The Language of Product Reviews in Digital Magazines. Case Study: "Best Laptop for Most People" in *PCMag*

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Abstract:
The article presents the language used in the February 2025 review of a laptop in *PCMag*, a digital computer magazine, which delivers reviews, previews and news of the latest products and services for IT professionals. The analysis follows the review of the "Best Laptop for Most People", a subcategory under the section "The Best Laptops for 2025", which evaluates a few of the latest products in the industry. In order to help different types of consumers to make choices according to their specific needs, the hardware analysts use a language which both informs and entertains, with the indirect outcome of products possibly being purchased by the manufacturers' target public. The language includes specialized technical jargon and seeks to be professional, objective, concise and clear, with features of technical writing, as the review does not directly advertise this item; at the same time, as a magazine article, its language needs to draw readers in and keep them interested and engaged. Therefore, the text builds in informality features, such as a relaxed tone, colloquialisms preferred by young people, emotional terms, and structures that convey spontaneity and personal, friendly communication. The rhetorical patterns used to carry out the functions of this text are definition, classification, cause and effect, along with comparison and contrast. The paper outlines linguistic features producing these patterns, and also identifies the context that enables them to operate.

Keywords: *digital tech magazine, technical writing, product review, rhetorical patterns, marketing language*

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1. Introduction

The trend nowadays is for digital magazines to replace their print variants for several reasons. Firstly, the former are more easily accessible through mobile smart devices, capitalizing on people's contentment to be spared the effort of purchasing it in physical format, although many may prefer the "feel" of the paper format. As two U.S. authors note in their study, "Gen Z will likely force future media into the realm of digital-only." (Bonner & Roberts, 2017: 10)

Secondly, digital publications allow the readers' engagement through social media platforms, a fact which provides editors with useful immediate feedback regarding the reception of content and guiding lines about what needs to be adjusted. Instant feedback is also achieved through online analytics, which bring data on readers' engagement and behaviour, which input is most popular, how much time readers spend on each page, or when they leave it. Being thus informed, content decisions are more attuned to the public's preferences and experience, while also exploiting and shaping their behaviour and tastes. In order to attract large numbers of viewers, which in turn earns revenue from exposure to online advertising, the public is more prone to being drawn in an online filter bubble, which perpetually and narcissistically caters for and mirrors the consumer's own image and inclinations.

About the difference between *online magazines*, which merely offer a pdf version of the print material, or an electronic reality-like flipping through the pages, the main characteristic of *digital magazines* is interactivity: links, videos, effects, shopping cart etc. A digital magazine "is built to deliver an immersive, engaging and interactive reading experience. Content is created, managed or housed on a digital magazine platform […], which gives an authentic reading experience by putting readers in control over how they consume content. Readers can view or listen to video or audio, easily navigate and digest content, while text, forms and images can link out to other content." (Turtl, 2024)

PCMag, as a digital computer magazine providing reviews for emerging IT technology, is part of what Knotzer calls *recommender systems.* These are defined as "information systems that assist the user in making choices without sufficient personal experience of the alternatives. This is achieved by providing information about the relative merits of alternative courses of action." (Knotzer, 2008: 6)

The magazine also features articles on computer developments, how-to articles and computer entertainment products. Thus, by covering a wide range of interests in the field of IT, this digital publication has the potential to attract a substantial number of people, which is in direct proportion to the revenue that it can generate. Admittedly, each page of the magazine includes a disclaimer header or footer stating as follows: "PCMag editors select and review products independently. If you buy through affiliate links, we may earn commissions, which help support our testing." (PCMag, 2025) We note the use of the adverbial "independently", the epistemic modal "may" and the conditional clause "If you buy…", which support the idea that the information provided in product reviews is reliable, as it is not strictly conditional on direct material gains by its authors.

