



EVALUATING VALUE: A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ADJECTIVAL WORDS IN HIGH-END AND BUDGET SMARTPHONE REVIEWS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how reviewers linguistically construct evaluations of high-end and budget smartphones through adjective usage in YouTube video reviews. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes English captions from ten review videos and processes them with AntConc to identify frequency patterns and discourse functions. The findings show clear lexical distinctions between the two categories. High-end smartphone reviews favor adjectives such as *new*, *best*, and *better*, emphasizing innovation, premium identity, and advanced features, including emerging AI-driven functions. In contrast, budget smartphone reviews rely heavily on adjectives like *good*, *same*, and *little*, framing these devices as practical, affordable, and often built upon recycled or minimally improved components. The analysis demonstrates how evaluative language shapes consumer perceptions by positioning flagship models as technologically progressive, while presenting budget devices as sufficient within financial constraints. The discussion connects these findings to existing literature on product discourse, innovation framing, and brand image formation. Overall, the study highlights how linguistic choices in reviews influence consumer expectations, particularly regarding AI advancements in high-end smartphones and camera performance across market tiers.

Keywords: discourse analysis, smartphone reviews, adjectives, consumer perception, corpus linguistics

A. INTRODUCTION

The smartphone industry has evolved rapidly, transforming mobile devices from luxury items into essential tools that support almost every aspect of modern digital life. Major manufacturers such as Apple and Samsung collectively generated profits exceeding 120 billion USD in 2025 (Murphy & Schrifrin, 2025), illustrating the remarkable economic scale of this sector. Alongside this industry boom, a new category of influential online figures known as tech reviewers has emerged.



Tech reviewers are content creators who evaluate and explain the features, advantages, and limitations of smartphones and other technological products. Among the various platforms available, YouTube has become one of the most prominent spaces for tech review content. Notably, Marques Brownlee, one of the leading smartphone reviewers, reached nearly 20 million subscribers in 2025 (Carlin, 2025). With such a large audience, reviewers like him significantly influence public perceptions of smartphone quality and value, shaping trends in consumer behavior.

In the current digital era, consumers can easily access abundant information before making purchasing decisions. Prospective smartphone buyers increasingly rely on third-party sources to obtain honest and unbiased evaluations of smartphone features. The growth of digital platforms has further facilitated this behavior, enabling consumers to browse online product reviews effortlessly an activity shown to contribute to increased product sales (Park & Lee, 2019). As a result, tech reviewers play a crucial role in informing consumers, guiding expectations, and influencing market dynamics.

Previous studies on smartphone reviews in online platforms, particularly YouTube, have largely focused on analyzing user comments rather than the review videos themselves. For instance, Dinaryanti (2023) examined comments on high-end smartphones such as the Samsung Galaxy S22 Ultra, iPhone 13 Pro, and Xiaomi 12 Pro, concluding that users tend to discuss price, software, screen quality, camera performance, and overall functionality. Meanwhile, Xie and Ding (2016) analyzed news coverage of the iPhone 13, finding that China Daily displayed biases that favored Chinese manufacturers. Another study by Laksana et al. (2025) highlighted how smartphone campaigns construct narratives that portray new devices as necessary solutions to consumers' problems, thus reinforcing the perceived need to upgrade.

Despite these contributions, existing research has not thoroughly examined the discourse within the review videos themselves. The present study addresses this gap by conducting a discourse analysis of smartphone review content on YouTube, focusing specifically on comparisons between budget and luxury phone segments. This study aims to contribute insights for consumers, helping them critically evaluate whether a review is balanced or biased, and for



manufacturers, enabling them to understand which aspects reviewers emphasize in different market categories.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Discourse Analysis

Discourse refers to a particular way of speaking, writing, or communicating shaped by rules, conventions, and shared meanings within a specific socio-cultural group. It involves the use of language to construct ideas, shape identities, and negotiate power dynamics (Alek, 2023). In a similar vein, Canning and Walker (2024) define discourse analysis as the study of how language is used in real-life contexts, emphasizing how messages are produced, delivered, and interpreted by audiences.

