in four of the vlogpology texts in the corpus.

But there are a lot of mistakes that I have made and I’m sorry for that,

I’m sorry for everybody I’ve let down.

(David Dobrik, 2021)

In this example, the vlogger says they are *sorry*, then apologises again three words after the initial *sorry*. In this example, the vlogger does not specify what the mistakes are they are

sorry for. They also do not specify who “*everybody*” is that they have *let down*. The apology, at least in this part of the example, has no specific recipient or reason behind the apology.

There are also positive adverbs to support the apologetic language. The collocations *very* (ranked 13th), *truly* (ranked 30th), *really* (ranked 20th), and possibly *so* (ranked 4th); serve the purpose of emphasising or exaggerating the feeling behind the apology.

Adding *that* to an apology is suggested to negate the actual apologetic sentiment (Arizavi and Choubsaz, 2018; Maule, 1988; Choi, 2021) by altering or transforming the apologetic act into a statement. This is specifically done by placing the word directly after an apologetic word like *sorry*. This style of altered apology is thought to be prompted by refusal, self-repair, or compensation (Arizavi & Choubsaz, 2018) *That* was linked within a span of four words to the left or right of *sorry* 31 times in the dataset. It may occur before *sorry* at times or a few words after *sorry*. Here are three examples from the corpus that show the different meanings *that* and *sorry* can denote, based on their order and proximity in a sentence.

I am sorry that some of you felt a certain type of way.

(Callux, 2021)

The first example shows *that* directly after *sorry*, the vlogger apologises for the way the audience themselves *felt*, rather than for what they did. The vlogger in the first example also uses *that* as an adjective to clarify which pronoun the vlogger is primarily addressing in the sentence, as there are two options, *some* and *you*. *That* is used before *some* to let the audience know the speaker is not addressing this to the entire audience, but rather a specific group that makes up the *some*. Had the vlogger said *I am sorry that you felt a certain type of way*, the statement would be

addressed to anyone watching, as *that* before *you* would emphasise both the individual *you* and the *you* as in the collective audience. What characterises the *some audience* this apology has been directed towards has not been shared, as the vlogger describes the reaction as having *felt a certain type of way*; without describing what the *way* was.

The vlogger refers to the emotions viewers *felt* in the past rather than in the present tense. This suggests the vlogger thinks the crisis has already happened and is no longer relevant. The offended group *felt*, they do not *feel*. As a whole, this apology seems to be altered and may have come from a place of either self-repair or refusal (Arizavi & Choubsaz, 2018).

I'm aware of that, I'm so sorry for how much of a coward I have been.

(Tana Mongeau, 2020)

The second example shows *that* as the third word before *sorry*. The vlogger uses *that* as a pronoun to describe a thing they have referenced previously. They then apologise for their *cowardly* behaviour. What is interesting about this is that the vlogger does not criticise themselves in the direct *past* tense, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, was observed in 93.3% of the dataset. The vlogger could have said *how much of a coward I was*. Had they used *was*, rather than “*have been*”, they would be referring to something that had concluded, meaning they were no longer a coward. By saying *have been* the vlogger refers to the past but also infers that this cowardice has continued and not just one instance. They are apologising both for their current state of being and their previous state, and this comparatively direct labelling is unusual for the corpus. The *that* in this example, does not change the sentiment of the apology in the example.

I'm so sorry I missed that.

(David Dobrik, 2021)

Finally, the third vlogger places *that* three words after *sorry*. The third vlogger uses *that* as a pronoun to label something they have previously mentioned, as the second vlogger did. In this example, *that* is the thing the vlogger is apologising for. *That* in both the second and third examples can be swapped out with the actual thing they are labelling as *that*; *the* apology itself would not be altered as it was in the first example. Meaning in some instances the collocation of *that* and *sorry* comes from an 'altered apology', and in other instances, the words may collocate simply due to the study's scope of four words to the left or the right of the keyword. However, all of the apologies or altered apologies with *that* and *sorry* in these examples show the vloggers using vague language. This raises an incredibly basic question for each example:

1. The first vlogger apologises for viewers having *felt a certain type of way*. **What way did the viewers feel?**
2. The second vlogger states they are *aware of that*. **What are they aware of?**
3. The final vlogger apologises for having *missed that*. **What did they miss?**

By not using specific language to describe how or what the viewers *felt*, what they think the vlogger was *aware* of and what the vlogger *missed*, it seems like the vlogger is apologising for whatever *feeling* or *thing* the viewer can imagine as an applicable answer to the questions in the examples above. This may be a pattern with the 31 '*sorry that*' apologies in the dataset, or it may be found in other sorry-based statements. This will be discussed further in the concordance section.

5.2.3 Collocations with Don't

Table 5.4 shows six of the collocations with the keyword *don't*.

Table 5.4

Collocations with Don't

Rank	Collocate	Frequency	Statistic
4	negativity	8	7.36575
6	edit	7	6.95071
10	risk	10	6.62879
19	make	9	5.33928
20	don't	14	5.23451
31	video	10	4.29536

Don't can be used to issue commands or warnings, to ask questions, and to make negative statements that refute or disagree with something. It is set in the present tense, when the vlogger uses *don't*, they are speaking about their current opinions, advice or queries. In the dataset, the vlogger's pair *negativity* (ranked 4th) and *risk* (ranked 10th) with *don't* eighteen times. In the vlogpology corpus, *don't* is paired with *negativity* and *risk* to form a command or warning fourteen times. This can be seen in the example below, where the creator tells their audience not to send negativity to anyone else in a direct manner. The *else* implies it has already happened and that the creator is unhappy with this.

Don't send negativity to anyone else.

(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

In the remaining four pairings of *risk* and *negativity* with *don't*, the vlogger's use *don't* to make statements that refute arguments that may be raised against them. Which can be seen in the next example.

I live alone, I don't put anyone at risk.

(Doctor Mike, 2020)

In this example, the vlogger, a doctor, was socialising with friends in a manner the CDC guidelines had approved. However, as the doctor is a public figure who encouraged participants to follow practices like social distancing, critics used this incident to discount his previous advice. The vlogger is using *don't* to illustrate that they were only putting themselves at *risk*. In the vlogpology corpus, through statements and commands, *don't*, when paired with *negativity* or *risk*, is used to manage a part of the crisis.

Don't also collocates with *don't* (ranked 20th), fourteen times in the dataset. As discussed earlier the collocations *sorry* and *sorry*, in a sentence, *don't* and *don't* have been counted as two individual occurrences of *don't* collocating with *don't* in the frequency table. This means *don't* and *don't* collocate in seven examples within the text. In these seven examples, *don't* and *don't* are used in two distinct ways.

Firstly, *don't* and *don't* are used in four of the texts to perform what Hollister et al. (2017) describe as an anaphoric stutter, which indicates stress. Anaphora is a rhetorical device where the same word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of consecutive clauses. It is used to create rhythm in a text, links ideas, give structure to a list and make an important part of a text more memorable (Nordquist, 2019). Hollister et al. describe the stutter aspect as a combination of

speech fluency issues due to feeling nervous or pressured and, due to the nature of the whole word being repeated rather than tripping up over parts, believe the repeated word within the same sentence is likely to be a place holder for filler words *um* or *uh*. Filler words are used to help a speaker remember a word, formulate thoughts or when a speaker is hesitating (Lieberman, 2014).

Anaphoric stutter uses the beginning word or words of a single sentence in repetition to indicate the speaker has a clear idea of what they intended to say. However, they are interrupted either by the pressure or nerves related to what they are about to say and begin to self-edit mid-speech to ensure they say it the *right* way, or they need a moment to gather themselves before speaking (Hollister et al., 2017). This can be seen in the following example.

I don't, I don't know I have texted her.

(Jatie, 2021)

Secondly, the remaining three instances of *don't* and *don't* collocates exist within the rhetorical device parallelism. Parallelism compounds phrases, sentences and ideas that share or have equivalent meanings. Parallelism also uses the same or similar words to collectively construct, emphasise or balance a pattern or theme within an argument (Abreu, 2022). This can be seen in the following example:

For my fans who are defending my actions, please don't, I don't deserve to be defended.

(Logan Paul, 2018)

In this example, the vlogger uses the first *don't* to plead with fans who are currently *defending* their actions. The second *don't* is used as a statement and represents a different

meaning in that it shows how the vlogger views their own actions as not worthy of being *defended*. The vlogger uses the repetition of *don't*, and the rhyme-like repetition of a polyptoton (same root word, different suffix) *defending* and *defended* to connect their audiences' behaviour and their own desire to calm the online discussion surrounding the situation.

5.2.4 Collocations with Didn't

The following table, 5.5, shows six collocations with *didn't*.

Table 5.5

Collocations with Didn't

Rank	Collocate	Frequency	Statistic
2	listen	10	9.20001
3	manipulate	6	9.04801
8	gaslight	5	9.04801
13	didn't	17	7.62175
29	think	11	6.55325
38	address	9	6.38505

Didn't is the past tense contraction of did not. It is used to state a thing was *not* done. It has not been considered, initiated or completed.

Five of the collocates are verbs. The remaining collocate is *didn't* (ranked 13th), which, like with *sorry* and *don't*, the frequency denotes 8 instances of *didn't* and *didn't* collocating. The collocation of *didn't*, like with the collocation pairing of *don't* and *don't*, is split into the two categories of *anaphoric stutter* and *parallelism*.

The collocations for *didn't* and *didn't* are delivered through parallelism in seven of the occurrences in the dataset. An example of this can be seen below.

I didn't cheat, I just didn't understand Fortnite had rules.

(Faze Jarvis, 2019)

The first *didn't*, is used by the vlogger to negate the idea the vlogger *cheated* concisely. The first three words of the sentence *I* (personal singular pronoun) *didn't* (refuting) *cheat* (main verb) accomplish this. The vlogger then supports their position by using the second *didn't* to share a little more detail. They stated that they *didn't understand* the online game they played had *rules* in place. The juxtaposition of 'cheat' and 'rules' reinforces his lack of knowledge as an excuse for what the game interpreted as cheating. The dataset had one collocate for *didn't* and *didn't* that featured anaphora. Which can be seen in the following example.

I didn't, didn't, did not address it.

(Colleen, 2021)

In this example, the vlogger repeats *didn't* twice in a row before breaking up the contraction to move on from the probably unintentional repetitive speech pattern. *Did not* adds emphasis to the remainder of the example, as it slightly disrupts the pattern formed by the repetition from the neighbouring *didn't* and *didn't* collocates. The shift from the shorter contraction to full word catches the eye and makes *addressing it*, which is the part of the example that gives context for the situation, stand out in contrast. The vlogger also uses

consonance; out of 26 letters in this example, the alveolar plosive sounds /d/ and /t/ are used twelve times. When spoken aloud, /d/ and /t/ use the same mouth area, meaning they sound similar. This repetition of sound throughout also creates a memorable rhythm. Although this was an example of the anaphoric stutter, the extent of the pattern was likely unintended.

Two collocates, *think* (ranked 2nd) and *listen* (ranked 29th), are paired with *didn't* 21 times in the dataset. The verbs are used in the corpus to share some insight into why the vlogger did not acknowledge advice from commenters earlier, who had pointed out their behaviour online. In the example below, the vlogger explains that they did not listen or think because they did not view it as an issue worthy of their attention.

I didn't listen because I did not think it was a big deal

(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

They use the past tense *didn't*, to suggest this is no longer their viewpoint, and with the context of their speaking about it in the video, the audience can gather that the vlogger now understands 'it'.

Address (ranked 38th) in the corpus is paired with *didn't* in a similar manner as *listen* and *think*, in that it is also directly related to the vlogger, the situation that caused them to make the vlogpology, and their actions. Although in the example below, the vlogger uses *address* to express that although they have *grown* from the situation, they fell short by not *addressing* the harmed party.

I grew from it but I didn't address the situation with these women.

(David Dobrik, 2021)

In the first instance, the vlogger has been told their previous actions were not acceptable but ignored them until recently. In the second, the vlogger suggests that they took the feedback onboard and *grew*, which presumably means they took the advice onboard and used it to better themselves. *Grew* is in the past tense, which suggests they believe their growth has been achieved. They may have mentioned this to signal to the viewer that they do not deserve to receive a poor reaction to the vlogpology. However, by not *addressing* the victims in the *situation* at the time, they believe they have more work to do in the future with the situation. The final two collocates are *manipulate* (ranked 3rd) and *gaslight* ranked (8th). They appear with *didn't* eleven times in the corpus. Gaslighting is a form of manipulation, and it specifically refers to a psychological practice of manipulating a person or people over a period of time that causes victims to doubt the validity of their memories, thoughts and perception of reality (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In the example below, the vlogger uses *gaslight* in their apology to fans, to acknowledge that although they did this, they *didn't mean to*.

I am so sorry to my fans that I never gave a proper apology to, I didn't mean to gaslight
you.

(Tana Mongeau, 2020)

The vlogger suggests that by not properly apologising to their fans, they have engaged in this mental manipulation practice. *Proper apology*, also suggests, that the vlogger has previously

apologised to them, although in an unsatisfactory manner. The word “manipulative” is used in the following example, to explain how the vlogger behaved in the past.

I was evil, I didn’t mean to be manipulative, but I was.

(Hungry Box, 2020)

Like the previous example with *gaslight*, the vlogger uses *mean*, to cushion the behaviour by suggesting that although they acknowledge they treated people in a certain manner, this was not their intention. The vlogger uses *was* twice and *didn’t* once, to suggest this past behaviour is unrelated to their current state of being. Whilst severely criticising their past self, labelling themselves as *evil* and *manipulative*.

