

Visual narrative and humour in vines

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the visual narrative and humorous nature of vines, the popular six-second videos that trended in social media around 2013-2016. Little study has been made of vines or micro-videos in general despite their still relevant presence in social media. To study the vines' humorous nature, a paper titled "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication" (2006) written by John C. Meyers will be used as reference, and a visual narrative analysis used for comic strips from Neil Cohn's "Visual narrative structure" (2013) is used when analysing the vines and their narrative structure. This is because vines often resemble comics structurally and visually because of their hectic pacing and short timeframe. By combining these theories this thesis will look into what made vines so popular and why their humour and visual narrative structure is unique.

Key words: visual narrative, Vine, theory of humour, social media

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1. Introduction

Because of its importance in creating and maintaining social relationships, it is not surprising that humour is a subject that has been studied over the years from many different angles and perspectives. This thesis studies how vines, the popular six-second videos that trended on social media in 2013-2016, create their humorous nature by analysing them through their visual narrative structure and the theory of humour. The analysis is based on a sample size of popular vines that were prominent both in Vine itself and other social media platforms. Some of these vines have influenced popular culture as well by staying alive as winged words in social media. Previous studies regarding social media platforms and forms of communication via micro-videos include "Creating micro-videos to demonstrate technology learning and digital literacy" (2016) by Mark Frydenberg and Diana Andone and "YouthTube: Youth Video Authorship on YouTube and Vine" (2016) by Svetlana Yarosh et.al. and these will be used as reference when discussing what micro-videos are and what the difference between Vine and YouTube is, since these two video-sharing platforms share many similarities. In this thesis, however, I chose to focus on vines' narrative structure and humour to try and unravel vines' unique features and longevity on social media. Based on "Visual Narrative Structure" (2013) by Neil Cohn, vines are roughly divided into two main categories and three subcategories. The vine' individual structures are examined more closely by identifying their narrative structure using Cohn's five basic narrative categories: Establisher, Initial, Prolongation, Peak, and Release. For the theory of humour, I will use John C. Meyers's "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor" (2000) that discusses the functions of humour. In the analysis, I will be combining these two theories to showcase how the vines' visual narrative structure combined with the humour present in them make them a unique media form. The analysed vines are visualized in a comic strip-like manner with the basic narrative categories indicating where each panel belongs in. These narrative categories form the narrative arc of the vine. This ensures that the visual narrative and rapid event structure is represented as accurately as possible.

2. What is Vine and where did it come from?

This thesis introduces two categories of previous research: the first will look into media studies that have focused on Vine or other micro-videos and how they differ from other social media platforms like YouTube. The other part focuses on visual narrative structure and how it can be used to analyse vines, and the theory of humour that is used when analysing the content of the videos. This will provide a multifaceted basis for the analysis so that the vines can be analysed comprehensively. To avoid confusion, it should be noted that in this paper "Vine" refers to the net site Vine, while "vine" refers to an individual six-second video.

Vine started on 24th of January 2013 when Twitter introduced the new video-sharing platform on their blog. Twitter described it as "a mobile service that lets you capture and share short looping videos." (@sippey) The defining characteristic of the video sharing platform was that the videos had to be micro-videos, lasting six seconds or less, a concept that had not been introduced by other social media platforms before. Because the time restriction was a new concept, Vine soon became very popular among other social medias like Instagram and YouTube. Of its 39 million videos multiple vine compilations have been made, most of them being on YouTube. These compilations usually reference the most popular vines, although compilations of rarer vines have been made. Despite its popularity, Vine shut down abruptly in January 2017 due to economic reasons with a lot of its user base still active. Even though Vine was shut down, new micro-video platforms like TikTok (previously known as musical.ly) emerged to replicate the concept of short videos.

When starting to gather materials for this thesis, a big problem presented itself. Vine had been shut down in January 2017, and while an archive was supposedly up and running, it was for unknown reasons inaccessible. This archive would have been a similar site to Vine when it was still operating but without the feature to add more content. An archive like this

would have been ideal for gathering the needed material. This inaccessibility presented a problem, and while many vines were reuploaded into YouTube, I was hesitant to use it as a source. This was because of two reasons. The first one is that even if the reuploaded vines were sometimes posted by the same person who made them (since some creators from Vine switched to YouTube after the shutdown), most of the ones used in this study were reuploaded by someone else. This would mean that the sources used in this thesis would not lead to the original creator, and out of respect for the original creators and Vine in general, I did not use this method. The second reason is that many vines in YouTube belong to a bigger compilation and marking all the short timestamps in each video would have been confusing and time-consuming.

With this challenge, the gathering of the original sources proved to be more troublesome than previously planned. Fortunately, finding a link to the original creator or the original vine itself would direct you to Vine's working archive. Luckily, some YouTube videos of the reuploaded vines offered the link, but most of them did not. The rest of the vines chosen for this paper required heavy use of internet's search engines. If the real name or username of the creator was known, sometimes using it as a search word with a key word from the vine would come up with a link to the original vine. This process was repeated with varying results until all the links to the original creators' individual vine was found.

3. Background

To study what makes vines funny, it is best to look into both their narrative structure and the nature of humour they present since they are often linked together. Many sit-coms and other humorous entertainment are heavily dependent on proper pacing to create the humour, and a pacing too slow or too fast does not allow the audience a proper interval to react to the scene presented to them. Unlike sit-coms, vines are extremely fast paced and allow little to no intervals for the audience to take in the information, and because of the six second time limit, the vines are densely packed with distinctive audio-visual cues. These cues can be arranged in a comic-strip like formation in order to study their narrative structure. This structure is one aspect that creates the humour, but often the vines reference other media or trends that are easily recognisable to the audience. The narrative structure together with the content of the vines is what creates the humour, and the situations the audience expects and the situation that the vine presents often differ, creating an incongruity between them. This incongruity between the expectations of the audience and the content of the vine is an essential feature of vines' humour and it is something that many micro-videos that came after vines still rely on. To study the vines and their narrative structure and humour, they will first be roughly categorised to identify common narrative features that popular vines tend to follow. After the initial categorisation, the vines will be studied individually to see a more detailed picture of the vines using the narrative theory in "Visual narrative structure" (2013) by Neil Cohn. Lastly, the vines' content will be analysed to see what makes vines humorous through the theory of humour that is introduced in "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication" (2000) by John C. Meyers.