One section of the computer digital magazine PCMag is entitled "Best Products", which under "Laptops" introduces "The Best Laptops for 2025", this further including several categories: "Best Laptop for Most People", "Best Workstation Laptop", "Best Budget Laptop", "Best Ultraportable Laptop", "Best Business Laptop", "Best Convertible 2-in-1 Laptop", "Best Gaming Laptop", etc., the variety in such enumeration of head nouns with strings of modifiers suggesting a thoroughness and complexity of the

provided information. This paper analyses "Best Laptop for Most People", as a corpus sample of how language is used in order to review a product in a magazine of this profile. We note that the product chosen for each category constantly changes, the one being assessed here having last been updated on February 3, 2025 at the time the present academic paper was drawn.

2. Corpus analysis: progressing to the review

The layout of this digital magazine article is marked by interactive headings and subheads, mingled with bulleted lists, tables and captions. It favours the ease of navigation and processing of information in a succinct, selective manner, also stressing the most important aspects through typographical features. These include variation in print size (which, according to Sarah Thorne, is used "to absorb readers into" (Thorne, 2008: 292) a text); and also variation in colour: black fonts against a white background, which is typical for most writings, enhanced by some red subtitles and interactive pictograms, providing contrast and fluency of orientation.

Pictures support the text and give substance to the explanations by helping them acquire a concrete face, but they do not overwhelm the reader, as the focus of the review lies on the technical clarifications. As one author points out when discussing writing for technical products, photos, diagrams and illustrations should have a complete caption, which "helps to ensure the accuracy of model numbers or other product information." (King, 1993: 177) In our case, we have a picture of the product being reviewed under the heading "Best Laptop for Most People", which is captioned with the brand name and model identification data: "Asus Zenbook 14 OLED Touch (UM3406)".

The review starts with the main headline, "The Best Laptops for 2025", the disclaimer at the top of the page and the names of the technical writers, Brian Westover and Joe Osborne (2025, February 3). The temporal mentions in both the headline and under the names of the authors ("Updated February 3, 2025") signal the relevance of the information, as IT products rapidly become obsolete in the context of massive and continuous developments in the industry. Moreover, the two hardware writers' names are interactive, meaning that by clicking these, readers have access to their short biographies, which focus on data that demonstrate their expertise in the field.

There is also an introduction to the broader section of the magazine, "The Best Laptops for 2025", in which we identify the rhetorical patterns of definition and enumeration: "The best laptop for you depends on what you do every day. Whether you want a simple budget PC, a productivity workhorse, or a screamer of a gaming notebook, our deep-dive guide has all the advice you need, plus our top product picks in every major laptop category." (Westover & Osborne, 2025)

We then find an interactive subhead, "LOOK INSIDE PC LABS: HOW WE TEST", a section which elaborates on the mission and working manner of those contributing to the magazine, also providing figures about the number of experts, the tradition of the publication and its level of productivity ("65 experts", "43 years", "41,500+ reviews"). This part also offers a summary of the mission statement: "Our team tests, rates, and reviews more than 1,500 products each year to help you make better buying decisions and get more from technology." We note the rhetorical parallelism between the experts / magazine authors versus consumers / magazine readers, marked by: the direct address *we* versus *you* (the possessive adjective in "*our* team", the personal pronoun *you*); the coordinate structure with evaluative verbs in the present simple ("our team *tests, rates and reviews*"); quantified effort from *our* part in the use of the numeral

and time adverbial (*1,500* products *each year*) versus improved experience on *your /* the readers' part in the use of comparatives ("you make *better* buying decisions and get *more* from technology").