5.3. Concordances

This section will analyse ten lines of concordance with the lexical items *video* and *sorry*, to understand the context and purpose of their use in the text in terms of what is relevant in a vlogpology. The collocates for *video* were heavily centred on producing a vlogpology or their previous video, with *make*, *made*, *making* and *watching* appearing in the collocation table. These collocations were expected and so did not provide interesting insight into the relationship between *video* and the neighbouring words.

The *sorry* collocations also displayed a selection of words that did not supply much information. With *very*, *truly*, *so* and *very* appearing to emphasise *sorry*, as well as *that*, *I’m*, *am* and *guys*. Which seemed to refer to the incident, the vlogger, and their audience. The concordance lines will give more information regarding the apologies found in the vlogpology, which, as discussed throughout this study, have been suggested to have a lack of apologetic language (Binraya &

Panjaitan, 2019) or using clever techniques to deliver non-apologetic apologies (Abad-Santos, 2018).

Didn't and *don't* were particularly illuminating in this chapter. As they have been discussed in depth, I will look briefly at their usage in the concordance lines and will evaluate whether or not these align with the previous understanding developed in the collocation section through six lines of *don't* and *didn't* concordance. The next section will examine ten lines of concordance for video.

5.3.1 The use of Video

Video is often used as a noun in the vlogpology, referring to the vlogpology content itself or a previous piece of content uploaded to their channel.

Table 5.6

Concordance of Video in the Vlogpology Corpus

1	back today and bring you an apology	video	a proper apology video this time (David Dobrik, 2021)
2	I don't want to make this	video	about me or my emotions or excuses (Tana Mongeau, 2020)
3	never thought I'd be having to make this kind of	video	but I have to today (Faze Jarvis, 2019)
4	A year ago I did a	video	called never doing this again and I meant that (Jeffree Star, 2020)
5	welcome back to my channel this	video	obviously looks really different (Olivia Jade, 2020)

- 6 my point in the video and this **video** is number one clickbait thank you for
(Callux, 2021)
- 7 I don't want to make this **video** a bunch of gibberish
(Jatie, 2021)
- 8 royally pissed off by my **video** and honestly I do understand
poetry apology (Cozy Kitsune, 2017)
- 9 But I'm aware that making this **video** about my emotions would do nothing
(Colleen Ballinger, 2021)
- 10 I am going to be monetizing this **video** but please do not think that I'm only
(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)
-

In the collocation section for video, although it might be assumed that *make* or *making* provide little information, these words still relay information regarding how the vloggers wish to deliver their vlogpologies. In some instances, they may hint that they perceive there to be rules or parameters when making a vlogpology. Lines (2) and (9), for example, appear to incorporate a discussion about emotions.

2. I don't want to make this video about me or my emotions or excuses
(Tana Mongeau, 2020)

Line (2) focuses on *themselves*, their *emotions* or *excuses* being things they do not want the *video* to be about. This suggests the vlogpology, or how they perceive it, is expected to be a focused product that discusses the actual issue that prompted the video.

9. But I'm aware making this video about my emotions would do nothing
(Colleen, 2021)

The vlogger in line (9) expresses that they believe making their vlogpology about their *emotions* would *do nothing*. By saying they are *aware*, it suggests something has occurred to create this understanding of focussing on one's own emotions during a vlogpology, and this in turn nullifies the intent of the vlogpology.

An article by Sung (2018) suggests there is an 'art' to making a vlogpology, and that it involves more than just saying a vague sorry and crying. It is worth noting, the videos they linked in their piece, which featured crying, have since been taken down; which is indicative of videos that were received poorly. The article itself features comments where viewers had called out a particular vlogger for fake crying. The emotional vlogpology videos Sung discussed may have contributed to the 'awareness' and 'don't want' lines (2) and (9) mention about expressing emotions within the vlogpology genre.

In line (7), the vlogger states their desire to have a clear video, by stating their intent to not *make* a video that is a bunch of *gibberish*.

7. I don't want to make this video a bunch of gibberish

(Jatie, 2021)

Lines (1), (4) and (8) show vloggers who have made previous vlogpologies, which can be seen below.

1. back today and bring you an apology video a proper apology this time

(David Dobrik, 2021)

4. A year ago I did a video called never doing this again and I meant that

(Jeffree Star, 2020)

8. *royally pissed off by my poetry apology video and honestly I do understand*

(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

Lines (1) and (8) talk about their earlier vlogpology, which is for the same incident. Line (1) states they are *back*, which suggests they may have been away for a while after the last video, and have returned to share an *apology video*, a '*proper one this time*'. Line (8) discusses a particular style they delivered in their previous apology video through *poetry*, they also state their viewers were *royally pissed off* by it. Line (4) is discussing an apology video they made a year ago; they titled it *never doing this again*, and affirm they meant that. Yet, they are making a vlogpology again. This statement suggests to the viewer that their word or promises are not reliable.

Lines (3) and (5) discuss the vlogpology, in the example below, the vlogger's sentiment towards making it can be seen.

3. *never thought I'd be having to make this kind of video but I have to today*

(Faze Jarvis, 2019)

In this example, the vlogger states they '*never*' thought they would '*have*' to make this '*kind of video*'. *Thought*, suggests they were aware of '*this kind*' of *video*, they just had never entertained the idea that they would '*have to*' make one. Meaning they are aware of other vlogpologies when making their own, and so understand that vlogpologies have particular shared qualities; otherwise, how would they identify this *kind of video*? They also say *having* to make and *have*, which shows they did not make the video of their own volition. It was unavoidable, something they must do.

Whereas line (5) mentions their video looks different, this, in itself, suggests visually the vlogpology may have particular visual features compared to other videos they have produced.

(This will be discussed further in the next chapter).

5. welcome back to my channel this video obviously looks really different

(Olivia Jade, 2020)

The following line (6), suggests a playful reason for the vlogpology.

6. my point in this video is number one clickbait thank you for

(Callux, 2021)

The vlogger mentioned clickbait as the reason for issuing their vlogpology. This acknowledges that vlogpologies have the potential to go viral and that by making a vlogpology, the vlogger may also have an increase in viewership on the vlogpology video. Which will result in the vlogger not only earning money but potentially gaining new followers. The controversy they are apologising for may be less serious than suggested in their thumbnail and title. Still, they may have purposefully made it more dramatic to the level of *clickbait*. Viewers, therefore, may watch a video that is less serious than suggested in the thumbnail, as is common in the practice of gaining through clickbaiting. Clickbaiting over promises or falsely promises viewers something through the title, thumbnail or description to earn a click from a viewer and their subsequent view, which may equate to financial benefits for the creator (Jung et al., 2022). The vlogger may have confessed that they have intentionally clickbaited the viewer, which suggests their situation was less serious than they had designed it to appear through the thumbnail, description and title of their vlogpology.

Although, it seems more likely that they have labelled the video as clickbait jokingly to lighten

the mood. As click-baiting is known for frustrating viewers or readers of a text, it is believed to be manipulative as the vlogger farms the viewer's time for a profit without giving the viewer what they believed they were trading their time for (Vadde et al., 2020). The final line (10) involves a vlogger and a comment on monetisation.

10. I am going to be monetising this video but please do not think that I'm

(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

The vlogger seems to realise there is a negative sentiment attached to monetising a vlogpology, as after they announce they are *monetising* it, they request their viewers to *not think* they are doing it for whatever reason. This shows they know their audience will likely have an impression on those who monetise their vlogpologies and are eager to avoid that through their request to *please not think that*.

Overall, the video lines of concordance have provided a range of information surrounding the vlogpology as a genre that was not evident in the *video* collocation section of this chapter.

They discuss needing to make a vlogpology that is a *particular way* in lines (1), (2), (7), (8), (9) and (10), perhaps in a way to educate their viewers as to why they are taking this action. In line (2), expressing their desire to keep the video about the situation rather than *themselves*, *their emotions* or *excuses* and (9) stating the inclusion of their emotions would nullify the video's sentiment. Line (7) wants to make a video that is clearly understood. Line (10) divulges that they will earn money from the video. However, they try to avoid negative fallout by pleading with their fans not to view it in a manner where they are profiting from the incident. Line (1) discusses their intention to provide a proper apology video *this time*. Line (3) also indicates the vlogger felt pressure to make their vlogpology, and that although they had previously never

thought they would make one, they now *have* to. Collectively, this suggests the vloggers are aware of some unspoken rules for making a vlogpology, that they have identified it as a particular type of video, and that they are stressed about making their video and feel pressured from other sources to not only create one but to create it the *right* way.

5.3.2 The use of Sorry

The following table shows ten collocation lines for the keyword *sorry*.

Table 5.7

Concordances of Sorry in the Vlogpology Corpus.

1	just genuinely want to say I'm	sorry	to anyone I've offended (Cozy Kitsune, 2017)
2	obnoxious that may be right I'm	sorry	if you felt that way (Callux, 2021)
3	need to apologise I am so	sorry	to everyone who felt hurt (English with Lucy, 2020)
4	It was not okay I am really	sorry	if I offended or disappointed anyone (PewDiePie, 2017)
5	the bottom of my heart I am	sorry	I want to apologize to the internet (Logan Paul, 2018)
6	apology video I've ever made I'm	sorry	for uploading them and I'm sorry (Tana Mongeau, 2020)

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| 7 | made when I was younger | sorry | I hope you can all see that the person (Colleen, 2021) |
| 8 | come on here and say I'm really | sorry | um to anyone I offended (Olivia Jade, 2020) |
| 9 | To the Jatie fam I'm so | sorry | you guys even have to be a part (Jatie, 2021) |
| 10 | apologise like genuinely very very | sorry | and I have just made myself (Alfie Deyes, 2018) |

There indicate a range of apology types present within the concordance lines. Line (6) as seen below, issues apologies in quick succession.

6. *apology video I've ever made and I'm sorry for uploading them and I'm sorry*
(Tana Mongeau, 2020)

The vlogger apologises for every apology video they have ever made, which is interesting for two reasons. First, they are the first example in this study that I have encountered throughout the extensive research for this study, which has made more than two vlogpologies. Second is the irony of apologising for making vlogpology videos whilst making a vlogpology. Lines (3), (5), and (10) use additional apologetic language, which contradicts the opinion of the vlogpology lacking in this linguistic feature (Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019). This can be seen below.

3. *need to apologise I am so sorry to everyone who felt hurt*
(English with Lucy, 2020)

5. *the bottom of my heart I am sorry I want to apologise to the internet*

(Logan Paul, 2018)

10. Apologise like genuinely very very sorry and I have just made myself

(Alfie Deyes, 2018)

All three examples use *apologise*, alongside *sorry*, in their speeches. Lines (3) and (10) use apologise to express that they are about to issue an apology. Line (5) approaches this differently, after delivering an apology from the depths of their heart, they share that they ‘*want to*’ *apologise* to the internet as a whole. Line (10) delivers the ‘self-repair’ apology (Arizavi & Choubasaz, 2018); the vlogger uses *genuinely very very* to emphasise their apology, although they leave out the *I’m* part. Arizavi and Choubasaz believe this is done to comfort the speaker by removing their direct attachment to the apology. Line (7) also engages in this style of apology, which can be seen below.

7. made when I was younger sorry I hope you can all see that the person

(Colleen, 2021)

Here, the vlogger also puts the focus on their younger self, indicating that they are no longer like this. The vlogpology also features many examples of the *if*, *but* and *felt* apologies, which were found to be an obligatory step in the previous chapter. Perkins & Jason (2022) believe this style of apology is a form of gaslighting, as the speaker is placing the blame on the receiver rather than themselves. This can be found in lines (2), (3), and (4).

1. obnoxious that may be right I’m sorry if you felt that way

(Callux, 2021)

2. need to apologise I am so sorry to everyone who felt hurt

(English with Lucy, 2020)

3. it was not okay I am really sorry if I offended or disappointed anyone

(PewDiePie, 2017)

What is clear from the lines of concordance for sorry is that multiple techniques are used when apologising in the vlogpology. Many of these seem to be an attempt to reassure themselves. This may be an unconscious decision, as this study has discussed the pressure vloggers may be under, as well as the stress they indicate whilst discussing the vlogpology. Abad-Santos (2018) believes vloggers purposefully use clever techniques to deliver non-apologetic apologies, manipulating their audience into thinking they have received a real apology; when they have not.

It seems more likely that the vloggers have planned key points to hit when discussing their scandal, understand on some level that there are parameters for what may be successful or unsuccessful in a vlogpology, and keep that in mind as they deliver their vlogpologies to the camera; rather than scripting them and inventing manners to deceive their viewers. It would be significantly easier and would be of better use to the vlogger; to offer an apology that linguistically seems sincere and to not mean it; than to plot ways to deliver a false apology; which may, in turn, put the vlogger further into the crisis they are attempting to navigate through.

Due to the pressure of the situation, the vlogger may unconsciously deliver an apology where they feel less emotionally connected to it, to comfort themselves. Delivering a less-apologetic apology or a non-apology may be a way to regain a sense of control, to compromise over a piece of work they feel pressured to make, or, as Abad- Santos believes; it may indeed be a pretend apology to get people to leave them alone.

5.3.3 Minor Concordance: The use of Don't

The following section briefly examines the use of *don't* in the vlogpology corpus through six concordance lines.

Table 5.8

Concordances with Don't

1	the AdSense of this video because I	don't	want to be earning any money (Alfie Deyes, 2018)
2	I don't want to defend that video I	don't	want to delete that video (David Dobrik, 2021)
3	skewed they have been once again I	don't	want to make this video about me (Tana Mongeau, 2020)
4	Attack me	don't	attack the science (Doctor Mike, 2020)
5	that is what pissed me off I	don't	want you guys feeling some way (Callux, 2021)
6	like to ask you guys a favour I	don't	like telling you guys what to do (Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

In lines (4) and (6), the vloggers use *don't* to try and get their fans to do something for them.

