

# The Advertising of Smartphones: Discourses of Assurance, Functionality and Experience

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## ABSTRACT

Smartphones are a socially and culturally significant technology available in a wide variety of brands, models, and options. Consumers consistently seek devices that best align with their needs, and advertising plays a vital role in promoting these smartphones by delivering comprehensive information that fulfils consumers' informational requirements. This study investigates the key underlying discourses in smartphone advertising through the verbal components of print advertisements. Conducted as a qualitative analysis, it examines 41 print advertisements from various brands showcasing a range of smartphone models. The verbal content was coded and categorised using reflexive thematic analysis, revealing three prominent discourses: assurance, functionality, and experience. These discourses suggest that smartphones are marketed by instilling a sense of trustworthiness, highlighting the features and performance of the devices, and illustrating the potential for a rich user experience. The implications of these findings are noteworthy, as they deepen the understanding of product advertising, particularly within the smartphone context, where advertising not only serves as a platform to convey product information but also shapes and informs consumers' latent interests and aspirations for the device. The insights from this study could potentially inform future advertising strategies and consumer behaviour research.

**Keywords:** Smartphone; Print Advertisements; Discourse; Verbal Components; Reflexive Thematic Analysis

## INTRODUCTION

With 6.9 billion subscriptions and a forecasted global industry market value of USD 790 billion by the end of the decade [28], [80], smartphones have emerged as one of the most influential technological advancements in recent memory. They revolutionise everyday communication, manage personal and professional matters, and provide entertainment resources [82], [77]. This significant growth and desire for smartphones are driven by their increasing necessity, easier access to vast digital information, functionality for problem-solving, a growing population, and, importantly, heightened promotional activities by brands that utilise powerful advertising strategies.

Brands rely on advertising to attract consumers and communicate messages effectively to their target audience. Advertising creates exposure and offers broader publicity, leaving a lasting impact [2]. Research shows that advertising conveys specific intentions through information and language, appealing directly to the intended audience for whom a product or idea is designed and produced. For example, information in health-related product advertisements targets individuals who aspire to enhance their well-being [13], while beauty product ads often employ both positive and negative characterisations to convey values associated with products appealing to consumers seeking aesthetic transformation [54], [39]. Effective advertising not only visualises a

product or idea but also communicates information that aligns with what is perceived as appealing to the needs and desires of the target audience [32], [39], [87].

Various product advertisements have been studied over the years to understand how they are presented in a manner that is both informational and appealing to their target consumers, ranging from beauty products [54], [39] to food [32], [87], health and hygiene [55], [66], automobiles [40], and more. However, there has been little exploration into smartphone advertising despite its significant cultural impact and the creativity involved in brand promotions, which diversify its appeal. Most existing resources focus on the semiotic meanings projected by elements in advertisements [75], [56], [88]. This study aims to explore key elements in smartphone advertising through the verbal components of print advertisements such as their anchorages, product descriptions and specifications, headlines and taglines and other relevant verbal details. It will examine how the information presented not only attracts the target audience but also fosters interest in the device while suggesting an alignment with general smartphone consumers.

This study employs reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the verbal components in these print advertisements [14]. Over the years, thematic analysis has been used in various studies to identify recurring themes in diverse documents such as literary collections [9], interviews, and articles [6], [8], as well as advertising [67], [48]. While there may not be an abundance of research on advertising that utilises thematic analysis specifically, they reinforce the potentiality that the method is still applicable in this context, suggesting that such methodology is can effectively be used to assist the present study to meet its objectives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Practicality of Smartphones

Smartphones, while varying across brands, designs, and compatibility, share common characteristics. These include programmability, the ability to execute various tasks, and functionalities beyond their basic features. Key aspects encompass their operating systems, applications, audiovisual playback, navigation capabilities, wireless connectivity, online browsing, and more [82], [81]. The smartphone industry boasts both significant economic influence and vast sociocultural impact. The diverse features and limitless digital capabilities of smartphones allow them to perform functions and feats that older phones cannot, catering to users' varying needs and preferences.

Research on smartphones indicates that they enhance practicality and assist in daily activities. Downloadable applications and online resources available through smartphones contribute to knowledge enrichment in both formal and informal settings [23], [76], [79]. Additionally, access to abundant information and social platforms fosters connections with a more extensive network of individuals, aids in travel and navigation, and simplifies both professional and everyday tasks [76], [65]. Several studies suggest that smartphones improve quality of life by reducing loneliness and facilitating social connections [62], [76], and they are particularly beneficial for individuals with special needs, helping them in travel, expressing their needs, and staying connected to society [85]. In critical fields, smartphones are shown to transform pedagogy, enhance teacher-student interaction, facilitate assessments, and improve the overall learning experience [23], [86], [79]. Moreover, their quick access to applications enables medical practitioners, healthcare providers, and patients to utilise evidence-based resources for prompt diagnosis, calculations, remote consultations, self-education, and management [49], [4], [64].