Preceding the revision per se, there follows the mission statement, a 149-word text laying out general guiding principles and standards of the magazine team:

"Here at PCMag, we've tested thousands of laptops since our lab's founding more than 40 years ago. Our analysts and editors have more than a collective century of experience telling the good laptops from the great ones. We test more than 100 models every year to determine the best laptop overall. We also rank winners in various subcategories, such as gaming laptops, work laptops, budget laptops, Chromebooks, and MacBooks. We test all models for CPU and graphics performance using rigorous, repeatable benchmark tests, and we evaluate design, usability, connectivity, and—most important!—value. Our current best laptop for most people is the Asus Zenbook 14 OLED Touch, a top-value ultraportable that lasts nearly 20 hours on a charge, but we have plenty more tested, vetted recommendations. Read on to see all our picks, compare their specs, and get down-to-earth buying advice for nailing down the best laptop for you." (Westover & Osborne, 2025)

The main function of this section is conative, as it seeks to persuade the reader that it is worth engaging with the content and taking the review recommendations into account, as they are supported by a high degree of professionalism. As well as the introduction to this mission statement, the text capitalises on the dynamic of the *we – you* relation, where *we* is represented by *PCMag* as a brand and *you* being its readership as the target audience. Except the last sentence in this text, all the other sentences are built around the first person plural of the personal pronoun *we* or the possessive adjective *our*, outlining the profile of the brand as a reliable source of information for prospective purchasers on the laptop market: "Here at PCMag *we*'ve tested…" ; "*our* lab's founding more than 40 years ago…"; "*Our* analysts and editors…"; "*We* test…"; "*We* also rank…"; "*our* current best laptop…"; "*we* have…". This sequence of declarative sentences ends with an imperative sentence, in which the focus shifts on *you*, in a rhetorical buildup to a call for action: "*Read on* to see all our picks, compare their specs, and get down-to-earth buying advice for nailing down the best laptop for *you*." We can also identify a cause and effect rhetorical pattern, since the profile of the experts is presented, with their achievements and expertise, to justify the relevance of their evaluation, hence the reader's engagement with the review content.

While not directly marketing the reviewed products, there is active marketing in the magazine's attempt to build a relationship with its readers, a fact that can be identified in several strategies present in this piece of discourse, such as fostering trust and credibility, focusing on the public's needs and desires, or using a conversational and engaging tone.

Firstly, it builds trust and credibility by showcasing its ongoing commitment to assessing laptops. This is achieved by providing quantitative arguments through the use of: the indefinite large quantity phrase *thousands of* ("we've tested thousands of laptops"); time clause with a numeral determiner plus noun and adverb, in a comparative of superiority structure ("since our lab's founding *more than 40 years ago*"); noun with a string of predeterminers in a comparative of superiority structure ("more than a collective century of experience"); noun with numeral determiner in the comparative of superiority, followed by time adverbial ("more than 100 models every year"); the indefinite adjective of quantity *all* in determiner or predeterminer position ("We test all models […]"; "Read

on to see all our picks […]"); the indefinite adjective *plenty more* modifying a noun to indicate an unspecified, but large quantity or number ("we have plenty more tested, vetted recommendations"). Quantitative arguments are also brought through enumeration ("We also rank winners in various subcategories, such as *gaming laptops, work laptops, budget laptops, Chromebooks, and MacBooks*."), enumeration with emphasis ("we evaluate *design, usability, connectivity, and*—most important!—*value*"), or enumeration of infinitives in a coordinated structure ("Read on *to see* all our picks, *compare* their specs, *and get* down-to-earth buying advice.").

Also supporting the cause and effect rhetoric is the use of superlatives, meaning that readers should trust experts because they can discern the highest quality or degree in products: "Our analysts and editors have more than a collective century of experience telling the good laptops from *the great ones*."; "We test more than 100 models every year to determine *the best laptop overall*."; "*most important!*—value"; "*best* laptop for *most* people"; "a *top-value* ultraportable"; "*the best* laptop for you".

Finally, the proficiency argument is articulated through the careful interspersion of specialized technical vocabulary terms: "CPU and graphics performance"; "design, usability, connectivity"; "gaming laptops, work laptops, budget laptops, Chromebooks, and MacBooks", "ultraportable", etc.

Moreover, the demonstration of expertise by the PCMag brand while relating it to *you* puts focus on the target audience needs and desires, in the sense that, by identifying the features of various products that cater to specific users' needs, this means that "*we* understand *you*".