4. Attack me don't attack the science

(Doctor Mike, 2020)

Line (4) does this through a direct command by telling viewers to *attack them* instead of *the science*.

6. like to ask you guys a favour I don't like telling you guys what to do

(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

Line (6) approaches viewers more gently by minimising any demand for help. The vlogger approaches this task by asking for a *favour*, which means the audience can choose not to

do so. They then hedge their request by sharing that they *don't like* to tell their audience what to do, which is a softer approach - but may be more effective in getting viewers to comply with their request. This suggests they are uncomfortable with the approach used in (4). Although they are ultimately still both trying to get their audience to do something. The vlogger in line (4) offers themselves up to be attacked or criticised instead. Line (6) asks for a favour, which is a psychological way of strengthening bonds between people (Flynn & Lake, 2008).

Lines (1), (2), (3) and (4) are focused on what the creators *don't want* in regard to the vlogpology. Line (1) discussed not wanting to earn money from the AdSense monetisation feature to signal to viewers that they will not be financially rewarded for their vlogpology.

1. the AdSense of this video because I don't want to be earning any money

(Alfie Deyes, 2018)

The vlogger makes out that they do not want to earn money from the vlogpology, that this is their desire which constructs them more positively. Monetisation is a known criticism of vlogpologies which is said to affect whether or not they are accepted (Rearick, 2018). Some of the vloggers appear to understand and therefore seek to show that this is not their intent. The next line (2), seen below, discusses a vlogger's previous vlogpology.

2. I don't want to defend that video I don't want to delete that video

(David Dobrik, 2021)

The vlogger expresses their desire not to defend the video or delete it. Vlogpologies, like the Notes App apology, are theorised to have had relative longevity in the digital space due to their accessibility (Diop, 2020). The Instagram story apology disappears after 24 hours, whereas the vlogpology or Notes App apology is intended to be a part of a creator's library. Sung calls the

vlogpology a ‘rite of passage’ for vloggers (2018), and Douglas (2019) refers to the vlogpology as a ‘must have’ in any successful vloggers library of work. The vlogpology is expected to remain in their library; this permanence contributes to the vlogpology genres’ comparative digital longevity. The vlogger owns their mistake and has the vlogpology to show their growth. Even if an initial vlogpology is received poorly and a secondary one is posted, both are expected to remain on the vloggers channel. Once again, to show growth and accountability. This specific expectation of the genre was featured in the Saturday Night Live vlogpology parody (2021); where a vlogger says in their video titled ‘Fifth apology (last)’ that if the viewer likes their apology video, they should check out their previous apology videos, before pointing towards two linked videos. This can be seen below in Figure 5.1:

Figure 5.1

SNL Vlogpology parody



(Saturday Night Live, 2021)

For parody to be understood, the features of the original form must first be known to identify what is being exaggerated. In this parody, the vlogger is on their fifth vlogpology and is encouraging people to watch their previous apology videos. Anyone watching the parody video who is aware of vlogpologies may find humour in this representation of many vlogpologies in a

single creator's library and that they seem to be encouraging viewers to watch them for further entertainment. Saturday Night Live suggests that viewers could 'binge' watch a creator's vlogpologies like a television series, simply because some vloggers have made more than one vlogpology and have kept the vlogpologies within their content library.

In line (2), the vlogger attempts to signal that the decision to keep their initial failed vlogpology on their channel is an original idea of their own, in a manner of virtue signalling, when it is an expectation of the vlogpology genre. Some vloggers do delete their vlogpologies, but as discussed earlier in this study in the case of Laura Lee, the deletion of an initial vlogpology, can influence the reception and viewership of the secondary vlogpology in a negative manner. Viewers are said to believe it is deceptive to erase the mistake of the first vlogpology, when they are trying to navigate through another issue in their second. It lacks accountability for the whole picture of the crisis and vloggers career. Accountability is the vlogpologies buzzword (Paik, 2021), it occurred so frequently in the data collection process; that it was added to the sample search words that otherwise consisted of apology words.

The following line (3), features a vlogger discussing what they *don't want* the video to be about.

3. *Skewed they have been once again I don't want to make this video about me*

(Tana Mongeau, 2020)

As discussed in the *sorry* concordance lines, this vlogger had made vlogpologies before this one. So, this repetitive disclosure about not wanting to make the video about *themselves* in the *don't* concordance line, or as seen earlier in the video concordance line, their *emotions*, *themselves* or their *excuses*; they have received this feedback in regard to previous vlogpologies they made. As such, they have been influenced on how to make a vlogpology through this

feedback and are attempting to demonstrate they have taken the advice or criticism on board.

This is indicative of the pressure they feel from their audience or those who have critiqued them, to create a vlogpology that fits their requirements.

5.3.4 Minor Concordance: The use of *didn't*

The following table shows six lines of concordance for the keyword *didn't*. The interpretations of this table will be discussed below.

Table 5.9

Concordances with Didn't

1	ten million people with a piece of content I	didn't	properly think about before (Alfie Deyes, 2018)
2	I should have known better and I	didn't	and I'm extremely embarrassed (Hungry Box, 2021)
3	what I'm most sad about because I	didn't	nail my job properly (Callux, 2021)
4	deceiving and manipulative even if I	didn't	think so at the time (Cozy Kitsune, 2017)
5	now I	didn't	monetize this that's not what it's about (Jeffree Star, 2020)
6	problems publicly or privately I'm sorry I	didn't	listen to you guys I'm sorry (David Dobrik, 2021)

With *didn't*, the vloggers seem to be reflecting on their behaviour as well as the pressure they are under as part of the vlogpology. Line (1) states they had *ten million people* view a video, which is a massive viewership figure. The vlogger acknowledges their reach by stating the figure of viewers *ten million*, then expresses their discomfort by saying they *didn't properly think about* it. Line (3) also expresses pressure related to the job, as seen below.

3. *That's what I'm most sad about because I didn't nail my job properly*

(Callux, 2021)

Their job is to create content, and they express feeling sad about not *nailing* the *job properly*. This phrase may be inspired by the idiom nail on the head, which means to get something '*exactly right*'.

Line (2) places the responsibility for their behaviour on themselves, which can be seen in the next example.

2. *I should have known better and I didn't and I'm extremely embarrassed*

(Hungry Box, 2021)

Here they state they should have known better when it came to their behaviour. Their embarrassment over what happened is reinforced through the adjective "extremely". The next example, line (6), states there was discourse surrounding their situation and that they may have ignored it.

6. *problems publicly or privately I'm sorry I didn't listen to you guys I'm sorry*

(David Dobrik, 2021)

Line (5) is intriguing; the vlogger refutes the idea that they would monetise their vlogpology. As discussed in the move/step analysis chapter, discussing monetisation in a typical vlog is not done. Discussing money on YouTube is generally frowned upon because the vlogger is supposed to feel like an average relatable everyday figure (Smith, 2014).

5. *now I didn't monetise this that's not what it's about*

(Jeffree Star, 2020)

The vlogger says *that's not what it's about*, and they appear to feel compelled to mention that they are not profiting off their situation or taking advantage of the vlog's increased viewership which could equate to a significant monetary figure. It also suggests they are aware that portions of their audience may react negatively if they assume the vlogger is using the crisis for their own benefit, which strengthens the argument vloggers have unique pressures both within their job and when creating a vlogpology. They are aware of certain parameters that could result in a poorly received apology and so follow particular steps unique to the genre, like denying monetary gain, as a way to repair their image.

5.5 Summary

This chapter analysed the keywords of the vlogpology to find the aboutness of the text. Findings suggested that personal and possessive pronouns comprise a large part of the vlogpology corpus, and the authors position themselves at the centre. It also looked at the collocations for keywords *video*, *sorry*, *don't* and *didn't*. This section focused on the words that surrounded the lexical items to see what words shared a strong relationship with them. *Video* and *sorry* unexpectedly had weaker collocates than expected. With the paired words either presenting like a sentence, for example, with *sorry*, the collocates were *I'm so, very, really, truly, sorry*. *Didn't* and *don't* unexpectedly reveal more information about the corpus than *sorry* and *didn't*, in the collocates section. However, *don't* and *didn't* give less information with lines of concordance, as most of their salient features or uses had been discovered in the previous section. In contrast, the words *sorry* and *video* provided a significant amount of information in regard to linguistic strategies, the vlogger's own perception of the vlogpology, external pressure from fans and potential unconscious techniques to look after the vlogger. It offered an intriguing glimpse into the complexities behind a vlogpology, particularly

when it came to how language was used for apologising to their audience and for the purposes of image repair. However, since vlogpologies are specifically constructed as videos - understanding how the vloggers look and perform through the YouTube platform is an essential aspect of this study. The following chapter will examine the visual characteristics of the vlogpology.

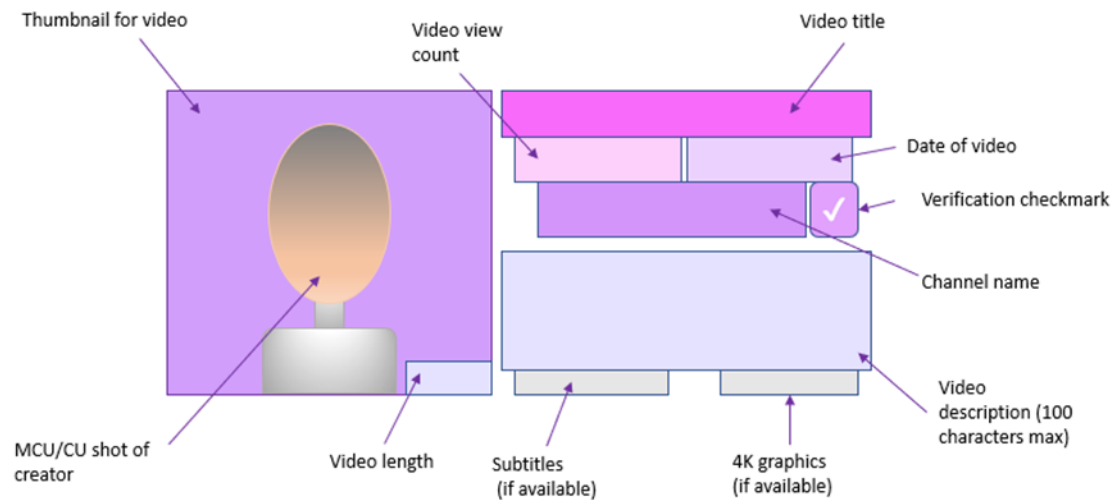
Chapter 6: Visual Design Analysis

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the visual characteristics that contribute to the vlogpology genre, as apologising goes beyond words when it comes to communication in videos on YouTube. It focuses primarily on the use of thumbnails, as these are a particular feature on YouTube channels, like miniature versions that represent the vlogpology itself that is used to attract the attention of viewers (this will be explained in more detail in the following section). Given the limitations of the scope of this research, the thumbnails are, therefore, a convenient way to gain a basic understanding of how vloggers apply visual strategies when it comes to their vlogpologies. In some instances, I will compare and contrast the differences between the vlogpologies thumbnail visual design and the actual vlogs if there appears to be a significant difference. After these sections, I discuss the unique or unusual visual features I have identified as part of the vlogpology genre. I will explore potential reasoning for their individual or minor inclusion within the sample.

As YouTube has a feature that allows creators to either manually choose their thumbnail from their uploaded video or to choose from three preselected ones the algorithm recommends, it is important first to have an understanding of the conventions that a vlogger is confined to. Experts (Shimono et al., 2020; Sweatt, 2022) recommend that users create their thumbnails, as they can control things through editing software to better portray the tone of the video or what the video is about; they can also make it look more visually appealing to increase their chance of receiving views.

My analysis begins by looking at the structure of the thumbnail under certain conditions. Figure 6.1 below shows a typical thumbnail setup.

Figure 6.1*Average Thumbnail Set-Up*

This figure indicates the various parts of a typical thumbnail layout that often includes a close-up or medium close-up shot of the creator and/or other content applicable to the video's theme. Thumbnails do not have to have the vlogger represented; they can feature anything, although a closer shot is desired so that the object or figure being represented is visible on smaller devices. Other information provided includes the title of the video and a brief description of it, the date that the video was made, the length of the video and whether the vlogger has their channel and a facility for captions to be accessed. This information enables viewers to decide whether they wish to click on the video or not - but the video view count might also affect their decision-making - particularly if a video has proven to be popular on a large scale. might judge how much time they have to watch it. What is most important, however, is how the thumbnail helps the viewer to engage with the video. My analysis focuses on the visual aspects that encourage that engagement by looking at various modes from Kress and van Leeuwen's work on visual grammar. As noted in Chapter 3 – these are when it comes to representational (elements

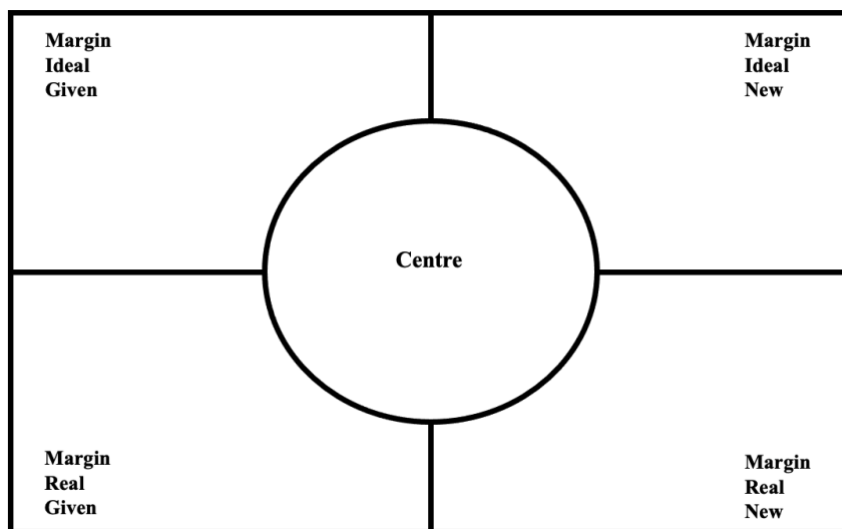
within a text), interpersonal/interactive (elements that establish a relationship with the viewer) and compositional metafunctions (the image, organisation and framing elements). In the following sections, I concentrate on gaze, social distancing, body image, camera angle, body positioning and image, framing and salience and end with looking at outliers. By outliers, I mean the lone or minor visual features in the genre. These will briefly be discussed in an attempt to understand what their purpose may have been and why they are not represented more in the sample and perhaps the wider vlogpology genre.