These capabilities stem from smartphones' configurations, which are often communicated through advertising—one of the key methods of information dissemination. Advertising significantly influences consumer behaviour and smartphone purchasing intentions [29], [20], [52]. Consumers rely on advertisements to gather information when searching for products that meet their desires [7]. Although numerous studies on smartphone advertising exist, they primarily focus on interpreting meanings and messages from a semiotic perspective [75], [56], [88]. There is a lack of research specifically aimed at exploring the core components of smartphone advertisements, examining the verbal information provided to consumers, identifying key concepts within such information, and assessing how these concepts reflect consumer desires for the device. The present study analyses the aforesaid verbal information featured across the smartphone print advertisements to

consumers which include anchorages, tagline and headline phrases, product description, specifications, and so forth to uncover the most prominent themes in smartphone advertising and how these themes align with what consumers seek in a smartphone.

### **Language as a Verbal Component in Advertising**

Language plays a crucial role in the verbal components of advertisements, which typically include elements like headlines, slogans, and the main body of text. These components illustrate the advertisement's concept and what it promotes, convey ideas, meanings, or messages within its context, draw attention, and influence consumer behaviour towards the advertised product [47], [89]. Although modern advertising is multimodal, language remains essential due to its clarity and the way it is often processed as if it were spoken, even when written [35]. Given that print advertisements prominently feature written language, this study aims to examine the language used in smartphone print advertisements. It will focus on the information provided alongside the smartphones being advertised to identify the most significant discourses. These discourses not only convey the key ideas behind smartphone advertisements to the general public but also offer insights into what consumers may desire in their devices.

Advertising is one of the most effective tools for promoting products, ideas, and associated details. Advertisements, in any form, aim to inform audiences about what is being promoted and are crafted to persuade and influence, ultimately altering opinions, emotional reactions, and behaviours [24]. In addition to traditional forms of advertising, various methods, such as electronic ads, televised commercials, and online promotions, have emerged with advancements in media communication today. However, print advertisements remain relevant because they represent the cultural and economic growth of consumer markets [32] and are widely used as an effective medium of promotion in international marketing [84]. Therefore, this study focuses on the verbal components of smartphone advertisements in print such as headlines and taglines, product description and specifications, anchorages, among others, to analyse the diverse information presented, contributing to the overall discourses surrounding the marketing and sale of smartphones to consumers.

### **Language and Consumers in Advertising**

Numerous research studies on language-focused advertisements relate more to the meanings and messages conveyed or inferred through linguistic features and functions. The mixing of languages, such as English with foreign languages, not only fills in gaps for unavailable lexical or phrasal equivalents but is also present in regional advertisements to evoke familiarity among consumers, convey prestige and align with their desires for the advertised products [32], [42]. Moreover, specific linguistic units, such as pronouns and adjectives, are often found in product-based advertisements to genderise and stereotype products, highlight their significance and superiority, and evoke promises of improvement [13], [39].

Some literature on language and consumers in advertising indicates that language usage reflects the audience's characteristics and sociocultural contexts. For instance, the inclusion of faith-based lexicons in advertisements resonates with the majority of Malaysia's nationals, who are Malay Muslims and practitioners of Islam, as they seek lawful, safe, and clean consumption aligned with their faith [32]. Additionally, celebratory advertisements often feature culturally familiar words or phrases associated with festive seasons, mirroring Malaysia's multicultural and multiracial society and enhancing the appeal of the advertisements [36].

Methodologically, some studies have inclined towards adopting more common approaches to assess language in advertisements. Critical discourse analysis [27], [41], and critical social semiotics [16] are frequently used to elucidate how language is employed to perpetuate ideological and sociocultural values, stereotypes, and realities [39], [36], [73]. Conversely, genre-based approaches [38], [12] are reliable methods for analysing verbal components in advertisements, evaluating how advertisements are crafted and designed in recognisable ways by employing common structural and rhetorical strategies, such as capturing attention, establishing credibility, among others [32], [87].