3.1 Visual narrative structure in vines

To see how micro-videos are generally created, Mark Frydenberg and Diana Andone decided to test how students create a vine when they are required to demonstrate their understanding of a topic in a short period of time. They published their findings in a study called "Creating micro-videos to demonstrate technology learning and digital literacy" (2016). As a conclusion they said that "this exercise exposed students to new ways to express themselves and think creatively" (107). The students demonstrated so called "visual agility" that brought creativity into the final product. This visual agility could be considered to be a defining feature of vines since most of the popular ones have a distinct, hectic narrative to them. Despite this fast pace, the vines are not hard to follow and they can convey a lot of information in a short period of time. The study also demonstrated that while six seconds is a short period of time, most participants chose to include multiple shorter shots to convey the information they had to share more efficiently. This requires the aforementioned visual agility. Because the six second timeframe is so short, editing out any unnecessary footage like taking a breath before speaking or changing the speaker condenses the video so that it can fit all necessary information.

This visual agility and editing prompted me to study the vines and their structure more closely. The vines seemed to follow a few distinctive patterns in their narrative structure, and with that I decided to categorise them based on the video's editing and what kind of narrative structure the video had. The first category looks into the vines' editing and whether they are heavily edited and minimally edited or non-edited videos. Editing in this context includes frequent cut scenes, adding or removing elements like music, text or other visual elements, and excessive zooming. Non-edited vines use minimum to none of these features. It should be noted that music that is not added in editing like music playing from a radio while filming is not counted as an edited vine. This category focuses on the visual agility of the vines and what kinds of features are added or omitted when trying to create a humorous effect. Since most of the vines in this study are edited, it's interesting to see how

the non-edited vines create humour when there is no editing present in them. Non-edited vines would presumably rely on other methods to create humour.

The next categories presented can fall into either previously mentioned main category depending on the editing of the vine. This category focuses on the general narrative structure of the vine, meaning what kind of action or scene is present in it. By looking at the overall narrative structure of the vines, they seem to follow a few simple patterns. Some vines end in an escalating situation, or the “main event” is only beginning when the vine is ending. A situation a vine like this could depict is, for example, a cat walking on the edge of a full bathtub and falling into it right as the video ends. This kind of narrative structure is an escalating narrative structure. Another common narrative structure in popular vines is a structure where the video includes the whole escalating situation and offers some kind of resolution, like the cat climbing out of the tub and splattering water everywhere. This kind of video would have a peaking narrative structure. The last common structure in vines is when nothing particularly shocking happens. A video like this would perhaps only show the cat walking on the bathtub, the viewer expecting something to happen and the vine ending without any resolution to the situation. This kind of video would follow a flat narrative structure, where there is no Peak in the narrative. It’s also possible that a flat narrative arc has Peaks, but the Peaks are repeated in such a way that the overall narrative does not have one big meaningful Peak, but several smaller ones. These small repetitive Peaks create an overall flat narration. To study these structures, this paper introduces the visual narrative theory in Neil Cohn’s article “Visual narrative structure” (2013) that explains how narrative works and what kind of parts it consists of. The visual narrative structure in vines is an important part when creating a humorous effect.

3.2 How visual narrative structure works

Neil Cohn’s article originally covers comic-strips and their structure, but because vines are very short and often edited into even smaller pieces, it is easy to convey the short moments

as comic like strips. Like comic strips, vines consist of short scenes that can be arranged into a visual narrative arc, and because vines are so densely built, the essential parts of them can quite easily be depicted as still images. Cohn's statement "Images generally look like objects in the world, and actions in the world are understood perceptually; thus, the argument would go, understanding sequential images should be just like seeing events" (413) supports this similarity between vines and comics. In his article Cohn explains how a visual narrative works. The visual narrative of a comic strip or a vine consists of smaller scenes that can be analysed by looking at what is happening in that particular scene. When a comic strip's panel presents a big explosion, that panel presents a peak in the story, meaning something very meaningful has just happened in the story. Similarly, in a vine, the peak in the video could depict a person breaking a lamp because they threw something at it. These individual scenes can be analysed based on what is happening in them and how and why it is meaningful in the story. Those scenes can be then placed in the correct narrative category. Cohn's article introduces five distinctive narrative categories. A conventional story or scene includes all five categories in the presented order:

Establisher [E]: The establisher sets the environment without any significant action.

The Establisher usually depicts a static state that sets the environment and lays groundwork for the following scene. It does not initiate an action and the characters present are usually in a passive state. For example, a teenager listening to music with their Bluetooth headphones on could be an Establisher for a narrative arc, but it does not show the direction of the narrative sequence. If the teenager started to sing along or dance to the music, the panel or scene develops into an Initial. According to Hermann (2009a), cited by Cohn, Establishers can function as "story builders" and are common in "world-building" where the panel, action or world is introduced for the first time.

Initial [I]: The initial starts a sequence of action or makes active process in the already started action.

The Initial usually follows the Establisher and it starts the action or changes the direction of the action that another Initial before it has started. The Initial is important since it acts as a catalyst to the following narrative sequences. As such, it involves action that sets the tone and directs the characters or sequence in a clear direction. The Initial's function is to catch the viewer's attention and establish a milieu that the viewer can recognise, and to some extent, predict the following actions. If the before mentioned teenager took off their headphones and looked at them, the viewer would assume that next they will engage in an activity that requires them to hear something or that something is wrong with the headphones. Taking off their headphones would indicate an action that starts a meaningful sequence that would further the already established narrative. As stated by Cohn, "Initials can be related to Peaks in several different ways" (423). Because of this, Initials are often diverse visually and narratively.

Prolongation [Pr]: Prolongation continues the initial by setting a direction of the action or by extending the initial further. Prolongation does not initiate new action.