6.1 Gaze

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) suggest within visual grammar that eyes are naturally drawn to the centre of an image. Additionally, subjects or items placed in certain locations of a frame suggest different meanings that we consciously or unconsciously will understand when viewing this in an advertisement.

Figure 6.2

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) Reading Images



Note. Reproduced from *Reading Images* (3rd edition, p.119) by G. Kress & V. T. Leeuwen, 2020. Copyright 2020 Routledge.

The thumbnail's gaze is the primary focus here, as to view the actual vlogpology on YouTube one must consider the thumbnail before clicking. The gaze is often the first visual relational piece of information the viewer notices when it comes to their engagement with the viewer and this is usually centrally positioned. The gaze can be a visual demand - demanding attention from the viewer through direct eye contact or a visual offer - where there is no direct gaze but where the viewer is "not required to enter a kind of interpersonal relationships with the participants, but to look at the represented participants as items or information or objects of contemplation (Goatly & Hiradhard, 2016, p. 107).

The vlogpologies offered a variety of gazes. Ten vlogpologies used a direct gaze at the audience, although some slightly tilted their heads or avoided direct eye contact (visual demand), as seen in Figure 6.3 below. Two looked away, and two looked downward - this helped to establish the tone of the video, especially if they were apologising or indicating shame for what they had done, as can be seen with English with Lucy.

Figure 6.3*Downward Gaze in Thumbnail*

(English with Lucy, 2020)

In the example Figure 6.3 from English with Lucy (2020), we can see the figure is demanding something from their relationship with the viewer by not offering their gaze or the connection directly. Conveniently, the text has been edited to contextualise why the vlogger is avoiding gaze because she is apologising for a misdemeanour. As viewers follow gaze vectors when reading an image, the viewers, whether or not they are aware, are gathering a little more information from where the averted gaze is prompting them to look. Lucy was apologising for saying there were correct ways to pronounce English words; she had said that future employers may think less of those who do not speak as she does. In this video, Lucy acknowledges that there are over a hundred English dialects and that this statement was wrong and harmful to non-native speakers. So, the lack of gaze may be present here to show that Lucy is ashamed of her actions and cannot meet her audience's gaze. She may be trying to appear humble as well as if she is not worthy of connecting with her audience in this moment of the thumbnail due to her shame.

Figure 6.4

Thumbnail with Averted Gaze



(Callux, 2021)

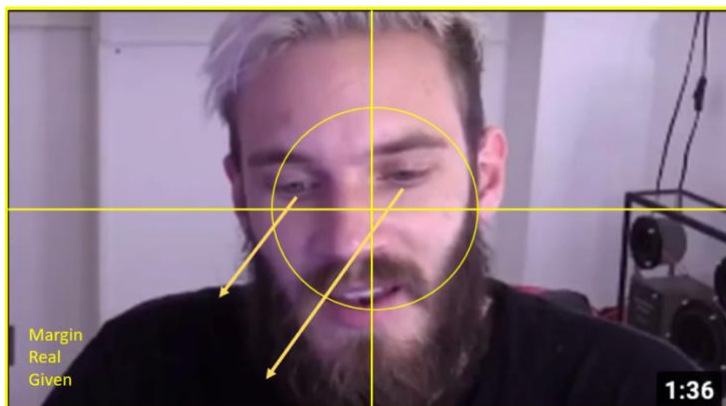
This creator Callux in Figure 6.4, is also in the centre of the thumbnail, yet his gaze is looking out to the side. This could suggest to the viewer that the avoidant look is due to something very recent and that it is not positive due to the slightly lowered eyes. Callux apologises for his collaboration with a larger YouTube channel, ‘Sidemen’; the collaboration was received poorly. Viewers of the Sidemen channel thought he was arrogant and rude to one of the Sidemen team members during their video. The viewers took to social media and Callux’s channel to demand an apology and to insult him. Here, Callux is letting his audience know what happened whilst also addressing the new viewers who have either attacked him on social media or found him through the larger channel. He’s apologising for offending the attacking audience and explaining the situation to his own audience. The gaze to the side is used to illustrate Callux is pensive, that he has something on his mind. This may cause a viewer to feel sympathy, as the gaze insinuates he is troubled. Callux, as discussed in the previous chapter, called his vlogpology

‘clickbait’. Although that may have been a joke, it still suggests that Callux made his thumbnail dramatic to ‘bait’ more viewers to watch the video.

The example below, in Figure 6.5, shows Pew Die Pie’s gaze looking away from the viewer. Perhaps this choice was a body language decision, where looking downward indicates shame or embarrassment.

Figure 6.5

Averted Downward Gaze



(PewDiePie, 2017)

6.2 Social Distance

As thumbnails can be quite small, depending on the device used when accessing YouTube, it makes sense for the images to be edited or adjusted when it comes to the social distance that they wish to convey to their audience. If they have more intimate messages to give, a close-up might be more convenient compared to more general statements or excuses about their behaviour that they wish to rectify. The majority of the vlogpology thumbnails (13/15) sought engagement with their audiences - seven used Close Ups (CU)- and six Medium Close Up (MCU) shots implying personal engagement (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016, p.109) as in the two previous Figs. It supports an imagined close relationship between the creator and the audience

(Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) which aligns with the focus on being apologetic. One vlogpology thumbnail features a Medium Shot (MS), creating a sense of more distance and less engagement” (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016, p.109). It is a notable choice for the thumbnail, as it puts distance between the vlogger and their audience, it also makes their connection to the viewer weaker as the viewer may have trouble understanding the facial expression cues this thumbnail is trying to portray.

The final thumbnail uses a pink plain background with capitalised text that appears to be on a tape-like duck egg blue background. This ‘tape’ draws attention to the relatively small text on the expansive pink thumbnail.

Figure 6.6

A Vlogpology Thumbnail Without a Person



(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

The title *A PROPER APOLOGY* states what it is, but aside from the placement of the text, font and colour scheme, little information can be drawn from this thumbnail.

Comparing thumbnail and vlogpology social distancing shots

In comparison with the thumbnails, the actual vlogpology videos also featured a range of different shots between a Medium Long Shot (MLS) to CU, although the shots preference differs

from the thumbnail selection. For the videos one used an MLS, three used an MS, six used an MCU and five used a CU. The three shots used by the majority of vlogpologies are still within personal distance, but even the shift between a CU thumbnail and to MCU can seem quite dramatic. The two images in Figure 6.7 are an example of the CU distance used for the thumbnail and the actual MCU shot used in the vlogpology - this serves to demonstrate that the thumbnail is used to immediately engage the viewer, make them curious and direct them to the full video as a strategy to capture the audience. The video, of course, is not static like the image and therefore has more opportunity to apply different shots and also to maintain the interest of the viewers.

Figure 6.7

Comparison of Thumbnail and Vlogpology Distance Shots



(Doctor Mike, 2020)

To remain visually interesting, vlogs often feature flashy sets, interactions with other people, visually aesthetic clips, memes edited in or videos from the vloggers' day. These short breaks or shifts in content create a moving story to maintain the viewers' interest. The constant MCU-CU is not a standard shot for vlog videos, as it appeared that there was no consistent, *standard shot*, but rather a collection of filming styles. The vlogpology seemingly only has two image shot variations, what is selected for the thumbnail and what is chosen for the vlogpology.

This static style of video may seem far more intimate relationally due to the contrast. The vlogger is an open book and is not detracting. What they are saying, what they are emoting, and the distance between viewer and creator is very close. The vlogpologies were focused on their messages, there was no laugh breakthrough inclusion or a meme or zooming on a random object, like some other types of videos that are more entertaining. The vlogpology is personal.

The following thumbnail and vlogpology social distance comparison in Figure 6.8 demonstrates a more dramatic example of a visual relationship shift.

Figure 6.8

MCU Thumbnail Image and MLS Vlogpology:



(Jeffree Star, 2020)

The MLS (medium long shot) vlogpology on the right is a close social distance, that is two shot spaces down from the MCU, which has a close and personal relationship established with the audience. The viewer has shifted from an imagined personal relationship with the creator to a sociable causal relationship that provides greater insights into the contextual surroundings of Jeffree Star and a greater sense of their mansion-like surroundings as Star is swamped by the size of the plush couch and entranceway behind. This is perhaps a nod to their wealth and status, which become part of the image-building and branding they wish to maintain as part of their apology. The greater distance makes it harder for viewers to read expressions, and the creator may seem slightly less accessible as the small facial movements an MS to CU would

show are harder to detect here. Yet there is much more going on here in this vlogpology; it seems as if the distance is a nod to Star's wealth and status, which become part of the image building and branding that they wish to maintain as part of their apology. Through distance, they remind the viewer that they are not intimate friends – as other vloggers use close distance to enhance the parasocial bond. Star, as discussed in the previous chapter, points out many larger issues in the world through the bigger picture step in their vlogpology. The frame of the actual vlogpology Star uses makes them seem smaller in contrast to the close shots their peer's favour for vlogpologies.

6.3 Body Language

Despite the high frequency of intimate or close shots in vlogpology thumbnails, which are used to show a figure from their shoulders up, vlogpologies also frequently feature hand gestures. This can provide a viewer with further nonverbal information about the video.

Figure 6.9

Body Language in a Thumbnail



(Alfie Deyes, 2018)

According to Pease and Pease's (2017) work on body language, the collar tug in Deyes' thumbnail in Figure 6.9 above is an action that is performed when one is under stress. The tug is said to be an effort to cool down, as blood pressure and body temperature often rise when stressed. The gesture provides ventilation to relieve the discomfort of the temperature increase. It is also associated with guilt, anger and frustration. This seems like an interesting choice of image to represent a vlogpology. It may have been an algorithm selection - but Deyes could still have changed the image if he had wanted to.

Figure 6.10

Blocking Finger Placement in a Thumbnail



(English with Lucy, 2020)

Covering one's mouth is thought to portray a desire to hide one's emotions as can be seen in Lucy's thumbnail in Fig 6.10 - also an interesting choice. As her gaze is also averted, it is difficult to see what the vlogger may be feeling. The intention behind the combination of averting gaze to not make contact with the viewer, and trying to hide their mouth, suggests a level of shame. The arms cross and interlocking fingers also suggest a level of protection and comforting oneself and is an example of where a vlogger might seek to incorporate some distance between themselves and the viewers. The gaze (as discussed earlier) in conjunction with

covering the mouth and the text across her body stating “My apology”, highlights to the viewer that this thumbnail is indicating that the video will be quite different from the usual cheerful ones they might be used to seeing with this vlogger. While she protects herself, it also makes her seem somewhat vulnerable and may appeal to the viewers to be more sympathetic to her message.

Figure 6.11

Open Palm Gesture in Thumbnail



(Jatie, 2021)

This vlogpology thumbnail in Fig 6.11 of Jatie portrays him as a confident figure compared with the other examples already given. This displays the furthest social distance for a thumbnail I encountered in my vlogpology dataset. At the same time, Jatie’s body is leaning forward towards the viewer and still engages intimately with the audience. The body language also assists here with his arms apart and indicating motion. Jatie is also looking directly at the camera and has a slight smile despite being mid-speech. His hand is also in an open palm gesture, which indicates trustworthiness by public speakers and politicians (Bull, 1986). The fingers are also pointing toward the audience, which is engaging for the viewer. Their overall

body language suggests confidence and trustworthiness and aligns with his message which was about rebuilding the trust in his personal relationship with his partner, which his channel is centred on, and the relationship with their audience the *Jatie fam*, a nickname used for their subscribers.

Overall I encountered a diverse range of body language and potential meanings throughout the vlogpologies. However, this would relate to more than just being a vlogpology genre as each individual has their characteristics, which are well established in life before they even become a blogger. Having said this, I was still able to establish that there were two types of body language in the sample that had a high occurrence:

Uncomfortable – which fell under the interpretations of stress, shame, upset, avoidant and embarrassed.

Comfortable – which could be seen through body language that expressed confidence, open/listening and sincerity.