While much of the existing research primarily focuses on linguistic features in advertisements to imply the intended ideas, meanings, or messages understood by an audience, the current study explores the meanings and

messages generated by language through the identification of key themes or discourses reflected in the verbal components of smartphone print advertisements. This study aims to analyse a wide range of verbal information regarding advertised smartphones, including headlines, slogans, descriptions, specifications, and other relevant details, to uncover the most prominent discourses related to the marketing and sale of smartphones to general consumers. Utilising reflexive thematic analysis [14], the study will examine the information and other verbal details featured in smartphone print advertisements to uncover underlying discourses that reflect shared ideas about smartphone advertising and highlight what consumers seek in a smartphone.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Sample

This study employed a qualitative design to examine the verbal components of various information presented in smartphone print advertisements. A total of 41 advertisements promoting different smartphone models from eight distinct brands were analysed: Sony, Huawei, OPPO, Xiaomi, Honor, Nokia, Samsung, and Vivo. Sony and Huawei had the highest number of samples, with seven advertisements each, followed by OPPO, Xiaomi, and Honor, each with six. The remaining samples were distributed among the other brands, with Nokia having four samples, Samsung having three, and Vivo having two. The use of these eight brands were not without reasons. During the samples collection period, some of the smartphone brands that were available in the market alongside the included brands (Apple, for instance) were discovered to not have produced physical advertisements for their respective smartphone models. As the study utilises brands which produce print advertisements that were retrievable to the public at their respective stores, brands that did not have smartphone print advertisements readily available during the samples gathering period were not included. Furthermore, the varying number of samples for each presently included brand was due to some advertisements not being produced or available for all smartphone models sold at their flagship stores during the sample collection period. Table 1 shows the distribution of smartphone brands and their corresponding samples.

Table 1. Distribution of smartphone print advertisements based on brands

| Brands       | Quantity  |
|--------------|-----------|
| Huawei       | 7         |
| Sony         | 7         |
| OPPO         | 6         |
| Xiaomi       | 6         |
| Honor        | 6         |
| Nokia        | 4         |
| Samsung      | 3         |
| Vivo         | 2         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>41</b> |

Purposive sampling was used to select samples based on the researcher's knowledge and experience rather than adhering to a specific theory or a predetermined number of samples [11]. This method is not bound by a specific theoretical framework or sample quantity [26] and it facilitates a sample collection process that provides insights aligned with the investigation's objectives [26], [11].

The gathering of smartphone print advertisements was based on several criteria:

1. Smartphone brands had to be available and well-established in the local market.
2. These brands must currently produce print advertisements for their respective smartphone models available to the public.
3. Print advertisements needed to be easily retrievable from the brands' stores.
4. Advertisements should contain clear verbal information regarding the smartphones being advertised, including product descriptions, specifications, headlines, and other relevant information.

Samples were collected between February 2018 and February 2020. The information was analysed to identify key themes in smartphone advertising using reflexive thematic analysis [14]. This analysis allowed the study to produce results that accurately reflected the analysed data, informed by the knowledge, resources, and understanding gained through ongoing engagement with the data throughout the analysis process [14]. This approach complements purposive sampling, as both methods emphasise the researcher's knowledge and experience, unconstrained by theoretical frameworks or sample size, thus ensuring that the findings are grounded in the study's focus and intent [26], [11], [14].

### Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is invaluable for identifying potential themes or ideas from vast data resources. Although research incorporating thematic analysis methodology is relatively scarce, the existing literature demonstrates that this method is more than capable of exploring and uncovering emerging messages conveyed within advertisements and their conceptualisations. For example, thematic analysis is often used to extract key messages in promoting and marketing institutions, such as universities, through their prospectuses [48]. It is also applied in advertisements for products, such as beauty products, to explore the ideas communicated to and understood by target consumers regarding their benefits [67].

The present research employs reflexive thematic analysis [14] to identify key discourses in smartphone advertising by analysing smartphone print advertisements. This method acknowledges the researcher's resources, knowledge, and understanding during data engagement, resulting in a more meaningful curation of codes, ideas, and theme interpretations that reflect the focus of the exploration [14], [17], [15]. Although reflexive thematic analysis is flexible, it does consist of a set of phases that must be followed to achieve the intended findings for an investigation, as illustrated in Table 2. The flexibility of this approach means that these phases are non-linear; thus, the current analysis may revisit previous stages if needed [17].

Table 2. Six phases of reflexive thematic analysis [14]

| Steps | Phases                         | Descriptions   |
|-------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1     | Data familiarisation           | Immersion in the data by reading and reviewing to understand the content.  |
| 2     | Initial code generation        | Curation of preliminary codes for each observed data.  |
| 3     | Generation of (initial) themes | Surfacing initial themes by reviewing and sorting all preliminary codes.   |
| 4     | Themes review                  | Further review of the initial themes is needed for finalisation, coherence, and effectiveness of representation. |
| 5     | Themes naming and definition   | Proper naming and description of each finalised theme.   |
| 6     | Report production              | Concise presentation of themes and exemplified accounts from the data in a report.                               |



In applying these phases, the first step involved assessing and familiarising ourselves with the available information to comprehensively understand the content. After this, the second phase focused on developing initial codes based on the information and organising them into groups through semantic and latent interpretation methods [17]. Although using either interpretation method alone is sufficient, it was found that considering both approaches more effectively represented the meanings conveyed or inferred from the information related to smartphone advertising rather than concentrating on just one approach.

