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**Emotional Self-disclosure as a Resource  
in the Discursive Construction  
of Feedback on YouTube Product Reviews**

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# Abstract

This dissertation examines emotional self-disclosure as a discursive resource in user-generated textual feedback on YouTube. While previous research on online emotions has often focused on sentiment analysis or psychological outcomes, less attention has been paid to how emotions are linguistically constructed and strategically deployed in specific digital genres. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how YouTube users explicitly express their emotions as part of their textual feedback on smartphone unboxing videos.

Adopting a discourse-oriented perspective, the research analyses emotional self-disclosure in a corpus of 16,034 comments (477,668 words) collected from 50 YouTube videos reviewing Apple iPhone and Samsung Galaxy smartphones. The methodological approach combines qualitative discourse analysis with corpus-assisted techniques, incorporating a quantitative component based on frequency counts and distributional analysis. The analysis proceeds through three complementary stages: (1) a thematic analysis identifying the main targets towards which emotions are oriented; (2) a pragmatic analysis examining the social functions fulfilled by emotional self-disclosure; and (3) a discourse-analytic examination of the linguistic, pictorial and discursive resources used to construct emotional expression.

The findings show that emotional self-disclosure is a recurrent feature of YouTube feedback and is oriented towards three main domains: the self, the online community and the product under review. These emotional disclosures fulfil several interactional functions, including self-expression, social validation, identity clarification, social control and relational development. Furthermore, emotional meanings are constructed through a combination of lexical choices, punctuation, orthographic variation, emojis and broader discursive resources such as humour and irony, personal anecdotes and narratives, and the evocation of spatial dimensions.

Overall, the study highlights emotional self-disclosure as an important mechanism through which users participate in online communities, articulate evaluative feedback and negotiate identity in digital discourse. By focusing on YouTube comment sections, the dissertation contributes to research on self-disclosure, emotion and participatory culture in contemporary online environments.

**Keywords:** emotional self-disclosure; digital discourse; YouTube comments; feedback; discourse analysis; Internet-mediated communication; smartphone unboxing videos.

# Resumen

Esta tesis examina la autorrevelación (*self-disclosure*) emocional como un recurso discursivo del feedback textual generado por usuarios en YouTube. Si bien existen investigaciones previas sobre las emociones en línea que se han centrado generalmente en el análisis de sentimientos o en sus efectos psicológicos, se ha prestado menos atención a cómo las emociones se construyen desde el punto de vista lingüístico-discursivo y cómo se despliegan de forma estratégica en géneros digitales específicos. A fin de contribuir con esa área menos explorada, el presente estudio investiga cómo los usuarios de YouTube expresan sus emociones de forma explícita como parte de su feedback textual en videos de unboxing de smartphones.

Desde una perspectiva discursiva, esta investigación analiza la autorrevelación emocional en un corpus de 16.034 comentarios (477.668 palabras) recopilados de 50 videos de YouTube que reseñan los smartphones Apple iPhone y Samsung Galaxy. El enfoque metodológico combina análisis discursivo cualitativo con técnicas asistidas por corpus, e incorpora una dimensión cuantitativa basada en el análisis de frecuencias y distribuciones. El análisis se desarrolla en tres etapas complementarias: (1) un análisis temático que identifica los principales objetivos hacia los cuales se orientan las emociones; (2) un análisis pragmático que examina las funciones sociales que cumple la autorrevelación emocional; y (3) un análisis discursivo de los recursos lingüísticos, pictóricos y discursivos utilizados para construir la expresión de emociones.

Los resultados muestran que la autorrevelación emocional es un rasgo recurrente del feedback en YouTube y se orienta hacia tres dominios principales: el yo, la comunidad en línea y el producto reseñado. Estas autorrevelaciones emocionales cumplen diversas funciones interaccionales, entre ellas la expresión personal, la validación social, la clarificación identitaria, el control social y el desarrollo relacional. Asimismo, los significados emocionales se construyen mediante una combinación de elecciones léxicas, puntuación, variación ortográfica, emojis y recursos discursivos más amplios como el humor y la ironía, las narrativas y anécdotas personales, y la evocación de dimensiones espaciales.

En conjunto, el estudio destaca que la autorrevelación emocional constituye un mecanismo importante que los usuarios emplean al participar en comunidades en línea y que permite articular feedback evaluativo y negociar aspectos identitarios a través del discurso digital. Esta tesis, centrada en las secciones de comentarios de YouTube, contribuye a la investigación sobre autorrevelación, emoción y cultura participativa en entornos digitales contemporáneos.

**Palabras clave:** autorrevelación emocional; discurso digital; comentarios de YouTube; feedback; análisis del discurso; comunicación mediada por internet; videos de unboxing de smartphones.

# 1. Introduction

In recent years, digital communication has become an integral part of everyday social interaction. Social media platforms, far from functioning as mere channels for information exchange, have become complex social spaces in which users narrate experiences, negotiate identities and, crucially, express emotions. From overt displays of enthusiasm and disappointment to more intimate confessions of frustration, longing or attachment, emotion has emerged as a salient feature of many forms of online discourse, shaping the ways in which users position themselves in relation to others, evaluate content and provide feedback (Jaworska & Vásquez, 2026). This centrality of affect has attracted increasing scholarly attention, particularly within fields such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics and Internet-mediated communication (Herring, 2001; Papacharissi, 2010; Yus, 2011; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014; Jones et al., 2015; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019; Kennedy, 2020, among others). Within these fields, language is understood not simply as a neutral vehicle for meaning, but as a resource for social action, interpersonal positioning and the performance of subjectivity. Against this backdrop, an important question arises: how are emotions linguistically performed and exploited in public yet deeply personal digital environments?

One concept that has proven particularly useful in addressing this question is *self-disclosure*. Traditionally defined as the act of revealing personal information, thoughts or feelings to others, self-disclosure has long been examined in face-to-face interaction and interpersonal communication. However, the emergence of digital platforms has transformed the conditions under which disclosure takes place, the meanings attached to it and its potential consequences. For instance, online environments tend to blur the boundaries between the public and the private (Papacharissi, 2012), complicating the notion of audience as well as challenging traditional assumptions about intimacy and personal revelation. In these environments, users often disclose information to audiences that are partially unknown, potentially vast and temporally dispersed. As a result, it can be argued that online self-disclosure functions as a discursive practice through which users position

themselves, seek affiliation, manage visibility and negotiate social relations in considerably more complex settings.

Within this broader phenomenon, *emotional self-disclosure* occupies a particularly relevant place. Emotional self-disclosure refers to the expression of one's emotional states, reactions or evaluations. In online contexts, the disclosure of emotions may be facilitated by perceived anonymity, reduced social risk and platform-specific norms that encourage personal expression. At the same time, emotional self-disclosure is shaped by the users' awareness of an audience and by the affordances of the medium, including comment sections, likes, emojis, replies and other multimodal resources. Emotions expressed online are therefore more than just internal states made visible; they are socially oriented acts that anticipate responses, invite alignment and contribute to the co-construction of meaning and community.

Previous research has shown that self-disclosure often serves as a means of building rapport, seeking validation, strengthening social bonds or participating in communities of shared interest (Derlega and Grzelak, 1979). Nevertheless, much of this work has either focused on face-to-face interaction or has been conducted from certain disciplines, like medicine or psychology, addressing such issues as well-being, mental health or social anxiety (Desjarlais, 2022; Saha et al., 2025). Less attention has been paid to how emotional self-disclosure is discursively constructed in specific genres of online interaction, or how users strategically deploy emotional language as part of their communicative practices, particularly in the feedback they provide to others. This gap highlights the need for discourse-oriented analyses that foreground language use and communicative functions, as well as context-sensitive meaning-making.

Among contemporary platforms, YouTube represents a particularly rich site for investigating emotional self-disclosure as a key resource through which users articulate feedback. As a hybrid medium combining audiovisual content with interactive comment sections, YouTube enables multiple layers of participation. Users are not only viewers, but also active commenters who provide feedback, evaluate content, address creators and interact with one another. The comment section operates as a public forum where opinions, evaluations,

experiences and emotions are shared, often in highly expressive and informal ways. Importantly, YouTube comments are persistent and visible to a broad audience, raising questions about how users manage personal expression, emotional exposure and social alignment in such a space.

Within YouTube, product review and unboxing videos constitute a highly popular and distinctive genre that is particularly well suited to the study of emotional self-disclosure. Unboxing videos centre on the first encounter with a product and often emphasise anticipation, excitement and evaluation. Viewers are invited to share in this experience, and the comment sections frequently become spaces of collective participation and emotional resonance. Users can offer feedback and comment on the technical features of a product or the quality of the video, but they can also share their feelings: affection or appreciation for the content creator, excitement about a potential purchase, disappointment with a brand, nostalgia for earlier product models, or even frustration related to financial limitations.

The decision to focus on unboxing videos of smartphones as the material of analysis in this dissertation is also theoretically motivated. Smartphones are not neutral consumer goods; they are deeply embedded in users' daily routines, social relationships and self-presentation. As such, they often carry strong emotional associations. Commenters may relate the product to personal experiences, identity aspirations or feelings of belonging to a particular brand community. This makes smartphone unboxing videos an especially fertile ground for examining emotional self-disclosure as a socially and discursively situated phenomenon.

Despite the growing body of research on YouTube discourse, a clear gap remains. Existing studies have often prioritised metrics of engagement, marketing effectiveness or general sentiment polarity (Yang et al., 2022; Pelttari, 2025; Le et al., 2025). While these approaches provide valuable insights, they tend to overlook the interactional and pragmatic functions of emotional expression through discourse. To this day, there exist few qualitative, linguistically informed analyses that examine how emotional self-disclosure is realised through language and how it contributes to the construction of meaning in YouTube comments. This dissertation therefore seeks to address this underexplored area by focusing

on explicit emotional self-disclosure as a communicative resource exploited when giving textual feedback on YouTube.

The dissertation is structured in six chapters. This Introduction situates the study within broader research on digital discourse and emotion, outlines its purpose and presents the research questions, hypotheses and objectives that guide the analysis. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework, discussing key notions such as self-disclosure, emotional self-disclosure, and YouTube as a digital platform where emotional expression is frequently articulated through feedback practices. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, including data selection, analytical approach and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents a thematic, pragmatic and discursive analysis of YouTube comments, focusing on patterns of emotional self-disclosure and their discursive functions. Chapter 5 discusses the main findings and implications of this study, while Chapter 6 offers concluding remarks, explores limitations and suggests directions for future research.

## 1.1. Background to the Study

Research on self-disclosure has a long tradition in communication studies and social psychology, where it has been associated with intimacy development, relational maintenance and interpersonal trust. Early models conceptualised self-disclosure primarily as a dyadic and reciprocal process occurring in face-to-face interaction (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Roloff, 1981; Reis & Shaver, 1988).

However, with the rise of digital communication and the study of digital discourse, scholars began to question the applicability of these models to online contexts, where audiences are often invisible, interactions can be asynchronous and involve multiple participants, platform-specific affordances give rise to new discursive practices and ways of exploiting linguistic resources, and information disclosure may persist over time. Studies of online self-disclosure have explored how users share personal information on social networking sites, blogs and forums, often highlighting the role of anonymity, platform affordances and perceived social norms (Walther, 1996; Herring, 2004; Park et al., 2011; Ma et al., 2016).

Parallel to this line of research, work on emotions in Internet-mediated communication has demonstrated that emotions are not diminished online but are instead expressed through a range of linguistic and multimodal resources. Evaluative lexis, intensifiers, narrative strategies, emojis and stickers, among other emergent phenomena, have been shown to play a crucial role in compensating for the absence of non-verbal cues (Yus, 2011; Herring, 2013; McCulloch, 2019; Petersen, 2023; Scribano, 2023).

In addition, recent scholarship has begun to frame online emotions as socially circulated and discursively constructed interactional achievements, shifting from internal states to relational processes (Wetherell, 2012; García et al., 2016; Chau & Lee, 2017; Parini & Yus, in press). Nevertheless, there remains limited research that brings together self-disclosure, emotion and genre-specific discourse analysis, particularly in the context of YouTube comment sections and consumer-related content. This study builds on and extends previous work that has explored commenting activity and sentiment on YouTube (Lange, 2014; Tur-Viñes & Castelló-Martínez, 2019; Parini et al., 2025) by adopting a pragmatic and sociolinguistic approach to emotional self-disclosure in a clearly defined digital genre.

## 1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study adopts a discourse-oriented view of emotion. From this perspective, emotional self-disclosure is understood as a communicative practice through which users position themselves in relation to others, express evaluations, seek alignment and participate in the norms and values of a particular online community.

Against this background, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine how emotional self-disclosure is discursively constructed in YouTube comments on smartphone unboxing videos. By focusing on a clearly defined and highly popular digital genre, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which users explicitly draw on emotional language as well as other resources to express themselves, provide feedback, articulate personal experiences and negotiate their place within the YouTube ecosystem.

More specifically, the study aims to move beyond approaches that treat emotions as abstract sentiment categories, and instead to offer a qualitative, pragmatic and sociolinguistic analysis of what emotions are oriented towards, what social functions they fulfil and how they are discursively constructed. In doing so, this dissertation seeks to contribute to research on self-disclosure and digital discourse by highlighting emotional self-disclosure as a strategic communicative resource in everyday online participation.