6.4 Camera Angle (perspective)

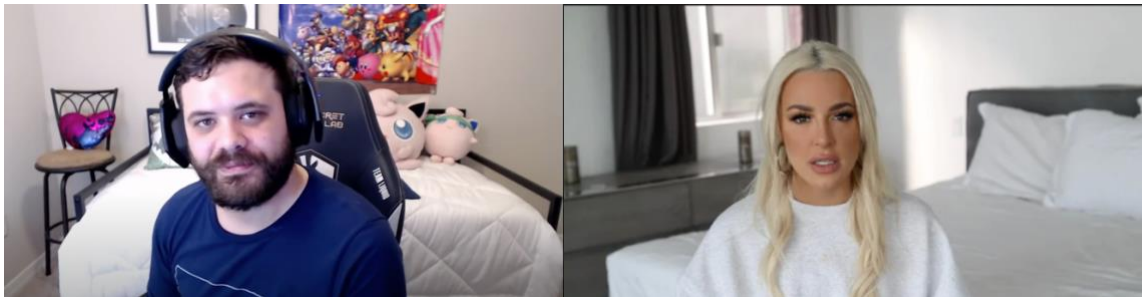
Camera angles are known to be a particular aspect of interactional meaning when it comes to visual texts because they enable a perspective and can represent the vloggers in terms of their degrees of involvement with the viewer and also the degrees of power that they hold. For example, as Goatly & Hiradhar (p.109) point out, 180 degrees involving a visual horizontal angle between the frontal plane of the creator and the viewer “projects a message of inclusion and involvement, suggesting that the represented participants are part of the viewer’s world”. An oblique angle as in Fig 6.10. projects a message of exclusion where there is a lack of involvement between the creator and the viewer. When it comes to the degree of vertical angles

in the perspective of an image, the higher the viewer is, looking down on the creator, the more power they have and vice versa. With both horizontal and vertical perspectives, the more equal these are between the vlogger and the viewer, the more equal the relationships.

For the vlogpology thumbnails, only two featured a slight angle which can be seen in Figure 6.12. In both thumbnails, the vlogger is positioned as looking up towards the camera, which places the viewer in a position of suggested power, but perhaps is a way to seek more empathy.

Figure 6.12

Slightly Raised Angle in Two Thumbnails



(Hungry Box, 2020; Tana, 2020)

In the actual vlogpologies, however, the perspective shifts slightly. One vlogpology is shot from below, meaning the vlogger is looking down on the audience and has an imagined increase in power as they look down on the viewer. Four are shot from slightly raised angles, putting the viewer in power, which can be seen in these examples of YouTube commentary and lifestyle vlogger PewDiePie:

Figure 6.13

Equal Angle in a Thumbnail - High Angle in the Vlogpology



(PewDiePie, 2017)

On the right is the image used for the thumbnail. It's a close-up shot that seems to be set at an equal angle, although an intense zoom-in may have been used to make it look equal, as the hard drive on the creators' background is still in the frame, and would not be if the camera had been set to eye-level. In the second image, PewDiePie is further away in a medium close-up shot with a high angle. Their head is slightly tilted upwards to meet the gaze of the camera. This makes the viewer feel as if they are gazing down at someone smaller, but at the same time, it enables PewDiePie to offer a friendly wave to his audience and to display a bit more of his background. The remaining ten vlogpologies were found to position their videos in neutral or equal positioning with the viewers, both vertically and horizontally, thereby establishing a more equal relationship.

The difference between the perspectives of the thumbnail and the actual vlogpology through camera angle could also be explained by the fact that thumbnails are much smaller. So, the close to extremely close shots used in a thumbnail is crafted to better show the creator's face and emotion to engage the viewer and entice them to watch the video. The shift in angle between the vlogpology and thumbnail in my dataset, however, does not seem to have a clear reason. It could be to edit the relational dynamic between viewers and themselves. It may also be because

they prefer that angle for filming, or perhaps it might be indicative of occasions where the thumbnail is taken at a different time with a different set-up.

6.5 Framing and Positioning

While camera angles and social distancing of the vlogger are important elements of the way a thumbnail is framed, the positioning of the vloggers within the rectangular frame is also relevant. The frame design for vlogpologies seems to be quite intentional, with many of the vloggers choosing backgrounds with minimal clutter and neutral colours and wearing clothing that blends or compliments the background.

Eleven of the vloggers are in well-lit light-coloured frames, which is a stylistic lighting design choice called ‘high-key lighting’. It is often used in cinema and television to make a character look favourable or angelic. The vloggers may use this feature in their vlogpologies to influence the audience's perception of them, as it plays into the simplistic black-and-white dualism that is well-known in Western culture and media, perhaps equating the contrasting nature of white and light with good and dark or black as evil. Three vloggers chose to dress in colours that contrasted or clashed with their background frame, which also draws attention to them through contrast.

In Figure 6.14 below, the vlogger Tana Mongeau sits in the domestic space of a bedroom and uses this blend of complimentary monochromatic colouring to make the hues in their skin tone appear vibrant. She stands out against the blended cohesion of background frame elements even though her white top is the same as the bed sheets behind her.

Figure 6.14*Blended Features in a Thumbnail*

(Tana Mongeau, 2020)

Tana Mongeau's face is the most salient feature of the text, and our attention is drawn to her expression. Seven vloggers in the study used this combination of either matching or similar clothing and background colours to blend their torso and emphasise their faces as the most important part of the image. Which is also achieved from the central position of the vloggers. This lets the vlogger's expressions, gaze and gestures, when included, be the most expressive parts of the image. Here, the vlogger should convey some emotion to imply the video's tone.

As indicated before, some backgrounds might enhance a vlogger's status, as seen in Figure 6.18 with Jeffree Star. The vloggers are all sitting down for their vlogpologies; they are often either in a bedroom or living room, as seen in both Figures 6.15 and 6.16. These backgrounds may have been chosen due to the intimacy and comfort these domestic spaces display where one may spend time with friends.

For some vloggers, this may be an unusual setting. A travel vlogger may use their journeying status to have a plethora of backgrounds, a fashion vlogger may seek out backgrounds that highlight their outfit, a gamer is likely to post content from their gaming desk which may have a cool personalised set-up, and a lifestyle vlogger I likely to bring the viewer

along to various areas they travel through during their day. Perhaps a lifestyle vlogger would begin their vlog in the kitchen while they have a coffee in the morning, then out for a run or walk with their dog, then meet friends or run errands and so forth. Like the gamers' desk, the lounge or bedroom setup are static locations. The gamer may have a split screen, where the game they play is visible. The contrast between the static gamer set-up and the game exploration is complimentary. The gamer navigates the game world as other mobile vloggers move through their day. With the vlogpology, the background is fixed, which highlights the vlogger.

Figure 6.15

Vloggers in a Bedroom

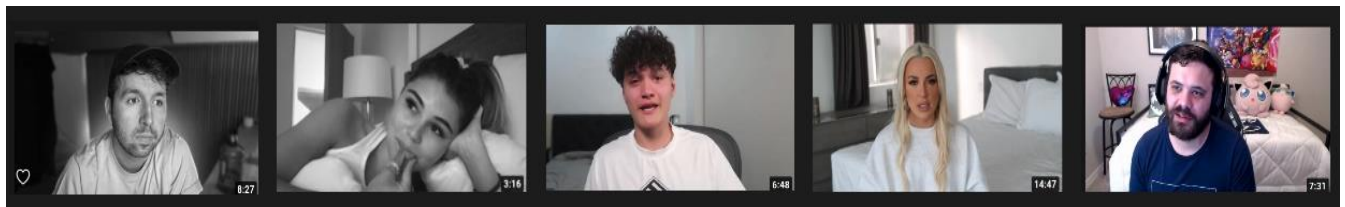


Figure 6.16

Vloggers in a Lounge



The example below, Figure 6.17, shows a vlogger who is using a space that may be used in their regular vlogs.

Figure 6.17*Colourful Background for a Vlogger*

(Jatie, 2021)

The neon white sign with a bluish hue stating ‘Jatie vlogs’ compliments the seafoam green couch. It is a salient feature in this thumbnail due to the glow from the light, the size of the text and the identifying purpose it has. The sign works to identify the vlogger, and as a logo for their business. The pastel colouring of the vlogger's shirt also pairs well with the green of the couch in the background. The wall is a light grey which contrasts with the vlogger’s tan-orange hue skin and his clothing. Essentially, this highlights the vlogger - their arms and face against the blend of colours that make up the rest of the image - making his gaze, body language and expression the centre of attention.

Nine vloggers positioned themselves centrally in the frame, looking directly at the audience, creating a sense of symmetry, as noted by Kress and van Leeuwen (2020). The remaining five thumbnails that featured faces have their subjects positioned in the middle of the frame, but their gaze follows a different direction. One vlogpology in the sample did not have a face and will be discussed in the next section.

The use of symmetry in the thumbnail framing is also quite noticeable. It is not just the central positioning of the vlogger; the background also has these elements. It looks aesthetically pleasing and well put together. Vlogger Jeffree Star in Figure 6.18 below uses a combination of contrasting and complementary colours. Their background is mostly gold and brown, which makes the vivid pink clothing and streaked hair stand out. Their hair also has some bright yellow, which suits the gold tones in their frame. They have also positioned themselves between two rounded staircases, with the space between them creating a halo-like effect around their head.

Figure 6.18

Halo Frame Around a Vlogger



(Jeffree Star, 2020)

6.6 Saliency

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) use saliency to highlight the hierarchy of elements within a composition. Elements that manage to draw the eye or stand out are the most salient features. They can catch through things like size, colour, or contrasts. While I have noted some of the objects that feature in the background of thumbnails and vlogpologies, I suggest that there is

a range of strategies used in the vlogpology thumbnail design to accentuate the vlogger's face as the most salient feature of the text. After all, to be an influencer involves ego-centric focus, and this is what they are concerned with, especially when it comes to making a vlogpology and restoring their image. In 13/15 of the vlogpologies below, the vlogger's faces are the most prominent feature, which can be seen in Figure 19 below.

Figure 6.19

Vlogpology Thumbnails



In contrast, those thumbnails with prominent text detract attention in different ways. The pink example thumbnail (15) does not feature a face. The text is small, making the pink background the most salient feature. The reason for this will be discussed in the next section. The second example with text is in the middle row thumbnail (7). As the vlogger is wearing a dark colour and has layered the large text in capital letters that take up approximately $\frac{1}{5}$ of their

screen, it places the focus on the text first. The text also uses white highlighting and black font, which slices through Lucy's dark jumper and over the wrists. The vlogger (Lucy) is the second most important feature, as her face is in the centre of the image. However, her gaze is averted down to the text she has placed over her thumbnail image. Redirecting the focus back to the text.

The top row of images also displays light-coloured shirts and light (or black and white for the first two videos on the left side of the top row) backgrounds. This makes their face the most prominent feature in the text. Most vloggers have clear backgrounds, meaning few objects in the background to distract the viewer. This may have been done to give the viral viewing audience who are unfamiliar with the vloggers previous work more information about them. As well as to make them the most important feature in the frame and to express humility through the muted frames and colour palettes.

The vlogger in the ninth photo (Hungry Box, 2020) has children's toys and a poster for some combination of video game characters. Like Jatie, this may be the vlogger's work setup. However, the inclusion of children's toys detracts from the vlogpology and the crisis situation the vlogger is in. This may be why this was a lone choice in the vlogpology sample, as the vlogpology is a break from their standard vlog work.

Overall, the vlogpologies can be seen to use a range of shared design strategies, such as intimate shots, colour design, placing themselves at the centre of the image, using a demanding gaze and the design of their background frame.

6.7 Unusual outliers

In this study, although I was looking for common features that would signal a vlogpology genre, some exceptions are worth noting. Two of the vlogpologies featured text edited onto their thumbnail images. As thumbnails are accompanied by the video's title and part of the first 157

characters of the video description when appearing in search results, this is an unusual choice. The first usage was discussed above in the gaze section of this chapter. The vlogger (English with Lucy, 2020) uses an averted gaze, focussing their eye line vectors downwards, where the caption is. It mirrors the video's title and describes what they intend their video to be my apology. They use capital letters for the caption on the thumbnail, which stands out as it seems as if they are shouting the title. The title itself is in lowercase font. This is a direct approach; the vlogger has used multiple visual and textual tools to indicate what their video's purpose is.

The second example Figure 6.20 below of Cozy Kitsune's vlogpology, shares some similarities with English with Lucy as it features words relating to the purpose of the video – in this case, 'A Proper Apology'. These words are placed centrally and written in black capitalised font within a pale blue-grey text box to highlight the words.

Figure 6.20

A Vlogpology thumbnail without a vloggers face



(Cozy Kitsune, 2017)

The shade of pink that dominates the screen is also an interesting choice as it is a few shades lighter than Drunk-Tank Pink, also known as Baker-Miller Pink. This colour is said to have a positive and calming effect on people expressing erratic or hostile behaviour (Alter, 2014). The text uses the word apology in this caption, although the video's title is different 'Turning over a New Leaf//'. Adding the adjective 'proper' before 'apology' also indicates that not all apologies do what they are supposed to. In this instance, Cozy Kitsune is representing herself as honest. The font used, however, is much smaller than the one in the previous example. It would be hard to read for people accessing the video on a smaller device. Not having a face involved makes it harder to garner the relationship connection that the other vlogpology thumbnails use. No demand/offer negotiation is going on. However, all these points perhaps show that the focus is purely on the apology and not the vlogger themselves. It may be that they felt so embarrassed and ashamed that they needed to make a 'proper' apology rather than just an excuse for an apology or a non-apology, as others might do. They are not doing it in a loud way. This is displaying some sincerity and humbleness, which may still attract the viewer if they already know the vlogger and want to see his apology. If this video were on a user's home page or suggested the next video, it would be hard to tell who had made the video.

It is also interesting to note that this Cozy Kitsune video is the only one in this creator's portfolio that does not feature a face in the thumbnail image. The design choices for this thumbnail may have been used to create an image that was less interesting than other videos on the home page, in the vloggers' own library, in search results or in the suggested YouTube videos that appear when one is watching a related video.