The third phase involved sorting all the codes based on comparable properties and meanings, grouping them into preliminary discourses. The fourth phase resembled a quality-checking stage, where these discourses underwent further review and re-examination. This included refining and merging overlapping discourses to ensure data coherence, proper representation, alignment, and finalisation [17].

The finalised discourses, created in the fifth stage of the analysis, consisted of proper names and descriptions relevant to smartphone advertising. In the final phase, a concise report included these discourses. Examples from printed advertisements on smartphones were provided to illustrate what each discourse represented about smartphone advertising and consumers. This flexible approach allows for a non-linear progression through the phases [17], enabling the analysis to revisit previous stages if necessary.

## RESULTS

### Findings of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis on the Verbal Components of the Smartphone Print Advertisements

The reflexive thematic analysis of the verbal components in 41 smartphone prints advertisements yielded and formed three prominent discourses, all of which are clearly labelled and defined in Table 3.

Table 3. Key discourses emerged from verbal components of smartphone print advertisements

| Discourses    | Descriptions   |
|---------------|--|
| Assurance     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivating trustworthiness towards an advertised smartphone</li> <li>• Informing informational transparency, positive qualities and prestige, technological advancement and enhancements, as well as safety and security</li> </ul>  |
| Functionality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discouraging the characterisation of a smartphone's features, operation and performance</li> <li>• Explaining key attributes such as durability, efficiency, versatility, immediacy and seamlessness</li> </ul>                       |
| Experience    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alluding to the ways and experiences a smartphone and its features would make consumers feel upon usage</li> <li>• Forming profound usage through experiences such as comfort, enjoyment, personalisation and desirability</li> </ul> |

Table 3 illustrates three main discourses identified in smartphone advertising: assurance, functionality, and experience. The assurance discourse focuses on building trust in the advertised smartphone, while the functionality discourse highlights the various features and performance characteristics of the device. Finally, the experience discourse relates to the different emotional responses or experiences consumers are suggested to have when using the smartphone. The following discussion will further explore these discourses, provide justifications for their significance in smartphone advertising, and offer examples to illustrate each discourse.

## Assurance as a Discourse of Smartphone of Smartphone Advertising

The discourse in smartphone advertising, particularly in print advertisements, seems to focus on instilling confidence in prospective consumers when purchasing and using these devices. This aspect, labelled as "assurance", is shaped by the information provided to cultivate trust in the advertised smartphones.

The analysis concluded that the assurance discourse consists of various informational details designed to promote transparency, highlight the smartphone's positive features and prestige, illustrate technological advancements and enhancements, and inform consumers about safety and security aspects.

The assurance discourse was shaped by the verbal elements through the provision of informational transparency to consumers. Figure 1 illustrates how transparency played a role in establishing assurance within the print advertisements.

- a. *"Y17 runs on an octa-core processor with 12nm design and clock speed of up to 1.3GHz." (Vivo 17)*
- b. *"Battery has limited recharger cycles and battery capacity reduces over time. Eventually battery may need to be replaced." (Nokia 2.1)*
- c. *"Abuse of improper use of device will invalidate warranty." (Sony Xperia XZ1)*
- d. *"Visit our website to learn more: [www.sonymobile.com/xperia-xa1-plus](http://www.sonymobile.com/xperia-xa1-plus)" (Sony Xperia XA1)*

Figure 1. Examples of informational transparency

Figure 1 illustrates how transparency in providing comprehensive information helps build consumer confidence in a device. This includes presenting detailed smartphone specifications (Example a), outlining possible limitations and inconveniences (Example b), offering clear instructions to encourage mindful usage (Example c), and including contact information for customer support (Example d). Research shows that lacking information can lead to dissatisfaction and decreased confidence [33]. Therefore, establishing transparency in marketing and advertising smartphones, particularly in print advertisements, is crucial. This approach aligns with the current trend of promoting openness, which caters to more discerning consumers, satisfying their desire for awareness regarding their purchases and facilitating more informed buying decisions [50], [45].

The assurance presented in smartphone print advertisements is also reinforced by information highlighting the smartphone's exceptional features and notable qualities, which suggest credibility and prestige. Figure 2 provides examples of information that convey this sense of assurance.