Prolongations can occur in almost any part of the narrative arc, but most commonly they extend the action started in the Initial. Cohn states that "Prolongations often depict the trajectory between a Source and Goal, sometimes clarifying the manner of the path" (425), source meaning here what started in the Initial and goal meaning what will happen in the Peak, thus acting as a pause or means to add atmosphere to the sequence. Prolongations are important tension builders, especially if it is situated after Initial and before Peak. Using the teenager as an example, when they remove their headphones, a Prolongation could focus on the teenager's expression or the headphones on their hands and the low battery of the headphones. This kind of focus does not direct the action to a new direction, rather focusing on something that has already been put into motion.

Peak [Pe]: The peak is the highest part of the narrative arc. This is where the escalation of the action happens.

The Peak presents the height of the event or scene. What the Establisher, Initial and Prolongation have started and built up, the Peak culminates the result of those previous events. Peaks can also include events or actions that were not built in any of the previous narrative phases, acting as a sudden culmination, like an explosion or other unpredictable event. Continuing with the previous example, the headphones running out of battery and the teenager tossing them on the bed would be the culmination of the event. This throwing motion and movement would be a natural Peak. While the classical narrative arc only has one Peak, narrative arcs in general can have multiple Peaks. Peaks sometimes rely on surprises or shock value, and Cohn notes that “a surprise would be difficult to reveal in a place other than the culmination of a narrative.” (422)

Release [R]: Release is the aftermath of the peak and shows how the action ended.

The Release is the last narrative category, and it shows the aftereffects of the previous action before it. Releases are sometimes omitted from the narrative arc since they can sometimes over-explain the situation or take away from the impact of the Peak. The reverse is also possible, where the action is not shown and only the Release offers the explanation to the situation.

These narrative categories can be joined in any way, and not all narrative arcs follow the same [Establisher, Initial, Prolongation, Peak, Release] structure. As later will be discussed, vines tend to omit certain categories almost completely, and do not rely on the conventional narrative structure. This particular sample size of popular vines was gathered based on three qualities: their unique visual or narrative features, their loop count and how much they are referenced on other social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter. First, the structure of the vines is studied more closely to see how they differ from more traditional forms of media. Later, the content of the vines is analysed to see how it creates the humour in them. The vines will be presented in comic strips with the basic narrative

categories [Establisher, Initial, Prolongation, Peak and Release] indicating where each panel belongs to and a transcription of the audio, sometimes with additional information embedded into it.

3.3 Incongruity in humour and vines

This theory of humour used in this thesis is based on John C. Meyers's "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication" (2000) which divides humour in four functions based on the theory of humour and the social function of the situation.

Meyers names the theories of humour as "the relief theory, which focuses on physiological release of tension; the incongruity theory, singling out violations of a rationally learned pattern; and the superiority theory, involving a sense of victory or triumph." (310) He further explains that the incongruity theory, the most prominent theory present in popular vines, is based on the element of surprise and deviation from learned schemes (i.e. learned patterns of behaviour and social norms) which is what people base their knowledge of the world on.

Meyers's functions of humour are based on the relationship between the recipient of the humour and the provider of the humour. The two categories that define the function of the humour are the *topic* of the humour (e.g. politics, dogs or marriage) and the way the provider's *values* align with the topic (e.g. do they deem the topic as something good or something bad). In total there are four basic functions, the relevant ones for this study being identification and clarification.

Identification occurs when the provider of humour is familiar with the issue at hand and shows a safe, relatable environment for the recipient to integrate into. This position sometimes relies on self-deprecating jokes or other, sometimes obvious observations. Identification aims to lift the recipient to the same level as the provider.

Clarification can be described as a summary of the provider's values or attitudes in a humorous manner. This "serves to clarify social norms without a sense of correction or

censure of anyone involved.” (319). This form of humour strives to convey a message without reprimanding the opposition or other recipients. Clarification does however, to some extent, lean on breaking the social norms present in the social group.

The theories of humour apply to the nature of the humour, meaning if it is meant to be perhaps tension-relieving or absurd, while the functions of humour apply to the social situation and the intention of the provider, meaning if they are trying to find common ground or separation with the receiver. The function of humour relies heavily on the social context of the situation, so it is important to note that misunderstandings can happen between participants. Furthermore, the provider of the humour does not have to be a person, and in this thesis, the provider of humour is the vine video itself. From these theories, the incongruity theory is the most present in vines, and the functions of humour that are usually related to it are the identification and clarification functions. This means that most vines rely on the recipient being (fairly) familiar with the subject at hand, and they agree with the provider’s values regarding the topic. Myers states that “correct sociocultural perspective” (321) is needed in order to know when incongruity in humour is happening. To create the humorous effect, the receiver needs to have two scenarios in mind: a scenario constructed by norms that are socioculturally acceptable and a scenario where these norms are broken. As Myers says, “Individuals must have rationally come to understand normal patterns of reality before they can notice differences.” (313) These differences can be exploited when communicating through humour good naturedly, or in Meyers’s words “Identification and clarification humor --- show the violation [of correct sociocultural perspective] as a humorous exception to the normal, reassuring, relaxing state that is expected and that, it is implied, will soon return undisturbed.” (325).

In conclusion, incongruity in humour aims to unite people without corrective action rather than separate them or punish them for reacting “wrong” to the humour. Most vines seem to base their humour on solidarity rather than differentiation; we are laughing with them, not at them. This connection creates an identification or clarification between the participants, in this case the vine being the provider of humour and the person watching it

being the receiver. Meyers quotes Veatch (1992), who mentions the term “affective absurdity” (313). Meyers states that “Veatch (1992) makes incongruity through ‘affective absurdity’ the centrepiece of his humour theory, which holds that a humorous situation must involve a perceiver simultaneously having in mind one view of a situation that seems normal, and one view where there is a violation of the moral or natural order.” (313).

The vine “Real housewives of Vine” by Luke Abercrombie demonstrates well how visual narrative structure and the aforementioned affective absurdity create the humour in vines. This vine was one of the most popular ones when Vine was active, and its last line has been quoted on other social media platforms regularly.