As noted in the literature review, some vloggers have issued multiple vlogpologies, as their earlier one was delivered in a way that was not received well. As this particular vlogpology

was published in 2017, when the genre was forming, the thumbnail features may have served as an early example of what would meet viewers' expectations. Or, perhaps they chose the title card style thumbnail to make the video stand out amongst their own content library, to draw in viewers.

This particular vlogpology was received poorly. Cozy Kitsune lost over thirty thousand subscribers in the month that followed the vlogpology (Cozy Kitsune's YouTube Stats, n.d.). Two vloggers also used colour in an interesting manner for their thumbnails, which was unusual for vlogpologies in my data set and can be seen in Figure 6.21, Figure 6.22 and Figure 6.23. The shot on the left in black and white is the thumbnail; the right side showcases the colour setting of their actual vlogpology video.

Figure 6.21

Black and White Versus Colour in Thumbnail and Actual Video



(Callux, 2021)

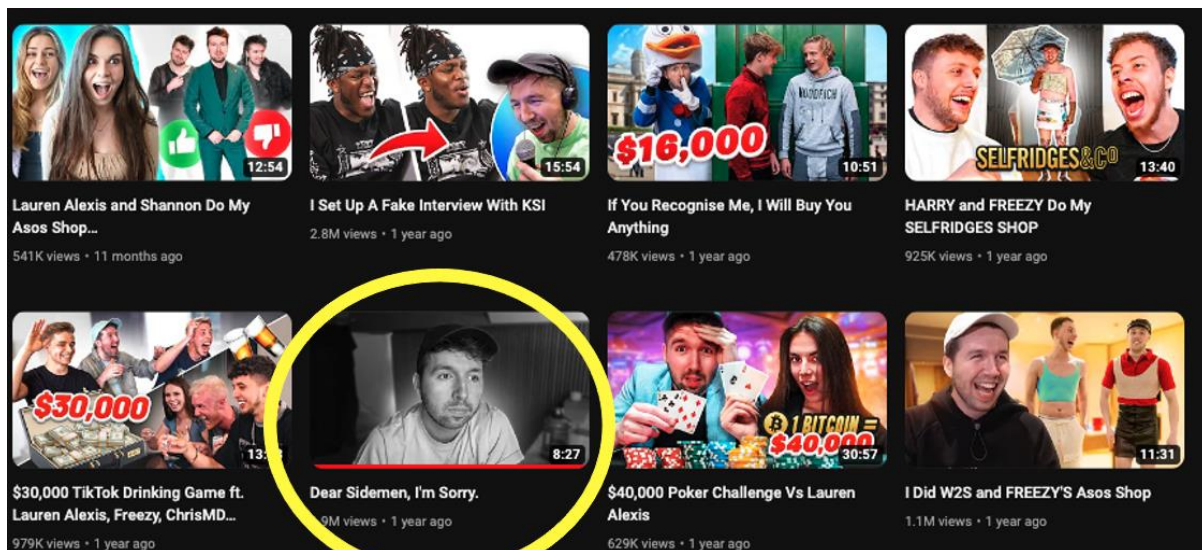
Here, the vlogger uses the lack of colour to make their thumbnail appear dramatic. Black and white have the lowest modality regarding how naturalistic an image is, so only darkness and light remain (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2020). This choice was made intentionally - but why the thumbnail versus the video? Again this might be a way to attract attention in the first instance.

The lack of colour is part of Callux's 'click baiting' technique to make the thumbnail more dramatic than the actual vlogpologies content.

People who are depressed experience a phenomenon where they process visual information in a manner that dulls colour. The contrast and brightness dim, which effectively dulls the colours being viewed, making the world appear closer to black, grey and white (Salmela et al., 2021). The vlogger has utilised this design for their thumbnail to portray they are feeling upset, along with visual elements like their expression, lack of gaze and body position being shifted towards the side instead of facing towards their audience. Their actual video is in colour. This black and white thumbnail also dramatically contrasts with their other videos, which can be seen below. It seems as if there is too much going on in the other thumbnails, which is why the viewer's attention is drawn to 'Dear Sideman' which I have ringed in yellow.

Figure 6.22

A Vlogpology Thumbnail Amongst the Vloggers Library



The vlogger also uses a lack of detail in their thumbnail, as compared to their other thumbnails. They are alone, in the centre of the frame to indicate they are the primary focus, they have not edited in any visual image clues or textual clues to help make the image easier to read.

Instead, they rely on the contrast of their usual design choices to provide the viewer with information.

The next example Figure 6.23 shows the Vlogger Olivia Jade, who not only decided to use a black and white thumbnail but also chose to have a black and white vlogpology. This was the only video in the sample that did this.

Figure 6.23

A Black and White Thumbnail and Vlogpology Video



(Olivia Jade, 2018)

Olivia's vlogpology and thumbnail are visually designed to be similar. The thumbnail on the left uses a slightly zoomed-in image that seems to be a screenshot from their vlogpology video. The zoom was likely added to make their expression and body language more visible for their thumbnail.

Their black and white thumbnail and video combination were unique in the vlogpology corpus and during the selection process for this sample. The pink vlogpology thumbnail (Cozy Kitsune, 2017) was also unique in the sample and selection process.

The black and white vlogpology from Olivia, like the previous example with Callux, is the vlogger's only black and white thumbnail without other design elements like text or edited image layers. Yet it is possibly conveying more sincerity about being a "real" vlogpology and

wishing to distinguish itself from the others in the sample who appeared to be more concerned about their image.

6.8 Visual Framework

Following on from my identification and analysis of the various communicative elements presented in this chapter so far, applying Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework categories, in this section, I present a table that summarises my findings in an effort to establish what constitutes the vlogpology as a genre visually. I also incorporate into the table aspects of Pease and Pease's (2017) *body language* and expression findings to support Kress and Van Leeuwen's *narrative representation* category. The narrative representation is used to describe the actions being performed by someone in an image or video; the figures in vlogpology thumbnails tend to be stationary with more subtle narrative expressions.

In Table 6.1 below, I have indicated the different visual features of the thumbnails in the dataset to show percentages of what was used. From this chart, there are indications of intentional design, and perhaps visual patterns can be observed within the genre.

As can be seen, most of the thumbnails/videos involve the vlogger centrally framed in the confines of the video borders. This is the most salient feature of the vlogpology as the vlogger needs to be the centre of attention. The personal distance is close and intimate overall, the gaze is a direct demand for engagement, and the angle with the viewer is mostly on an equal footing – indicating a more equal power balance with the vlogger neither wishing to be looked down upon nor dominate over the viewer. The body language, however, might be seen as more negative than positive as this combines with a more emotional aspect showing humility.

Table 6.1*Vlogpology Visual Grammar*

Personal Distance	Close	Intimate	Extreme intimate	Far personal	N/A
	40%	40%	6.67%	6.67%	6.67%
Most salient feature (Frame, position)	Creator themselves		N/A		
	93.33%		6.67%		
Gaze	Demanding		Offer		N/A
	60%		33.33%		6.67%
Angle	Equal	Viewer power	Creator power	N/A	
	73.3%	13.3%	6.67%	6.67%	
Body language	Negative		Positive	N/A	
	60%		33.33%	6.67%	

These results suggests, at least within this study's sample, that a typical vlogpology thumbnail is designed with the following dominant features in mind:

Demanding gaze

Establishes an imaginary relationship with the audience and demands the viewers' attention.

MCU to CU shot

Suggests a close personal distance to an intimate distance between the viewer and the vlogger.

Equal angle

Suggests the viewer and vlogger are standing at exactly equal height, looking eye to eye. The imagined relational power balance is even.

Negative body language

The creator expresses some form of discomfort, such as stress or embarrassment, through gestures.

Design

Should be crafted to visually make the vlogger the centre of attention. Using symmetry, complimentary, neutral or contrasting colours strategically, and having a clear background to keep the attention on the vlogger. Communicating that the video is about them specifically.

Overall this analysis has shown how the visual aspects of vlogpologies, as indicated in the thumbnails, play an important role when it comes to the purpose of apologising. My analysis has shown the intense focus that the vloggers put on themselves and how they wish to construct their identities. This seems particularly pertinent when it comes to repairing their image, which has been tarnished through a misdemeanour. Body language and, the composition of their

thumbnails, and how they position themselves with settings, choice of objects, colours are all necessary components in getting their message across in the most effective way. Much of this translates into the vlogpology videos themselves, which may be the object for further research in the future.

6.9 Summary

In this chapter, my findings have shown that there are many common visual communicative elements within the vlogpology thumbnails that are indicative of the vlogpology genre. This chapter discussed the possible meaning behind some features, noted unique or individual characteristics, discussed why they may not be more common, and looked at the relationship various communicative features had with each other and how they may have influenced the imaginary audience between creator and viewer. The final discussion/conclusion chapter will discuss my key observations of the findings in the last three chapters and how they served to answer my research questions.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

7.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on this study and the research findings presented in the previous three chapters. I assess how the various analyses served to answer the research questions shared in Chapter one. I provide key observations in this discussion that have emerged from this study which serve to provide a greater understanding of the vlogpology genre. I discuss my contributions to the research, note the limitations of the study and finally highlight potential pathways for future research.

Understanding the vlogpology as a genre

This study aimed to discover and present a foundational understanding of the vlogpology as an internet phenomena that had emerged through digital platforms as a way for vloggers to apologise to viewers and fans for inappropriate situations or misdemeanours. It sought to address the gaps in existing research – particularly those studies that labelled the vlogpology as a genre but failed to identify generic features. Given that vlogpologies are created as videos, a genre-based linguistic and visual study required broad questions, particularly since this topic involving a digital genre within a participatory context (that is, viewers could upload comments on the YouTube videos) was relatively new and Genre-focused research, as discussed in earlier chapters, allows for a range of features to be understood in individual and collective ways (Miller, 1984). The main observation I present here was identified by reviewing the findings of this study, and I suggest that the vlogpology should be seen as more of a concession than an apology. To support this, I discuss four themes or communicative goals of the vlogpology that

stood out for me that stem from insightful genre-specific patterns, research and correlations in this research.

This study had one overarching question:

In what ways can the vlogpology be classified as a genre?

To investigate this question, the following two questions were asked:

1. What discourse moves and steps are common across vlogpologies that can identify them as a genre?
2. What are the linguistic and visual communicative characteristics that have established it as a new genre?

A mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) was used to aid the identification process for generic features of the vlogpology described in Chapter 3. Although only a small dataset was collated because of the intense analysis that would be conducted – this still presented an opportunity to establish key features of the vlogpology. Fifteen vlogpologies were collected and examined using three different analytical methods on a macro and micro level (i.e. move/step analysis and lexico-grammatical analysis, and visual analysis of the vlogpology thumbnails to understand the representation of the vloggers).

The findings from this study showed the complexity involved when it comes to vloggers and influencers performing an apology on the YouTube platform. The features found across most of the dataset suggest that there is a particular way of conducting a vlogpology on a macro and micro level was forming despite there not being any specific guidelines for vloggers as to ‘how’

it should be. In other words, I suggest there seemed to be particular ways in which vloggers, especially those who attract thousands of views and comments, needed to conform when apologising to the audience. In reviewing the findings of chapters 4 to 6, there are several key observations that I wish to make.

7.1 Key observations

Genre-focused research, as discussed in earlier chapters, allows for a range of features to be understood in individual and collective ways (Miller, 1984). The main observation I present here were identified by reviewing the findings of this study and I suggest that the vlogpology should be seen as more of a concession as an apology because there is a great deal more going on. To support this, I discuss four themes or communicative goals of the vlogpology that stood out for me that stem from insightful genre-specific patterns, research and correlations in this research.

7.1.1 The vlogpology as a concession

This section examines the findings that indicated the vloggers' purpose for producing a vlogpology was in part encouraged by the audience's comments and reactions to their behaviour or past misdemeanour. The vlogger is always at risk of encountering a crisis in their work, in part because they are prominent figures and there are no real parameters for what is exciting and what is too extreme, or what is right or wrong for their specific circumstance when they create a vlog. They are also crucially, still partially the person their original 'average' identity was before it became an identifiable character, like 'Charlieissocoollike' Charlie McDonnell. However, they have earned money for being this brand on YouTube. Their audience has expectations; they may gain new viewers and fame through creating exciting content. They may predominantly

experience praise until one day; they go too far. They may be burned out and not notice a mistake they have made – a common claim that was found in the dataset.

In crisis situations where a vlogger's reputation was at stake, which has the potential to affect the monetization of their channels and their income stream; they sought to repair their image and regain a sense of autonomy despite being placed in a position where they feel forced to apologise. This was discovered through the findings discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, indicating that vloggers perform in particular ways depending on their audience, which aligns with traditional genre research (Paltridge, 2006). At the same time, it is worth noting that there was not only a layering of different audiences on the YouTube platform observing the vlogger's behaviour (fans, brand organisations and YouTube), but also the potential for the vlogpology to go viral, a feature identified in digital genre studies (Luzon & Pérez-Llatanda, 2022; Xia, 2020). This meant that the vlogger really had no choice but to try and appease a multi-layered audience through the vlogpology.

The vloggers, as observed in my data seemed to make a vlogpology to acknowledge the growing voices online that demanded an explanation and apology for the crisis. This study, therefore, drew on the idea of the layered audience (Xia, 2020; Luzon and Pérez-Llatanda, 2022). Studies like those from Sandlin and Gracyalny (2018, 2020) showcase the relationship between fans and vloggers during a vlogpology, how the fans react and how the vlogger speaks directly to them during the vlog. Studies by Afriza and Rusadi (2021) and Sng et al. (2019) indicated the relationship between brand partnerships and vlogpologies before, during, and after a crisis – and this seemed to be a major concern of vloggers in the dataset.