- a. *"Huawei Nova 2i features a dazzling 2.5D glass large screen with 5.9' display" (Huawei Nova 2i)*
- b. *"High-power stereo speakers tuned by AKG" (Samsung Galaxy S9 Series)*
- c. *"Sony's award-winning 2mm wide G Lens f2.0" (Sony Xperia XZ1)*

Figure 2. Examples of illustrating smartphone's excellent characteristics and prestige

Research shows that information with positivity, prestige, and credibility adds value to a product, positively influencing consumer perceptions of quality and purchase intentions [57], [39], [70]. The examples in Figure 2 illustrate the defining qualities of various smartphones by highlighting their features in an impressive way (see Example a), as well as emphasising their significance through references to award-winning components or endorsements from reputable organisations specialising in technology, such as AKG (see Examples b and c). These examples demonstrate how brands strive to positively showcase their smartphones, likely aiming to reassure consumers that the devices incorporate only the best features.

Additionally, detailed information about innovative advancements integrated into smartphones and enhancements made to improve the quality and performance of the devices bolsters consumer assurance. Figure 3 depicts instances of such information that contribute to this assurance discourse.

- a. *“POCOPHONE F1 is one of the few devices in the world to feature LiquidCool Technology cooling system.” (Pocophone F1)*
- b. *“With 40% improved CPU and graphical performance compared to the previous generation,” (Xiaomi MI Max 3)*

Figure 3. Examples of smartphone’s advancement and betterment

In Figure 3, we see examples of how certain information about advancements and improvements influenced consumer assurance regarding smartphones. For instance, one example (Example a) highlights the unique and innovative technology integrated into the smartphone. In contrast, another example (Example b) emphasises how the current smartphone model is a significant upgrade from the previous one. Research indicates that smartphone development is driven by market demand, technological evolution, increased usage, and consumer trust [31], [69]. Additionally, consumers' acceptance of technology is partly linked to their level of trust [3]. The information presented in Figure 3 and other relevant data is crucial in shaping consumer assurance as a discourse. It encourages consumers to trust that smartphones will offer technological innovations and improvements over past models, addressing their curiosity and desire for superior devices, which may lead to quicker adoption.

Another way assurance is fostered in smartphone print advertisements is through information about safety features and secure usage. Figure 4 provides examples illustrating how assurance is developed from a safety and security perspective.

- a. *“It’s safer too, with nine charging protection technologies protecting both your battery and the charging process.” (Vivo Y17)*
- b. *“Huawei P20 Pro features the TUV Safety Certified Huawei SuperCharge technology – one of the most stringent battery safety tests in the world.” (Huawei P20 Series)*

Figure 4. Examples of safety and security

In Figure 4, both examples are some of the information paving the way for providing

safety and security measures to go along with the manufacturing and marketing of smartphones, which contributed to the construction of the sense of trust towards the device by the prospective consumers. Research shows that safety and security are fundamental in product marketing, aligning with the advent of more safety-conscious consumers [68], [18], [21], [78]. The examples communicate an intent to assure consumers of the care that went into the smartphone’s manufacture by making known the safety-preserving mechanism incorporated into the device (Example a) and informing any forms of intensive device testing to ensure its usage readiness (Example b).

All in all, the assurance discourse formed by including transparent information, highlighting the smartphone’s positive quality and prestige, elucidating its advancement and betterment, and apprising the safety and security aspect of manufacturing and usage seemed to present considerable importance not only to the brands in advertising their smartphones but also to potential consumers and users who might harbour a desire to find the best smartphones for themselves and would like to be well informed before making a purchase decision.

### Functionality as a Discourse of Smartphone Advertising

Another segment of the larger discourse of smartphone advertising within the verbal components of smartphone print advertisements analysed constitutes the utility aspects of a smartphone. Labelled as



“functionality”, the information coded and determined to make up the discourse pertained to the characterisations of smartphone features, operation and performance.

The reflexive thematic analysis concluded the functionality discourse of smartphone advertising was determined by the information edifying several properties widely highlighted throughout the print advertisements, namely durability, efficiency, versatility, immediacy and seamlessness.

Durability was a part of the functionality discourse of smartphone’s advertising whose information was determined to describe the device as powerful, able to produce seemingly robust performance and possessing longer-lasting property. Figure 5 features information instances to illustrate the way durability was depicted:

- a. *“The powerful stereo speakers let you share your music and movies with friends” (Sony Xperia XZ2)*
- b. *“Redmi Note 6 Pro sports large 4000mAh battery that provides more than a day of use on a single charge.” (Redmi Note 6 Pro)*

Figure 5. Examples of smartphone’s durability

Figure 5 illustrates the durability of a smartphone, describing the device as powerful and equipped with features that deliver formidable performance (Example a) and capable of lasting through extended use (Example b). Durability is a highly sought-after quality in a product, as consumers generally expect longevity and can express frustration if a product does not meet these durability expectations. This disappointment can affect financial resources and hinder sustainability due to the need for replacements or repairs [59], [46]. As highlighted in the examples, emphasizing the robust and long-lasting capabilities of a smartphone can satisfy consumers who are looking not only for high performance for various smartphone-related tasks but also for a device that can withstand prolonged usage.