Taken together, these definitions highlight discourse analysis as an approach that focuses on how language is intentionally constructed to communicate particular ideas and meanings. This perspective is highly relevant to smartphone review videos, where reviewers craft messages, evaluations, and impressions for viewers seeking guidance about smartphone performance and value. The language choices used in such reviews play a significant role in constructing the image of smartphones across different market categories—whether high-end flagships or budget models. Therefore, this study examines how reviewers build these images, with a specific focus on the lexical choices employed throughout the review discourse.

Lexical Choice

The term lexical refers to vocabulary items that carry meaning, distinguishing them from structural words that primarily serve grammatical functions. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, lexical items contribute directly to meaning within a context. Adjectives, in particular, play a central role in describing attributes, qualities, and evaluations, thereby shaping the characterization of entities within a discourse.

Khafaga (2023) refers to this phenomenon as strategic lexicalization, whereby speakers deliberately select specific words to construct intended meanings. Strategic lexicalization is a widely used analytical tool in the linguistic study of both written and spoken discourse, as word choices reveal how speakers frame, evaluate, and persuade.



In discourse-based studies, lexical choices can be examined through quantitative measures such as word frequency, which captures the number of occurrences of particular lexical items within a dataset (Khafaga, *ibid*). By identifying frequently used adjectives and analyzing their surrounding words, researchers can uncover the evaluative patterns and meanings communicated through the discourse.

Adjectives form the primary focus of this study due to their descriptive and evaluative functions. As modifiers of nouns, adjectives shape the perceived characteristics and quality of the entities being discussed. The adjective-based analysis has proven useful in previous linguistic research, such as identifying discourse trends related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Idda & Sofi, 2020). In the context of smartphone reviews, adjective usage provides insight into how reviewers express opinions, construct product identities, and influence audience perceptions.

B. METHOD

This study was analysing adjective frequency in high-end smartphone and budget smartphone. The analysis is based on corpus analysis which is involves software aided analysis of electronic text (Baker, 2025). The samples were taken using purposive sampling method where intentionally chosen sample were taken to represent the whole sample (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024)

The sample in this study were chosen by using typical case sampling. Typical case sample focuses on average case wihtin the context of video review, besides that it will also provide relevant example (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, *ibid*). Based on the sampling method, there are 10 videos that are chosen. 5 videos are representative of high-end smartphone review and 5 videos are sample of budget phone review. Table 1 presents the list of the samples, including video titles, creators, view counts (as of 1 December 2025), and category classification.

Table 1. List of Data Sources Used in the Study

No.	Title	Creator	Views (1 Dec 2025)	Category	Source
1	Have they gone too far (Honor Magic V5)	Unbox Therapy	1,059,380	High End	Unbox Therapy Channel
2	iPhone 17 Review: No Asterisks!	Marques Brownlee	4,500,000	High End	MKBHD Channel
3	OPPO Find X9 Pro - My New Favourite Android Phone!	The Tech Chap	368,000	High End	The Tech Chap Channel
4	Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra Review: The Tables Have Turned!	Marques Brownlee	5,500,000	High End	MKBHD Channel
5	Apple made an iPhone for me – iPhone 17 Pro	ShortCircuit	1,000,000	High End	ShortCircuit Channel
6	Samsung Galaxy A36 & A56 Hands-On – The Best Budget Phones?	The Tech Chap	261,000	Budget	The Tech Chap Channel
7	Why is THIS the Best Selling Phone?	Mrwhosetheboss	9,100,000	Budget	Mrwhosetheboss Channel
8	The Real Truth About Nothing's Budget Phone! (30-Days Review)	TechWiser	293,000	Budget	TechWiser Channel
9	This Smartphone is \$149 – Motorola Missed the Memo...	JerryRigEverything	1,600,000	Budget	JerryRigEverything Channel
10	This \$150 Smartphone Might Be All You Need	Hardware Canucks	905,000	Budget	Hardware Canucks

After selecting the videos, the English auto-generated captions were downloaded for each source. All caption files were converted into plain-text format to ensure compatibility with corpus analysis tools. The transcripts were compiled into two separate corpora:



1. High-end smartphone review corpus
2. Budget smartphone review corpus

Corpus processing and quantitative analysis were conducted using AntConc 4.2 (Anthony, 2025). The Word List function was used to extract word frequency counts. A part-of-speech filtering procedure was manually applied to identify adjectives within the list. The top five most frequent adjectives from each corpus were selected for further analysis.