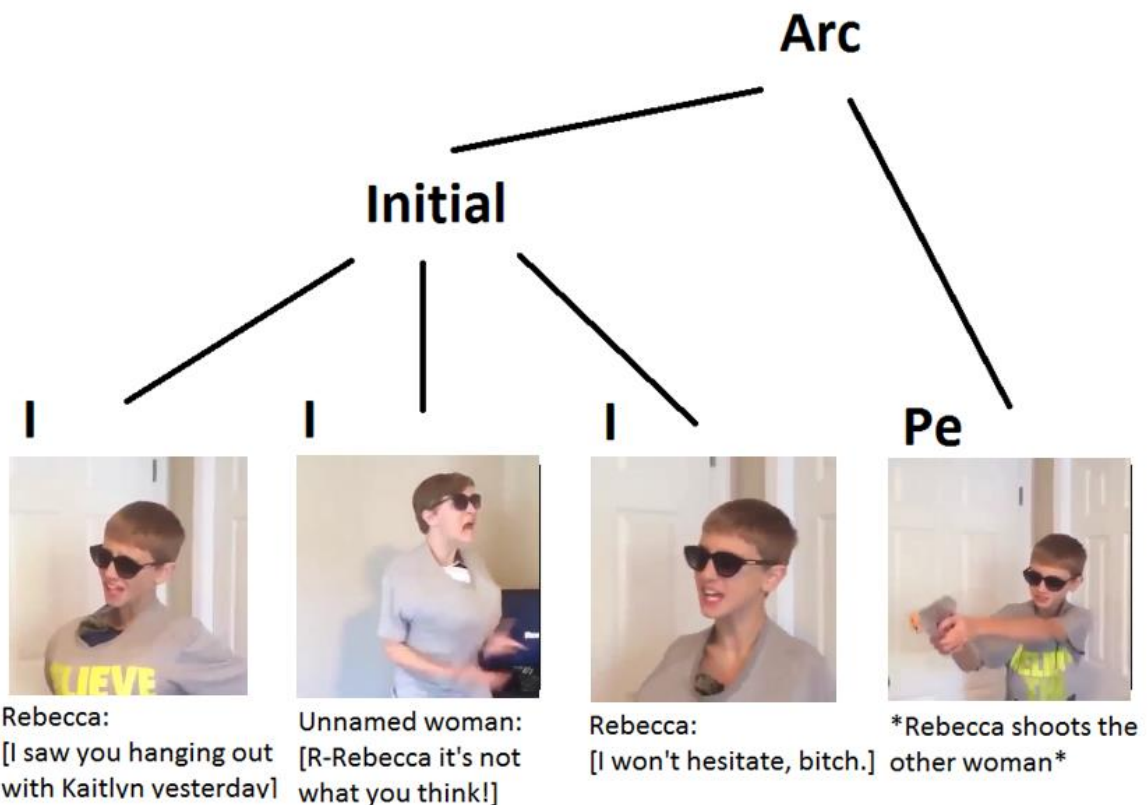


Fig. 1A

Creator: Luke Abercrombie

Name: Real housewives of Vine

Date: 19.10.2015

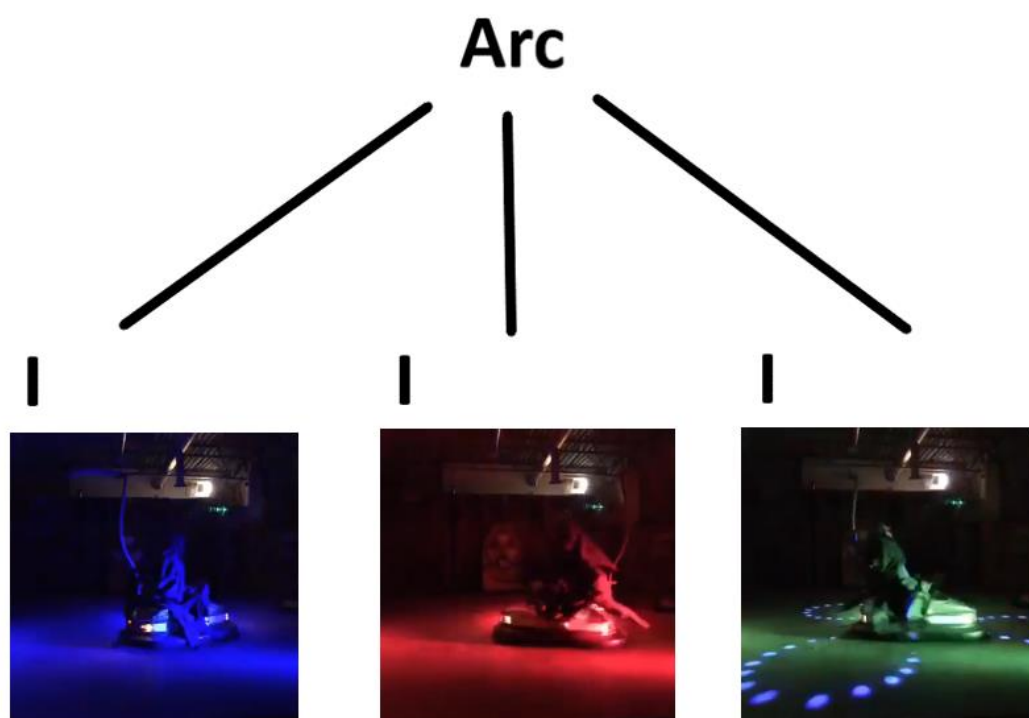
Loop count: 50.3 million (9.3.2019)

In the vine two people, both played by Luke Abercrombie, are fighting over apparently incorrect social norms. The unnamed woman has been spending time with a woman called Kaitlyn, and this has angered Rebecca. The fight escalates quickly after Rebecca states that she will not hesitate to punish the other woman and then shoots her. Abercrombie, who plays the characters, has stuffed a pillow under his shirt to imitate female anatomy and wears sunglasses. The vine has three scenes cut into one video. The vine's structure is [Initial, Peak]. It consists of only two narrative categories, and is missing an Establisher, Prolongation and Release. The vine starts with a long Initial when Rebecca confronts the woman, and the Initial is divided into three sections. This is because when the speaker changes, it takes the action into a new direction, offering a new initiation in the situation. The end of the scene is a Peak, where the sudden shooting acts as the Peak in the narrative. The pacing is hectic, and the Peak is almost left unfinished. There is no Release at the end since the action escalates until the end. Because of this structure, the vine is an edited, escalating vine.