The feeling of "relationship" between the magazine and its readers is also conveyed by using a conversational and engaging tone, rather than a formal or authoritative stance, this creating a more personal tie. Thus, the imperative in "Read on […]" creates connection through direct address, as well as the use of the personal pronoun in the second person "you" ("the best laptop for you"). Informality is also marked through punctuation such as dashes or the exclamation mark ("and—most important!—value") and through the use of colloquial vocabulary, which is preferred by young people and IT specialists, as it renders a dynamic, creative and relaxed mood: "top-value", "read on", "our picks", "specs", "nailing down", etc.

Following the mission statement, we have another subhead, reading "Our Top Tested Picks". This section offers an inventory of the revised products, which are assigned to different categories, "Best Laptop for Most People" being among them. There is also a subhead entitled "The Best Laptop Deals This Week", which lies above a list of links to various online retailers, each one with a price tag, this also contributing to the practicality aspect of the magazine features.

We note that headings in general in technical writing vary in the type of information they provide, one classification referring to:

"a) brief topic headings use short words or phrases

b) statement headings use sentences or phrases and are more informational in nature

c) question headings are useful when writing documents that explain how to do something" (Utah State University, College of Engineering, 2021)

In our corpus analysis, we mostly encounter brief topic subheadings ("The Best Laptops for 2025"), "OUR TOP TESTED PICKS", "Best Laptop for Most People", "Asus Zenbook 14 OLED Touch (UM3406)", "$799.00 at Walmart", etc.), with some statement subheads ("Get it now"; "Learn more"; "LOOK INSIDE PC LABS: HOW WE

TEST", "Jump To Details"; "See It" etc.), a fact that contributes to the ease of navigation, orientation and processing of information. We mention that, following the review per se, there is also an interactive subhead, linking to a much more extensive technical analysis of the product, which will not make the object of the present discussion.

3. Corpus analysis: the product review per se

The text of the review as such also comprises several divisions, each being delimited by subheads or a change in the page layout, with drop-down lists, bulleted lists and variation in fonts: the category title and name of the product (" Best Laptop for Most People", "Asus Zenbook 14 OLED Touch (UM3406)"); a general list of pros and cons ("Pros & Cons"); an introduction paragraph; the body of the review ("Why We Picked It"), with a different paragraph for each of the five main decision factors supporting the experts' choice ("Design", "Display", "Performance", "Battery life", "Value for money"); a conclusion-type section, which identifies the target public for the product ("Who It's For"); a succinct list of the product's main technical specifications and configurations ("Specs & Configurations"), including interactive price tags linking to different websites that allow instant purchase.

This schematic structure of the review supports a rapid and general grasp of the product characteristics. If the main function of a section such as the previous mission statement, in its attempt to persuade readers to engage with and rely on the information provided in the review, is focused on the *conative* function, the dominant function of the review text is *informative*, as it offers a substantial number of technical details. The technical writers do not seek to sell the product, but to assess it and inform readers about their conclusions. We also note that there is a secondary, *conative* function of this text, in the sense that, its rhetoric being constructed around cause and effect, with the review presenting the technical reasons behind a certain product being chosen as "Best Laptop for Most People", the readers may be persuaded to form an opinion, which will further guide them in purchasing a product or further research. Moreover, being a magazine article, the text also fulfils a *poetic* function, since its language needs to be interesting enough so as to entertain its readers and not leave the webpage altogether. Assuredly, the risk of the reader disengaging from the magazine content is more significant in an online environment, since there are alternatives at the click of a button. Therefore, the *informative* function must be served without making the public feel overwhelmed with details, or confused because of a lack of clarity; the *conative* function should be performed so that the readers should not feel pushed or deceived through a lack of disinterested objectivity or professional expertise; and the *poetic* function needs to be carried out by striking a fine balance between a style that is compelling enough to resonate with the ethos of a certain public and one that succeeds in being taken seriously despite its informality.