Quantitative Analysis

The chosen top five adjectives were analyzed using word frequency analysis. It is a method where the data is presented based on aspect of frequency (Baker, 2025). The frequency then will be analyzed using qualitative method.

Qualitative Discourse Analysis

Following frequency extraction, a qualitative examination was conducted to interpret how the most frequent adjectives were used in context. Concordance lines from AntConc were analyzed to identify patterns in meaning-making, such as:

- how adjectives evaluate features (e.g., new, good)
- how comparison is constructed (e.g., better, same)
- how reviewers frame technological value and performance

Examples from the transcripts were selected to illustrate typical discourse strategies used by reviewers based on given lexical choice.

Comparative Interpretation

The final stage involved synthesizing quantitative and qualitative findings to characterize the discourse used in high-end versus budget smartphone reviews. Differences were interpreted in based on existing literature on evaluative language in technology reviews, and similarities or divergences from previous studies were discussed in the Findings and Discussion section.



C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

High-end Smartphone Review

The high-end smartphone corpus contains 12,235 word tokens and 1,868 word types. From this dataset, the five most frequent adjectives used to describe high-end smartphones are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Top Five Adjectives in High-End Smartphone Reviews

No.	Word	Frequency
1	New	58
2	Little	36
3	Best	30
4	Good	28
5	Better	22

The adjective **new** appears most frequently, suggesting that reviewers emphasize the innovative and cutting-edge qualities associated with flagship devices. For example:

“on the iPhone. And by default, this opens up the *new* AI mind space, which is a really cool new”

— *OPPO Find X9 Pro - My New Favourite Android Phone!*

“quality display finally. This screen is also protected by the new ceramic shield 2. But then buried in this display up”

— *iPhone 17 Review: No Asterisks!*

These examples highlight that both software and hardware improvements are central to how reviewers frame high-end devices, reflecting consumer expectations for premium innovation.

The second most frequent adjective, **little**, is used to highlight small or incremental improvements rather than major leaps:

“one, the battery does seem to charge a little bit faster, not a lot faster, but a little bit faster.”

— *Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra Review: The Tables Have Turned!*

This usage shows that not all upgrades in high-end phones are transformative; some are minor refinements from previous generations.

The adjective **best** frequently refers to cameras and displays, reinforcing the premium performance associated with flagship products:

“I think Find X9 Pro for me at least this is the best photography camera on a phone and the video is not far behind either”

— *OPPO Find X9 Pro - My New Favourite Android Phone!*

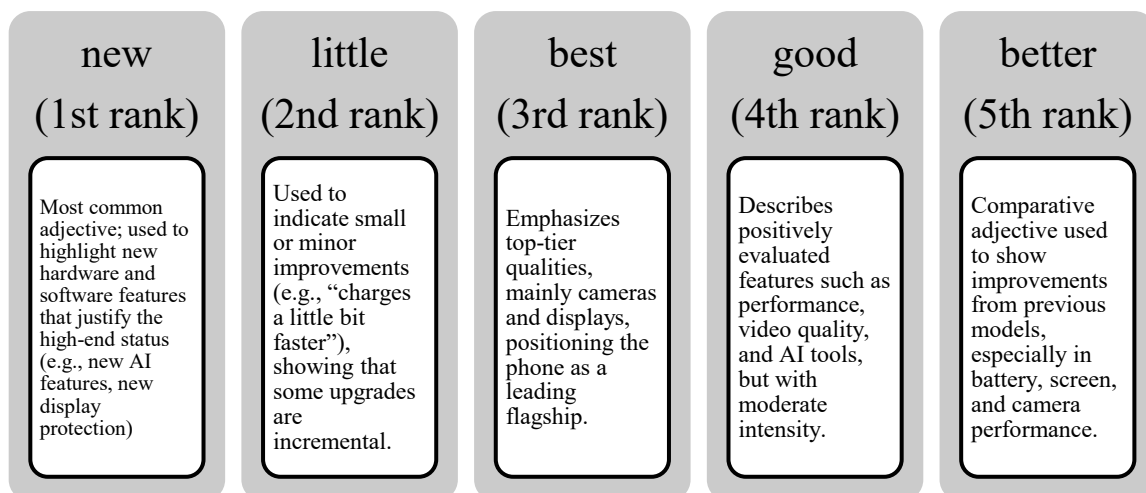
“Even without a huge display upgrade, this is still absolutely one of the best displays. Super crisp, very bright,”

— *Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra Review: The Tables Have Turned!*

Meanwhile, **good** is used more broadly to denote strong performance or features, and **better** functions as a comparative adjective evaluating battery, screen, camera, and system performance relative to previous models.