The video parodies reality shows, where dramatic situations are sometimes over-exaggerated to the point of absurdity. The fast escalation at the end, where Rebecca draws a gun and shoots the other woman, creates absurdity to the situation. The vine creates identification in the audience who have rationally come to expect a different kind of confrontation, usually a verbal one, from other media content like "The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" that the vine parodies. A parody is a good example of incongruity since the way it creates humour is to escalate the topic to a preposterous scale, and in vines this escalation is easy to achieve in a short period of time. Because of the time limit, there is also no need or time to offer any kind of conclusion to the scene. Ending the video so that the audience is deprived of the next scene leaves the situation open. Revealing too much can be worse than showing too little. If a Release scene would be added, it would take away from the absurdity of the situation.

4. Analysis

As seen in the first vine, humorous effects of vines are usually built by combining sociocultural influences such as trends or popular media figures, the unique visual narrative structure in vines, and various audio-visual features like music or editing. This chapter analyses four popular vines that create humour in different ways. These vines have a high loop count and trended on social media during Vine's active days. The first vine is filmed by Tim Chester and features an attraction in the amusement park Dismaland, Banksy's parody of Disneyland.



* Bee Gees - Staying Alive plays in the background*

The Grim Reaper is spinning in a bumper car with neon lights flashing in the background

Fig. 1B

Creator: Tim Chester

Name: Grim reaper spinning to the Bee Gees at Dismaland

Date: 20.8.2015

Loop count: 21.6 million (5.3.2020)

The vine is filmed in Banksy's parody amusement park called Dismaland, a word play on Disneyland. The Grim Reaper is sitting in a bumper car and he is spinning around while Bee Gees' Staying Alive is playing in the background. There are neon lights flashing around him. The song is not edited over the video, and there are no cuts or zooms.

The vine's structure is [Initial, Initial, Initial]. This structure is not seen as much, as many vines have or end in a Peak in order to create tension in the narrative. There is no escalating action or an establishing scenario, and the action does not peak at any point. Because of this the structure is a single Initial that creates the whole narrative arc, and it counts as an unedited vine with a flat narrative arc.

In this vine, the humour does not come so much from the structure and visual elements of the vine, but the ironic context that it is portrayed in. The surface level of irony comes from the juxtaposition of the song and the Grim Reaper. Pairing Staying Alive with the personification of death creates affective absurdity: we understand the irony in the situation and find the black humour in it amusing. As the pairing of the two is contradictory, our reaction to it is incongruous by nature. A deeper level of irony is revealed when the receiver is aware of the connection to Banksy and his art works. Banksy is a street artist and is known for his political satire and obscure art that is sometimes created in illegal ways like spray-painting walls where it is prohibited. The subjects of his paintings shed light to social injustice and the hypocrisy in the current political climate. Knowing this, the receiver can understand the vine from a deeper sociocultural perspective, where Banksy's history of making satirical commentary through art is seen in the juxtaposition of the song and the Grim Reaper.

Because of these two levels, either identification or clarification can happen. Some people might identify the milieu and connect the vine to Banksy's Dismaland immediately, while other people might only grasp the surface level irony and need clarification to understand the underlying black humour. The Grim Reaper vine, like Abercrombie's vine, relies on parody to create the humour. In addition to that, the Grim Reaper vine utilises black humour and irony to create a deeper level of humour that is apparent to those who know the specific sociocultural context that is needed to understand the vine. The next vine creates humour similarly through affective absurdity, and in addition has had particularly long-lasting effect on social media because of the frequent referencing of its content.

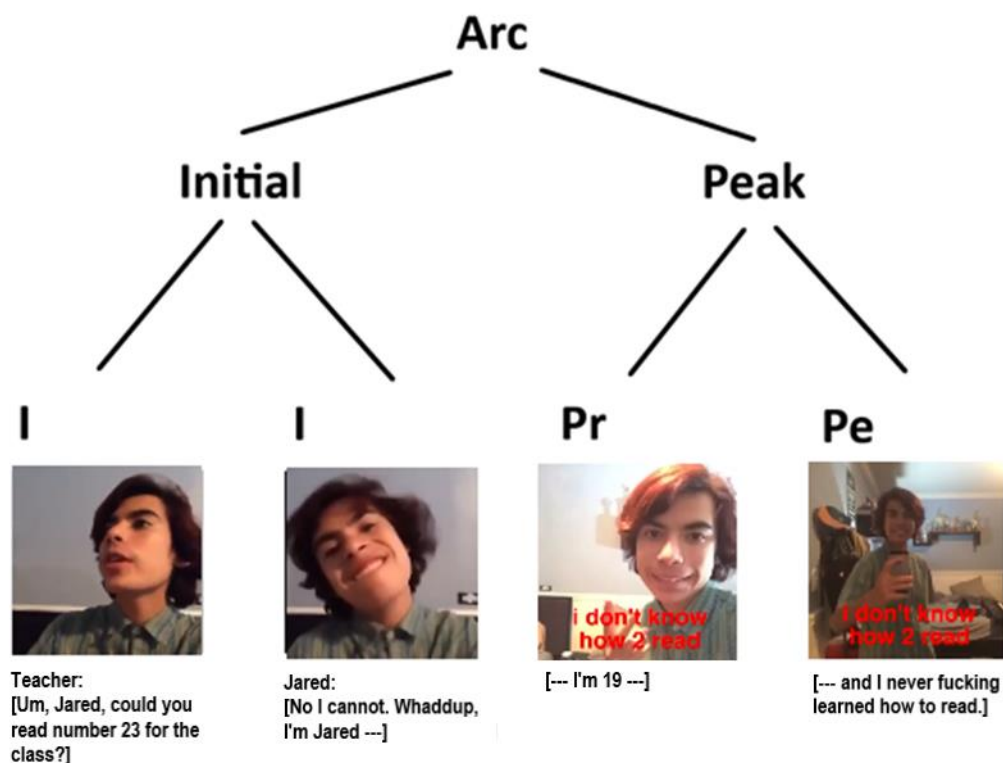


Fig. 1C

Creator: Josh Kennedy

Name: unnamed

Date: 5.6.2015

Loop count: 27.9 million (5.3.2020)