### 1.3. Research Questions

This dissertation seeks to address the following research questions:

- 1) Towards which targets are emotions oriented in YouTube textual feedback on smartphone unboxing videos, and which categories of emotional self-disclosure can be identified from such thematic orientation?
- 2) Which social functions does emotional self-disclosure fulfil in this context, and which of these functions are most prominent in the corpus?
- 3) What specific linguistic, pictorial and discursive resources are commonly used to construct emotional self-disclosure in user feedback on YouTube?

### 1.4. Hypotheses

This study is based on the following hypotheses:

- 1) Emotional self-disclosure is a recurrent feature of user-generated textual feedback on smartphone unboxing videos on YouTube.
- 2) In this context, emotions may be oriented not only towards the product under review, but also towards the self, the YouTuber and the wider community of users.
- 3) Emotional self-disclosure serves key social functions, including alignment, community-building and identity construction.

4) Emotional self-disclosure is realised through strategies that combine linguistic, pictorial and discourse-level resources.

## 1.5. Objectives

In line with the research questions and the hypotheses outlined above, this study pursues the following objectives:

### 1.5.1. General Objective

To analyse emotional self-disclosure as a key resource in the construction of textual feedback on smartphone unboxing videos on YouTube, to contribute to discourse-based research on emotion and self-disclosure in digital environments.

### 1.5.2. Specific Objectives

- 1) To identify and categorise the main types of emotional self-disclosure found in the corpus based on their emotional orientation, and to examine their relative distribution.
- 2) To analyse the social functions fulfilled by emotional self-disclosure in YouTube comments, with attention to their frequency and prominence within the dataset.
- 3) To examine and characterise the linguistic, pictorial and discursive resources through which emotional self-disclosure is constructed in textual feedback on YouTube.

## 2. Literature Review

Broadly speaking, self-disclosure refers to the act of revealing personal information to others. However, this apparently simple definition conceals a concept that is theoretically rich and analytically complex. In fact, over the past decades, self-disclosure has been approached from multiple perspectives, ranging from experimental psychology to sociological and discursive frameworks. This section therefore reviews the main theoretical

contributions to the study of self-disclosure, focusing on its definition, dimensions, functions, relational nature and links to identity construction. This overview provides the conceptual foundations for the subsequent discussion of emotional self-disclosure, its articulation in online contexts, and its specific manifestation on YouTube as a space for emotional expression and user feedback.

## 2.1. Self-disclosure

Early work on self-disclosure is most closely associated with the research of Sidney Jourard, who defined self-disclosure as the process by which individuals willingly make themselves known to others through the communication of personal information (Jourard, 1971). According to Jourard, disclosure involves information that is private, personal and not immediately observable, such as thoughts, feelings, experiences and beliefs.

Subsequent scholars have refined this definition, highlighting that self-disclosure is inherently relational and a major factor in the development, maintenance and deterioration of a relationship. Through their study of self-disclosure in close relationships, Derlega et al. (1993) argue that disclosure only exists in relation to an audience, since information cannot be considered “disclosed” unless it is shared with others. In this sense, self-disclosure is understood as a communicative act shaped by social expectations, norms and perceived reactions. These initial definitions already point to a key tension that remains relevant for contemporary research: while self-disclosure is often conceptualised as a personal or psychological process, it is fundamentally communicative and socially situated.

In relation to the content of self-disclosure, Altman and Taylor (1973) suggest a three-layer model, alluding to the “onion” metaphor. The peripheral layer of self-disclosure refers to biographic data (such as name, gender or age); the intermediate layer refers to personal values, attitudes and opinions; and the core layer refers to personal needs, beliefs or fears. As one approaches the core layers, the information about the self becomes increasingly sensitive. In addition, of relevance for the present study is the distinction between two types of disclosure depending on the type of content being shared: descriptive disclosure, which

involves factual information about the self, and evaluative or emotional disclosure, which involves content related to feelings, attitudes and subjective evaluations.

Moreover, researchers have consistently emphasised the multidimensional nature of this phenomenon. Omarzu (2000) identifies three primary dimensions through which the level of self-disclosure can be assessed: breadth, duration and depth. Breadth refers to the range of topics discussed, with a wider range indicating greater self-disclosure. Duration concerns “the time spent describing each item of information” (Cozby, 1973, p.75), such that longer descriptions typically signal higher levels of disclosure. Depth, finally, refers to the intimacy or personal significance of the information shared, which tends to increase as relationships develop. Other dimensions identified by scholars that also shape self-disclosure are the amount or frequency of disclosure, its valence (positive or negative), and its honesty or accuracy (Derlega et al., 1993). Although the present study does not operationalise all these dimensions quantitatively, they underscore the complexity of self-disclosure as a communicative phenomenon.

In connection to the motivations and social functions of self-disclosure, Derlega and Grzelak (1979) argue that disclosure fulfils five important functions: self-expression, identity clarification, social validation, relational development and social control. Self-expression refers to the use of self-disclosure as a means of articulating one’s thoughts, feelings and experiences, usually motivated by an intrinsic need to express the self rather than to achieve a specific interpersonal outcome. It often serves a clear cathartic function, for instance, when it implies relieving distress through disclosure of negative emotions or problems. Identity clarification relates to the role of self-disclosure in helping individuals define, negotiate and make sense of who they are, both for themselves and for others, through the sharing of personal information. This process of identity clarification is closely linked to the function of social validation, as personal information can also be disclosed to seek confirmation, approval or reassurance from others. Positive evaluations from others often lead to a positive self-concept and self-development. The function of relational development concerns the use of disclosure to initiate, deepen or maintain interpersonal relationships, since sharing personal information can foster intimacy, trust and mutual understanding. Finally, social control refers to the strategic use of self-disclosure to influence others’

perceptions or behaviours, for instance by setting expectations, eliciting certain responses or managing impressions within a given interaction.

Naturally, not all types of interactions are the same (e.g. friendships vs. romantic relationships), and the goals and motivation for self-disclosure will vary depending on many factors, including the size and nature of the audience involved in each interaction. This means that these categories should be understood as flexible and context-sensitive functions that help account for the diverse ways in which self-disclosure operates across interactional settings, audiences and communicative goals.

It is important to point out, however, that not all self-disclosure is necessarily relationship-enhancing. Self-disclosure may instead be deployed strategically, as a performative resource for self-serving purposes. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) work on self-presentation, disclosure can be understood as a way of managing impressions and projecting a desired identity. This insight is particularly relevant in public or semi-public contexts, where disclosures may be oriented toward visibility, recognition or affiliation rather than intimacy.

From this perspective that links self-disclosure to processes of identity construction, disclosure is not only about revealing pre-existing aspects of the self, but also about actively constructing and performing identities through discourse. Giddens (1991) argues that in late modernity, individuals increasingly rely on reflexive narratives of the self, continuously telling and retelling who they are: "[t]he reflexive project of the self (...) consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives" (p. 5). In this narrative work, self-disclosure plays a central role. Discourse-oriented approaches have further emphasised that identities are constructed interactionally and contextually. For instance, Bamberg (2004) and De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) show how personal stories and evaluative stances contribute to the positioning of the self in relation to others. Even brief disclosures can index identities, values and affiliations, particularly when they involve emotional or evaluative content.

Although briefly explored in this section, all these approaches to the study of self-disclosure show that this phenomenon is a complex, multidimensional and context-sensitive

communicative practice that goes beyond a simple act of revealing personal information. It involves decisions about what to disclose, how deeply, to whom and for what purposes, and it is shaped by social norms, relational expectations and identity concerns. In fact, self-disclosure constitutes a discursive resource through which identities, relationships and social meanings are actively constructed. This understanding provides a useful foundation for examining emotional self-disclosure in the next section.

## 2.2. Emotional Self-disclosure

In order to conceptualise emotional self-disclosure, it is first necessary to address what is meant by *emotion*, a notion that has proven difficult to define. Across disciplines such as psychology, sociology and linguistics, emotions have been understood in markedly different ways, and no single, universally accepted definition exists (Pawlik & Rosenzweig, 2000). While some approaches conceptualise emotions as internal, psychological states that reside within the individual, others emphasise their social, cultural and interactional dimensions. This plurality of perspectives has important implications for how emotional self-disclosure is understood and analysed.

Traditional psychological approaches, like the James-Lange theory (Lange, 1885/1912; James, 1894), have often treated emotions as relatively stable inner experiences or affective states that precede their expression. From this perspective, emotions such as happiness, anger or sadness are seen as internal responses to stimuli, which may then be externalised through language or behaviour. Although these approaches have contributed valuable insights into the nature of emotional experience, they tend to conceptualise emotion as something that exists prior to, and independently from, discourse. As a result, emotional expression is often treated as a transparent window into an individual's inner emotional life.

In contrast, social constructionist and discursive approaches have challenged this view by foregrounding the socially situated and communicative nature of emotions (Gendron & Barrett, 2009). From this perspective, emotions are not merely internal states that are later expressed, but are actively constructed, negotiated and displayed through discourse

(Edwards & Potter, 1992; Harré & Gillett, 1994). Scholars working within this tradition argue that emotions are shaped by cultural norms, interactional expectations and available linguistic resources, and that they serve important social and interpersonal functions. Emotions are therefore felt, performed and interpreted in context.

Regardless of the perspective adopted, any attempt to conceptualise emotion must address several key questions, particularly when examining digital environments where users from diverse cultural backgrounds interact in platform-specific contexts. Are emotions universal human experiences, or are they culturally constructed in different ways? Can they be reduced to a limited set of basic categories, or are they better understood as complex, context-dependent phenomena with fluid boundaries? A prominent universalist account is offered by Ekman (1992), who proposes six biologically grounded basic emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust) which he argues are universally recognisable across cultures. In contrast, Lutz and White (1986) challenge such universalist models, emphasising that emotional experience, expression and interpretation are deeply embedded in specific social and cultural contexts, and therefore vary across societies.

Despite decades of research, there is little consensus on these issues, largely because emotions sit at the intersection of biological processes, cognitive evaluations, social practices and cultural norms. This theoretical diversity has resulted in a wide range of definitions, models and analytical frameworks, each foregrounding different aspects of emotional experience and, in turn, offering partial accounts of what emotions are and how they function. Consequently, emotions remain a particularly challenging object of study, especially when attention shifts from internal experience to observable forms of expression and communication. Nevertheless, what scholars from such diverse areas as neuroscience (Nummenmaa et al., 2012) and sociology (Stets & Turner, 2006) do seem to agree on is that emotions play a very important role in human behaviour and social interaction.

For the purposes of this study, the definition of emotion provided by Wharton and de Saussure (2023) offers a suitable point of departure for analysing emotional self-disclosure. These scholars define emotions as psychological states characterised by a specific phenomenology (they are felt), by intentionality (they are directed towards specific objects,

persons or situations and involve an evaluation of them), and by relative transience (they are relatively short-lived, distinguishing them from longer-lasting sentiments and moods). Emotions are thus conceived as dyadic relationships in which a subject experiences a particular feeling towards a given entity. This conceptualisation is particularly relevant for analysing emotional self-disclosure in evaluative and interactional contexts where several targets for emotions may exist.

It is worth noting that the boundaries between related concepts such as emotion, affect and evaluation are not always clearly demarcated in the literature. In this study, evaluative expressions are generally treated as instances of emotional self-disclosure when they are framed in affective terms and anchored in the commenter's subjective experience. Moreover, from an interactional perspective, the distinction between feeling something and evaluating something on the basis of that feeling is rarely meaningful in practice. Since affect and emotion frequently surface together in spontaneous online discourse and are difficult to disentangle, this study reflects that reality by treating these two notions as functionally overlapping concepts, without imposing a rigid theoretical boundary between them.

Building on a socially oriented understanding of emotion, emotional self-disclosure can then be understood as the communication of one's feelings, emotional states or affective evaluations to others, which may fulfil personal needs but also perform interactional and relational functions. Unlike descriptive self-disclosure, which primarily involves the sharing of factual information about the self, emotional self-disclosure centres on subjective and evaluative experience. It includes the expression of emotions such as excitement, disappointment, frustration or satisfaction, as well as more general affective stances towards events, objects or people, like gratitude or scepticism. Because of its evaluative and personal nature, emotional self-disclosure is often perceived as a deeper and more intimate form of disclosure.

Emotional self-disclosure is also central to the construction and negotiation of identity. By expressing emotions, individuals position themselves in relation to others and to the topics they are discussing, indexing values, preferences and affiliations (Smith & Mackie, 2016).

Emotional expressions can signal enthusiasm, expertise, distrust or loyalty, and thus contribute to the performance of particular identities. From a discourse-oriented perspective, emotions function as stance-taking devices that allow speakers to align with or disalign from others and to evaluate objects, experiences or social practices (Du Bois & Kärkkäinen, 2012).

Furthermore, another important consideration for this dissertation is that emotional self-disclosure should not be taken as a purely spontaneous or neutral act. It is often, in fact, a selective and potentially strategic communicative practice which can have both positive and negative outcomes. Individuals do not disclose all emotions they experience; rather, they make choices about which feelings to share, how explicitly to express them, to what end, and in which contexts such disclosures are considered appropriate. Previous research has shown that emotional self-disclosure can involve a degree of vulnerability, as revealing one's feelings may expose the speaker to evaluation, misunderstanding or judgement. As pointed out by Ho et al., "people often avoid disclosing to others out of a fear of negative evaluation" (2018, p. 713). At the same time, such disclosures can also generate important interpersonal benefits, including social support, affiliation, credibility and a sense of shared experience. For instance, disclosure can ease stress stemming from adverse experiences (Martins et al., 2013), lessen feelings of anxiety (Tam et al., 2006), strengthen interpersonal closeness and intimacy (Sprecher et al., 2013), and promote psychological benefits linked to self-perception, such as increased self-affirmation and a renewed sense of self-worth following intimate disclosure (Creswell et al., 2007). Emotional self-disclosure thus involves a continuous negotiation between personal expression and social risk, as speakers manage vulnerability alongside potential personal and relational benefits, shaped by contextual norms, perceived audience expectations and the relational goals of the speaker.