A summary chart of high-end adjective frequency is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Frequency Distribution of Adjectives in High-End Smartphone Reviews



High-end smartphones can be categorized as luxury products, and although the reviews analyzed here are produced by independent creators, their discourse still shapes how the public



perceives premium devices. The prominence of *new* mirrors findings in advertising discourse. Díez Arroyo (2021) found that car manufacturers frequently rely on adjectives such as *unique* to position themselves as innovative in a saturated market. Similarly, smartphone brands highlight novelty to differentiate their offerings in saturated market.

These findings also support Li (2022), who showed that smartphone brands cultivate strong cognitive associations among consumers—e.g., Samsung devices being known for excellent screens and design but weaker battery longevity. The repeated emphasis on *new* innovation in high-end reviews reinforces these brand identities, suggesting that premium models maintain their reputational edge by consistent technological advancement.

Budget Smartphone Reviews

Compared to high-end devices, budget smartphone reviews show a less diverse distribution of adjectives. The five most frequent adjectives for this corpus appear in Table 3.

Table 3. Top Five Adjectives in Budget Smartphone Reviews

No.	Word	Frequency
1	Good	26
2	Same	17
3	New	13
4	Little	13
5	Big	11

In contrast to the high-end corpus—where *new* and *best* dominate—budget smartphone reviews rely heavily on **good**, indicating adequacy rather than excellence. Reviewers often describe features as satisfactory within the expected price range. Two recurring areas of evaluation are software value and camera performance. For example:

“CMF offers you 3 years of software updates and 6 years of security update, which I feel for a budget phone is a really good number. But even with good software and updates, my experience with the CMF Phone 2 Pro software was kind of meh.”

— *The Real Truth About Nothing's Budget Phone! 30-Days Review*



Here, *good* denotes acceptable value, although “meh” signals lingering issues such as bugs.

Camera evaluation also reflects conditional praise:

“under really good lighting conditions the images but pretty good detail albeit with some noticeable post-processing enhancement”

— *This \$150 Smartphone might be All You Need.*

The adjective **same** appears frequently in budget reviews, highlighting the reuse of components or lack of innovation:

“It's essentially the same chip used last year. You get like 10% better scores than last year, and if you do casual task, the phone performs well. But the moment you start pushing the phone like video recording or opening heavy apps, the phone feels slow and there's lag.”

— *The Real Truth About Nothing's Budget Phone! 30-Days Review*

This emphasizes minimal generational improvement, reinforcing the perception that budget devices offer incremental upgrades.

Reviewers also use **new** to describe minor additions that elevate perceived value:

“Samsung's also upgraded the object eraser and the creative filters and there's also a new Auto Trim which basically uses AI to edit some of your photos”

— *Samsung Galaxy A36 & A56 Hands-On - The Best Budget Phones?*

The adjective **little** signals subtle differences in performance between similar models:

“The speed of the cameras the a56 on the right not only opens the app a little bit quicker”