Another way in which the functionality discourse was established in smartphone print advertisements through verbal information was by showcasing the device’s efficiency. This was achieved by highlighting useful features and performance, as well as promoting manageable usage and consumption. Figure 6 provides examples of information that illustrates or implies the efficient aspects of the advertised smartphones.

- a. *“The Xperia XA2 Ultra ergonomic design fits in your hands as if it was made for you alone.” (Sony Xperia XA2 Ultra)*
- b. *“It’s octa-core CPU is built on the 12nm process and consumes about 48% less power than comparable 28nm chipsets.” (Redmi 6)*

Figure 6. Examples for smartphone’s efficiency

Both examples in Figure 6 highlight functionality through the lens of efficiency, illustrated by design ergonomics (Example a) and the capability of a smartphone's components to consume less power while delivering the required performance, thus helping the device preserve more energy (Example b). Studies show that smartphone consumers are more inclined to select devices with features perceived as functional, effective, and efficient, especially when performing demanding tasks such as seeking information or online browsing [72]. Advertisements that emphasize the efficiency of smartphones in their usage and performance can attract consumers looking for devices that are not only practical but also energy-efficient for everyday tasks.

In addition to durability and efficiency, the functionality aspect of smartphone advertising in print media also includes information about versatility. This refers to the various ways a smartphone or its features can perform, as well as their adaptability and flexibility in different situations. Figure 7 provides examples from print advertisements that illustrate functionality from the perspective of versatility.

- a. *“... the Note10’s processor brings to the table hyperfast power and top-tier mobile graphics performance to give you all the speed and flexibility you need.” (Samsung Note 10)*
- b. *“The revolutionary camera that adapts like the human eye – taking stunning pictures from bright daylight to moonlight.” (Samsung S9)*

Figure 7. Examples for smartphone’s versatility

From Figure 7, it can be inferred that the versatility of smartphones stems from their integration of features that not only enable impressive performance (Example a) but also allow them to operate effectively in a wide range of settings and situations (Example b). Consumers often look for products that can perform beyond their basic design and purpose, such as smartphones [44]. This versatility has been identified as one of the most significant factors influencing potential buyers' willingness to purchase smartphones [43]. In shaping the conversation around functionality, information highlighting the versatile nature of smartphones aims to attract consumers who value such traits. These consumers are generally more interested in models that offer multiple operational and performance capabilities, allowing them to fully utilize their smartphones' features and potential.

In addition to showcasing a smartphone's durability, efficiency, and versatility, print advertisements also emphasized the element of immediacy. This indicates promptness and efficiency in operation and performance. Examples illustrating how smartphones were marketed for their immediate functionality can be found in Figure 8.

- a. *“Integrated fingerprint sensor is an advanced and secured Ultra-fast 0.3 sec\*\* unlocking.” (Huawei Nova 5T)*
- b. *“AI Face Beauty enhances your facial features even further with customized solutions, so you can spend less time editing your selfies” (Vivo Y17)*

Figure 8. Examples for smartphone’s immediacy

Today's consumers are consistently seeking instant gratification and have high expectations for speed in their smartphones [1]. Fast task processing and quick response times are among the most preferred features when it comes to smartphone adoption [22], [5]. Examples in Figure 8 support these findings, showing that smartphones are not only technologically innovative but also designed to operate quickly (Example a). Additionally, they offer nimble, time-saving performance through fast-performing features (Example b), appealing to consumers who prioritize these attributes when choosing the best smartphone for themselves.

Furthermore, the advertisements for smartphones emphasise their functionality by highlighting their smooth operation and seamless user experience. The information promoting smartphones’ seamlessness is illustrated in Figure 9.

- a. *“Transfer files, or simply extend your display to work with mouse and keyboard for a truly seamless multitasking experience.” (Samsung Note 10)*
- b. *“The new Nokia 2.1 comes with Android 8.1 Oreo (Go edition), simply optimised so you can use apps faster, without annoying lags.” (Nokia 2.1)*

Figure 9. Examples for smartphone’s seamlessness

According to Figure 9, the concept of smartphone seamlessness is demonstrated by the ability of these devices to perform smoothly during demanding tasks or across multiple platforms (Example a) and to do so with minimal technical lags (Example b). Research into smartphone usage behaviour reveals that seamlessness is one of the most significant aspects for users when it comes to smartphone usage, driven by features such as

computing power, software applications, and operating systems [58]. The portrayal of seamlessness in smartphone advertising suggests a desire to appeal to consumers' interest in technologically advanced devices that provide a smoother user experience.