The vine stars Josh Kennedy who plays two different characters, a teacher and a student named Jared. The teacher asks if Jared can read a certain page from a book to which Jared answers that he cannot and continues to introduce himself to the audience as Jared who is 19 and who never learned how to read. During this, the video changes to show still images of Jared with the caption "i don't know how 2 read" with him in different poses. The vine's structure is [Initial, Initial, Prolongation, Peak]. The vine starts with the teacher's request for Jared to read which acts as the Initial to the situation. As the speaker changes from the teacher to Jared, a new Initial begins when he answers to the teacher and the scene is cut to focus on him. The vine then changes to show still images of Jared with his voice over explaining how he cannot read. The first still image acts as a Prolongation since Jared's explanation has already started an Initial. The last still image where he reveals that he never learned to read act as the Peak. The vine is an edited vine because of the voice over and cuts and is a peaking vine because of its structure. This is one of the more common types of vines, and as Andone and Frydenberg stated in their findings, many vines consist of smaller cuts or scenes since it allows more information to be conveyed. This in turn requires visual agility to understand what parts from the footage is essential and what is disposable. Although visual agility might suggest high skills in editing, it rather means having a good understanding of efficient output of information with the help of audio-visual cues. This vine does not include anything unnecessary, and the characters' lines take up all six seconds of it.

There are two levels of irony in the vine. Similar to the Grim Reaper vine, the first layer of irony is obvious to most people: it is absurd that a 19-year-old teenager who goes to school does not know how to read. Once again, affective absurdity is created by the contradiction of him not knowing how to read while attending school, which in turn creates the humour with the help of the odd editing choices of adding still images where he poses in slightly uncomfortable positions. While the incongruity in the situation is clear, the deeper level of irony comes from the word choices in the vine. Teachers sometimes joke that if a student asks them if they "can" do something like go to the bathroom, sometimes they answer that no they cannot, but they "may". In the vine, Jared tries to argue this same comeback for the

teacher even though the teacher did not say “can” which could also mean “be able to”. At this point, Jared looks somewhat childish and silly since his comeback was unsuccessful. This is then turned around again when Jared states that he is in fact unable to read the text, something the teacher did not even originally insinuate. The first level of irony creates identification within the audience, especially if they have experienced a situation like this before. Clarification might be needed to those who are not aware of the linguistic joke.

The vine’s line “I’m Jared, I’m 19” is also something that is still used as a reaction when something unpleasant is encountered in social media. The quote indicates that the social media user would have rather never seen the content that they were presented with, indicating that they wish they could not read. This longevity of quotes from vine is something that is not so common with other social media platforms and their content, perhaps because vine’s short timeframe does not allow a lot of speaking lines. This would mean that everything that is said needs to have meaning and purpose, which could make the sentences more memorable.

The next vine introduces an uncommon structure and it has not been quoted as frequently as Kennedy’s vine, but showcases the affective absurdity in vines clearly.

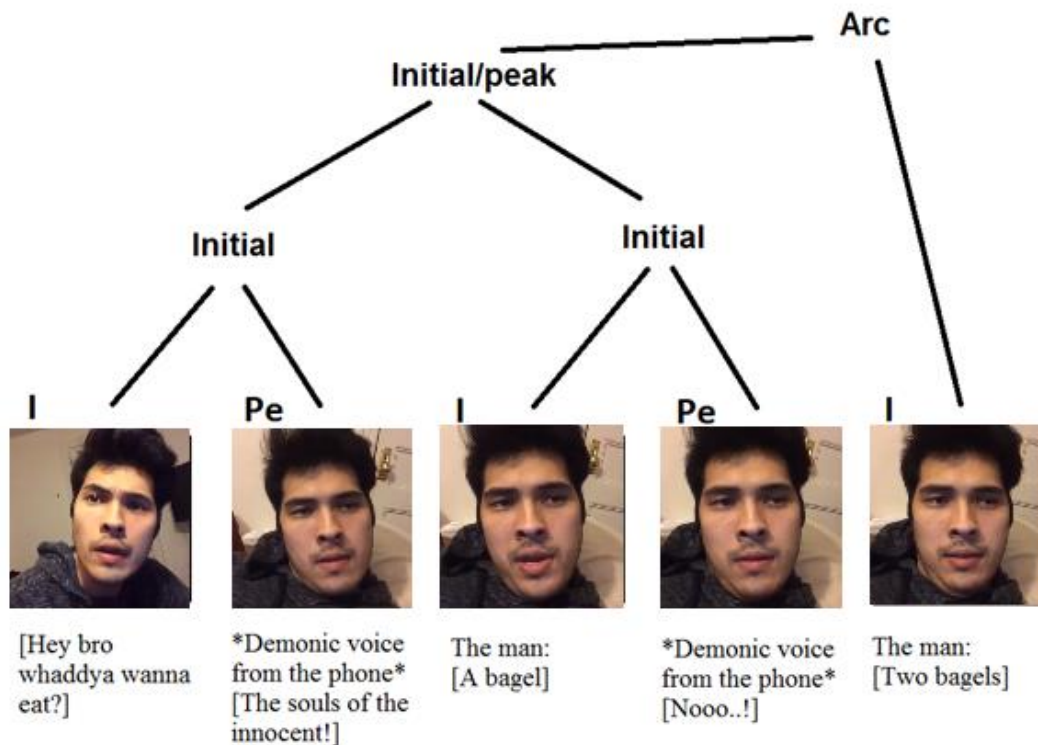


Fig. 1D

Creator: Matt Post

Name: When your bro who is always high gets possessed, but the demon isn't powerful enough to phase him

Date: 5.6.2015

Loop count: 24.9 million (5.3.2020)

Matt Post's vine "When your bro who is always high gets possessed, but the demon isn't powerful enough to phase him" features two men both played by Matt Post. One of them is possessed by a demon, but because he seems to be under the influence of marihuana based on his vacant expression and slow reflexes, the demon has no effect on him. The demon's voice is distorted as it speaks through a low-quality microphone. The possessed man speaks on behalf of the demon, presumably because the other man in the vine cannot hear him. The dialogue is filmed in separate shots, and when the speaker changes between the two men, a new shot begins. The vine is an edited vine with a flat narrative.