Of course, there is more that could be said about both emotion and self-disclosure, and the present discussion does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of these notions. Overall, the discussion above highlights emotional self-disclosure as a complex and context-sensitive phenomenon that, from a discourse-oriented perspective, cannot be reduced to the simple expression of pre-existing inner states. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of emotional experience and communicative practice, performing both personal and social

work. Conceptualising emotional self-disclosure in this way allows for an analysis that prioritizes not so much *which* emotions are expressed, but *how* and *why* they are made relevant in interaction in particular contexts. This perspective is especially well suited to the analysis of user-generated online discourse, through which emotional expressions are publicly displayed, oriented to multiple targets, and embedded in evaluative and participatory practices. The following section turns to self-disclosure in online contexts, with particular attention to how digital environments shape the expression and interpretation of emotions.

### 2.3. Self-disclosure and Emotions in Online Contexts

Much of the foundational work on self-disclosure was developed in the context of face-to-face, dyadic interaction. As communication technologies evolved, scholars began to question whether these theories could be directly applied to mediated environments. Walther's (1992) Social Information Processing Theory challenged early assumptions that reduced social cues would necessarily limit disclosure, arguing instead that individuals adapt their communicative strategies to the affordances of the medium. Subsequent research has shown that mediated contexts can, under certain conditions, facilitate self-disclosure, particularly when factors such as anonymity, reduced social risk or audience control are present (Joinson, 2001; Tidwell & Walther, 2002). These findings paved the way for a growing body of research on online self-disclosure.

Building on early work in computer-mediated communication, research on online self-disclosure has emphasised that this phenomenon cannot be understood independently of the technological affordances that shape interaction. Rather than simply constraining social behaviour, mediated environments offer users new resources for managing how and when personal information is revealed. Walther's (1996) Hyperpersonal Model, for instance, suggests that reduced cue environments may actually intensify relational communication, as users engage in selective self-presentation and greater message optimisation. Features such as asynchronicity allow individuals to carefully craft their contributions, potentially enabling more reflective, deliberate or emotionally nuanced forms of self-disclosure than those typically found in spontaneous face-to-face interaction. From this perspective, online

disclosure is not a deficient version of offline communication, but a qualitatively different practice shaped by medium-specific conditions.

A recurring theme in the literature concerns the role of anonymity and perceived social distance in facilitating online self-disclosure. Some studies indicate that individuals are often more willing to share personal or emotionally charged information in mediated contexts where visual cues are absent and social accountability is reduced (Joinson, 2001). Suler (2004) conceptualises this tendency through the notion of the *online disinhibition effect*, arguing that factors such as invisibility, dissociative anonymity and minimised authority can lower users' inhibitions. In addition, he distinguishes between benign disinhibition, which may encourage openness, self-exploration and emotional sharing, and toxic disinhibition, which can result in hostility or antisocial behaviour. This distinction underlines that increased self-disclosure in online contexts is not inherently positive or negative but contextually situated and socially regulated: "...in the very wide variety of online subcultures, what is considered asocial behavior in one group may be very à propos in another..." (Suler, 2004, p. 322).

While anonymity may encourage openness, online self-disclosure is also shaped by complex considerations of the audience. In contrast to dyadic interaction, many online platforms involve what has been described as context collapse, whereby diverse audiences coexist within a single communicative space (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). As a result, users often address an imagined audience instead of a clearly defined interlocutor, adjusting their disclosures according to assumptions about who might be reading, now or in the future (Litt, 2012). These audience dynamics complicate traditional understandings of self-disclosure, as expressions that may feel intimate or personal to the writer are simultaneously made publicly accessible. Emotional self-disclosure, in this sense, becomes a strategic practice, negotiated at the intersection of personal expression and public visibility.

Beyond individual motivations, scholars have increasingly drawn attention to the normative and relational dimensions of online self-disclosure. Disclosure practices are embedded within platform-specific cultures that shape what kinds of personal information are considered appropriate, expected or valued. Scholars have argued that online communities

develop shared norms around intimacy, authenticity and emotional expression, which guide participants' communicative behaviour (Waterloo et al., 2017; Masur et al., 2023). From this perspective, self-disclosure functions as a form of relational work, contributing to the construction of solidarity, affiliation and group belonging. In highly interactive environments, emotional disclosures may invite responses, alignment or validation, reinforcing their social significance.

In addition to platform affordances and audience dynamics, research on online discourse has drawn attention to the importance of specific linguistic and semiotic resources through which emotions can be made visible in text-based interaction. Given the relative absence of prosodic and paralinguistic cues on many platforms that offer written modes of interaction, users frequently adapt written language to convey affective meaning, interpersonal stance and emotional intensity. These adaptations challenge traditional distinctions between spoken and written modes, resulting in what has often been described as a hybrid or “orality-influenced” form of discourse (Herring, 2001; Crystal, 2006). Emotional self-disclosure in online contexts thus relies both on lexical choices and on a range of graphical and typographic strategies that compensate for the lack of face-to-face cues.

One of the most extensively studied resources in this regard is the use of emojis and emoticons. Originally developed to signal basic emotional states and reduce ambiguity in text-based communication, emojis have evolved into a rich semiotic system capable of conveying illocutionary force, nuanced affective meanings, interpersonal alignment and evaluative stance (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Danesi, 2017; Sampietro, 2019; Cantamutto & Vela Delfa, 2019; Halté, 2020). Beyond functioning as substitutes for facial expressions, emojis operate pragmatically in more complex ways, modifying or intensifying the emotional force of an utterance, signalling irony or indexing shared cultural meanings (Yus, 2025). In contexts of self-disclosure, emojis may soften emotionally sensitive statements, invite empathy or reinforce expressions of enthusiasm, disappointment or attachment, thereby contributing to the interpersonal work of online interaction.

Despite their widespread use as affective markers, emojis pose significant interpretative challenges, particularly in relation to the expression and recognition of emotions. One of the

central issues highlighted in the literature concerns their inherent ambiguity, as pointed out by Vela Delfa & Cantamutto (2025), which complicates attempts to establish stable one-to-one correspondences between specific emojis and discrete emotional states. While some studies have sought to systematise the emotional meanings of emojis (e.g. Moreno-Ortiz, 2019) the boundaries between emotional categories frequently remain blurred, with considerable overlap and variability in emoji usage. Other researchers, such as Kelly and Watts (2015), have also stressed the decisive role of context in shaping emoji interpretation. Studies such as these suggest that emojis should not be understood as transparent carriers of emotion. Instead, they seem to operate as flexible, context-dependent semiotic resources whose emotional significance emerges through situated acts of interpretation.

Beyond emojis, users frequently exploit punctuation and orthographic variation to express emotion and emphasis. The repeated use of exclamation marks, question marks or their combination (e.g. “!!!”, “??”, “!?”) has been shown to index heightened emotional involvement, surprise or evaluative intensity (Androutsopoulos, 2011). Similarly, unconventional capitalisation may be used to signal excitement, urgency or strong affect, though it can also carry interactionally delicate meanings such as aggression or shouting. These punctuation-based strategies allow users to encode degrees of emotional intensity that would otherwise be conveyed through intonation or volume in spoken interaction (Giammatteo, 2025).

Another salient feature of online emotional expression is the repetition or elongation of letters or symbols, as in forms such as “soooo happy”, “:((((” or “loveeee this”. Such practices, often referred to as expressive lengthening, function to dramatize emotional states and convey affective intensity (Tagg, 2012). Repetition may also occur at the lexical or phrasal level, reinforcing emotional stances through rhythmic or accumulative effects. In the context of self-disclosure, these features can index spontaneity, sincerity and emotional involvement, contributing to the construction of an “authentic” online voice.

Nonetheless, these semiotic resources rarely operate in isolation. Emojis, punctuation, orthographic variation and lexical choices are often combined to produce layered emotional meanings. Zappavigna (2012) notes that such combinations play a central role in fostering

ambient affiliation, allowing users to align affectively with others around shared experiences, interests or evaluations. Consequently, attention to these micro-level discourse features is essential for understanding how emotional self-disclosure is enacted and made recognisable in online environments.

Finally, it is important to note that early research on online self-disclosure tended to focus on relatively bounded, text-based environments such as chat rooms, forums or email exchanges. However, the rise of social media has considerably expanded the scale, visibility, modes of communication and persistence of online interaction. Contemporary platforms are characterised by the convergence of text, image, audio and video, as well as by algorithmically mediated forms of circulation and engagement. These developments have important implications for self-disclosure, as personal and emotional expressions are no longer confined to discrete interactions but may be stored, edited, recontextualised and encountered by multiple audiences over extended periods of time. As a result, online self-disclosure increasingly involves the circulation and negotiation of emotions across different modes, combining multiple resources to convey nuanced emotional meanings (Parini & Yus, in press).

In conclusion, online emotional self-disclosure emerges through the dynamic interplay of technological affordances, audience design, community norms and the semiotic resources available to and exploited by users. Far from being impoverished or purely compensatory, online discourse provides a rich repertoire of linguistic and graphical strategies through which emotions can be displayed, intensified, mitigated and negotiated. Understanding these dynamics is therefore crucial for examining how emotional self-disclosure functions in YouTube comment sections.

## 2.4. YouTube as a Space for Emotional Expression and Feedback

YouTube, founded in 2005 under the slogan “Broadcast yourself”, has become one of the most prominent digital platforms for the public articulation of personal experiences, opinions, emotions and evaluative feedback. Although it may seem like a simple repository of audiovisual content, YouTube constitutes a complex discursive environment in which users

are actively encouraged to participate, react and engage with both content creators and fellow viewers. The platform hosts a wide range of content genres, including vlogs, tutorials, gaming videos, music performances, political commentary, lifestyle content and product-related videos, each characterised by different communicative purposes and interactional norms. Among these genres, product review and unboxing videos stand out as a particularly salient form of user-generated content, combining technical description with personal experience and evaluation, and often inviting affective responses or feedback from viewers.

As several scholars have noted, YouTube exemplifies the principles of participatory culture, which can be defined as a culture in which “fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 290). Participation on this platform is characterised by low barriers to expression, strong support for user contributions and a general expectation that audiences will do more than passively consume content (Burgess & Green, 2009). Within this context, emotional expression is central to how interaction unfolds: liking a video, posting a supportive comment, expressing excitement or disappointment, or aligning emotionally with others are all routine and meaningful feedback practices on the platform.

From an affective perspective, YouTube can be understood as a space where emotions circulate, accumulate and gain social force. Drawing on the notion of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015), emotions expressed on YouTube can be understood as discursive and relational phenomena that connect users around shared interests, evaluations and experiences. Comment sections, in particular, function as sites where emotions are made visible, negotiated and responded to, often creating temporary or sustained forms of emotional alignment. As Ahmed (2004) argues, emotions “stick” to objects, texts and bodies; in the case of YouTube product reviews, emotions frequently become attached to specific products, brands, people or technological practices, as well as to the creators who mediate them.

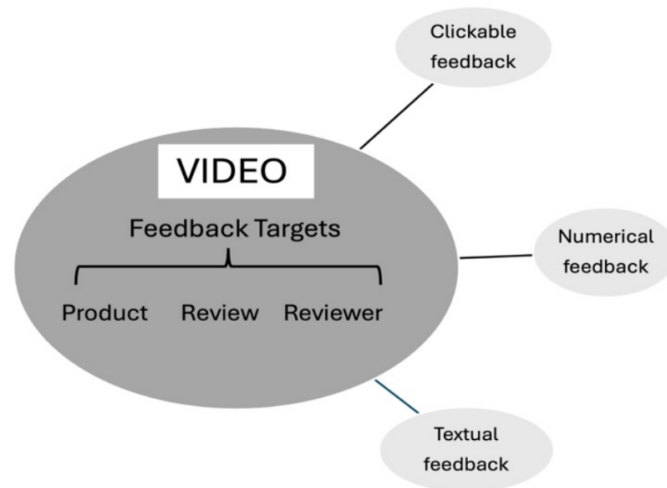
A particularly useful way of conceptualising YouTube’s communicative architecture is offered by Parini et al. (2025), who describe the platform as a digital discursive space designed to give users a voice and foster community through the sharing of stories, opinions

and experiences. According to these scholars, every uploaded video generates a multimedia interaction environment composed of three interrelated discursive spaces. The audiovisual space, corresponding to the video itself, constitutes the hierarchical core of the interaction: it is a closed, finished communicative product created by a limited number of participants, without which the other spaces could not exist. Surrounding this core is the textual space, namely the comments section, which is open, dynamic and constantly reshaped by a potentially unlimited number of users who can add, edit or delete contributions over time. Finally, the pictorial space, represented by likes and dislikes, allows users to engage through icons that index approval, alignment or rejection, without verbal elaboration.