Overall, the functionality conveyed through the verbal components of smartphone print advertisements presents smartphones as technologically sophisticated devices with various capabilities. Features such as durability, efficiency, versatility, immediacy, and seamlessness are frequently emphasized, highlighting that smartphones serve not only as tools for communication but also as multifunctional devices that meet various user needs while alleviating any concerns.

### Experience as a Discourse of Smartphone Advertising

The final analysis of smartphone advertising, particularly focusing on the verbal components of print advertisements, revealed that the messaging primarily aimed to create a significantly positive and uplifting experience for consumers. This aspect, labelled as "experience", is the third key element of the overall discourse surrounding smartphone advertising. It highlights the various ways in which smartphones and their usage can evoke unique and fulfilling emotions in consumers.

Through reflexive thematic analysis, it was determined that the "experience" discourse was shaped by information emphasizing the diverse feelings and sensations that smartphones and their features can provide. These feelings were specifically categorised as comfort, enjoyment, personalisation, and desirability.

Among these, comfort was identified as a frequently advertised experience in smartphone print advertisements. The messaging related to comfort conveyed a sense of ease and convenience, suggesting that using smartphones is uncomplicated, even with their advanced technology. For example, Figure 10 provides two illustrations that exemplify how the concept of comfort is promoted in relation to smartphones.

- a. *"Combining iris scan and face recognition to make unlocking simple even in bright sunlight or low light." (Samsung S9 Series)*
- b. *"... while offering 12.5% more display area, so you get an immersive experience without compromising on hand feel." (Redmi 5 Plus)*

Figure 10. Examples of comfort as a smartphone usage experience

The information presented suggests that the advertised smartphones, despite their advanced technology and specifications, are designed with consumer convenience in mind, prioritizing simple and straightforward usage. Figure 10 illustrates the experience of comfort through the integration of user-friendly technology (Example a) and a focus on ergonomic design, regardless of the device's size (Example b). Research indicates that ease of use is a significant factor influencing product purchases and adoption, especially for smartphones, even though there are varying levels of perceived usefulness among consumers [61], [83]. Highlighting features that emphasize comfort would appeal to consumers seeking convenience, portraying smartphones as devices designed for effortless and trouble-free usage.

Additionally, the smartphone print advertisement conveys that using these devices can bring joy to users. This enjoyment is reflected in the sense of gratification and pleasure experienced when using a smartphone. Examples of advertisements that emphasise this emotional experience can be seen in Figure 11.

- a. *"Have fun interacting and share it with your friends." (Huawei Mate20 Series)*
- b. *"The camera that turns you into an emoji." (Samsung S9 Series)*

Figure 11. Examples of enjoyment as a smartphone usage experience

A sense of enjoyment in smartphone usage aligns with the idea of a gratifying product, which provides not only functionality but also emotional appeal and pleasurable engagement [37]. Smartphones are often relied

upon for support, as emotional benefits are among the key factors driving consumers to use them for relief from negativity and to enhance positive emotions [90]. Figure 11 illustrates smartphones as devices that can offer shareable joy through the discovery of features and applications (Example A). They also incorporate fun-inducing features, such as augmented-reality emojis that can be used in texts and conversations (Example B). The enjoyment derived from smartphone usage appears to be as significant to consumers as the gratification smartphones provide, suggesting a desire for both a pleasurable and emotionally positive experience in addition to their functionality and technical attributes.

Another commonly highlighted aspect is the sense of personalisation associated with smartphones. Information suggests that smartphones are designed with significant user-centricity, promoting individuality in both design and usage. Figure 12 features several instances that convey or imply a sense of personalisation.

- a. *“Allow you to fine-tune every detail of sound the way you like it.” (Sony Xperia L1)*
- b. *“Speak to your individuality through never-before-seen colour.” (Huawei Nova 5T)*

Figure 12. Examples of personalisation as a smartphone usage experience

The examples in Figure 12 illustrate the smartphone's ability to be personalized and highlight other attributes that contribute to a user-centric experience. This ranges from the integration of customisable features tailored to consumer preferences (Example a) to the selection of physical features, such as colour options, that consumers can choose from (Example b). Personalized products appeal to individualism, aligning with consumers' personal knowledge, capabilities, characteristics, and consumption habits. This personal connection fosters a sense of distinctiveness among users [34], [30]. The customization and personalized traits of smartphones satisfy consumers' desires for unique devices that offer greater freedom of use, influenced by their personalities, preferences, and consumption patterns.

In addition to comfort, enjoyment, and personalisation, the experience conveyed through smartphone advertising is shaped by the attractive features of the advertised devices and their seemingly transformative qualities, which create a positive impact for consumers when using the product. Desirability as a smartphone usage experience is exemplified by several instances in Figure 13.