The vine has a structure of [Initial, Peak, Initial, Peak, Initial]. The vine's structure is somewhat unusual, since it introduces three Initials and two Peaks. The vine starts with an Initial when the man asks what the possessed man would like to eat. If the next panel is analysed as an individual panel separate from the rest, the dialogue would indicate a Peak in a conversation with the demanding tone and line of the demon. The first Initial and the Peak form a pair of narrative categories that is repeated in the vine one and a half times over, where the third panel acts as an Initial to the fourth panel where the demon strongly objects the request for a bagel. The fourth panel makes the second Peak, and the fifth panel, following the same pattern as before, would start another narrative pair of an Initial and a Peak. Because the unusual structure of the vine with the back and forth dialogue, the overall flat narrative structure that is supported by the unchanging visuality of the vine. There are no Establishers, Prolongations or Releases in the vine, something that is common throughout the sample vines in this thesis. They are the categories that are most often discarded since they do not hold as much importance to the overall narrative structure.

The vine's humour comes from its unassuming visuality and the methods it uses to create the dialogue. The bad quality of the demon's lines itself is amusing as well as the spaced-out expression of the possessed man. The affective absurdity largely comes from the dialogue where the possessed man requests a bagel instead the demon's demand of souls of the innocent. When the demon protests, the possessed man requires two bagels instead, presumably so that they can each have one. The unassuming bagel and the nonplussed expression of the possessed man contradicts the demon's raspy voice and request. The recipient of the humour can easily pick up on this and is presumably amused by it.

The last vine to be analysed is a remake of another, very popular vine by Chloe France. While in Vine it was somewhat popular to remake famous vines, it is especially prominent in TikTok that has largely based its concept on recreating already existing videos or lip syncing to popular songs.

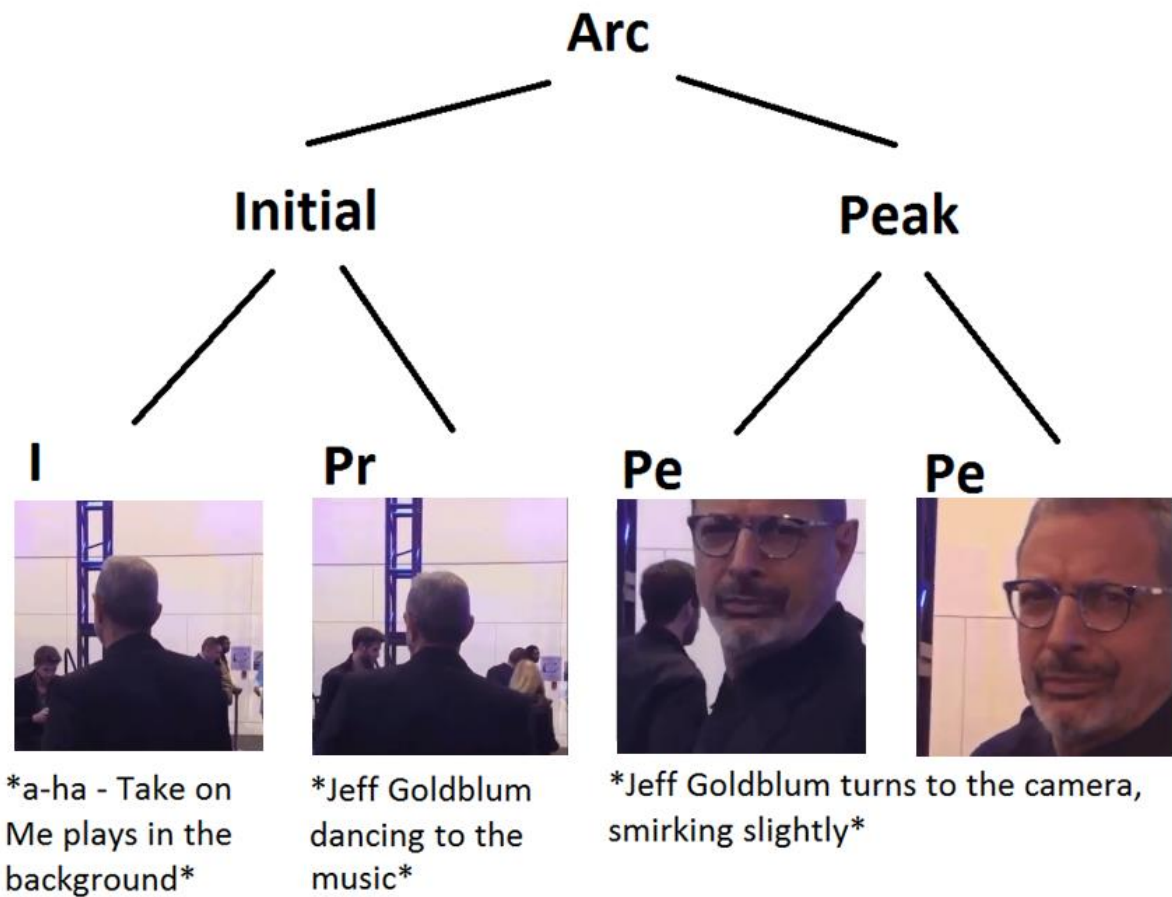


Fig. 1E

Remade vine:

Creator: Entertainment Weekly

Name: who is he ft. Jeff Goldblum

Date: 5.2.2016

Loop count: 36.6 million, Mar 9th 2019.