The brief bulleted list of pros and cons with which the review starts comprises noun phrases with modifiers or postmodifiers: "Peppy performance", "High value", "Long battery life", "Lots of ports for its size", "Just a 1200p display", "No WWAN option or SD card slot", "Face login only – no fingerprint reader". The strings of modifiers in such noun phrases, which are also encountered along the rest of the review, while possibly seeming excessive, they contribute to the informative function of the text and its profession of objectivity and professionalism.

Regarding the main rhetorical patterns encountered in the review, there is *classification*, which can be used to organize a paragraph or section. There are lists of

items organized according to principles of classification, which help sorting products into categories, with the review identifying where the product fits in.

The *cause and effect* relation in the context of this technical text is mostly identified in various structures with superlative meaning. A conspicuous section of the review using this pattern is the introduction of the review, which summarizes the main reasons in favour of the chosen product:

"After testing dozens of laptops for this recommendation, we find the Asus Zenbook 14 OLED Touch to be the best laptop for most people. Appropriately for the best laptop overall, this Zenbook takes every factor we measure for and evaluate to a highly competitive level for its sub-$1,000 price. It's a powerful system wrapped in a tough, attractive, and portable frame, with a good OLED display and enough battery life to outlast most of its rivals. For all that, we've ranked the Asus Zenbook 14 OLED Touch as the best laptop value overall." ("Westover & Osborne, 2025)

We note the causal clause introduced by the conjunction *after* plus gerund, with the quantitative determiner *dozens of*, designating an indefinitely large number ("*After testing dozens of* laptops for this recommendation"), used to provide a measurable argument in favour of the chosen product; the latter is identified through a relative superlative followed by the preposition *for* plus the superlative quantifier *most*, denoting a certain context or qualification ("*the best* laptop *for most* people"). Other superlatives are the relative superlative "the best laptop overall", or an absolute superlative combined with the preposition *for* denoting a lexical contrast with a limitative value ("a *highly* competitive level *for its sub*-$1,000 price"). We also find lexical items with superlative or positive semantic value in a technical context: "It's a *powerful* system wrapped in a *tough*, *attractive*, and *portable* frame, with a *good* OLED display and *enough* battery life to *outlast* most of its rivals." The *cause and effect* pattern concludes the introduction with a causal clause introduced by the conjunction *for*, which was previously emphatically repeated several times in this short paragraph, and also with an emphatic repetition of the model name and a rephrasing of its ranking category: "*For* all that, we've ranked the Asus Zenbook 14 OLED Touch as *the best laptop value overall*."

The *cause and effect* pattern can also be recognized in the body of the review: "The AMD chip's integrated graphics also led in most visual tests, *making for* quite the all-rounder ultraportable laptop." Here we have the phrasal verb "make for", meaning "to cause a particular result or situation" (LDOCE Online, 2025), aligned with "all-rounder", which extends its meaning from "someone with many different skills" (*idem*), to a product that is versatile. There are also lexical items denoting superlative technical performance and characteristics ("*impressive* performance and battery life"; "a *high-end ultraportable* laptop"; "this Zenbook led the pack with *a whopping* 19 hours and 56 minutes of lasting power"; "*thin* profile and *light* weight"; "will handle *plenty of* basic AI tasks *easily*").

We note that the *cause and effect* pattern combines with the *comparison and contrast* rhetoric, which is apparent in the organization of the review text, signalling the body of the analysis with a statement subheading introduced by the adverb *why*, using a verb to draw a conclusion or observation: "Why We Picked It"; another statement subheading ("Who It's For"), with its further subcategorizing subheads under the form of noun phrases with determiners ("General home users"; "Frequent travellers"; "AI early adopters") supports the argument and lends clarity to the text structure.

The *comparison and contrast* pattern is also used to organize the text, in order to examine the similarities and differences between products. More specifically, the authors

identify the common characteristics shared by several items and their distinguishing features, also explaining how products measure up against one another.