- a. *“These bold and unique colour schemes treat phones to a stylish makeover.” (Vivo V15)*
- b. *“The Huawei P20 Series uses its AI-driven 3D facial modelling technology to follow the contours of your features, adjusting for the most flattering selfies.” (Huawei P20 Series)*

Figure 13. Examples of desirability as a smartphone usage experience

As shown in Figure 13, the instances highlight the desirability of the smartphone experience, which is influenced by the device's impressive aesthetics (Example a) and the integration of visually-enhancing features (Example b). These elements transform how consumers perceive themselves, making them appear more desirable to others while using the device. Research indicates that aesthetically pleasing smartphones are often viewed as accessories [71], and the visually-modifying features of smartphones can be compared to advertisement research on beauty and health products, which are promoted as transformative tools for physical improvement [13], [39]. Consequently, desirability emphasizes a transformative aspect of smartphone usage, enhancing self-presentation and improving others' perceptions of consumers.

In conclusion, the verbal elements in smartphone print advertisements portray the device as a tool for enriching user experiences. The analysis reveals various experiences such as comfort, enjoyment, personalization, and desirability. These characteristics illustrate that smartphones are not only technologically advanced devices that serve multiple personal and professional purposes but also foster emotionally rewarding user experiences.

## DISCUSSION

Three key discourses were identified and labelled through the reflexive thematic analysis of the verbal components of smartphone print advertisements, collectively forming the overall advertising discourse for smartphones: assurance, functionality, and experience. The analysis revealed a strong emphasis on consumer-centric messaging in these advertisements, assuring consumers of quality and excellence while positioning the products for ideal real-life use. This is likely significant, as research indicates that a product with a consumer-oriented benefit can enhance consumer-product engagement [60]. Advertising smartphones with information that highlights how they will satisfy consumer needs suggests a desire to meet various consumer expectations, ranging from quality assurance to performance capabilities. This approach fosters a user-friendly experience and paves the way for a richer overall usage experience.

Examining each discourse, the assurance discourse reflects an evolving consumer awareness. Research suggests that this awareness stems from uncertainties surrounding the production process, the information consumers receive about a product or service, quality standards, regulatory issues, consumer involvement, and security concerns [10], [25], [51], [63]. The information presented in the analysed print advertisements contributes to building assurance among consumers who may have specific needs and reservations regarding smartphones on the market and who require comprehensive details before making confident purchasing decisions. This highlights the importance of providing crucial information in smartphone advertising to empower consumers in their ownership decisions.

Conversely, the functionality discourse emphasizes the significance of product attributes in shaping purchase and usage decisions. Studies have shown that the characteristics of a product or service play a critical role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions and enhancing the user experience. For instance, style is important for clothing [53], while seamless functionality enhances the experience of using a service [74]. The functionality discourse clarifies the smartphone's multidimensional characteristics, underscoring its complex nature and essential utilitarian values. It also reflects the diverse expectations that consumers may have regarding the performance and operation of their chosen smartphones.

Additionally, the experience discourse relates to the importance of user experience in product or service utilisation. For example, comfort is vital for clothing products [53], while ease of use is fundamental for smartphones, driving brands to innovate and produce improved models [19]. The presence of experience-related discourse highlights that how smartphones make consumers feel during use is equally important. The information presented in these advertisements not only emphasises operational capabilities but also implies positive physical and emotional experiences that can enhance overall utilisation.

## CONCLUSION

The study investigates the main themes present in smartphone advertising by examining the verbal components of print advertisements. The identified themes reveal how smartphones are marketed to consumers and how the information in these ads aligns with potential consumer interests when they are looking to purchase a device. The analysis revealed three prominent themes: assurance, functionality, and experience. Assurance involves building trust in smartphones through informational transparency, highlighting positive qualities, prestige, technological advancements, and safety and security. Functionality focuses on the descriptions of the smartphone's features and performance, emphasising durability, efficiency, versatility, immediacy, and seamlessness. Experience encompasses the emotional responses and satisfaction consumers derive from using smartphones, including comfort, enjoyment, personalisation, and desirability.

These findings provide valuable insights into how smartphones, as an essential part of modern life, are marketed to consumers. The range of information conveyed through language not only serves an informational purpose but also suggests what consumers may desire, indicating a consumer-focused approach to smartphone advertising.

However, the findings may offer a limited perspective on smartphone advertising discourse. This limitation arises because the current research is confined to print advertisements from eight major smartphone brands.



Future research could expand this analysis by including additional smartphone brands and their print advertisements, provided they offer well-constructed information about their smartphone models. This could lead to a wider variety of verbal information and potentially more comprehensive and representative analytical results.

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