— *Samsung Galaxy A36 & A56 Hands-On - The Best Budget Phones?*

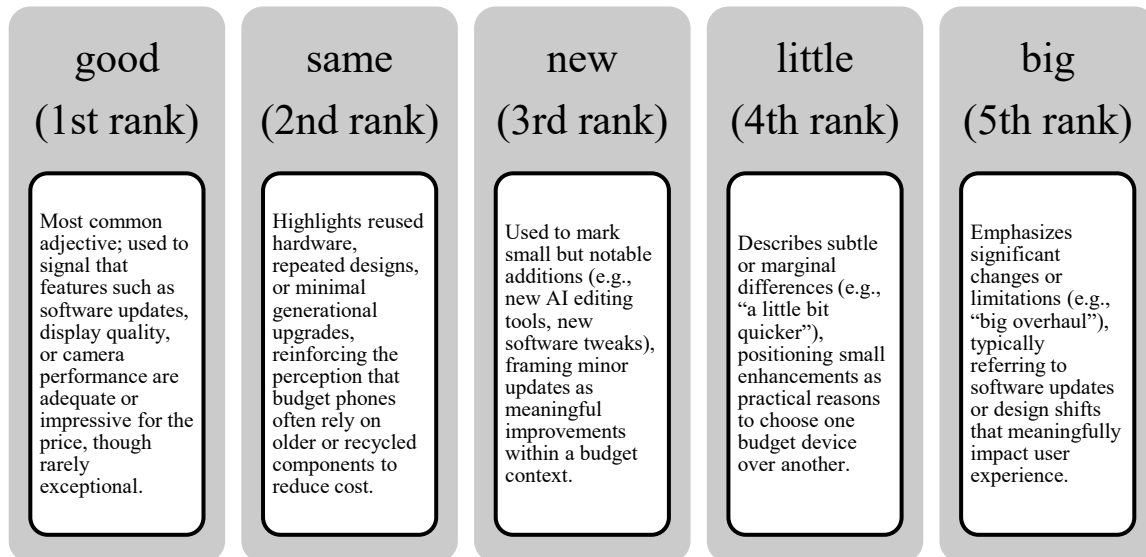
Finally, **big** is used to denote major software or design changes:

“a56 they both ship with one ui7 which actually is a pretty big overhaul for Samsung software”

— *Samsung Galaxy A36 & A56 Hands-On - The Best Budget Phones?*

A summary of adjective frequency for budget reviews appears in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Frequency Distribution of Adjectives in Budget Smartphone Reviews



Discussion

The results demonstrate a clear contrast between adjective use in high-end and budget smartphone reviews. High-end reviews emphasize **innovation, superiority, and incremental refinement**, with adjectives such as *new*, *best*, and *better* foregrounding technological leadership and premium experience. This type of evaluative discourse aligns with patterns observed in luxury product advertising (Díez Arroyo, 2021) and contributes to brand identity narratives described by Li (2022).

Conversely, budget smartphone reviews construct a discourse centered on **adequacy, value, and compromise**. The frequency of *good* suggests that reviewers frame budget devices as practical and serviceable, but not exceptional. Frequent references to *same* underscore the iterative nature of budget models, where manufacturers often reuse components or provide limited upgrades to maintain affordability.

These findings support Putri et al. (Putri et al., 2021), who reported that consumers especially in markets with financial constraints tend to prioritize devices that are “good enough” rather than the best available. This suggests that the evaluative language used by reviewers mirrors consumer expectations for cost-effective products.



However, contrasting global patterns also exist. Gärling et al. (Gärling et al., 2023) found that young consumers in Sweden view owning the latest high-end smartphone as a necessity, even to the point of financing through loans. This highlights a cultural dimension: while some markets prioritize adequate performance, others prioritize premium technological features as social or functional necessities.

E. CONCLUSION

This study examined how reviewers construct evaluations of high-end and budget smartphones through adjective usage in online reviews. The findings show that high-end smartphone discourse centers on innovation and exclusivity, with adjectives such as *new*, *best*, and *better* highlighting advanced hardware, premium design, and especially emerging AI-driven features. Budget smartphone reviews, in contrast, frequently use adjectives like *good*, *same*, and *little*, framing these devices as practical, sufficient, and cost-effective while acknowledging limited improvements or reused components.

Taken together, the results indicate that reviewer discourse helps shape consumer expectations by positioning flagship devices as symbols of technological progress and budget devices as accessible alternatives with acceptable compromises. These patterns also reflect how customers increasingly evaluate smartphones: AI features in high-end models are often perceived as markers of modernity and future-oriented utility, while camera capabilities remain a central factor in purchase decisions across both segments. Consumers tend to associate high-end cameras with excellence and innovation, whereas budget cameras are viewed as conditionally adequate good in optimal lighting but limited otherwise.

In light of these findings, future research could focus more closely on how customers interpret AI-related innovations in flagship models and how camera performance influences purchasing decisions across price tiers. Such perspectives would provide a fuller understanding of how linguistic evaluations in reviews align with, or differ from, actual consumer priorities in the rapidly evolving smartphone market.



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