However, my main observation is that my study identifies through the analyses of structure, language and visuals, that the vlogpology is a concession rather than just an apology

needing to be stated. In other words, the vloggers perform an act of making a concession in response to a demand from others. This was evident in the features of the vlogpology, where their videos indicate the range of different moves and structures, applying certain linguistic terms in expressing their explanations and regrets, and presenting themselves visually as being remorseful. The vlogger's mindset of feeling forced to make a vlogpology was apparent in the data and further reinforced by contextual information that indicated the negative outcomes that might result to those who do not issue a vlogpology fast enough. The capability of digital platforms, therefore, enables fast and effective communication between the vloggers and their audience to directly address and appeal to their audience for understanding in times of crisis. They hope to meet their demands so that the crisis can conclude satisfactorily. While the vlogger may express discomfort at making a vlogpology, they make it regardless because it is expected of them. They know that if they do not make one, the comments may swell to such an extent that they lose followers and/or sponsorship support and potentially may have their channel taken down by YouTube. However, the vlogpology was a concession of many parts.

As discussed in the introduction to this study, what is believed to be the first vlogpology, was one that was crafted in response to online discourse and mass unsubscribing. The Fine brothers released a vlogpology to mitigate the damage. Losing followers through ignoring the crisis is a real risk for the vlogpology. So, the vlogger, to avoid this, is placed in a position where they feel as if they *have* to make the vlogpology, even if they don't want to.

Further to identifying the vlogpology as having a 'concession' function, I also suggest that the findings overall indicate four communicative purposes or goals that determine the vlogpology as a genre which are discussed below.

(i) Relationship management with the audience

Maintaining a friendly or heart-warming relationship with the audience is suggested to be the core of vlogs and their appeal (Smith, 2014; Werner, 2012). The need for vloggers to convey to their subscribers and fans the value they place on maintaining their relationship with them. This was achieved, for example, through the *parasocial bond* step from the *relational repair* move, which is represented in 93.3% of the dataset, and through their use of words such as ‘sorry’ and ‘thank you’ for drawing attention to their misdemeanour, to explain and show remorse. The vloggers also use complex and varied lexical patterns to try and meet their ultimate goal of achieving closure (Martins, 1984) so that their relationship with their audience can be restored. The apologies also featured *if, but, that, feel and felt*, which are all techniques that negate apologetic sentiment (Arizavi & Choubsaz, 2018; Maule, 1988; Choi, 2021) by altering the apology as an act to resemble a statement. This style of altered apology, like the singular *sorry*, is thought to be a means of self-repair, refusal and compensation. The apology style may also be an unintentional concession of the vlogger, where they apologise to meet the needs of the audience and slightly disconnect themselves from the act of an apology, which would involve more personal and direct statements that attached themselves as the transgressors who did something, rather than placing the focus on the audience who may have felt a particular way. This suggests they are apologising to the audience for their reaction rather than for acting offensively.

These apology techniques were standard in the vlogpology and align with Abad-Santos’s (2018) assertion that the vloggers used clever strategies to deliver non-apologetic apologies. Whilst *sorry* was the only apologetic phrase to appear in the keyword list, it had a frequency of 79, which works out to approximately five uses per video. The vloggers may not follow this exact division. However, apologies and apology did appear in several of the concordance lines

for video and sorry, which suggests other apologetic phrases were present in the vlogpology; they may have just been less valuable than sorry when compared to the ANC reference corpora. This refutes the idea Binraya & Panjaitan's (2019) research found about the lack of apologetic words. However, Binraya & Panjaitan analysed a single vlogger and three of their apologies, which consisted of one Notes App apology and two vlogpologies. So, their particular vlogger may have lacked apologetic phrases throughout their work. However, this was not indicative of the genre; or at least within this study's dataset.

All the vlogpologies skipped asking their viewers to like and subscribe at the end of the video, which Bhatia (2018) and Werner (2012) describe as usually being archetypal for vlogs. Meaning even if a viewer is not one of the critics the vloggers allude to, a subscriber, or a brand, as long as they have seen a vlog from any other vlog-based genre, they should understand how strange this is.

(ii) Reinforcement of positive self-image with a layered audience – subscribers, advertisers/sponsors and YouTube

The need for vloggers to appeal to a layered audience and remind or introduce others to their impressive and influential status. It appeared that many of the vloggers were concerned with reinforcing a positive self-image of themselves as 'career' vloggers or influencers, which is why they conceded to their demands. Examples of how this was done in their vlogpology include the *bolstering* step in the *self* move which was found in 86% of the dataset videos. This took into account their subscribing audience, those who saw their videos when they went viral, or those who provided an economic benefit to the vlogger - brands they worked with now or potentially in the future, and the YouTube platform itself, which enables advertising and optimisation of

their videos might be affected by the vloggers' behaviour and any criticism of it. YouTube can demonetise or de-platform creators.

The vlogpology thumbnail analysis indicated that the vloggers sought to represent themselves in a certain way - perhaps to show their sincerity but also to attract sympathy as a result of their apology. The thumbnail design aims to look like it is a candid moment from the video, perhaps one that the YouTube AI chose as they uploaded the video. However, subtle differences between the vlogpology thumbnails and their actual videos show that the thumbnail has slightly been picked by the vlogger and carefully manipulated - but plays a key part in establishing the way in which they represent themselves as part of their vlogpology. The vlogger likely chose a frame of their video that best represents the vlogpology sentiment and their attempt to concede. Many chose their thumbnails to be close-up shots which creates a more intimate relationship with the audience - an important element if one wishes to disclose details about what they did and why. These thumbnails stood out against the heavily edited neighbouring videos suggesting they know how a vlogpology needs to be designed and that it has a genre-specific design to convey a particular tone.

Features included the use of central positioning of the vlogger within the frame of the video, close-ups, body positioning sometimes leaning forward and sometimes open body to reduce social distancing and enhance intimacy (and trust) with the audience, the lowering of gaze to reinforce humility yet one which still demands audience engagement. This 180-degree horizontal angle put the vlogger on an equal footing with the viewer (and thus no power imbalance), using settings that enhance the vlogger's identity, such as sitting within a domestic background (their home) with soft furnishings and symmetric architectural sorry' in verbal ways as well and to try and seek some empathy from the audience. As the vlogger was limited in

regard to editing their actual video, they regained some control through the careful design of their thumbnail. They manage their audience's requirements of appearing simplistic, like the vlogpology, whilst having minor individual choices like background design and clothing that either contrasted or blended with their setting, expression and body language. Although these choices are limited, individual flair, like the choices to wear bright colours by vloggers like Jeffree Star (2020) and Jatie (2021), are acceptable diversions from their peer's otherwise neutral colour choices. Because these are seen as authentic or not manipulated to influence the perception and reception of their vlogpology. These findings tie in with the sense of humility that the vloggers expressed, as will be discussed in goal (iii).

Ultimately, vloggers pursue different roles with these communicative purposes when conceding to the layered audience. That is, they seek to show that they are:

- an impressive and safe brand (identity) for companies to align with,
- an asset as an employee or *partner* for YouTube the business,
- cognisant of the value of their fans (and potentially new audience courtesy of digital virality) and their expectations of how they should act as vloggers.

(iii) Expression of emotions and tone

A concession was made to the layered audience by making a vlogpology in response to their demands. This was performed through direct address (a strategy though to garner pity or sympathy when it comes to apologising (Sandlin and Gracyalny, 2018, 2020), where the vloggers expressed a range of different emotions. The audience should have time to process their emotions. While the orientating move places a distance between the vlogger and the viewer, the relational repair step attempts to repair this and promote that the vlogger understands the

audience and where they were coming from; the apology move tries to navigate the crisis. The shifting move has a range of intriguing steps. The vloggers thank those who have criticised them, plead with their fans, they warn the viewers not to do the often unique thing they have done - inferring the fan could also make that mistake, which in a dataset that features a unique and intriguing range of situations, such as the creator initiating a witch hunt to their ten million followers and a creator who labelled certain accents or English dialects pronunciation of words as wrong and indicative of lesser intelligence; these are not common at all. The vloggers then shame their collective audience through the bigger picture step. Implying the viewers should not have called them out or paid their crisis any attention, as there are other global issues. The self-step is naturally lasered in on the creator's greatness and past errors. The closing step acknowledges their audience and fans, promising to improve and thanking them for watching the video; to regain a positive sentiment after, at times, admonishing the audience. There was evidence of multiple expressions by vloggers using negative terms to emphasise what they 'didn't' do or mean to do, to excuse their behaviour. But as mentioned previously, a non-apology means that the vlogger can deliver what might be expected by the audience, yet enables them to maintain control of their status by purely appeasing their critics with a vlogpology. It seems that vloggers have a good sense of what language they need to use to appear to be apologetic and to regain the trust of their audience.

The vlogpologies, like vlogs, are filled with personal statements. However, the vloggers seem aware that their vlogpology will be assessed by those who make memes or will critique their work, which has been shown in papers (Cui, 2022; Woods, 2021; Binraya and Panjaitan, 2019). Cui suggests the most popular vlogpology memes come from those that are overly emotional or self-indulgent. This may, in turn, count for the script-like quality vlogpologies have

been accused of having (Douglas, 2019; Sung, 2021); the vlogger is in real-time attempting to juggle the rules or parameters which may result in an unsuccessful vlogpology, whilst meeting some of their fans or commenters needs, and looking after themselves.

Expressing a level of humility also seemed important as part of a vlogpology. The vlogpology is a single video file that allows the audience to see all the pauses, breath, emotion and other things that may usually be left out of their video. Expressing a level of humility appeared to be a common requirement of vlogpologies. This was achieved by the vlogger drawing a line through what was acceptable based on their current and past actions through the step *deprecating*. This was also evident in the *self-move*, which was present in 93.3% of the dataset. The vlogger may insult themselves, often in the past tense, to express how sorry they are for what happened. and how ridiculous they are for not realising what they did. The past tense language creates a division between the past and the present and future because they then state how they now understand that they are wrong and then promise that this will not happen again.

There were also lexical patterns, where the vloggers shared not wanting to appear in specific ways. The idea of making a vlog about themselves, their emotions or excuses was shared by a few vloggers within the dataset. Yet in the move/step structure, the *self* move was the only obligatory move, with both steps bolstering and deprecating being featured in 86% and 93.3% of the sample, respectively. Personal statements were also apparent at such a frequency in the dataset that every 10th word was a self-referring pronoun. A vlogpology feature relies on constant self-referral using pronouns 'I' and 'me', with this personal language occurring every tenth word in the corpus.

Despite the connections with self throughout the dataset, the vlogger may lack personal language when it comes to apologetic expressions. Some chose to remove self-referring

pronouns before saying the only apologetic word on the keyword list, *sorry*. Saying *sorry* rather than *I'm sorry*, indicates self-repair or an interruption. The lack of a self-referring pronoun makes the *sorry* an exclamation rather than a feeling from the vlogger to the viewer (Arizavi & Choubsaz, 2018). *I'm sorry*, is believed to be an authentic apology. The vloggers stare directly at the camera, not a prompter, and speak, without pauses to refresh their 'lines' to appear sincere.

(iv) Protecting one's brand identity as a vlogger

The vlog genre is supposed to be a self-authored diary-like form of content. The vloggers in my dataset were the main focus of their YouTube channels because they are a brand that they have sought to create and build to attract an audience. This is why vlogpology becomes such an important genre for them in times of crisis. The need for image repair not just for the vlogger but also for their brand within the structure and design of the vlogpology genre was another key observation of this research, and much I suspect, had to do with monetisation and the economic benefits of their channel.

A clear link is that the vloggers have incredibly complex jobs and open themselves up to more personal critique because they provide more intimate content regularly to people. According to Smith, the vlogger often starts as a regular person, and the audience finds them. The appeal is their relatability, their realness, and the possibility that the audience member could be them. As well as stylistic traits and perhaps their personality. They go from a regular person to a brand. Their positive, enjoyable or informative - whatever the brand's attractive feature is - Werner (2012) suggests it is their 'realness' that makes them become a friend in people's lives. Unlike Instagram or Twitter, subscribers or fans see hundreds of hours of this character, broken into often lengthy and edited stories that form each vlog's narrative. Like a diary entry or

conversation with a friend. The vlogger ultimately provides more of themselves to be attached to and more chances for error through this mass of content.

This creator could theoretically grow their entire career from their couch. Meaning their entire system of values, morality and experience come from their regular life and online feedback. The unique pressures vloggers face to craft this identity, maintain it, create exciting content that stands out from the vloggers previous work, manage social media, to share so much of themselves with their audience - do make them vulnerable. They have no parameters, as vloggers shared in the lexico-grammatical findings and as discussed in the literature review; vloggers struggle to understand before they post where the line is (Dobrik, 2020; Paul, 2018). Collectively the vloggers in the dataset repeated that they didn't think and didn't know. Because their point of reference is their peer's past mistakes, current work, and their own life experience versus their interpretations of what the fans want from them. The vloggers have been known to express burnout, the vlogpology may be, in a sense, a reaction to the unique demands of vlogging. The relationship with the audience, the pressures to be brand and advertiser-friendly, and the struggle to create within these self-made and perhaps some contextually discovered expectation-based guidelines whilst learning on the job. The potential losses of a failed vlogpology or not issuing a vlogpology when commenters demand one are life-altering.

Previous studies and online commentary have suggested the vlogpology is done for financial gain. However, the inclusion of the monetisation step, which damages the integral 'normal' character viewers feel connected to; as the vlogger is earning off their imagined relationship, as well as other relational shifts; is indicative of how extreme the vlogpology is as opposed to other vlogging genres. Where this relationship is integral to their growth, continuation and success.