This tripartite structure is particularly relevant for the study of emotional self-disclosure, as it highlights how emotional expression is distributed across different semiotic modes and degrees of participation. While emotions may be performed audiovisually by content creators, they are frequently taken up, echoed or contested in the textual space of the comments, where users draw on their own experiences and feelings to position themselves in relation to the video, the reviewer, other commenters and the product itself. At the same time, the pictorial space offers a form of minimal yet socially important emotional signalling, contributing to the visibility and perceived reception of both videos and comments.

In addition, YouTube can also be conceptualised as a complex feedback environment structured by the platform's affordances. According to Parini (2026), a product review video may be understood as a form of first-order feedback, as the content creator provides an evaluative response to a specific product. This initial act of evaluation, in turn, prompts second-order feedback from viewers, which can take three main forms: clickable feedback (e.g. likes, dislikes, subscription buttons), numerical feedback (e.g. view counts and like/dislike ratios), and textual feedback (i.e. comments). These three modes, represented in Figure 1 below, together constitute YouTube's feedback landscape. Among them, textual feedback stands out as the most elaborated and interactionally rich form. Unlike a simple click, a comment requires discursive effort and enables personalised responses, evaluations and emotional disclosures. In this regard, emotional self-disclosure in comments can be understood as a form of affective feedback oriented towards the video,

the creator, the product, the review and/or the wider community. Such feedback positions emotion as a central currency within YouTube's engagement economy.



**Figure 1.** The feedback landscape of YouTube reviews (reproduced from Parini, 2026).

In terms of communication dynamics, YouTube departs from traditional one-way media models by enabling multidirectional flows of interaction (Parini et al., 2025). Communication operates not only in a one-to-many direction, from the YouTuber to the audience through the video, but also in one-to-one and many-to-many configurations within the comments section, where users can reply directly to the creator or engage in exchanges with each other. Importantly, participation also includes “lurkers”: users who do not actively post comments but consume content and read others’ contributions. The presence of this silent audience is nonetheless important, as commenters can orient their emotional self-disclosures to an imagined, potentially vast readership which includes lurkers, rather than to a single addressee.

Another major dimension of YouTube concerns self-presentation and strategic interests. Users can evidently position themselves through the content of their written comments, where self-disclosure often occurs explicitly through first-person references to personal experiences, feelings or evaluations. However, self-disclosure is also enacted through a range of semiotic and profile-based cues that accompany participation on the platform. Usernames may index aspects of identity such as someone’s (real or made-up) name,

nationality, age or interests, while public profile pages allow users to share varying degrees of personal information, including profile images, geographical location, links to other social media platforms or websites, and/or email addresses. Additional indicators such as the date a user joined the platform, the number of uploaded videos and subscriber counts further contribute to how users are positioned and perceived within the community. These features collectively enable users to manage their public persona and to calibrate the extent of their self-disclosure, reinforcing the idea that participation on YouTube is inseparable from ongoing processes of identity construction and visibility management. In particular, these elements can shape how emotional expressions are interpreted, lending greater authenticity, credibility or experiential authority to the feelings disclosed in comments.

Furthermore, while the platform began as a relatively straightforward space for personal expression and perceived sincerity, contemporary YouTube interactions are deeply shaped by commercial logics, including branding, monetisation and the pursuit of symbolic capital (Abidin, 2018; Parini et al., 2025; Parini et al., in press). Channel descriptions, profile images, banners and video watermarks all contribute to carefully managed forms of self-presentation that can help obtain more symbolic capital, especially in genres such as product reviews and unboxing videos. This commercial and competitive environment does not suppress emotional expression; rather, it tends to intensify it, as emotions such as enthusiasm, trust or loyalty become valuable resources for gaining visibility and engagement.

In this sense, emotional self-disclosure on YouTube is closely tied to the platform's affordances and algorithmic dynamics. Likes, replies and comment visibility play a central role in shaping which emotional expressions are amplified and which remain marginal (Milli et al., 2025). Algorithmic systems tend to privilege content that generates engagement, thereby indirectly encouraging users to produce emotionally charged comments that invite responses, agreement or debate. As a result, emotional self-disclosure practices are both interpersonal and strategic, often oriented towards achieving recognition within a highly scalable and persistent communicative environment.

Finally, communication on YouTube can be described as a process of collaborative co-construction. Parini et al. (2025) propose the notion of the macrotext to capture the idea that a product review, for instance, does not reside solely in the YouTube video itself, but emerges from the interaction between the creator's technical or evaluative discourse in the video and the users' opinion-based and often emotional comments. This macrotext is shaped by factors such as varying degrees of anonymity, asynchronous and fluid participation, and the negotiation of ideologies, identities and values. Within this collective textual artefact, emotional self-disclosure serves as a key discursive resource through which users affiliate with others, claim expertise or authenticity, and position themselves in relation to consumer technologies.

Existing research has begun to explore YouTube product reviews as sites where users actively construct identities through evaluative and affective discourse. A relevant example is the study by Giammatteo et al. (2021), which examines linguistic resources used in comments on YouTube product review videos as part of a broader process of impression management. Grounded in an interactional view of identity as socially constructed, the authors conceptualise comments as secondary reviews that respond evaluatively to the primary review presented in the video, thus contributing to the collaborative macrotext of YouTube product reviews. Their analysis identifies several recurring categories of self that commenters project through their textual contributions, including the resigned self, the aspirational self, the successful self and the affective self. The identification of these categories, characterised by the predominance of subjective positioning and explicit emotional expression, is particularly relevant, as it provides empirical evidence that emotional expression in YouTube product review comments functions as a salient resource for self-presentation and evaluation, anticipating the central role that emotional self-disclosure plays in the discursive practices analysed in this dissertation.

YouTube can then be conceptualised as an emotional ecology in which audiovisual performances, textual interactions, pictorial signals and algorithmic mechanisms intersect to produce a richly layered communicative environment. Within this environment, emotional self-disclosure emerges as a socially meaningful, platform-shaped practice and as a form of affective feedback that is central to how users participate in, experience and make sense

of YouTube content, including product reviews. This perspective offers a productive framework for examining emotional self-disclosure as a key resource in the construction of textual feedback on YouTube smartphone unboxing videos.

### 3. Methodology and Data

This chapter outlines the methodological framework and data used to investigate emotional self-disclosure in this study. The primary aim is to account for the research design, to describe the corpus and data selection procedures, and to explain the analytical steps through which emotionally self-disclosing comments were identified and examined. Given the exploratory nature of the research and its focus on naturally occurring digital discourse, the methodological approach combines qualitative discourse analysis with corpus-assisted techniques.

The study draws on a corpus of comments posted on YouTube videos featuring unboxing and reviews of smartphones, specifically models from the Samsung Galaxy S10, S20 and S21, and Apple iPhone 11, 12, 13 series. As these comments are part of a highly dynamic and interactive space within YouTube, they provide a particularly fertile context for examining how users articulate emotions and disclose personal experiences in a public online environment.

This chapter is organised as follows. Section 3.1 describes the overall research design and situates the study within a qualitative, corpus-assisted discourse-analytic framework. Section 3.2 details the composition of the corpus, the procedures used for data collection and filtering, and the criteria applied in constructing the final dataset. Section 3.3 outlines the analytical procedures employed to identify and examine emotional self-disclosure in the selected comments. Finally, Section 3.4 addresses ethical considerations related to the use of publicly available online data and the measures taken to ensure responsible research practice.

### 3.1. Research Design

The present study adopts a predominantly qualitative, discourse-analytic research design, supported by corpus-assisted methods and a limited quantitative component, to investigate how explicit emotional self-disclosure is discursively constructed in feedback comments on smartphone unboxing videos on YouTube. This design is suited to the study's aim of exploring not only the presence of emotions in user-generated content, but also the ways in which such emotions are discursively articulated, oriented and made meaningful within a specific digital interactional context.

Rather than treating instances of emotional self-disclosure as measurable psychological variables, the study approaches them as discursive phenomena that emerge through language use in situated communicative practices. From this perspective, YouTube comments are understood as instances of naturally occurring digital discourse, produced independently of the researcher and embedded within a participatory online environment. This allows for the analysis of emotional self-disclosure as it is spontaneously enacted by users in response to product reviews, content creators, other commenters and shared community norms.

Methodologically, the research combines qualitative discourse analysis with corpus-assisted techniques. Corpus-based procedures are employed primarily to support data selection, organisation and exploration, enabling the systematic identification of comments that contain self-disclosing and emotionally marked language. In addition, a quantitative dimension is incorporated using frequency counts and percentages to indicate, for instance, the relative prominence of emotional orientations or certain discursive resources within the dataset. These quantitative observations are not intended to support statistical generalisation, but rather to provide an overview of distributional tendencies that complement and contextualise the qualitative findings. The core of the analysis remains qualitative and interpretive, focusing on what emotions are oriented towards, what social functions they fulfil and how they are constructed through specific linguistic and discursive resources.

Data analysis software, such as LancsBox (Brezina & Platt, 2025) and NVivo (Lumivero, 2025), are used as methodological tools throughout this process. These are specialised tools designed to support corpus exploration and qualitative data coding. In this research, they are used to assist in the organisation and filtering of large amounts of data, as well as in the identification of instances of self-disclosure and emotional content. However, interpretive decisions are made by the researcher and informed by the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2.

Overall, the research design reflects an exploratory approach, appropriate for a study that seeks to shed light on underexplored aspects of emotional expression in YouTube product review comments. By combining corpus-assisted techniques with close qualitative analysis, the study aims to balance methodological transparency with sensitivity to the contextual and interactional nuances of online emotional self-disclosure.

### 3.2. Corpus and Data Collection Procedures

This study is based on a corpus of YouTube comments collected from unboxing and product review videos. The corpus was compiled in August 2022 and consists of comments posted in response to videos reviewing two major smartphone brands: Apple iPhone and Samsung Galaxy. These devices were selected due to their widespread popularity and the high levels of audience engagement typically associated with their release cycles, which makes them particularly suitable for examining evaluative and emotionally charged discourse online. Similarly, the decision to focus on the YouTube comment section reflects its highly interactive and dynamic nature as a space for the articulation of evaluative and emotional responses.

A total of 50 YouTube videos were preliminarily selected for inclusion in the corpus. These comprised 25 videos reviewing Apple iPhone models and 25 videos reviewing Samsung Galaxy models. Specifically, the Apple subset included 8 videos for the iPhone 11, 8 videos for the iPhone 12, and 9 videos for the iPhone 13, while the Samsung subset consisted of 8 videos for the Galaxy S10, 8 videos for the Galaxy S20, and 9 videos for the Galaxy S21. The videos are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

| Video no. | Phone Model | YouTube Link                                                                                          |
|-----------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1         | iPhone 11   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5P_EGqzW2Y">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5P_EGqzW2Y</a> |
| 2         | iPhone 11   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbErk1EM_pU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbErk1EM_pU</a> |
| 3         | iPhone 11   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpEXCvNB4Ws">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpEXCvNB4Ws</a> |
| 4         | iPhone 11   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-ElkF5GF7k">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-ElkF5GF7k</a> |
| 5         | iPhone 11   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGAflnIbD8A">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGAflnIbD8A</a> |
| 6         | iPhone 11   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BjpRwW9ITo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BjpRwW9ITo</a> |
| 7         | iPhone 11   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdO2xi94CF8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdO2xi94CF8</a> |
| 8         | iPhone 11   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_-aHUWiPzs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_-aHUWiPzs</a> |
| 9         | iPhone 12   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YH_DCqAmtxQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YH_DCqAmtxQ</a> |
| 10        | iPhone 12   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sx6dAx7dnXg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sx6dAx7dnXg</a> |
| 11        | iPhone 12   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLUjiaE9K8k">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLUjiaE9K8k</a> |
| 12        | iPhone 12   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrsaBpK-6Eg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrsaBpK-6Eg</a> |
| 13        | iPhone 12   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAkit-vR3zU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAkit-vR3zU</a> |
| 14        | iPhone 12   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzMQ3mughQ0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzMQ3mughQ0</a> |
| 15        | iPhone 12   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_FwS7BWI_y4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_FwS7BWI_y4</a> |
| 16        | iPhone 12   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPDXWFpDM1c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPDXWFpDM1c</a> |
| 17        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fop2oskTug8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fop2oskTug8</a> |
| 18        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qvfOluWQgA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qvfOluWQgA</a> |
| 19        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZcvMJetdbw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZcvMJetdbw</a> |
| 20        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Awu6ZyfDeeQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Awu6ZyfDeeQ</a> |
| 21        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YGGXrFv4GI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YGGXrFv4GI</a> |
| 22        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Cm0BIICgTw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Cm0BIICgTw</a> |
| 23        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=373FBud8_08">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=373FBud8_08</a> |
| 24        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84FatKnHhJI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84FatKnHhJI</a> |
| 25        | iPhone 13   | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXCt2MpB-rQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXCt2MpB-rQ</a> |