Among the means to achieve this pattern, we identify the following: a comparative structure meaning "relatively", "more than the average", which makes a less clear and narrow selection than a superlative, also making things seem less definite and more subtle ("at just 0.59 inch thick and 2.82 pounds, it's one of *the thinner and lighter* ultraportable laptops"); *to outlast* or *to lead*, verbs expressing superiority, followed by the quantifier *most of* before nouns with determiners, or *most* as a quantitative adjective ("with […] enough battery life *to outlast most of its rivals*"; "The Zenbook 14 OLED Touch *led* its competitors in *most of* our processing benchmarks"; "The AMD chip's integrated graphics also *led* in *most* visual tests"); the phrase *enough… to* is also used to signify that a specific quantity is sufficient for a specific purpose, in our case justifying the choice of the product as superior; a contrastive clause introduced by the conjunction *while* with the comparative quantifier *more* as a noun determiner, paired with the informal verb "to wow" in the main clause ("*While* we would appreciate *more pixels* (the screen resolution is 1,920 by 1,200 pixels), the Zenbook's OLED technology will *wow* you with its deep contrast and vibrant colours"); here, we also note the contrast between the epistemic modal "would" ("we *would* appreciate more pixels"), which expresses a less strong necessity than the degree of probability conveyed by the epistemic modal *will* ("The Zenbook's technology *will* wow you"); the quantitative adverb *pretty* as an adjective modifier paired with the preposition for, suggesting a high degree of performance with a specific context or limitation ("In our tests, we found the display to display 100% of the sRGB and DCI-P3 color gamuts and shine at up to 364 nits – *pretty bright for* an OLED panel"); *appreciate* as a valuative verb, which recognizes the worth of the product, paired with the preposition *for* to identify a quality, or also to designate the limitation of a specific context ("We also *appreciate* the laptop's MIL-STD 810H passing grade *for durability*, 1080p webcam, and broad port selection *for its size*."); lexical items suggesting contrast with other brands ("That figure leads most Windows laptops and makes the Zenbook *competitive with* Apple's MacBook Air models"; "the Zenbook 14 OLED Touch *is priced aggressively against* many rivals, including Apple's ultraportable laptops").

With respect to the clarity, simplicity and brevity of this technical piece of writing, the lack of the passive voice is conspicuous throughout the review, with only one recorded instance ("The Zenbook 14 OLED Touch *is priced* aggressively against many rivals") in a 930-word corpus, a fact that also contributes to the informality of the register.

4. Conclusions

The present corpus analysis demonstrates how the functions of a digital tech magazine review are fulfilled, namely the function to inform, to entertain and to persuade. The *informative function* is carried out through the use of specialized technical jargon, often under the form of noun phrases with strings of modifiers. Numerical data and quantifiers also play a prominent role, in rhetorical patterns that include comparison and contrast, cause and effect, classification or definition. We note the use of comparative and superlative morphological structures, along with lexical items with superlative or positive connotations supporting a good – bad dichotomy. The attributes of clarity, brevity and conciseness, which are characteristics of technical writing in general, also transpire through the text layout, schematic structure and interactive nature of the digital content. Besides the informative function, these attributes also support the *poetic function*, as the

text is not swamped by unnecessary detail or a lack of coherence, instead bearing the mark of language informality, playfulness and novelty, which is preferred by the magazine target public. Finally, the *conative function* results from both the confluence of the other two functions and its own specific characteristics. The readership is persuaded to engage with the content as the informative function is served with professionalism and the context / content progressing to the text of the review as such supports practicality, the ease of navigation, processing of information, and builds a feeling of trust in the validity of information. Moreover, readers are encouraged to form a bond with the magazine brand by capitalising on the *we – you* dynamic and by identifying those features in the product that cater for the public's needs and desires, on a personal, conversational and engaging tone.

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