In the vlogpology, the vlogger is presenting their perspective about what has occurred. Yet, some of the unique genre-specific boundaries they encounter have resulted that have been constructed through input such as audience feedback, memes, mainstream media coverage, peers' work and personal ideologies. So when vloggers are criticised for their monetisation, they have no choice but to defend their brand. The vloggers also use complex and varied lexical patterns to try and meet their ultimate goal of achieving closure (Martins, 1984).

Monetization appears to be recognised by the vloggers as an important aspect to mention to their fans during a vlogpology as there exist constraints of prior expectations, assumptions, values and beliefs attributed to people receiving monetary benefits from their online videos (Devitt, 2008). Devitt believes that within genres, writers are subject to the manipulations of others and that whilst there is room for creativity, there are also restrictions in how they might behave online. This study found that monetization featured as a generic feature in the findings. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, vloggers mentioning money is unusual on YouTube, yet it is still a key factor when it comes to the vlogpology. The Vlogger, according to Werner (2012) and Smith (2014), is meant to feel relatable as they start out as an average person but grow into more of a public figure where they experience more demands than ordinary people do and may benefit monetarily. Although the mention of monetization appeared to a small extent and was only present in 26.6% of the move/step analysis in Chapter 4, it also appeared but was referred to by another name AdSense (YouTube's advertisement pay system) in the following Chapter 5, examining lexical features.

In one example from the sample, the vlogger Cozy Kitsune (2017) took the unusual action of disclosing they earn money from their videos and that they intended to keep the money their vlogpology would earn. They noted that they had monetization on, specifically because they

relied on that money for income, to attempt to avoid the negative connotations that come with a vlogger profiting from their scandal.

It has been suggested that by stating one will not earn money from their vlogpology; they are more sincere in their vlogpology (Draper, 2018; Rutledge, 2019). The vlogger showed awareness of this and tried to reframe the narrative around monetization, stating that they needed it to live.

The monetization step was thought to have emerged from a vlogpology in this study that received a massive amount of mainstream media coverage related not just to their actions but also the idea that they would earn revenue from the 61 million views their vlogpology received in 2018 (Rearick, 2018). However, as Cozy Kitsunes' apology predates this, it must have emerged from an earlier vlogpology or set of vlogpologies that the 2017 vlogger was aware of. The 2018 one, however, received more coverage and so likely strengthened the awareness of this genre feature.

For more prominent YouTubers, who are financially stable, turning off monetization may not mean much to them. Smaller YouTubers, however, may not have the financial means to go without a week of pay. Ultimately, their revenue is their salary, and it fluctuates due to the nature of rising and falling numbers. So, this monetary moral signalling will have a different effect on each vlogger. This correlation between sincerity and financial gain is genre specific, as is mentioning monetisation so frequently. Still, it is essential for the vlogger, especially in times of crisis, to protect their brand by showing honesty.

One vlogger in this study, however, indicated they would keep their monetisation earnings, as they relied on this income to 'survive'. Here, the vlogger attempted to highlight the expectations of this genre feature for the collective vlogpology and to diverge from the

expectation by including their individual needs for this characteristic. By mentioning this, they hope to signal, like their peers, that their vlogpology is sincere without having to take on the financial loss that more successful vloggers may be better equipped to deal with.

As a result, the vlogpology transcends the specified 'normal' persona they aim to convey to address the unspoken element of the vloggers earning money from every view they receive. It creates a slight divide between the average viewer and the vlogger, which the vlogger usually avoids pointing out. With the vlogpology, this is necessary due to the negative perception of earning money from a vlogpology. One thing that may be worth considering in future work is that one vlogger in this study expresses they will keep monetisation on, as they have bills to pay.

Key Observations Summary

These four goals emerged from my observation of the findings. If vloggers produce a successful vlogpology for their varied audience by conceding to their demands, they hope that they can restore their reputations and convince people to continue to follow them and watch their videos. They hope to repair their image and return to the same place, and their same popularity (they hope), and monetary gain, as before the crisis.

The vloggers attempt to satisfy each layer of the audience through various moves and steps (some obligatory and some optional) whilst also comforting themselves through a range of lexical techniques. They often compliment themselves, use vague statements to avoid adding to the growing criticism that prompted their vlogpology and regains control by thanking their criticisers for calling them out. Visually they seek empathy from their audience and attempt to achieve this by creating an intimate engagement in their videos. In making a concession to their audience to apologise which includes stating that this experience has been a chance to grow, thus

making them appear humble and willing to be the bigger person, means the vlogger can still maintain some control over their future and feel more comfortable in overcoming the corner their audience has backed them into.

7.2 Contributions to new knowledge

The vlogpology is an incredibly complex genre. Previous vlogpology studies focussed on smaller samples of vlogpologies for analysis and examined the IRT techniques and sincerity judgement from test groups, comments, subscription analytics, brand partnerships and memes; the results of this study present broader findings than existing studies (Afriza & Rusadi, 2021; Binraya & Panjaitan, 2019; Cui, 2022; Lawson, 2020; Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2020; Sng et al., 2019; Woods, 2021).

This study has contributed new knowledge in a number of ways; I introduced a mixed-method approach to studying vlogpologies which has not been done previously. Identifying generic features introduced new territory into the research field of this digital genre and the discourse framework that was created sought to typify the vlogpology not only as a way to better understand its value and use but to provide opportunities for other academics to draw upon in future. The framework provides specific features for other academics to consider, such as an optional and obligatory statistical valuation to illustrate the importance of each part of the genre. Additionally, a description of each move and step is given, as well as a script like run through, to see the discourse structure with all moves and steps may look like. Which will help with future identification. The lexico-grammatical chapter allowed for ideologies within the text to present themselves, as well as unique lexical patterns that convey how the vloggers feel about the vlogpology itself, how they want the vlogpology to be received, the crisis they are in, the expectations from their audience, and other genre-specific pressures. Through the visual

characteristics chapter, the findings indicated that the vlogpology thumbnails, which could be used to attract viewers, were a way to represent the vlogger and their identity. The thumbnails had a shared goal of looking candid yet being slightly tailored to suit vloggers' needs.

7.3 Limitations of the study

As this study was designed as an introductory look at the vlogpology, it meant that the many features identified could not be investigated in depth. The vlogpology was found to be a genre filled with complexity. The three methodological approaches, which necessitated a look at the textual and visual level of the genre required very detailed analyses, were intense and time-consuming.

The research process was sometimes a struggle, as previous vlogpology studies had focussed so heavily on their sincerity and the comments reactions, or the vloggers relationships with brands from vlogpologies; that other genre were required to provide the firmest foundations of context. Previous research had generalised by calling the vlogpology a genre, without supplying what linked it. In saying this, the variety of sources, including other vlog genre studies, psychological studies on vloggers, research surrounding influencers, public figures, apologies, social media, and so forth, provided me with an expansive view of the space that surrounded the vlogpology and perhaps a closer than intended understanding of the vlogpologies complexities that certainly expand past the scope of this introductory study.

Even though the dataset was relatively small regarding the number of vlogpologies analysed, the corpus itself was very large. It was reliant on the transcription of the vlogpologies in the first instance. As a result, when it came to the visual aspects, only the thumbnails could be analysed closely when it came to visual aspects, and I would have liked to have done further analyses of the vlogpologies in their entirety. The study also coincided with the Covid-19

pandemic and lockdown situations which added to the pressures of study and analyses. However, while this thesis was limited by the scope of the research and the dataset was relatively small – it still contributes in an important way in bringing into focus the various generic features that can be identified in vlogpologies and which future researchers will be able to build on.

7.4 Implications for future research

Through genre-based analysis, a blueprint for future work and similar digital genres has been created in this study. What was clear, as this study began, was that there was little work done in relation to the actual vlogpology texts or the vloggers who specifically create vlogpologies. Previous research mentioning the vlogpology as a genre appeared to be generalisations without evidence. This study identifies many genre features, both major and minor, to allow future research to expand upon these findings.

The vlogpology is a complex genre, and this study itself could be expanded to examine more specified features and research goals, such as the visual communicative features throughout certain moments of the vlogpology, to see whether the sentiment expressed through the discourse matches the physical expressions. This could be particularly interesting, as the vlogpology genre is expected to avoid jump-cut editing. Any body language cues or facial expressions that would typically be removed may add supportive or even opposing insight into the genre's discourse meanings. It could also be interesting to view any examples of an edited vlogpology versus a classic single-shot monologue. The reception through viewers' comments and media coverage provides a further avenue for research – especially since I identified that the vlogpology was usually made as a concession to the audience. There are seemingly endless avenues to further understand and contextualise the fascinating phenomena of the vlogpology.

7.5 Final reflections

The vlogpology goes against many of the things expected for vlogging genres or vlogging. The vlogpology asks for something much greater than a subscription or a like during their sign-off; they ask, to be forgiven and overcome the contingency (Lüders et al. 2010). Through this study, multiple features have been picked apart and examined to understand their collective and individual purposes. What was overwhelmingly clear was the complexity within this genre and the numerous divisions between it, other social media crisis communication forms and other vlogging genres. The vlogging genre shares features with the overarching vlogging genre and other vlog genres. It also has several distinguishing characteristics that go against the understanding of vlogs.

Firstly, although vloggers can issue multiple vlogpologies, their channel will not consist solely of vlogpologies, as an unboxing genre channel may consist solely of ‘unboxing videos’ (Mowlabocus, 2020). The vlogpologies are created to reflect on a range of occurrences and engage with audience expectations whilst making concessions for themselves and the audience. The vlogger aims to exit the crisis. Although there may be consecutive vlogpologies, at some point, the vlogger should return to crafting their work through other genres. Although the vlogpology is not something a successful vlogger must have in their library, as suggested by Makalintal (2019) and Sung (2021); it is something a vlogger who has experienced a crisis of a certain level online is expected to have. It is supposed to remain in the vlogger's library after the crisis.

I also hope this paper may guide further work into digital genres, especially those with longevity, as stated by Xia (2020). I think in regard to the youth and people who idolise vloggers, this is an incredibly interesting subject. The vlogpology clearly represents an extreme of the vlogger's life, where they need to momentarily drop the tailored style of vlogging and their brand

identity to solve this issue. Vloggers and researchers have indicated the struggles involved with becoming a public figure in the vlogging space. Werner (2012), it seems, predicted the vlogpology in a way. His study on vlog genres concluded with an unexpected interpretation and note for the vloggers. He valued their variety of roles, identity shifts, and the highly unpredictable nature of online reception - especially to vlogs, with Werner noting many viral videos were viral for the wrong reason. Yet a vlogger should aim to go viral. He noted the vloggers tended to disclose intimate details and seemed incredibly vulnerable in their openness and wealth of content to be scrutinised, as well as the direct access the audience has to them. He highlighted that they were in real danger of becoming involved in crises as opposed to other public figures. The prominence of the vlogpology genre, and its longevity, support this. Werner raised concern for their mental health, and now understanding through the emotional disclosures in this paper and the already highly pressurised situation the vloggers find themselves in outside of the crisis, I, too, find this particularly worrisome. For most vloggers, a vlogpology is something they have to do while in the midst or even beginning of an incredibly stressful situation. I believe the vlogpology is, as a genre, a reaction to the incredibly intimate and multifaceted position that the authors of the vlogging genre find themselves in. The vlogpology is, in contrast, a far more restrictive genre, allowing little room for their own needs or creative expression to be met, instead focusing on forced humility while under duress. It is a division between vloggers and audiences that will hopefully be repaired, and perhaps someday, a safer and healthier approach to repairing the relationship may emerge, if required.

Additionally, I worry for the younger audiences who wish to grow up to be YouTubers, what effect it has on them to see their heroes so distressed, and what it does to fans to see these people they have dedicated many hours to and perhaps in context, years, of their lives watching.

To face backlash for supporting them, to feel as if they perhaps can no longer identify as a member of their creator's community or fandom groups, or to lose friends who leave it. It may also be particularly tough for fans to see their beloved 'friend' in such a state of distress without being able to communicate with them directly or comfort them. Perhaps that musing is the beginning of Rushdy's empathy transformation. I don't mean to dissuade apologies or accountability. Rather, I wonder whether it is right to encourage one in such a frantic manner before the vlogger has time to reflect and process the situation, to feel accountable and to want to make amends because it is the right thing to do rather than something that will hopefully save their career and image. Perhaps that would seem more sincere and would be better for the vloggers and sections of the audience who desire a 'real' apology rather than meme material or reality television-style schadenfreude entertainment that, due to various levels of pressure, creates a multitude of unexpected reactions.

It is clear from this analysis that vloggers and influencers experience a different life when they reach a certain degree of fame. It is very easy for them to become egocentric – particularly when they have so many subscribers and fans. Their image, identity and self-representation are essential to their careers as vloggers, whether that involves topics such as beauty, gaming or teaching. Regardless of when they are exposed as doing something 'wrong' or outed by viewers for incorrect behaviour, crisis management is required. It is not just their identity that is at risk, but also the damaging impact any criticism of them may have on their YouTube channel, which can result in a reduction in the amount of money they receive from advertisers and the brands they represent. So just like a business or organisation where brand management and self-presentation are essential, vloggers must seek to restore their image as quickly and as convincingly as possible. Hence the rise of the 'vlogpology' as seemingly the most effective

communicative genre to restore their image. The vlogger hopes that this singular shot, unedited speech is raw, honest, and meets the needs of the audience; so that they may overcome the contingency of the genre. They hope it is received well, but they are at the mercy of the masses.

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