Original vine:

Creator: Chloe France

Name: who is she

Date: 2.7.2015

Loop count: 121.1 million (6.3.2020)

The vine featuring Jeff Goldblum from Entertainment Weekly is a reference to Chloe Frances' original vine called "who is she". In the vines they both dance to A-ha's song "Take on Me", and at the electrical keyboard's peak in the intro they turn to the camera. The song is edited over the video. Immediately after the turn the camera zooms into their face. Goldblum's face is one of slight mirth. Based on the quality and unsteady filming, the vine is filmed on a camera phone.

The vine is structured as [Initial, Prolongation, Peak]. The Initial and Prolongation create the first section of the vine, and the Peak creates the second section. The Initial action sets the direction of the vine, and as Goldblum dances, it Prolongates the action. The Peak happens in two parts, when he turns and when the camera zooms into his face. The vine does not have Establisher or Release panels, because the action in the vine is already in motion, and no release is given. A possible release would be for example Goldblum laughing or walking away. Because of the edited audio and zooming and narrative structure this vine is an edited, peaking vine.

The humour in the video relies on incongruity. Because the vine is a remake of a previous popular vine with a loop count of 121.1 million loops, it can be assumed that many users had seen the original vine. As such, the audience has formed a "correct sociocultural perspective" and realize that the remake of the vine is a deviation from the original scenario. This intertextuality between the two vines creates clarification in the audience, contributing to the humorous effects in the vine. Additionally, the person in the vine is not easily recognized as Jeff Goldblum before he turns around. This adds more incongruity to the vine. The humour function in the vine relies on clarification. The vine presents a scenario, and the audience understands the original message of the vine while simultaneously creating a new perspective, allowing the audience to relate to the subject without correction. This incongruity and clarification between the two scenarios create the humour.

If the overall structure and narrative categories of the vines is considered, it is apparent that they rely almost solely on Initials and Peaks to create their overall narrative structure. There are no Establishers or Releases since all the vines begin with an Initial and end in a Peak or another Initial. Since a vine is only six to seven seconds long, it is sometimes necessary to remove all narrative phases that are not needed. In the case of Matt Post's vine, only the Initial and Peak remain from the narrative categories, and in The Grim Reaper vine only one long Initial is present. Overall, only two of the vines have Prolongations, and the rest consist of only Initials and Peaks. These "bare bones" of the narrative structure are enough to hold it together and still be understandable. Cohn stresses the importance of Peaks in his study and how deleting any other part of the narrative sequence does not disturb the arc in a meaningful way. This is evident in most of the analysed vines, but it should be noted that in some vines the absence of the narrative Peak is what creates the humour. An example of this kind of vine is The Grim Reaper vine. Cohn states that "many strips are funny because of the Release. --- The culmination occurs in the Peak, but the actual punchline is delivered in the Release. Thus, Releases provide an important panel for humour, perhaps because they convey an aftermath, response, or a (relatively) passive follow-up to the climax of the sequence." (423).

This is the biggest difference between Cohn's take on narrative structure and the structure found in most vines. Because vines are so short the most easily discarded steps of the narrative arc are left out. Contrary to what Cohn states, the Release would be considered an expendable narrative sequence in this case. This could also be a case of the "visual agility" that Frydenberg and Andone mentioned in their study. To create easily and quickly consumable media, vines must be condensed into a form that keeps the narrative structure intact while simultaneously conveying as much information as possible. Comparing this to more traditional media like the sitcom series "Friends", vines seem to rely on the speed of the medium and the "visual agility" that is needed to create these videos. Sitcoms tend to rely on the Release more than the Peak, and in some ways they guide the audience to react in a certain way. A laugh track is usually a sign for the audience to laugh, but vines do not offer these kinds of social cues. So in vines only the "bare bones" are left from the narrative

categories, most of the time consisting only of Initials and Peaks, where the Initials acts as the premise for the vine and the Peak culminates the action.

5. Conclusion

The point of vines is to bring out strong, temporary bursts of emotion in people. Their absurd humour, fast pacing and visual agility created a new category of media content that can be consumed rapidly in large quantities. This is because vines have an unusual narrative structure that allows them to convey a lot of information in a short period of time. From Cohn's five narrative categories, only two seem to be vital in vines, the Initial and the Peak. These two narrative categories are enough to create humour in most vines. Vines also rely on sociocultural influence and references as their material. Together these two features, the fast pace and sociocultural references, create identification and clarification in the audience. The "affective absurdity", or incongruity, comes from the juxtaposition of the audience's expected scenario and the scenario that is presented in the vine. Identification happens when the audience can immediately pick up on the surface level humour in the vine. Clarification happens when the audience realizes that the vine can have multiple layers of contexts and understands the vine on a deeper level.

The sample size of this study is small, and it only analysed a small portion of popular vines. While the vines in this study rely on a very condensed narrative structure that consist of an Initial and a Peak, many other popular vines can include different narrative categories. However, all vines follow the six second time limit, and because of that it is probable that most vines would discard the most unnecessary parts of the narrative structure in order to increase their amount of information. Vines have not been studied much, and even when Vine's net site has been shut down, micro-videos continue to offer interesting material to analyse. After Vine shut down, other media platforms emerged to continue the micro-video

trend that Vine started, the most popular one being TikTok. Despite the very similar concept, TikTok videos have not had the same kind of popularity and quotability that vines seemed to have. TikTok relies more on recreating already existing trends or video concepts rather than creating something new. They both share similar visual agility, but TikTok does not have the strict time limit that Vine had. This enables the creators to make longer videos that do not have to be condensed in the same way that vines had to be, allowing the videos to include Establishers and Releases more easily. TikTok seems to be a cross between Vine and YouTube, where the accessibility is similar to Vine but it's easier to document small pieces of everyday life in there which is more characteristic of YouTube. This would mean that Vine's uniqueness does not only come from the micro-videos' narrative structure and humour, but from the fact that it was the first site to make micro-videos a trend. Studying the differences between Vine and TikTok could be an interesting topic for future research.

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