**Table 1.** List of YouTube videos included in the corpus for iPhone smartphones.

| Video no. | Phone model | YouTube Link                                                                                            |
|-----------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 26        | Galaxy S10  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXF5sbhgnZE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXF5sbhgnZE</a>   |
| 27        | Galaxy S10  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzpJf24O1T8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzpJf24O1T8</a>   |
| 28        | Galaxy S10  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exl-hp7d-0g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exl-hp7d-0g</a>   |
| 29        | Galaxy S10  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aeSVJTlp2E">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aeSVJTlp2E</a>   |
| 30        | Galaxy S10  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VgC- aKJCK">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VgC- aKJCK</a>   |
| 31        | Galaxy S10  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqNKbkdoR6l">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqNKbkdoR6l</a>   |
| 32        | Galaxy S10  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZbZ2hAnJV8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZbZ2hAnJV8</a>   |
| 33        | Galaxy S10  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0o3Mgbr8oU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0o3Mgbr8oU</a>   |
| 34        | Galaxy S20  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbJkpeslcis">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbJkpeslcis</a>   |
| 35        | Galaxy S20  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOxPym_9l3E">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOxPym_9l3E</a>   |
| 36        | Galaxy S20  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKu67GC5T2s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKu67GC5T2s</a>   |
| 37        | Galaxy S20  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRRrz627b3l">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRRrz627b3l</a>   |
| 38        | Galaxy S20  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbWJwdeNdps">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbWJwdeNdps</a>   |
| 39        | Galaxy S20  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= o70MRr28yE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= o70MRr28yE</a>   |
| 40        | Galaxy S20  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= oF_ NV2ZqxM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= oF_ NV2ZqxM</a> |
| 41        | Galaxy S20  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jde55ppaHLM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jde55ppaHLM</a>   |
| 42        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vSMuSFmKPY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vSMuSFmKPY</a>   |
| 43        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9XKN0IGifA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9XKN0IGifA</a>   |
| 44        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5CT0M35uOw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5CT0M35uOw</a>   |
| 45        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfRCj1O1524">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfRCj1O1524</a>   |
| 46        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjzkSwyRoxY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjzkSwyRoxY</a>   |
| 47        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq65XAyatmU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq65XAyatmU</a>   |
| 48        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EomTIFwcAG8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EomTIFwcAG8</a>   |
| 49        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSwhBdAzaAl">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSwhBdAzaAl</a>   |
| 50        | Galaxy S21  | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Etkz0OABIlc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Etkz0OABIlc</a>   |

**Table 2.** List of YouTube videos included in the corpus for Samsung smartphones.

These videos were found using the YouTube search bar, applying the platform's relevance filter and the search string "Unboxing [phone model name]". To ensure the quality and comparability of the data, however, several additional criteria were applied before selecting them. First, videos that were not in English or that did not include the word "unboxing" and the specific phone model name in the video title were excluded. Second, videos with fewer than 100 comments were also discarded, as they were considered unlikely to provide a sufficient volume of textual feedback for meaningful analysis. With such criteria in mind, the top videos offered by the YouTube search for each smartphone model were selected, and all top-level comments posted under said videos were collected. Replies within comment threads were excluded, as this study does not focus on the specific interactional dynamics that may emerge within extended exchanges between users. Additionally, unlike replies, top-level comments all respond directly to the video, ensuring a more consistent and comparable dataset for the analysis of emotional self-disclosure as feedback. The final selection of comments therefore corresponds to a diverse range of video reviews produced by different content creators, with varying subscriber counts, view numbers, comment volumes and production styles.

It is also important to bear in mind that the corpus analysed in this study was produced by a heterogeneous group of users. It is safe to assume that the comments were authored by individuals from different geographical locations, with varying linguistic backgrounds and levels of English proficiency, including both native and non-native speakers. As all selected videos were in English, the vast majority of comments were likewise written in English. Although comments posted in other languages were excluded from the dataset, this linguistic diversity is treated as an inherent feature of online discourse rather than as a variable to be controlled.

Furthermore, to obtain a dataset suitable for close qualitative analysis of emotional self-disclosure, a process of data reduction was performed. This step was necessary to narrow the data to comments most relevant to the research focus, enabling a more detailed examination. The first stage of filtering was guided by the study's focus on self-disclosure, while the second stage targeted the identification of emotional content in the corpus.

For the first stage, self-disclosure was operationalised through the explicit linguistic marking of the self, as realised by the use of first-person pronouns. The software LancsBox was therefore used to conduct a complex batch search aimed at identifying comments containing different forms of first-person pronouns. The following search string was employed to make sure that any of the selected pronominal forms were present in the comments: /I|me|my|mine|we|us|our|ours/. This search allowed for the extraction of all comments in which users made explicit reference to themselves, either as individuals or as part of a collective. Comments that did not contain any of the specified pronouns were discarded at this stage. It is important to acknowledge, however, that self-disclosure can also occur without the overt use of first-person pronouns, and that some instances of implicit self-disclosure may therefore be excluded from the dataset. Consequently, the study does not claim to capture all possible instances of self-disclosure present in the original corpus. Rather, the dataset is systematically oriented towards a particular type of emotional self-disclosure: one that is explicitly self-referential, linguistically foregrounded and relatively direct. More implicit, elliptical or impersonal modes of emotional self-disclosure — which may carry their own pragmatic and interactional significance — fall outside the boundaries of this study. This filtering procedure was a deliberate analytical choice, since focusing on comments that explicitly reference the self ensures a high likelihood that the selected comments include some form of self-disclosing content, thereby facilitating a more targeted and efficient analysis.

The second stage of data filtering focused on the identification of emotional content within the self-disclosing comments. For this purpose, all comments extracted through the pronoun-based filtering process were imported into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. NVivo's sentiment analysis function was then used to automatically classify comments according to their emotional valence, categorising them as positive, negative, or neutral, the latter referring to comments that do not display clearly evaluative or affective language.

This procedure made it possible to distinguish between self-disclosing comments that contained emotional expression and those without an apparent emotional component. Comments classified as neutral were excluded from further analysis, as the focus of the

study lies specifically on emotional self-disclosure. It should be noted, nevertheless, that sentiment analysis tools are not without limitations, as automated classification is primarily lexicon-based and not context-sensitive. Additionally, sentiment analysis tools may fail to process words spelled in non-standard ways or they may fail to detect certain forms of emotional expression, particularly in cases involving irony, sarcasm or subtle evaluative language. For this reason, the results of the sentiment analysis are treated here as a heuristic aid, not as definitive classifications, and are interpreted with the necessary caution.

Following this filtering process, the final dataset consisted exclusively of the YouTube comments that included both explicit self-disclosure and some form of emotional content: positive, negative or mixed sentiment. Therefore, the analysis does not aim to account for all forms of affective participation in YouTube comment sections, but rather for discursively explicit emotional self-disclosure in this digital context, facilitating a more focused and systematic qualitative analysis. The resulting corpus comprises 16,034 comments and a total of 477,668 words, which constitute the empirical basis for the analyses presented in the following chapters.

### 3.3. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis of the data was conducted in several interrelated stages, combining thematic, pragmatic and discourse-analytic perspectives. This multi-layered analytical approach was adopted to capture how the emotions expressed in the comments are oriented, what social purposes they serve and how they are discursively realised. Throughout the analytical process, interpretation remained grounded in a discourse-pragmatic framework, with particular attention to the contextual nature of emotional self-disclosure in online environments.

The first stage of the analysis consisted of a thematic examination of the emotional orientation of the comments. At this stage, the focus was on identifying the main targets towards which emotions were directed in instances of emotional self-disclosure. During the initial reading of the data, it became apparent that users' emotional expressions were consistently oriented towards a limited set of options: themselves, other people and the

main topic of the video. On this basis, three broad categories were identified: self-oriented, community-oriented, and theme-oriented emotional self-disclosure.

This thematic categorisation made it possible to explore the objects and domains in which users invest their emotional evaluations in this context. However, it is worth noting that the analysis recognises that emotional orientation is not necessarily singular or mutually exclusive. For instance, a single comment may simultaneously include emotions directed at the self and the product, or it may combine community-oriented and self-oriented emotional stances. To account for this complexity, comments were allowed to be assigned to more than one thematic category where appropriate. This approach reflects the multifaceted nature of emotional expression and avoids imposing rigid analytical boundaries on dynamic communicative practices.

The second stage of analysis adopted a pragmatic perspective, focusing on the social functions served by emotional self-disclosure. Drawing on the theoretical accounts discussed in Chapter 2, comments were examined to determine the communicative purposes underlying users' disclosures of personal information and emotions. Specifically, comments were categorised according to whether emotional self-disclosure appeared to serve the following functions: self-expression, social validation, social control, identity clarification or relational development (Derlega and Grzelak, 1979). This classification was based on close reading of the comments and attention to their pragmatic intent, including how users positioned themselves in relation to others, sought agreement or recognition, expressed normative judgments, or constructed aspects of their identity through emotional narratives.

As with the thematic analysis, the pragmatic categorisation also allowed for overlap. Emotional self-disclosure in online discourse is often multifunctional, and a single comment may simultaneously fulfil more than one social function. For example, a comment may combine self-expression with a request for social validation, or identity clarification with relational engagement. More than one category of social function was therefore assigned to each comment whenever necessary. In addition, it should be stated that this categorization of social functions is not always straightforward. Given the context-

dependent and potentially indirect nature of discourse, pragmatic interpretation inevitably involves a degree of analytical judgement. In this study, classifications were guided by identifiable linguistic and contextual cues, and categories were assigned only where the available evidence was deemed sufficient to support the interpretation.

The final stage of analysis adopted a discourse-analytic perspective, focusing on how emotional self-disclosure is constructed through different semiotic resources in the comments. At a macro-discursive level, the analysis identified two broad patterns through which users articulated emotional self-disclosure: praising and complaining. These patterns function as overarching modes of evaluation and are closely associated with the expression of positive and negative emotions, respectively.

At a more micro-analytic level, close attention was paid to linguistic, pictorial and discursive resources. In the first case, the analysis focused on linguistic features such as lexical choice, evaluative expressions, punctuation and orthographic devices, including capitalisation and repetition, which often serve to amplify or adjust emotional intensity. Regarding pictorial resources, emojis were analysed as integral components of emotional meaning-making, which contribute to the expression, modulation or reinforcement of affective stances. To examine the distribution and frequency of emojis across the dataset, an automated counting procedure was employed: a custom script written in Python was developed and executed in Google Colaboratory, a cloud-based development environment. Additionally, the analysis considered recurrent discursive resources that users employed to frame and contextualise their emotional self-disclosure. The resources identified included the evocation of spatial dimensions, the use of humour, irony and sarcasm, as well as the incorporation of personal anecdotes and narrative sequences in the contributions. Such resources were examined as means through which users render their emotions more vivid, relatable and socially meaningful within the comments section.

Together, these three analytical layers — thematic, pragmatic and discursive — allow for a comprehensive examination of emotional self-disclosure in YouTube comments. By moving from emotional orientation to social function and, finally, to linguistic, pictorial and discursive

realisation, the analysis captures both the functional and formal dimensions of emotional expression and affective feedback in this digital context.

### 3.4. Research Ethics and Accessibility of Internet Data

The present study is based on comments posted on YouTube, a publicly accessible digital platform where user-generated content is typically made available without restrictions to viewers. As such, the data analysed in this research can be characterised as publicly available and naturally occurring, in the sense that the comments were produced without any form of researcher intervention. The study therefore adopts an observational stance, seeking to describe and analyse existing patterns of emotional self-disclosure rather than to elicit, evaluate, judge or influence users' behaviour.

Despite the public accessibility of YouTube comments, ethical considerations remain central when conducting research on digital discourse. This study is informed by established ethical guidelines for online research, including those proposed by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), as well as by scholarly discussions on the ethical use of digital data (e.g. Markham & Buchanan, 2015). These frameworks emphasise the need for context-sensitive ethical decision-making, recognising that public availability does not automatically eliminate concerns regarding user privacy or potential harm. In line with these principles, some measures were adopted to protect the anonymity and privacy of YouTube users. As a general practice, usernames were not reproduced in the analysis and excerpts were anonymised to minimise the traceability of individual users while still allowing for detailed linguistic and discursive analysis.

Although the content of comments is reproduced verbatim, including original spelling, punctuation and grammatical features, the risk of re-identification remains reasonably limited. YouTube comments are not systematically indexed by search engines, which means that searching for quoted excerpts is highly unlikely to lead back to the original videos or users. Moreover, even when the link to a video is publicly available, locating a specific comment within a large comment section is highly impractical, as there is no native comment search functionality within the platform itself. Additionally, YouTube only displays a limited

number of comments at a time, and extensive manual effort is required to retrieve older or less visible contributions from large and constantly evolving comment threads. Although traceability may be technically possible, these platform-specific constraints further reduce the likelihood that individual commenters could be identified through the excerpts included in this study.

Furthermore, the decision not to seek informed consent from individual users was guided by both practical and ethical considerations. As Tagg and Spilioti (2022) note, “the general principle is that the more public the site and the more open the access to it, the less urgent is the need to protect participants’ privacy” (p. 96). They further argue that decisions regarding informed consent in digital research depend on the researcher’s “awareness and assessment of the particular context” (p. 96) and should be guided by the overarching principles of doing no harm and protecting participants. In the context of this study, the large scale of the dataset makes the seeking of individual consent impractical, while the public nature of the platform and the observational focus of the research further render it unnecessary, as users have voluntarily made their contributions openly accessible.

Nevertheless, this section acknowledges the ethical tension that exists between the public availability of online data and users’ possible expectations of privacy. While YouTube users post comments in a space that is openly accessible, they may not necessarily anticipate their contributions being analysed in academic research. For this reason, the study adopts a cautious and respectful approach, and employs anonymisation procedures, mitigating potential ethical risks and ensuring that the analysis does not expose or stigmatise individual users. In this way, the research seeks to balance methodological transparency with ethical responsibility in the study of emotional self-disclosure in online environments.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

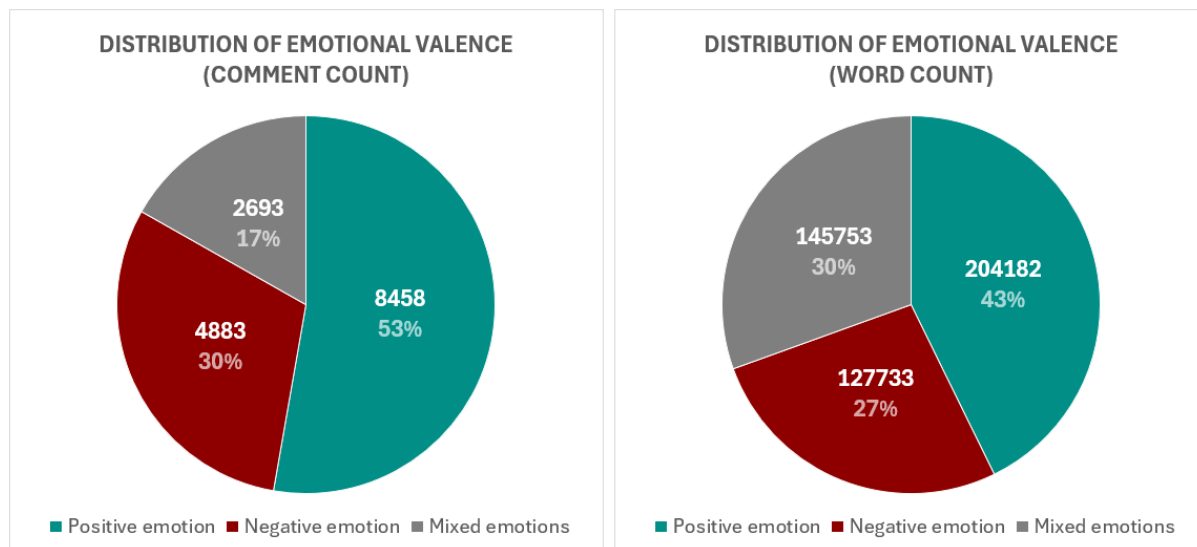
This chapter presents the findings of the empirical analysis and examines how emotional self-disclosure is discursively constructed in the corpus. The focus is on identifying recurring patterns in the data and on exploring how users draw on language and other semiotic resources to make their emotions relevant as part of their participation in the YouTube comment space. Given that the analysis is primarily qualitative in nature, supported by frequency counts, the excerpts discussed in this chapter are selected for their analytical salience and illustrative value, rather than for statistical representativeness.

To capture the complexity of emotional self-disclosure in this context, the analysis is organised into three complementary and interrelated layers: thematic, pragmatic and discourse-analytic. At a thematic level, the analysis examines the orientation of emotional self-disclosure, identifying the main targets towards which emotions are directed. This first layer addresses the question of what emotions are about, distinguishing between self-oriented, community-oriented and theme-oriented emotional self-disclosure. At a pragmatic level, the analysis shifts focus to what emotional self-disclosure does in interaction, exploring the social functions it fulfils. Finally, at a discourse-analytic level, the analysis investigates how emotional self-disclosure is constructed, identifying recurrent linguistic, pictorial and discursive resources through which emotions are framed, intensified or mitigated in comments.

While these three analytical layers are presented separately for the purposes of clarity and systematic description, they should not be understood as rigid or mutually exclusive. Emotional self-disclosure in online discourse is often simultaneously multifunctional, multidirectional and draws on a combination of discursive resources to convey emotional meaning. The three-layer framework adopted here is therefore intended as a tool that allows for a structured yet flexible exploration of emotional self-disclosure as a discursive phenomenon.

Before moving on to the three-layer analysis, it is convenient to observe the overall emotional profile of the dataset, based on the sentiment analysis conducted in NVivo.

Figure 2 below offers a broad picture of the distribution of emotional valence in the corpus: it shows the relative presence of positive, negative and mixed emotional expressions, presenting the data both in terms of comment count and word count.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of emotional valence in number of comments and words.

Comments expressing positive emotions constitute the largest group in the corpus (8,458 comments), followed by negative emotion comments (4,883), while comments displaying mixed emotions are comparatively less frequent (2,693). This distribution suggests that emotional self-disclosure in smartphone unboxing video comments tends to be more often positively framed, reflecting the evaluative and anticipatory nature of this genre, in which enthusiasm, excitement and appreciation are to be expected, particularly around new product releases.

However, a comparison with the word-count distribution reveals a more nuanced picture. Although mixed-emotion comments are the least frequent (17%), they account for a substantially larger proportion of the total word count (30%). By contrast, positive emotion comments, while dominant in frequency (53%), represent a smaller share of the total words (43%). This divergence between comment count and word count highlights the discursive density of mixed emotional self-disclosure, suggesting that emotional ambivalence tends to be articulated through longer, more elaborated comments. The visual contrast between the two charts thus suggests that emotionally complex stances involve greater discursive effort.

This tendency can also be seen when the number of words is considered in relation to the number of comments, resulting in an average words-per-comment ratio that is noticeably different for these emotional categories. As can be seen in Table 3 below, while positive and negative emotion comments display relatively similar ratios of words per comment (24 and 26 words in average respectively), mixed-emotion comments are markedly longer, with an average of over 54 words per comment.

|                  | Number of comments | Number of words | Average words-per-comment ratio |
|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Positive emotion | 8,458              | 204,182         | 24                              |
| Negative emotion | 4,883              | 127,733         | 26                              |
| Mixed emotions   | 2,693              | 145,753         | 54                              |

**Table 3.** Distribution of emotional valence with words-per-comments ratio.

A small set of examples extracted from the dataset are included below to illustrate how the sentiment analysis procedure operates and how comments were classified by NVivo according to emotional valence. Three comments are provided for each category (positive, negative and mixed emotions) with the sole purpose of exemplifying the type of content identified by the software in each case. These randomly selected examples are not intended to be analytically representative; rather, they offer a concrete sense of how emotional content is captured and labelled through the automated sentiment analysis process.

|                  |           |                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Positive emotion | Comment 1 | I really hope I can get the iPhone 13 pro max I'm using a iPhone 6 rn so this would be a huge upgrade.                                                   |
|                  | Comment 2 | Watching on my iPhone 11 🥰 waiting for iPhone 15 or 16 i will upgrade my phone very soon 🥰🥰🥰                                                             |
|                  | Comment 3 | Finally today I got this phone, its awesome, I'm so happy                                                                                                |
| Negative emotion | Comment 4 | PLEASE! I'm dying to get rid of my iPhone 7:(                                                                                                            |
|                  | Comment 5 | I can make due without the chargers. But only 1 Apple sticker? I'm FURIOUS 😡                                                                             |
|                  | Comment 6 | What a piece of trash this new iP is! I am impressed by how people get cheated                                                                           |
| Mixed emotions   | Comment 7 | I love my new pro. BUT I'm seriously jaded the pros don't come in the fun colours. I paid more... i should have the choice dammit!! Pmsl                 |
|                  | Comment 8 | Sitting here like Justine how do you have the phones already and I'm waiting for my pre order to ship 🙄😞                                                 |
|                  | Comment 9 | These look so cool, I'm getting the 12 pro for my birthday and we're going to buy it at the weekend!!! but I do have to wait a couple weeks to open it:( |

NVivo's sentiment analysis is likely to have classified these nine comments on the basis of the presence, frequency and intensity of emotionally marked lexical items and expressions. In the positive examples (comments 1–3), the software would detect clearly evaluative, affect-laden words and positive intensifiers such as “really hope”, “huge upgrade”, “awesome” and “so happy”, as well as emojis (🥰, 😊), all of which contribute to a predominantly positive sentiment score. By contrast, the negative examples (comments 4–6) contain strongly negative evaluative lexis (“dying to get rid of”, “furious”, “piece of trash”, “cheated”) and negative emojis (😡), which would result in their classification as negative sentiment. Mixed-emotion comments (7–9), in turn, combine contrasting affective cues within the same textual unit: positive evaluations (“love my new pro”, “these look so cool”) co-occur with explicit dissatisfaction, frustration or disappointment (“seriously jaded”, “I do have to wait”, “dammit”), frequently marked through conjunctions such as “but” or through the juxtaposition of emotionally opposed emojis (🙄😞). It is precisely this coexistence of positive and negative emotional markers that would prompt NVivo to classify these comments as both positive and negative, while also illustrating the need for subsequent qualitative interpretation to account for context, irony and interactional meaning.

## 4.1. Thematic Analysis: Categories of Emotional Self-disclosure

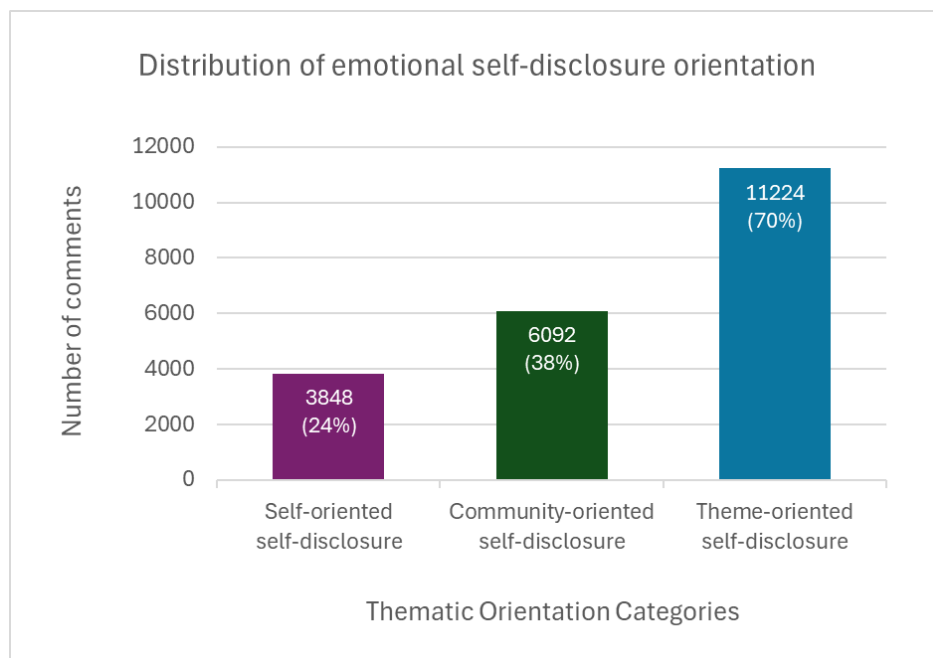
This section presents the results of the thematic analysis of emotional self-disclosure in the corpus, focusing on the orientation of emotions, that is, on the targets towards which users direct their affective expressions. As discussed in Chapter 2, emotions are both experienced and *directed*, as they involve an evaluative relationship between a subject and an object, person or situation. In the context of YouTube comments, emotional self-disclosure therefore emerges through the expression of feelings which are anchored to specific targets within the interactional space.

The analysis of the corpus revealed that emotional self-disclosure in smartphone unboxing video comments is consistently oriented towards three broad domains: the self, the online community and the theme of the video (namely the smartphone being reviewed). On this basis, three main thematic categories were identified: self-oriented, community-oriented and theme-oriented emotional self-disclosure. These categories capture recurrent patterns in how users position themselves emotionally in relation to different elements of the interaction.

Self-oriented self-disclosure refers to comments in which users direct emotional content towards themselves. This includes expressions of personal feelings, emotionally charged self-evaluations and references to personal experiences that are framed in affective terms. Community-oriented self-disclosure, by contrast, encompasses comments in which emotions are directed towards other participants in the interaction, the content creator, fellow viewers or the channel itself. In these cases, emotional expression is oriented towards the broader online community and the social relationships that are enacted within the YouTube comment space. Finally, theme-oriented self-disclosure refers to instances in which users express emotions or evaluative stances towards the topic of the video, i.e. the smartphone being unboxed and reviewed. Here, emotional self-disclosure is closely tied to product evaluation, consumer experience and affective responses to technology.

From a quantitative perspective, the distribution of emotional orientations provides a general overview of the prominence of each category in the dataset. Since a single comment may

simultaneously express emotions oriented towards more than one target, the figures below reflect relative salience rather than mutually exclusive proportions, and their sum therefore exceeds 100%. With this in mind, Figure 3 below shows that approximately 24% of the 16,034 emotionally self-disclosing comments include emotions oriented towards the self, 38% towards the community (including the content creator, other viewers and/or the YouTube channel or video as digital communal spaces), and 70% towards the theme of the video, that is, the smartphone-related content or the features under review.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of emotional self-disclosure orientation.

In general, the predominance of theme-oriented emotional self-disclosure is unsurprising in the context of smartphone unboxing videos, which foreground evaluation, anticipation and personal engagement with consumer technology. At the same time, the clear presence of community-oriented and self-oriented emotional expressions points to the fact that commenting activity goes well beyond product assessment. Users frequently draw on emotional language to express immediate affective reactions, narrate personal experiences, articulate feelings of longing or frustration tied to their personal circumstances, and establish connections with content creators and fellow viewers. Emotional self-disclosure thus operates simultaneously at individual, interpersonal and topical levels.

In those cases in which comments contained emotional expressions oriented towards more than one target, emotional self-disclosure was coded under all relevant categories. The proportions reported above therefore indicate the relative salience of different emotional orientations within the corpus and point to the central role of the product itself as a focal point for affective evaluation. A set of comments that illustrate instances of emotional self-disclosure with multiple orientations are included below, for the sole purpose of illustrating the process of comment categorization.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 10</b> | I just followed you on all your socials! 🙏 Really hoping to win this one. I've never been an iPhone owner before 🥺                                                                   |
| <b>Comment 11</b> | Hello im cristy from philippines, i am dreaming to have an iphone but i am poor and i don't have enough money to buy it 😞 i hope you notice me.                                      |
| <b>Comment 12</b> | I almost spit my ice cream 🍦 out 😂😂😂😂 shoe laces, forks and spoons! That's a good one but true 👍 ! I want the charger, too! Thanks... Flossy you always bring it! 😂 And the Black 🖤! |

These three comments illustrate how emotional self-disclosure frequently involves multiple, overlapping orientations within a single contribution. In Comment 10, the user combines self-oriented emotional self-disclosure by expressing how they feel about themselves in relation to the phone (“I’ve never been an iPhone owner before 🥺”), which indexes longing and lack of access, with community-oriented emotion directed towards the content creator through an explicit affiliative act that expresses admiration and attachment (“I just followed you on all your socials!”). In addition, the user expresses hopeful alignment with the giveaway announced in the video (“🙏 Really hoping to win this one”), which also links the emotional expression to the topic, i.e. the smartphone under review. Comment 11 additionally blends orientations, but with a stronger emphasis on self-oriented self-disclosure grounded in personal circumstances. The explicit reference to socioeconomic status (“i am poor and i don’t have enough money”) is framed affectively through sadness, while the appeal to the audience (“i hope you notice me”) directs emotion towards the YouTuber, positioning the commenter in a vulnerable stance vis-à-vis the community and the content creator. In addition, the expression of aspiration (“i am dreaming to have an iphone”) introduces a theme-oriented emotional component. Comment 12, by contrast,

foregrounds positive affect and humour, orienting emotion simultaneously towards the self through the expression of a spontaneous personal reaction to the video (“I almost spit my ice cream 🍦 out 😂😂😂😂”), the product and its accessories (“I want the charger, too!”; “And the Black 📱!”), and the reviewer (“Flossy you always bring it! 😊”). Across the three examples, emotional self-disclosure does not operate along a single axis: it emerges as a layered practice in which self-oriented feelings, community affiliation and product affective evaluation are intertwined.

#### 4.1.1. Self-oriented Self-disclosure

This section examines self-oriented self-disclosure in greater detail, focusing on instances in which commenters explicitly orient emotional expression towards themselves. In these cases, the emotional content is anchored in personal feelings, experiences, self-evaluations or personal circumstances, instead of being primarily directed at the product, the YouTuber or the wider community. This type of self-disclosure foregrounds the commenter’s subjective positioning and often involves a heightened degree of vulnerability, as users make their own emotional states publicly visible within the YouTube comment space.

The comments discussed in this section were selected as illustrative examples of self-oriented emotional self-disclosure, but they are not exhaustive representations of all instances present in the corpus. They display clear first-person reference, an explicit or strongly inferable emotional stance, and a transparent orientation towards the self as the primary (although not necessarily exclusive) target of emotion. They are intended to capture recurring patterns observed across the dataset and to illustrate how self-oriented emotional self-disclosure is realised in this context.

|                   |                                                   |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 13</b> | the knife next to the box makes me so anxious.... |
| <b>Comment 14</b> | 05:40 OMG! I really heard that voice behind me:(  |

A first group of comments illustrates self-oriented emotional self-disclosure through the expression of immediate affective reactions triggered by elements of the video.

Comment 13 exemplifies how users articulate embodied emotional responses such as anxiety (“makes me so anxious....”), even when the trigger is relatively peripheral to the product itself (“the knife next to the box”). The emotion expressed here is not evaluative of the phone, but rather of the commenter’s own affective state while watching the unboxing process. Similarly, Comment 14 reveals a moment of fear or startle, framed through temporal anchoring by including a hyperlink to the exact moment in which something happens in the video (“05:40”) and reinforced by the use of the exclamatory expression “OMG!” and the emoticon “:(”. In both cases, the disclosure functions as a form of spontaneous self-expression, foregrounding how the viewing experience affects the commenter emotionally.

|                   |                                                                    |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 15</b> | my sister threw my moms iphone 11 at my head and it hurt like hell |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|

Other instances of self-oriented self-disclosure rely more heavily on personal anecdotes that introduce aspects of the commenter’s offline life into the interaction. Comment 15 stands out as an example where emotional self-disclosure is embedded in a brief narrative: a recounting of an incident in which the commenter’s sister throws a phone at them. Although the comment is connected to the phone model under review, the emotional core of the utterance is the speaker’s experience of pain (“it hurt like hell”). This type of anecdotal disclosure blurs the boundary between product-related discourse and personal storytelling, illustrating how YouTube comments may become spaces for the narration of emotionally charged life events that exceed the immediate topic of the video.

|                   |                                                           |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 16</b> | I don't have money to buy this phone my family is poor 🙄😞 |
| <b>Comment 17</b> | watching this makes me sad. im actually so poor 😞         |
| <b>Comment 18</b> | I want 13 ❤️ but I don't have money 😞                     |

A particularly recurrent pattern within self-oriented self-disclosure concerns expressions of economic limitation, frustration and desire. Comments 16, 17 and 18 explicitly articulate emotions such as sadness, frustration and longing, closely tied to the commenters’ socio-

economic circumstances (“I don't have money to buy this phone my family is poor 😞😞”; “watching this makes me sad. im actually so poor 😞”; “I want 13 ❤️ but I don't have money 😞”). In these cases, the phone serves as a catalyst for emotional self-reflection rather than as the primary object of evaluation. The use of first-person pronouns, combined with negatively valenced lexical items and emojis, highlights the affective dimension of consumer aspiration and exclusion. These comments also reveal how self-oriented emotional self-disclosure can index broader social realities, such as inequality and financial difficulties, within consumer-focused digital spaces.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 19</b> | I'm 'not super tech savvy so please forgive me if this is a stupid question... Would the magnet at the back of the phone mess up a wireless charger, let's say, in a car? |
| <b>Comment 20</b> | The phone is really cool but in don't need 2 camera's to tell me i'm ugly.                                                                                                |

Self-oriented emotional self-disclosure may also be realised through self-evaluation and the anticipatory management of face. Comment 19 illustrates how users can position themselves affectively through epistemic self-assessment (“I'm not super tech savvy”) without resorting to explicit emotion labels. By pre-emptively downplaying their own expertise and requesting forgiveness (“please forgive me if this is a stupid question...”), the commenter implicitly projects feelings of insecurity and potential embarrassment, while also constructing an identity of non-expertise. This comment indexes an underlying emotional stance oriented towards the self, shaped by the anticipation of negative evaluation from others. A related but more overtly evaluative example can be found in Comment 20, where humour and self-irony are used to frame a negative self-assessment (“i'm ugly”). While the phone is briefly evaluated positively (“The phone is really cool”), the emotional weight of the comment lies in the self-deprecating remark, which can be understood as both critical and playful (“in don't need 2 camera's to tell me i'm ugly”). Here the commenter turns a product feature (the dual-camera system) into a vehicle for affective self-positioning, subordinating technical evaluation to self-directed humour. In both comments, emotional self-disclosure is closely tied to identity projection, allowing users to publicly negotiate competence, confidence and self-worth while mitigating potential social risk within the comment space.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 21</b> | Im getting my this phone for myself but in white, and I'm so excited because I am the one buying it i will save my money for 3 months to buy this 😊 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Of course, not all self-oriented disclosures in the dataset are negatively framed. Comment 21 offers a contrasting example of positive self-oriented emotional self-disclosure. In this case, excitement and pride (“I’m so excited because I am the one buying it”) are explicitly linked to personal effort and future-oriented planning (“i will save my money for 3 months to buy this 😊”). The emphasis on “for myself” and “I am the one buying it” foregrounds autonomy and self-achievement, constructing an identity of responsibility and determination. This type of disclosure reveals how self-oriented emotions may also serve identity-affirming functions, allowing users to present themselves as capable, motivated and deserving.

|                   |                                                      |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 22</b> | I need a laptop for my online class please help me 😞 |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------|

Finally, some comments combine self-oriented emotional self-disclosure with explicit requests for help, as in Comment 22. Although the product discussed in the video is a smartphone, the commenter redirects attention to their own needs and emotional distress. The disclosure of need and vulnerability (“I need a laptop for my online class”) positions the self at the centre of the interaction and, regardless of the commenter’s actual intentions or the factual accuracy of the claim, the user appeals to the audience for empathy or assistance (“please help me 😞”). This reinforces the idea that self-oriented emotional self-disclosure on YouTube is not purely expressive, but sometimes interactionally motivated and oriented towards potential responses from others.

Collectively, these examples show that self-oriented self-disclosure in smartphone unboxing video comments encompasses a wide range of emotional experiences, including anxiety, pain, sadness, frustration, excitement and pride. What unites these comments is the centrality of the self as the emotional target: emotions are articulated as personal states, grounded in individual experience and explicitly marked through first-person reference. In this sense, the feedback provided by users takes the form of affective self-expression,

where evaluations are articulated through emotions centred on the self. This orientation calls attention to the extent to which YouTube comment sections function not only as spaces for product evaluation, but also as arenas for personal expression, self-positioning and the public negotiation of emotion.

#### 4.1.2. Community-oriented Self-disclosure

This section focuses on community-oriented self-disclosure, that is, instances in which emotional expression is primarily directed towards other participants in the YouTube interactional space, including content creators, fellow viewers and the wider community, as well as towards the channels and videos, which serve as the shared focal points around which the community is organised. The analysis examines how users position themselves affectively in relation to others, expressing affiliation, trust, appreciation, criticism or solidarity, and how such emotional disclosures contribute to the construction and negotiation of community within the comment section.

|                   |                                                                                       |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 23</b> | 2:12 I would willingly subscribe without him telling me, this is such a great channel |
| <b>Comment 24</b> | New subscriber! I loved how you described each thing and you're very aesthetic too! 💜 |

Community-oriented emotional self-disclosure frequently takes the form of overt affiliation with a channel or content creator. Comments 23 and 24 exemplify how users publicly express appreciation and loyalty, often framing subscription as an emotionally motivated act and not just a purely pragmatic one (“I would willingly subscribe without him telling me”). The disclosure of positive affect towards the channel (“this is such a great channel”) and the YouTuber (“I loved how you described each thing and you're very aesthetic too! 💜”) positions the commenters as supportive and engaged community members, reinforcing shared values such as authenticity, effort and aesthetic quality.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 25</b> | The way I trust Arun is probably more than healthy 😊.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Comment 26</b> | I might cop some hate for this but I think Flossy's reviews are now better than mkbhd's. I find the Flossy reviews address some of the more real world issues where as mkbhd's s21 ultra review seemed kinda rushed. Also Marques tends to play it to safe with his opinions. I think Flossy spoke for everyone in regards to the no power brick in the box issue. I've been a subscriber for 2 years now but this video made me decide to hit the notifications bell which I don't do for many tech review channels. Keep up the great content Flossy! |

Trust emerges as another recurrent emotional stance directed at content creators. Comment 25 explicitly frames trust in affective terms, exaggerating its intensity through humour and emoji use (“The way I trust Arun is probably more than healthy 🤩”). Beyond evaluating the YouTuber positively, this comment also discloses the commenter’s own emotional investment, suggesting a parasocial relationship in which credibility and reliability are emotionally grounded as opposed to purely informational. A more elaborate example of this affective alignment can be found in Comment 26, where the commenter contrasts different reviewers (“I think Flossy’s reviews are now better than mkbhd’s”), expresses long-term subscription loyalty (“I’ve been a subscriber for 2 years now”), and frames the decision to activate notifications as an emotionally significant commitment by adding “which I don’t do for many tech review channels”. This functions as a stance marker signalling heightened affective alignment with this specific creator. Here, emotional self-disclosure acts as a form of endorsement that is simultaneously evaluative, relational and identity-oriented, positioning the commenter as an experienced and discerning member of the tech-review community.

|                   |                                                                                         |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 27</b> | This man disgusts me... He took of the plastic too quickly. That's punishable by death. |
| <b>Comment 28</b> | I feel u bro, that is totally BS                                                        |

However, not all community-oriented self-disclosures involve positive emotions. Comments such as 27 and 28 illustrate how emotions may be directed at others in the form of mock outrage, criticism or alignment through shared frustration. While Comment 27 relies on what reads as hyperbolic and humorous aggression to ironically criticise the YouTuber’s behaviour (“He took of the plastic too quickly. That’s punishable by death”), Comment 28 constructs solidarity through empathetic alignment, explicitly signalling shared stance (“I feel u bro”), and through a negative evaluation (“that is totally BS”). In both cases, emotional expression is oriented towards others and functions to negotiate interpersonal positioning within the comment space.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 29</b> | The video was very nicely done with superb background music, and you are like levelled up in making and editing videos. Also the long exposure shot photos were nice, but I do have 1 question that, do we need a tripod compulsory for this or not?                                       |
| <b>Comment 30</b> | For the love of god someone please tell me what the intro song is 🤔 I know it says the artists name in the description and I looked through his Spotify and couldn't find it. AND I looked through the intro song playlist and still couldn't find the song from THIS video. Please help 🙏 |

Some instances of community-oriented emotional self-disclosure involve an evaluation of the video itself as a multimodal artefact, which may often be interpreted as an evaluation of the content creator's skills as well. Comment 29 illustrates how positive affective evaluation is oriented towards certain audiovisual elements of the video, such as editing, music and camera work ("The video was very nicely done with superb background music...") and towards the YouTuber ("you are like levelled up in making and editing videos"). By explicitly evaluating the quality of the video and expressing appreciation for the creator's work, the commenter positions themselves as an attentive and competent viewer, while simultaneously reinforcing shared standards of value within the community. In addition, Comment 30 expresses frustration and emotional urgency in relation to a specific component of the video ("For the love of god someone please tell me what the intro song is 🤔"). Although affect is triggered by the video, the disclosure addresses the wider audience, inviting collective problem-solving ("Please help 🙏"). In this regard, emotions oriented towards the video also function as a bridge between individual experience and community interaction, foregrounding the video as an enabling object around which participation, evaluation and affiliation are organised.

|                   |                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 31</b> | To the Early Squad Reading This: sending Virtual hugs to everyone who needs it. Always stay safe, read my name btw 🌈         |
| <b>Comment 32</b> | Literally 1%✓ people who like this comment I pray may you and your parents live more than 100 years with good health 🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏 |

Several comments also reveal how users orient emotional expression towards the broader community of viewers, addressing an unspecified or diffuse audience. Comment 31 explicitly addresses fellow viewers, offering care and emotional support ("sending Virtual hugs to everyone who needs it"; "Always stay safe") and constructing the comment section as a space of mutual solidarity. Comparably, Comment 32 employs exaggerated affective language, emojis and religious references ("I pray may you and your parents live more than

100 years with good health 🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑”) to perform benevolence and goodwill towards an unspecified audience. These disclosures foreground emotion as a resource for community-building, even when directed at an abstract or imagined collective.

|                   |                                                                                           |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 33</b> | I hate people that shade on Android users you guys should all go to hell                  |
| <b>Comment 34</b> | All yall dip shits lol be a man or a woman and apologize to my mans! 🤩 Happy friday squad |

By contrast, other comments illustrate how community-oriented emotional self-disclosure may involve hostility and boundary-drawing. Comment 33 expresses anger and rejection directed at an opposing group (“I hate people that shade on Android users you guys should all go to hell”), implicitly reinforcing in-group identity among like-minded users. Similarly, although in a playful and ironic manner, Comment 34 uses aggressive language (“All yall dip shits”) mitigated by the use of an acronym (“lol”) and the emoji of the smiling devil (“🤩”) to police behaviour within the community, urging others to apologise (“apologize to my mans!”) and invoking collective affiliation (“Happy friday squad”). In these cases, emotional self-disclosure serves to assert norms, defend group members and regulate interaction.

In conclusion, these comments show that community-oriented emotional self-disclosure encompasses a wide spectrum of affective stances, ranging from admiration, trust and solidarity to anger and criticism. What all these examples share is the outward orientation of emotion: feelings are expressed towards others and function to negotiate belonging, affiliation, authority and norms within the YouTube comment space. In other words, affective feedback can also operate as a means of aligning with others and negotiating shared positions within the community. This reinforces the view of emotional self-disclosure as a relational and socially consequential practice, one that extends well beyond the purely individual act of expressing a feeling.

#### 4.1.3. Theme-oriented Self-disclosure

This section focuses on theme-oriented self-disclosure, which refers to instances in which emotional expression is primarily oriented towards product-related themes rather than towards the self or other participants in the interaction. In these comments, emotions are

mobilised to evaluate specific features of smartphones, design choices, corporate practices or broader narratives surrounding smartphone production and consumption, most of which are typically directly introduced, foregrounded or discussed in the videos themselves. The analysis shows how emotional self-disclosure functions as a resource for articulating stance, value judgements and consumer positioning in relation to shared thematic concerns.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 35</b> | I love the red                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Comment 36</b> | I'm watching this on my Samsung Galaxy S20 Ultra 5G, and the phantom black s21 5g ultra has won my heart omg it's so beautiful of a phone 🥰                        |
| <b>Comment 37</b> | The S21 Looks sooo comfortable....and the finish on the the buds is attractive in my opinion                                                                       |
| <b>Comment 38</b> | Too bad they couldn't do an iPhone pro or pro max in pink but I hope they do when they release the iPhone 14 pro and pro max. But I do love the gold color though. |

A first prominent thematic cluster concerns aesthetic evaluation, particularly in relation to the colour, design and material qualities of the smartphones. Several comments express immediate affective responses to visual features, as in Comment 35 (“I love the red”) and Comment 36 (“the phantom black s21 5g ultra has won my heart omg it’s so beautiful of a phone 🥰”). Here, positive emotion is directly anchored in the appearance of the device, with intensified language and emojis reinforcing the affective force of the evaluation. Additionally, Comment 37 links emotion to perceived usability and finish (“The S21 looks sooo comfortable....and the finish on the the buds is attractive in my opinion”), suggesting that comfort and material design are not merely technical attributes but sources of affective engagement too. Comment 38 further illustrates how emotional disclosure may involve nuanced aesthetic positioning, combining disappointment (“Too bad they couldn’t do an iPhone pro or pro max in pink...”) with appreciation (“...But I do love the gold color though”), thereby negotiating competing emotional responses within the same thematic frame.

|                   |                                                                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 39</b> | Idk man the designs are just irritating the heck out of me like WHY!!! 🤔🤔 |
| <b>Comment 40</b> | That 5g antenna looks stupid to me and can get obstructed easily          |

Negative aesthetic evaluations are equally salient. Comment 39 and Comment 40 express frustration and irritation oriented towards specific design choices, using emotionally charged lexis (“the designs are just irritating the heck out of me”; “That 5g antenna looks stupid to

me”), emphatic punctuation (“WHY!!!”) and emojis (“😭😭”). These comments foreground how design features can become affective triggers, eliciting strong emotional reactions that function as evaluative stances. In this sense, emotions are deployed to legitimise judgements about what counts as acceptable, attractive or functional design within the smartphone market.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 41</b> | I love apple products but unless you have a iPhone 11 u need to buy a separate charger for iPhone 12 OUT OF ORDER don't give this rubbish about environmental concerns it pure bottom line increase for shareholders pure greed            |
| <b>Comment 42</b> | If apple is Saving environment I think he should cut down the price of I phones 🙄                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Comment 43</b> | I love apple! Truly do (I'm literally using my iPhone to type this) but why did they not give a charger with it... I just kinda feel like that was a little disappointing! At least have it free with the new phone I mean it ain't cheap! |

A second, particularly salient thematic cluster centres on the removal of chargers from smartphone packaging and the environmental discourse used to justify this decision. Comments 41, 42 and 43 articulate strong emotional reactions such as anger, moral outrage and disappointment, explicitly challenging corporate narratives of sustainability. Comment 41 frames the practice as “pure greed”, rejecting environmental explanations (“this rubbish about environmental concerns”) and attributing economic motives to the company. Comment 42 adopts a conditional moral stance (“If apple is Saving environment I think he should cut down the price of I phones 🙄”), while Comment 43 combines brand loyalty with disillusionment (“I love apple! Truly do... but why did they not give a charger”). In these cases, emotional self-disclosure is clearly theme-oriented: emotions are not directed at individual users or content creators, but at corporate practices and ideological justifications. This reveals how product-related themes become sites of ethical and affective discussion or even negotiation over corporate responsibility and consumer expectations.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 44</b> | Nope.... The violet is hideous. Also, the bezels are still way too big. I'll keep my Note 10 plus. Phones, in general, are becoming way too similar for anyone to really need to upgrade, unless their current phone has a bad crack on it somewhere, and isn't worth fixing. |
| <b>Comment 45</b> | Can't wait to go back to Android. My friends talked me into getting an Iphone. What a mistake.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Comment 46</b> | iPhone 13 is the best for my needs!                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Comment 47</b> | Few years later apple will provide us only boxes of iphone and will tell us to buy phone fom iphone store. All other mobile phone companies will do the same 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔                                                                                                            |

Theme-oriented emotional self-disclosure also emerges in comments that address broader narratives of consumption, upgrading and brand affiliation. Comment 44 expresses dissatisfaction with perceived technological stagnation (“I’ll keep my Note 10 plus”, “Phones, in general, are becoming way too similar for anyone to really need to upgrade”), using negative evaluation to justify resistance to upgrading. Comment 45 frames brand switching in affective terms, as a regrettable and misguided decision (“What a mistake”), while Comment 46 offers a contrasting, needs-based evaluation (“iPhone 13 is the best for my needs!”) grounded in satisfaction rather than excitement or frustration. Comment 47 adopts a humorous and speculative tone, projecting a satirical future in which consumers receive nothing but an empty box and must purchase the phone separately (“Few years later apple will provide us only boxes of iphone and will tell us to buy phone fom iphone store”), using several laughter emojis (“😂😂😂😂😂”) to probably mitigate criticism and signal the non-literal, playful intent of the comment.

All these comments show that theme-oriented emotional self-disclosure plays an important role in structuring evaluative discourse in smartphone unboxing video comments. Emotions are mobilised to engage with shared themes such as aesthetics, corporate ethics, environmental responsibility and consumer fatigue, allowing users to position themselves affectively when offering feedback in relation to dominant narratives of technological innovation. These expressions of emotion therefore contribute to the collective construction of meaning around products and practices, reinforcing the idea that emotions are integral to how these technological artefacts are discussed, evaluated and contested in online contexts.

In conclusion, the three orientations discussed in this section — self-oriented, community-oriented and theme-oriented self-disclosure — underline the multifaceted ways in which emotions are embedded in YouTube product review comments. Even though these orientations often intersect, with individual comments simultaneously invoking personal experience, relational positioning and thematic evaluation, this analytical distinction makes it possible to trace the primary targets towards which emotions are directed. By

foregrounding emotional orientation, this section provides a foundation for the subsequent analysis of the social functions that emotional self-disclosure fulfils in this context.

## 4.2. Pragmatic Analysis: Social Functions of Emotional Self-disclosure

While the previous section focused on what emotions are oriented towards in instances of self-disclosure, the present section shifts the analytical focus to what emotional self-disclosure *does* in interaction. Adopting a pragmatic perspective, this part of the analysis examines the social functions fulfilled by emotionally self-disclosing comments in YouTube smartphone unboxing videos. In other words, the concern here is primarily with the communicative purposes that the disclosure of emotions appears to serve within the comment space.

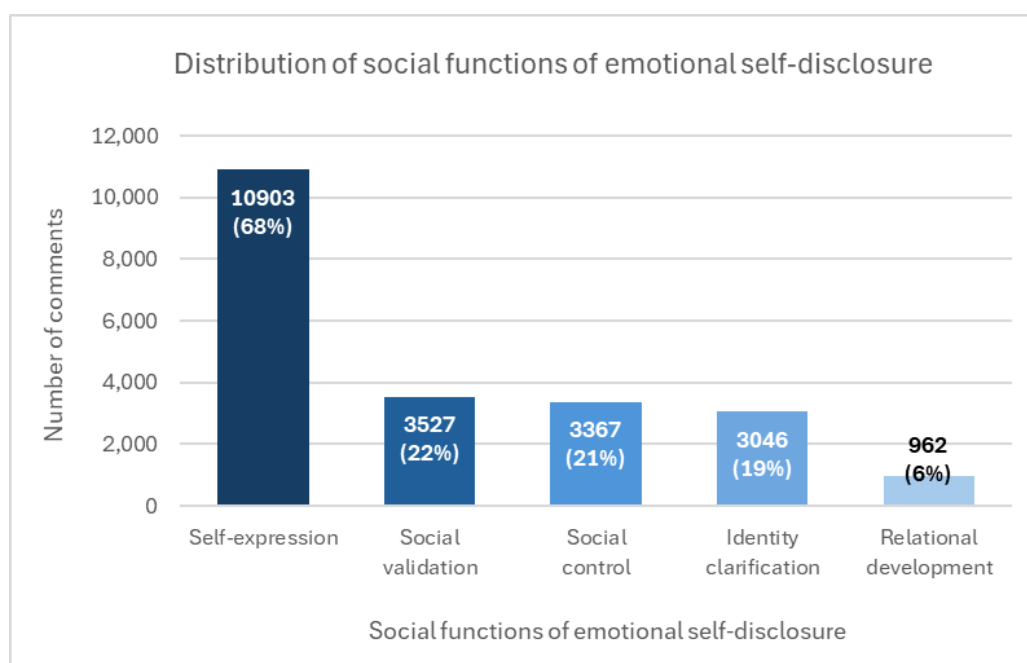
The analysis draws on the functional framework proposed by Derlega and Grzelak (1979), according to which self-disclosure may fulfil five broad social functions: self-expression, social validation, social control, identity clarification and relational development. It is important to note that these functions should be understood as analytically useful tendencies that capture recurrent motivations and interactional effects of self-disclosure, but individual comments may fulfil more than one social function at the same time. For this reason, comments in the dataset were coded under more than one functional category whenever necessary, as illustrated by the following comment.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 48</b> | Love love love your unboxing video..... Love the colour of your phone 🥰🥰🥰 Please make more videos of your phone and phone cases please.. You are so lucky to have a iPhone... I am using my Android phone for the last 6 years can't afford a new phone...Lots of love from Bangladesh BD ