"I'm just sorry for being a frickin' idiot and saying stupid stuff I don't mean." Apology Components and Image Repair Strategies in Apology Videos on YouTube

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Abstract

Research on apology videos is a relatively new and understudied area, especially in the context of social media apologies. The purpose of this thesis is to give insight into the linguistic features used in YouTube apology videos by utilizing Lewicki and Polin's six apology components of an effective apology as well as Benoit's image repair strategies. The aim is to provide framework into how these two approaches are integrated in the apologies. While previous research has examined apology components and image repair strategies separately, this thesis recognizes that the combination of the approaches could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of apologies. The thesis analyses 12 apology videos from relevant and popular YouTubers, utilizing discourse analysis and both quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis includes graphs illustrating the distribution and integration of apology components and image repairs strategies in the apology videos. The findings will be further discussed through the analysis of excerpts from the apologies. Also, brief discussion on possible further studies will be provided. The findings of this thesis indicate that from apology components, expression of regret and an explanation for why the offense occurred were the most common practices, while bolstering and mortification were the most prevalent image repair strategies. Furthermore, it was found that self-deprecating use of bolstering was especially common in YouTube apologies. It was also established that bolstering and mortification appear frequently in conjunction with the apology components. Additionally, inclusions of accident, defeasibility, attack accuser and corrective action were also found to be common practices with apology components. In conclusion, the approach employed in this thesis provides a more comprehensive understanding of YouTube apologies, and of the relationship between apology components and image repair strategies within the context of the analysed videos.

Tiivistelmä

Anteeksipyyntövideoiden tutkimus on suhteellisen uusi ja vähän tutkittu ala, etenkin sosiaalisen median anteeksipyyntöjen yhteydessä. Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella YouTuben anteeksipyyntövideoissa esiintyviä kielellisiä piirteitä, hyödyntämällä Lewickin ja Polinin kuutta tehokkaan anteeksipyynnön komponenttia sekä Benoitin imagon korjausstrategioita. Tavoitteena on tarjota kehykset näiden kahden lähestymistavan yhdistämiselle anteeksipyynnöissä. Vaikka aikaisempi tutkimus on tutkinut anteeksipyynnön komponentteja ja imagon korjausstrategioita erikseen, tämä tutkielma tunnistaa, että lähestymistapojen yhdistäminen voisi johtaa anteeksipyyntöjen kokonaisvaltaisempaan ymmärtämiseen. Tutkielmassa analysoidaan 12 anteeksipyyntövideota merkittäviltä ja suosituilta tubettajilta, ja siinä käytetään diskurssianalyysiä hyödyntäen sekä kvantitatiivista että kvalitatiivista menetelmää. Analyysi sisältää kaavioita, jotka havainnollistavat anteeksipyynnön komponenttien ja imagon korjausstrategioiden jakaumaa ja yhdistelmiä anteeksipyyntövideoissa. Löydöksiä käsitellään myös analysoimalla otteita anteeksipyyntövideoista. Lisäksi tutkielmaan sisältyy katsaus mahdollisiin tuleviin tutkimuksiin. Tämän tutkielman havainnot osoittavat, että anteeksipyyntökomponenteista katumuksen osoitus ja selitys loukkaukselle olivat yleisimpiä käytäntöjä anteeksipyyntövideoissa, kun taas positiivisten piirteiden vahvistaminen ja häpeän osoittaminen olivat yleisimpiä imagon korjausstrategioita. Lisäksi havaittiin, että positiivisia piirteitä vahvistettiin itseään vähättelevästi ja tämä oli erityisen yleisestä YouTube anteeksipyynnöissä. Todettiin myös, että positiivisten piirteiden vahvistamista ja häpeän osoittamista esiintyi usein anteeksipyynnön komponenttien yhteydessä. Myös vahinko, vastuun vähättely, hyökkäys syyttäjää kohti ja korjaavien toimenpiteiden käytön todettiin olevan yleisiä käytäntöjä anteeksipyynnön komponenttien kanssa. Yhteenvetona voidaan todeta tässä tutkielmassa käytetyn lähestymistavan tarjoavan kattavamman käsityksen anteeksipyynnöistä YouTubessa sekä anteeksipyynnön komponenttien ja imagon korjausstrategioiden välisestä suhteesta analysoitujen videoiden yhteydessä.

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1. Introduction

The rise of social media platforms has significantly transformed the landscape of public apologies, creating a new phenomenon: the YouTube apology video. YouTube apologies, typically posted by content creators and influencers, have become a popular means of addressing scandals, controversies, and other wrongdoings in a more personal way (Choi & Mitchell, 2022, p. 1). It is a relatively recent phenomenon, having gained attention within the last decade due to the increasing popularity of YouTubers and influencers (Sandlin & Gracyalny, 2018, p. 394). Apology videos have evolved into a distinguishable genre on YouTube, with some of the videos accumulating millions of views. The abundance of these videos has led to the trend of apology videos becoming targets for mockery and parody.

The act of apologizing has been a subject of discussion and examination for decades, within various disciplines such as rhetorical communication, social psychology, and organizational behaviour (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 178). Apologies are commonly made following a violation of trust or unjust treatment, and as a means to repair one's image and regain trust (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 178). While apologies have been studied previously, the effectiveness and characteristics of apologies have only recently become topics of research (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 95). Nevertheless, in the recent decade, research has been conducted exploring apology discourse in an attempt to determine if a formula for effective apologies exists. Notable literary contributions include Lewicki at al., who have explored apologies from the perspective of trust repair and created theory of six apology components of an effective apology (2012; 2016), as well as Benoit's image repair theory (1995, revisited in 2014).

This thesis aims to examine the linguistic practices used in apology videos on YouTube, utilizing Benoit's and Lewicki's theories as frameworks. The aim is to provide insight into understanding how apology components and strategies are used in apology videos on YouTube. The research in apology discourse so far has overlooked the components that make up an effective apology, until the contributions of Lewicki et al. Consequently, this study aims to integrate the apology practices of Lewicki et al. and Benoit to enhance the understanding of apologies. The thesis employs discourse analysis as its primary methodology, utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods. The thesis attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Which apology components and image repair strategies are found in the apology videos?

2. How are apology components and the image repair strategies integrated in the videos?

While scholarly discussions on apology videos and their impact have been sparse, there is a growing recognition of their significance and relevance in contemporary society (Choi & Mitchell, 2022, p. 2). The noticeable increase in the number of student papers on the topic reflects a growing interest in understanding the dynamics of the YouTube apologies. This indicates that apology videos are a topical subject and should perhaps be examined more closely within the context of apology discourse in the future.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

2.1 Apology Discourse: The Connection Between Trust Repair and Image Repair

Apologies are one of the most commonly found speech acts in public discourse and social interactions (Drew et al., 2015, p. 1). They are defined by researchers as acts performed by a violator in a response for causing offense or harm to a victim (Tomlinson et al., 2004, p. 169, as cited in Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 105). According to Lewicki et al., apologies present two general functions: an offering of apology and expression of regret (2016 p. 191). Apologies may also include a desire to reconcile and restore the relationship between the involved parties (Tomlinson et al., 2004, p. 169 as cited in Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 105). Essentially apologies are accounts of wrongdoings and act as a means to express remorse and demonstrate willingness to make amends. Apologies also serve as central processes for both trust and image repair (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 177). Lewicki et al., as well as Benoit have examined the dynamics of apologies from the perspectives of these two theories.

Trust and image repair are necessary procedures due to the inevitability of mistakes and wrongdoings in interactions (Benoit, 2014, p. 2). Trust repair is a process that requires involvement from both parties for it to be considered successful. The violator must take action in order to repair the trust, and the victim must accept the apology (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 98). Lewicki and Polin (2012), have categorized attempts to repair trust into two primary methods of action (p. 95). The violator can either acknowledge the offense without providing any further explanation or make a verbal statement that acknowledges and assumes personal accountability for the offense (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 95). Furthermore, the authors introduce other possible actions to mend a broken trust: by choosing to remain silent or offering compensation to the victim (2012, p. 95). Additionally, violators can also provide further explanations and statements regarding the offense and the factors that led to the violation of trust.

Benoit's perspective on apologies, considers them as a part of the image repair process, and as persuasive attempts aimed at influencing the audience's beliefs regarding the accused's responsibility and offensiveness in terms of a violation (2014, p. 3). According to Benoit, image repair discourse involves persuasive messages designed to address attacks or suspicions that led to the negative perceptions of the accused (Benoit, 1995, as cited in Benoit, 2014, p. 10). Benoit's image repair theory provides a framework for repairing damaged reputations by utilizing strategies, such as denial, evasion of responsibility, corrective action, and mortification (2014, p. 22). He emphasises that our

images hold a great importance to us, and threats to it can affect our wellbeing as well as our credibility and persuasiveness (2014, p. 2) Benoit suggests that acts like offering explanations, excuses and apologies are consequences from when the accused perceives a threat to their image (2014, p. 3). Effective apology practices can have the ability the mend one's image and repair trust (Benoit, 2014, p. 3).

Lewicki's perspective of apology components to repair trust and Benoit's image repair strategies can be considered interconnected theories within apology discourse. Both theories highlight the importance of acknowledging responsibility for the wrongdoing and damage caused while also emphasising the significance of taking corrective action to repair and rectify the offensive action and to prevent future occurrences. Both also acknowledge the role of interpersonal communication in the repair process (Lewicki & Polin, 2012; Benoit, 2014). When it comes to studying the effectiveness of apologies, image repair strategies can assist the process of trust repair, and vice versa. The theory can be applied within the context of trust repair to provide a more comprehensive understanding of image repair strategies, and image repair strategies can be utilized to address specific challenges of trust repair. For example, Benoit's image repair strategy, corrective action, can be applied to trust repair processes, as taking concrete steps to correct the situation and prevent future occurrences of the offense is important in trust repair (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 181).

Furthermore, integrating these two theories into research can allow the consideration of both the public image and the restoration of trust in apology videos. Benoit has studied the strategies which repair an image, but the research in apology discourse so far has overlooked the components that make up an effective apology, before Lewicki et al.'s 2016 theory of apology components (p. 178). According to Lewicki et al., the integration of these components in an apology increases the chances of the apology being considered as effective (2016, p. 190). Similarly, Benoit's work explores what strategies result in an effective image repair (2014, p. 44). Image repair theory also contains notions about the effectiveness of apologies and the characteristics that constitute a "good" apology, as successful image repair process is synonymous with an effective apology, as outlined by Benoit (2014, p. 3). By combining these two theories, a more comprehensive understanding of apologies and their effectiveness can be achieved. The strategies of Lewicki et al. and Benoit apologies will be further discussed in section 3.

2.2 The Phenomenon of Apology Videos on YouTube

The basic concept of a YouTube apology video is to upload an apology in video format following a scandal, with the aim of repairing their image and maintaining their status on the platform. Using social media for apologies has gained some support from researchers due to its popularity and accessibility which allows rapid sharing of information with global audiences (Moody, 2011, p. 413). With nearly two billion users in 2021 (Forbes, 2022), YouTube, as one of the most popular social media platforms, provides an ideal platform for uploading apology videos. Also, taking into consideration that top creators on the platform can have millions of subscribers and for many creators, their income heavily relies on the platform, there is a lot of pressure for creators to maintain their image on the platform. Paradoxically, in YouTube videos, dramatic and reckless behaviour performed in hopes of views has surged due to the growing popularity of the platform, which has resulted into abundance of video creators (Choi & Mitchell, 2022, p. 2).

As societal awareness of racial and social sensitivity continues to grow in present times, the phenomenon of cancel culture, especially targeted towards celebrities, has emerged. According to one definition, cancel culture refers to "collective strategies by activists using social pressures to achieve cultural ostracism of targets (someone or something) accused of offensive words or deeds" (Norris, 2021, p. 148). The heightened social awareness has led to many creators on YouTube finding themselves involved in controversies which create a threat to their career and public image. The core of cancel culture is that people are often unwilling to accept the creator's apology. This unforgiving nature of cancel culture complicates the processes of trust and image repair. As a result of cancel culture, a great number of YouTubers' past videos and posts including offensive acts have resurfaced and garnered negative media attention. This public backlash has seemingly led to the issuance of apology videos as a result (Choi & Mitchell, 2022, p. 2).

With so many apology videos emerging, the YouTube apologies have been subjected to mockery and parody. Many users have even created playlists compiling the worst apologies, aiming to showcase their lack of insincerity and predictability. These compilations highlight how these videos are "primarily made for monetization and avoiding cancel culture" (Dodgson, 2019; Haynes, 2019; Makalintal, 2019; Skinner, 2019, as cited in Choi & Mitchell, 2022, p. 1). This has fuelled the popularity of the YouTube apology genre. For example, PewDiePie's apology video for racist remarks has garnered 17 million views (PewDiePie, 2017), and Logan Paul's video of filming a dead body in the woods in Japan has gained 62 million views (Logan Paul Vlogs, 2018). The growing popularity

of apology videos has set off a need to consider new areas of apology discourse. Recent number of student papers also reflect the recognition of their significance in contemporary apology discourse.

3. Approaches

In this section, the apology components proposed by Lewicki et al., as well as image repair strategies introduced by Benoit will be explored in further detail. These frameworks serve as the foundation for the analysis conducted in this thesis as they enable the examination of apology practices used in the apology videos.

3.1 Lewicki, Polin & Lount's Six Apology Components

In Lewicki, Polin, & Lount's 2016 study, the objective was to find out which verbal components account for an effective apology (p. 193). The framework was drawn from Lewicki and Polin's study from 2012 that first established the six apology components: expression of regret, explanation for why the offense occurred, acknowledgement of responsibility, declaration of repentance, offer of repair and request for forgiveness (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 182).

An Expression of Regret

The first apology component presented here is an expression of regret which expresses that the accused is showing remorse and has negative feelings about the violation and their actions. It has also been found that the violated party might hold less anger towards the perpetrator if they have expressed regret over their actions (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 181). Expression of regret is realised with statements such as "I'm sorry," "I apologize," or "Excuse me" and is often coupled with statements indicating regret over the actions (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, pp. 101, 110). It is also often the most easily recognized component as the expression of "I'm sorry" is usually expressed directly, and is often included in apologies, as opposed to other components which are expressed more indirectly (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, s. 109).

An Explanation for Why the Offense Occurred

An explanation can be defined as a verbal narrative that seeks to provide reasons and justifications for why the past action or offense has occurred (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 105). Lewicki et al. found that the apology might be viewed better if an explanation is provided as it shows the reasoning behind the violation (2016, p. 181). In addition, the characteristics of the explanation as well as the credibility of the violator were contributing factors in determining the efficiency of the apology (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 105).

An Acknowledgement of Responsibility

An acknowledgement of responsibility has been described as the "centrepiece of an apology" (Coombs and Holladay, 2008, p. 253 as cited in, Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 181). It is an important feature as it shows that the violator is acknowledging the harmful or offensive nature of their actions and additionally signifies a desire to rectify the situation (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 181). Moreover, research suggests that taking responsibility leads to "more positive evaluations of the violators" and can alleviate feelings of anger while minimizing damage (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 181). Although acknowledgements of responsibility are often present in apologies, they may be less recognizable than expressions of regret due to their indirect nature (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 110).

A Declaration of Repentance

Previous research conducted by Lewicki et al., identified declaration of repentance as the most challenging apology component for violators. Their findings suggested that some violators indirectly referenced at their repentance even though it was not explicitly expressed in any statement (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, pp. 110-111). However, if included in an apology, a declaration of repentance shows that the violator is committed to prevent the recurrence of the offense (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 181).

An Offer for Repair

An offer for repair demonstrates the violator's willingness to rectify the situation or repair the relationship, while also showing awareness of the need to address the offense (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 181). Various actions can be taken, some resort to specific actions for repair such as offering compensation while others acknowledge their limitations in offering repair (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, p. 111).

A Request for Forgiveness

The authors point out that a request for forgiveness might also be beneficial to include in an apology. Though, in the study conducted by Lewicki and Polin in 2012, it was discovered that most of the examined apologies did not contain a request for forgiveness (p. 112). This can be attributed to the hypothesis that violators tend to prioritize such statement if they are inclined to believe that the victim will forgive them and participate in the trust repair process (Lewicki & Polin, 2012, pp. 181-182). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of request for forgiveness lies in its ability to enable the victim to become part of the conversation, thus making the apology into a two-way communication process (Lewicki et al., 2016, p. 181).

3.2 Benoit's Image Repair Theory

The objective in the image repair process, can be explained as individuals or organizations engaging in repetitive pattern of communicative behaviour aimed at repairing, reducing, addressing, or preventing harm to their image (Benoit, 2014, ix). At its simplest, an image repair situation consists of the following: an accusation of a wrongdoing and an attempt to repair image. Though, the image repair process is often not as simple, as multiple parties can act as violators, and the victims may not be the ones requesting the apology or attacking the violator (Benoit, 2014, p. 13). Benoit has divided image repair strategies into five main categories: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (2014, p. 22). Three of these have further been divided into the following subcategories: denial is divided into *simple denial* and *shift blame*, evasion of responsibility is divided into *provocation, defeasibility, accident,* and *good intentions,* and reducing offensiveness is divided into *bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking accuser* and *compensation.*

Denial

Simple denial means either outright denying the offense or alternatively denying their part in committing the offense. Claiming that there is not enough supporting evidence or offering alternative explanations may also be employed to help with denying the offense (Benoit, 2014, p. 22). According to Benoit, in theory, this strategy should free the accused of their culpability (2014, p. 22). However, the accusers might question the absence of a culprit, thus lessening the credibility of the simple denial strategy (Benoit, 2014, pp. 22-23). This leads us to the next subcategory of denial which is *shifting blame*. According to Benoit, this strategy may be a more effective means of denial as the audience's negative feelings towards the accused are shifted elsewhere and it answers the question of the culprit (2014, pp. 22-23).

Evasion of Responsibility

If the perpetrator is unable to deny or shift the blame of the committed offence, they might resort to evading their responsibility of the offence (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). In *provocation*, the perpetrator might claim that the offence was provoked by another offensive act. A successful outcome of this would be that the accuser starts to blame the provoker instead (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). *Defeasibility* means that the perpetrator defends their actions by claiming that the offence happened because they did not have enough information about or control over the situation. The goal in this strategy is to reduce the responsibility of the accused (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). The variant *accident* functions by claiming that

the offensive action was a mishap (Benoit, 2014, p. 23). In *good intentions*, the perpetrator might say that they meant good and did not mean to offend anyone (Benoit, 2014, pp. 23-24).

Reducing Offensiveness

In reducing offensiveness, the perpetrator attempts to reduce or minimize the experienced negative feelings the victim or audience experienced. This is done by replacing the negative feelings towards the perpetrator or the action with positive ones, which will lead to a redeemed image if successful (Benoit, 2014, p. 26). *Bolstering*, is a strategy where audiences' negative feelings are reduced by steering the attention to positive attributes or actions (2014, p. 24). Self-deprecation can also be considered a form of bolstering when the perpetrator deprecates themselves in order to gain sympathy from the victim or an audience. Secondly, *minimization* is a strategy where negative feelings of the offence are reduced by making it seem like the action was not as serious or offensive as first seemed (Benoit, 2014, p. 24). The third strategy is *differentiation*, which can make the offense seem less serious when attention is called to other similar offenses that are considered more offensive (Benoit, 2014, p. 24). The fourth strategy used to reduce offensiveness is *transcendence,* where the goal is to place the action into a different, more positive context (Benoit, 2014, p. 24). *Attacking the accuser* is the fifth strategy where the credibility of the attackers is questioned by attacking them instead and thus steer the attention away from the original offense (Benoit, 2014, p. 25). Finally, the sixth and final strategy of reducing offensiveness, *compensation,* is a strategy where compensation is offered in the hopes of lessening the negative feelings towards the perpetrator (Benoit, 2014, p. 25). Compensation can also act as a bribe in image repair situation as the goal is to not necessarily correct the situation but rather counterbalance it (Benoit, 2014, pp. 25-26).

Corrective Action

Corrective action is a strategy for rectifying the situation by promising to fix the problem caused by the accused. As opposed to compensation, corrective action offers to repair the situation or prevent recurrence by "addressing the actual source of injury" (Benoit, 2014, p. 26). It is to be noted that corrective action can be performed without directly taking the blame for the offence (Benoit, 2014, p. 26).

Mortification

The final main category of image repair theory is *mortification*. In mortification the perpetrator apologizes and consequently admits their blame (Benoit, 2014, p.). A request for forgiveness as well as an expression of regret is usually also included (Benoit, 2014, p.). Benoit points out that

mortification is an especially complex strategy in image repair as there are no collectively agreed components that should be included in an apology. The phrase "I'm sorry" is a common but it is also ambiguous as "it can reflect an admission of guilt, as in "I'm sorry I hurt you," or it can be an expression of sympathy, as in "I'm sorry you have been hurt", by someone else (Benoit, 2014, p. 26). This ambiguity can also be purposeful as there are risks in directly admitting to the blame. There is no guarantee that it is responded with forgiveness which is why some simply say "I'm sorry" without further explaining the reasoning behind their apologize or alternatively, being vague about it (Benoit, 2014, p. 26).

4. Research Materials and Ethical Considerations

The data used in this thesis was collected from YouTube and 12 apology videos, uploaded between 2016 and 2022 were included. To ensure the relevance of the data, the videos were selected based on the number of followers the creators had as well as the number of views their apology videos received. YouTube's sorting tool which prioritizes relevance, engagement, and quality in order to show the most relevant videos concerning a certain topic, was employed to identify the most relevant videos (Navigating YouTube Search - How YouTube Works, n.d.). The videos have been selected in March of 2022 as well as in May of 2023, and the keyword "apology videos" was used to search for data. To maintain consistency in the search results, the search was conducted on incognito mode as YouTube's recommendations can be influenced by the users watch history and previous searches (Navigating YouTube Search - How YouTube Works, n.d.). Furthermore, another determining factor in the selection process was a preliminary examination on whether the videos contained any of the apology components and image repair strategies. Videos failing to meet these requirements were discarded from the data. The length of the videos was a contributing factor as well, and videos under 10 minutes in length were selected, with majority being under 5 minutes. The videos were also transcribed to help with recognizing apology components and image repair strategies from the apologies. In the analysis section of the thesis, relevant excerpts from the transcripts have been incorporated.

In this thesis, YouTube apology videos from various creators are examined for educational purposes. Their channel names as well as excerpts from their apologies are referenced throughout the analysis. The inclusion of YouTube videos is solely for the purpose of analysis and examination within the context of answering the research questions. Some videos are still available on the YouTubers' channels but the inclusion of reuploaded videos for certain creators was necessary due to the unavailability of the original content. It is worth noting that some of the apology videos that were initially available for analysis, have been removed or made private along the course of making this thesis. This can be contributed to the nature of the platform as well as to the potentially negative reception the videos received. For the purpose of providing examples, the names of the YouTubers are mentioned to aid in the comprehension and discussion of the analysis. This approach has been supported by previous research, many of which have also included the names of public figures in their analyses. Links to the excerpts have been provided in the references to ensure the accuracy of the original content. It is also notable, due to the critical nature of apology video discourse, that the intention is not to ridicule the creators, as the aim of this study is to be purely educational.

5. Analysis and Findings

In this section, the analysis and findings of this thesis will be presented and discussed. Examination of the frequency of apology components and image repair strategies in YouTube apology videos will be included, as well as analysis on the how these two theories are integrated. First, the research question regarding the linguistic practices featured in apology videos on YouTube will be addressed in the quantitative segment of this section. Graphs will be included to illustrate the findings and patterns observed in the data. In the qualitative segment of this analysis, the findings will be analysed in further detail, with examples drawn from the data.

5.1 Quantitative Findings

This section will present the quantitative findings of the study. First, the analysis will cover the frequency of apology components appearing in the apology videos. Secondly, the frequency of image repair strategies will be presented. Finally, the combination of the frequency of apology components appearing with image repair strategies will be presented.

5.1.1   Distribution of Apology Components and Image Repair Strategies

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the amount of apology components and image repair strategies included in the apologies. The y-axis represents the number of apology videos included in the dataset, while the x-axis displays the different apology practices. The image repair strategies are represented by different colours, indicating the main categories utilized in the apologies. After each figure, the findings are deciphered.

Figure 1. Distribution of Apology Components
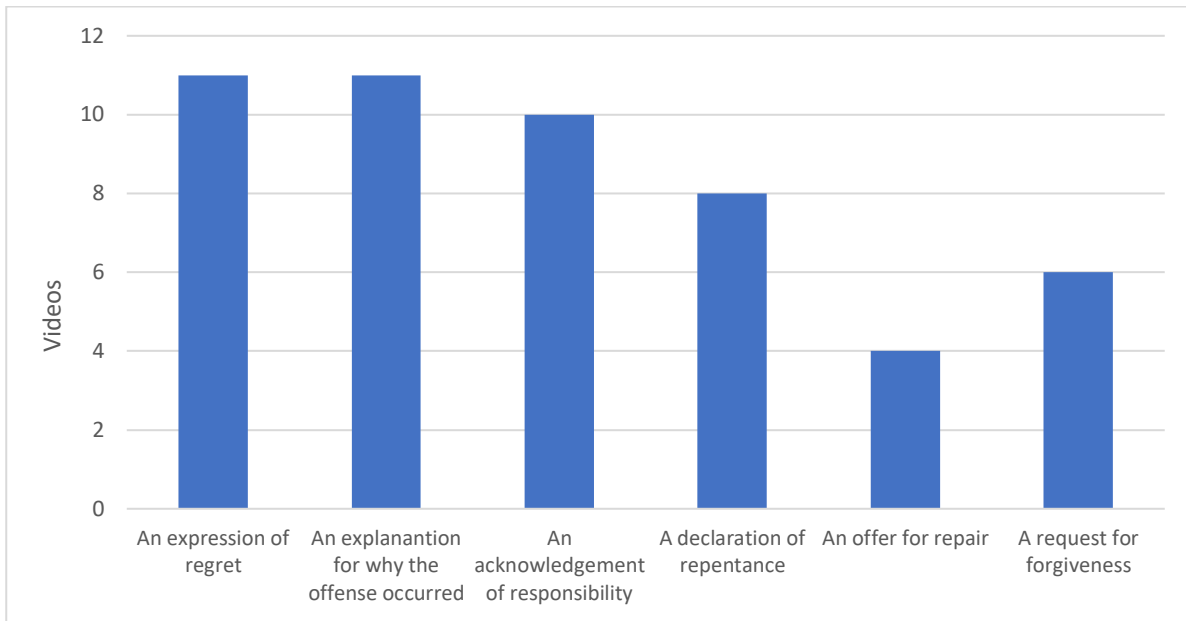
The most common apology component was *an explanation for why the offense occurred* and *an expression of regret* which were both included in 11 (92%) out of the total 12 apologies. The second most common component was *an acknowledgement of responsibility* which was found in 10 (83%) apologies. *A declaration of repentance* was included in 8 (67%) apologies, a request for forgiveness in 6 (50%) and finally, an offer for repair in 4 (33%) apologies.

Figure 2. Distribution of Image Repair Strategies
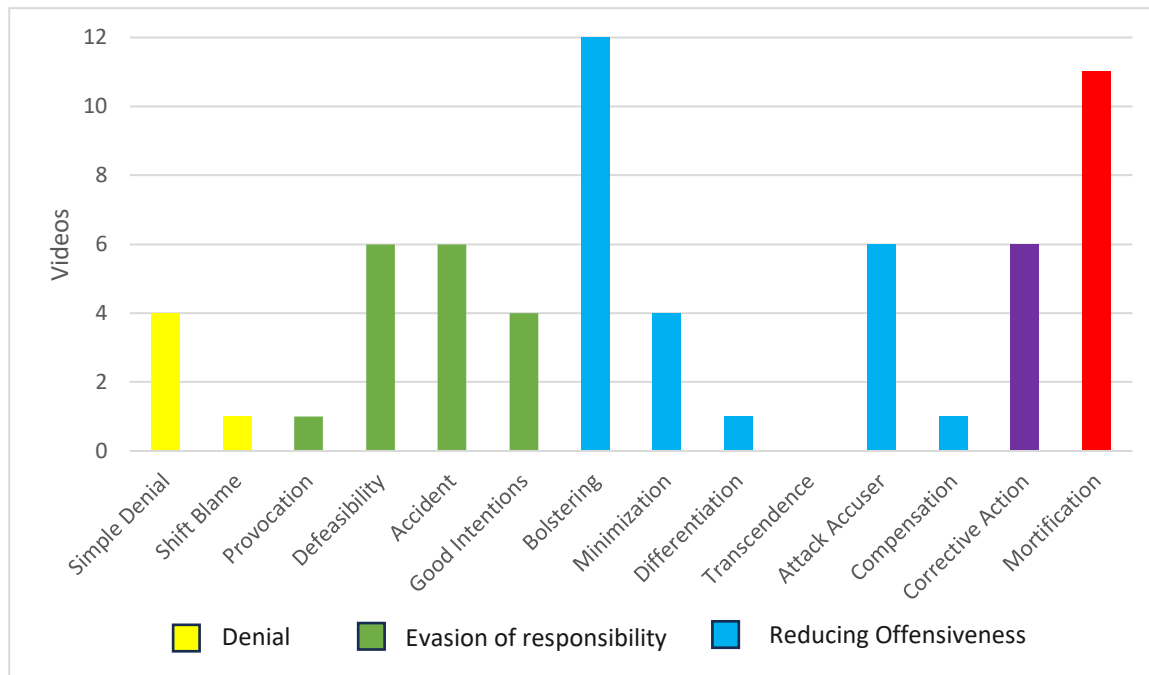
The biggest main categories within image repair strategies were *evasion of responsibility* and *reducing offensiveness*, which were both used in all the 12 apologies. The second most common main strategy was *mortification*, appearing in 11 (92 %) apologies. *Corrective action* was used in 6 (50%) apologies and finally, *denial* was used in 4 apologies (33 %).

Furthermore, the most frequently used subcategory of image repair strategies was *bolstering*, a form of reducing offensiveness, which was used in all the 12 apologies. From reducing offensiveness, *attacking accuser* was the second most common strategy, included in 6 (50%) apologies. *Minimization* was included in 4 (33%) apologies, and *differentiation* and *compensation* both were found in 1 (8%) apology. *Transcendence* was the only image repair strategy not included in any of the apology videos. From evasion of responsibility, *defeasibility* and *accident* were the most used strategies, both appearing in 6 (50%) apologies. *Good intentions* was employed in 4 (33%) apologies and provocation in 1 (8%) apology. Finally, from subcategories of denial, *simple denial* was included in 4 (33%) apologies while and *shift blame* was found in 1 (8%) apology.

5.1.2 Integration of Image Repair Strategies and Apology Components

Figure 3 shows the frequency of how often the image repair strategies were included with each apology component. For example, simple denial appeared in four apology videos overall, but appeared in three videos together with an expression of regret. The mediums of appearance have also been incorporated to help with data analysis. Below each figure, the most relevant findings are deciphered.

Figure 3. Distribution of Image Repair Strategies with Apology Components

Component/Strategy	Expression of Regret	An Explanation for Why the Offense Occurred	An Acknowledgement of Responsibility	A Declaration for Repentance	An Offer for Repair	A Request for Forgiveness
Simple Denial	3	4	4	2	3	3
Shift Blame	1	1	1	0	1	1
Provocation	1	0	0	0	0	0
Defeasibility	5	5	4	4	1	2
Accident	6	6	6	4	3	4
Good Intentions	4	4	4	3	2	1
Bolstering	11	11	10	8	4	6
Minimization	4	3	3	3	1	3
Differentiation	1	1	1	0	1	1
Transcendence	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attack Accuser	5	6	5	3	2	4
Compensation	1	1	1	0	1	1
Corrective Action	6	6	6	5	2	3
Mortification	11	10	9	8	4	6

The image repair strategy that was included together with apology components the most was *bolstering* with the medium of appearing in 8.33 videos. The second was *mortification* with the medium of 8, then followed by *accident* with the medium of 4.83, *corrective action* with 4.67, *attack accuser* with 4.16, *defeasibility* with 3.5, *simple denial* with 3.17 and *good intentions* with 3. *Minimization* was included with the apology components in 2.83 videos, *shift blame, differentiation,* and *compensation* in 0.83 videos, and finally, *provocation* in 0.33 videos. *Transcendence* did not appear together with any of the apology components as it was not apparent in any of the apology videos.

With explanation for why the offense occurred, bolstering was again the most common image repair strategy, appearing in 11 (92%) videos, while mortification appeared in 10 (83%) videos. Accident, attack accuser and corrective action were included in 6 (50%) apologies with an explanation for why the offense occurred. Provocation was not included in this category.

With an acknowledgement of responsibility, bolstering, included in 10 (83%) apologies and mortification, included in 9 (75%) apologies, were the most common strategies. Accident and corrective action were included in 6 (50 %) apologies. Provocation was absent from this category as well.

With a declaration for repentance, bolstering and mortification appeared in 8 (67%) apologies, corrective action in 5 (42%) and defeasibility and accident in 4 (33%) apologies. Shift blame, provocation, differentiation, transcendence, and compensation were not included in the videos with declaration for repentance.

With an offer for repair, bolstering and mortification appeared in 4 (33%) videos, while simple denial and accident were included in 3 (25%) apologies.

With a request for forgiveness, bolstering and mortification appeared in 6 (50%) apologies, and accident and attack accuser in 4 (33%) apologies.

5.2 Qualitative Findings

In this section of the thesis analysis and reflection on the data is provided in connection with the theoretical framework or Lewicki et al., and Benoit. This part is conducted by first briefly discussing the overall results from the data and then taking each individual apology component and discussing the connection between it and the image repair strategies. Examples are provided from videos that included the specific apology component in connection with image repair strategies. The context surrounding the offense is also introduced to aid with comprehension. Emphasis is on the most common apology components and image repair strategies, but examples of other apology practices are provided as well.

5.2.1   Analysis of the Data

Overall, looking at the quantitative data, it can be seen that from both image repair strategies and apology features, the most commonly included linguistic practices were bolstering, mortification,

expression of regret and an explanation for why the offense occurred. These findings align with the study conducted by Lewicki et al., which found that expression of regret and an explanation for why the offense occurred were often included the apologies (2016, p. 181). Though, they also mention that these components were often questionable in their quality which is exemplified in the excerpts (2016, p. 181). In all the videos, with apology components, the most commonly appearing image repair strategies were bolstering and mortification. These were also the strategies that appeared the most overall in the videos, as can be seen in figure 2. In previous studies by Benoit, bolstering was also pronounced as a common strategy, especially among celebrities (2012, p. 76-81). This is reflected in the analysis as all the YouTubers' used bolstering and many used it self-deprecatingly, as is exemplified in the following excerpts. Regarding the second most common strategy, mortification was also frequent with all the apology components. Additionally, inclusions of accident, defeasibility, attack accuser and corrective action were also common practices. In the case of including accident and corrective action in the apologies, it was common to express regret, give an explanation for why the offense occurred and acknowledge responsibility. Attack accuser often appeared with an explanation for why the offense occurred and defeasibility with a declaration for repentance.

Apologizing to viewers is common in YouTube apologies, as can be seen from later instances. Many strategies and components appear simultaneously, making it challenging to categorize certain statements into a single apology practice. For example, some apologies may employ accident as a strategy but can also be considered as good intentions. In these instances, both have been mentioned in the analysis.

5.2.2   Analysis of Apology Video Excerpts

Expression of regret

The following excerpts from PewDiePie's apology video regarding his past racist actions is used to exemplify the connection between image repair strategies in an apology that included statements of expression of regret.

"You probably won't believe me when I say this but whenever I go online, and I hear other players use the same kind of language that I did. I always find it extremely immature. And stupid. And I hate how I now personally fed into that part of gaming as well. It was something that I said in the heat of the moment. I said the worst word I could possibly think of and it just sort of slipped out."

First, PewDiePie uses *bolstering* by steering the attention to his positive traits and raising himself above the racist actions he committed. He portrays the offense as a lone incident, suggesting that it does not reflect his true character or values. This strategy aims to emphasize that the offensive language was out of character for him and not indicative of his overall behavior. He states that he views others who commit these actions as immature and *regrets* his role in it. He then proceeds to appeal to *accident,* saying that it happened in the heat of the moment and just slipped out accidentally.

"I'm disappointed in myself because it seems like I've learned nothing from all these past controversies and it's not that I think I can say or do whatever I want and get away with it, that's not it at all. I'm just an idiot."

He then employs *mortification* and simultaneously *expresses regret*, stating how he is disappointed in himself. He then again uses *bolstering* in self-deprecating way, saying that he is "just an idiot". By using the expression "idiot" of himself, he may aim to present himself as flawed, relatable, and self-aware, thereby appealing to his audience's empathy or understanding.

"I know I can't keep messing up like this. And I owe it to my audience and to myself to do better than this because I know I am better than this. I really want to improve myself and better myself, not just for me but for anyone that looks up to me, or anyone that's influenced by me."

Here PewDiePie includes statements of *corrective action* in his apology, saying that he wants to be a better influence from now on. This reflects an understanding of the need to *take responsibility* for his actions by avoiding the recurrence of the offense. He expresses a genuine desire to improve and better himself, emphasizing that he believes he is capable of being better than his past actions suggest. He also uses *bolstering* again, by placing himself above the offense with the statement "I know I am better than this."

An explanation for why the offense occurred
Here, Gus Johnson's and RiceGum's apology videos are used to exemplify the connection between the mentioned apology component and image repair strategies. Gus Johnson's alleged offense was mistreating his then pregnant girlfriend, and RiceGum was accused of promoting a gambling site on his channel which is frequented by a significant number of underage viewers.

"I think that I was so caught up in my own overwhelming fear of what was going on that it made it difficult for me to see through that to really connect with and understand her sense of fear."

In this part, Johnson gives *an explanation for why the offense occurred* by using *defeasibility*. He is stating that he could not prevent the offense since he was caught up in his own fears about the difficult pregnancy. By offering this explanation, he aims to provide context and help the audience understand the factors that contributed to his behavior as well as make the offense more understandable.

"I'm sorry that I caused her hurt during this time and I'm sorry that I was not the partner that she needed during this really difficult period. And the hurt is extended beyond that. There are a number of people who engage with my content or who I work with professionally that have been negatively affected as a result of my actions and my words, and I just would like to extend my sincerest apologies to these people as well."

This excerpt includes the combination of *mortification* and *expressing regret* for causing hurt, *admitting* failure as a partner, and *acknowledging* the negative effects for others. Johnson offers a direct apology by saying sorry to not only to the victim but to all the affected people such as his business partners and viewers. Extending the apology to viewers, even when the offense does not directly impact them, is common in YouTube apologies. Examples of this can be seen in other parts of the analysis as well. By acknowledging that his actions have negatively affected the victim and other people, Johnson is *expressing remorse* and demonstrating an understanding of the impact of his behaviour.

"I'm just trying (to) say that this mystery box thing has been on the internet for like three to four months for other creators but as soon as I do it it's a problem."

Here, RiceGum is *explaining* why he committed the offense (other people did it) while at the same time indirectly *attacking the accusers*, suggesting that the offense only became a problem when he did it, trying to lessen the credibility of the accusers by implying to an unfair bias towards him. Additionally, he is trying to *shift blame*, by bringing attention to other creators who committed the offense. Though, it can be argued, that these techniques appear defensive, potentially lessening RiceGum's credibility to address the issue in a genuine way.

An acknowledgement of responsibility

Logan Paul's apology video was made after he filmed a dead person in a forest in Japan. An excerpt from RiceGum's apology video is also included. The excerpts are used to showcase how acknowledgement of responsibility was combined with image repair strategies.

"I made a severe and continuous lapse in my judgement, and I don't expect to be forgiven. I'm simply here to apologize."

Paul starts his video by *acknowledging his responsibility* by stating that he made a severe mistake which he does not expect to be forgiven for. By acknowledging that a forgiveness is not expected, Paul showcases a deeper understanding of the severity of his actions. He then foreshadows an impending apology with the statement "I'm simply here to apologize" which implies *mortification* and *regret* for the offense. By combining the *acknowledgment of responsibility* and engaging in *mortification*, Paul seeks to convey sincere remorse as well as showcasing a genuine understanding of the harm he caused and the willingness to face the consequences of his actions.

"For my fans who are defending my actions, please don't. I don't deserve to be defended. The goal with my content is always to entertain: to push the boundaries, to be all-inclusive. In the world I live in, I share almost everything I do. The intent is never to be heartless, cruel, or malicious."

Here Paul *acknowledges his responsibility* by telling his fans not to defend his actions as he does not think he is deserving of that. Here he also uses *bolstering* in order to gain sympathy from the viewers with the self-deprecating statement "I don't deserve to be defended". Immediately after, he stresses his positive qualities, reminding how he usually acts on video. This is followed by *evading responsibility* as he states that he was just sharing everything he does, as usual, and that he had *good intentions*. Here he is expressing a desire to be seen in a positive light.

"I do know I'm somewhat in the wrong… (redacted) It's true, it's true, like I'm an asshole, like what was I thinking? Like I cannot really do much cause' I already did it, the damage has been done, you guys saw a money hungry side of me, and it is what it is. And there's nothing I can really do but say sorry and give these Amazon gift cards. So, I'm sorry, it's just– wouldn't happen again.

In this excerpt, RiceGum *acknowledges his responsibility*, stating that he was wrong and implying that the accusations were true. Though, the addition of "somewhat" lessens the effect of the

acknowledgement. This is then followed by self-deprecating *bolstering* when he calls himself an "asshole". He then *expresses regret* over the incident by stating that his actions were incomprehensible to even him in hindsight. He then follows this by *explaining the offense* further, saying that he was money hungry and then *expressing regret* and *mortification* by saying sorry. After saying sorry, he uses *corrective action* by promising to prevent recurrence.

A declaration for repentance

As an example of declaring repentance, excerpts from Laura Lee's and Olivia Jade's apology videos are included. Lee apologized for resurfaced old video material that showed her committing racist actions, and Jade's apology video responds to backlash after she said insensitive remarks as well as appearing indifferent about education on previous videos.

"I, six years ago, decided to re-tweet things that were so vile and hurtful. I was so stupid and ignorant. And I have no excuses here today. I'm not here to give you an excuse. I have no excuses. I'm only here to say that I'm so sorry. And I hope one day that you guys can see me for the woman that I am. And that I can prove to you guys that I'm not that girl."

In the above excerpt, Lee first *reduces her offensiveness* indirectly, using *minimization* by pointing out that the offense occurred in the past, six years ago. She then proceeds to *take responsibility* by saying that there are no excuses but at the end of the excerpt, again *minimizes* the offense by saying that she is not that person who makes vile comments anymore. This can also be viewed as *a declaration for repentance*, as she expresses willingness to prevent recurrence by promising to prove her improved actions in the future. She also *reduces her offensiveness* while simultaneously bolstering in the part "I was so stupid and ignorant", by using self-deprecating expressions. She is also suggesting that she did not have enough information back then because she was young and unaware, which can be seen as appealing to *defeasibility*.

"I'm just sorry for being a frickin' idiot and saying stupid stuff I don't mean. I... this video's already three minutes and it's probably just so boring but yeah. I love you guys and I'm gonna be better and I'm not gonna say stuff like that without thinking twice about it or thinking about who that could hurt because that's never my goal. I would never ever ever want to offend or hurt my subscribers. Uum… Okay the gates are ringing, I'm gonna go! I love you guys and I'll see you tomorrow, bye!"

In the above excerpt, Jade ends her apology video with *expressing regret* or *mortification*, *reducing offensiveness, evading responsibility,* and *declaring repentance or offering corrective action.* First, she offers a direct apology which includes *bolstering* as a strategy. She also uses self-deprecating expressions "I'm a frickin' idiot" and thus tries to gain sympathy from the viewers. She also apologises for saying "stupid stuff" she does not mean, implying that her previous insensitive comments were an *accident*. Another instance of appealing to accident is when she promises not to make insensitive comments without thinking first in the future. This also includes a statement of *corrective action* with plans to prevent recurrence. She then follows with stating that she did not mean to offend her subscribers, appealing to *accident* and *good intentions*.

An offer for repair

To give examples on image repair strategies appearing with an offer for repair, the founders of FamilyOFive channel's apology video for abusing their children for views was used, in addition to Brad Sousa's apology for allegedly cheating on his girlfriend.

"We are now in family counseling because we need it, not only to get through the umm…, you know media stuff but we– we need it to come back together and have everybody, even the kids to understand what we did wrong in all this."

In this excerpt, the founders of FamilyOFive state that they are engaging in family counseling as a means of repair. This *offer for repair* demonstrates their willingness to seek professional help and work towards resolving the issues within their family and *acknowledging the mistakes* they made. This can also be viewed as a *corrective action*.

"If there's anything you ever need, you know, I'm always here no matter what it is. Even if you wanted to talk or do whatever you know… This though, I'm just letting everyone know that– I'm an idiot and I'm saying sorry to not only the love of my life, (ex-girlfriend's name) but you guys."

This part of Sousa's apology comes off as very persuasive with all the strategies laying foundation to forgiveness. He first gives *an offer for repair* by telling her ex-girlfriend that he will be there if she ever wants to talk about the incident or if she needs something in the future. He then follows by *taking responsibility* and using self-deprecating *bolstering* by calling himself an "idiot", portraying a sense of remorse and fault. This *acknowledgment* of personal fault can be seen as an initial step towards repairing the damage caused. Then he proceeds to give a direct apology to his ex-girlfriend as well

as the viewers of the video. By extending their apology to both their partner and their audience, he is indicating an *acknowledgement* of the scope of the offense. The apology targeted to his ex-girlfriend also includes a statement about her being the love of his life, which is a persuasive statement made to appeal to the victim's feelings.

A request for forgiveness

TmarTn's apology video was made after he was accused of scamming people. Simply_kenna's apology video responds to accusations of her claiming someone else's artwork as her own.

"However, I do feel like I owe you guys an apology. I'm sorry to each and every one of you who felt like that was not made clear enough to you, and I truly honestly hope that you guys give me an opportunity to earn your trust back."

First, TmarTn offers an apology and uses *mortification* as a strategy. His apology can be viewed as ingenuine as he follows the statements of "I'm sorry" with indication that the victims were partly to blame as they did not understand the instructions correctly. The use of word "felt" lessens the impact of the apology, as he is implying that the viewers were partly to blame for the misunderstanding if they misunderstood or felt like there was lack of information. He then *requests forgiveness* by hoping to *repair the trust*. The statement includes a request for an opportunity to earn the audience's trust back, further highlighting their *request for forgiveness.* By expressing his hopes of the audience giving him a chance to rebuild trust, he is *acknowledging* the need for repair.

"I hope you'll hear these words; I hope they'll mean something. I hope they'll mend what I have torn. Although, I know for some, this won't be enough."

Simply_kenna's apology was made in poetry form which differentiated it from the other videos, and her statements could be in some instances a little vague. Here she indirectly proposes *a request for forgiveness* saying that she hopes that her poem will lead to her forgiveness and stating that she hopes her apologetic words will mend what has been torn. This excerpt also includes the phrase "Although, I know for some, this won't be enough" which is implying that she is aware that some viewers may not be satisfied with the apology. She is indirectly suggesting that those who do not accept her *request for forgiveness*, may have unreasonable expectations or biases against her. This is a form of *attack accuser,* as she is trying to diminish the credibility of the accuser.

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6. Conclusion and Discussion

This thesis aimed to give insight into what linguistic features are included in YouTube apology videos and how they are integrated in the videos. Based on the findings, it can be gathered that YouTube apology videos are multi-layered and incorporate several different apology components and image repair strategies. Findings also suggest that many aspects need to be taken into consideration when determining the perceived effectiveness of the apologies. This study included framework on how YouTubers use image repair strategies and apology components to create their apologies.

Based on Lewicki et al.'s apology components, it was found that an expression of regret and an explanation for why the offense occurred were the most popular apology components in the videos, and from Benoit's image repair strategies, bolstering and mortification were most frequently included. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, this thesis demonstrated examples of how these two theories manifested in the apology videos. It was found that strategies of bolstering, mortification, accident, corrective action, defeasibility and attack accuser were most frequently included together with different apology components. Furthermore, the excerpts illustrated common trends in the apologies, such as the utilization of self-deprecating bolstering, and instances of mortification or expression of regret being frequently combined with corrective action and with attempts to reduce offensiveness.

In reviewing the limitations of this thesis, a few observations about the findings need to be highlighted. First, the acknowledgement of the relatively small data which limits the ability to draw general conclusions, should be noted. The small scope can be a contributing factor in why some components or strategies failed to appear at all. Additionally, it is worth noting that the volume of the most used strategies also effects the frequency in which they appear together with the apology components. For example, if a video incorporated many apology components and a certain image repair strategy, it was more likely that these appeared together in the combined analysis. It is also to be noted that the frequency between the apology components and image repair strategies can also be dependent on the specific context of the videos in this data. Furthermore, if an apology included all components and employed several strategies, the effectiveness of the apology cannot be based on these findings alone. The analysis indicated that context had a significant role in determining he effectiveness, aligning with previous findings by Lewicki et al. and Benoit (2016; 2014). It was suggested that effectiveness of the utilized linguistic practices ultimately depend on factors such as audience response and the severity of the offense, as well as the overall behaviour and reputation of the creator.

Based on the critical reflections, a few notions for future research can be presented. Firstly, future research should also see which practices combined provide an effective apology. Also, the inclusion of audience response and the examination of the comments section would be beneficial. Comparing these responses with the theories provided by Lewicki et al. and Benoit would possibly provide valuable insights. Additionally, further studies could consider factors such as the severity of the offense, the reputation of the creator, consistency of the creator's future actions and the overall context in which the apology is received. The consideration of these additional factors, along with apology components and image repair strategies, may help social media creators with providing more effective apologies. All in all, this study gives insight into the linguistic practices used in YouTube apologies while providing a preliminary framework for further studies.

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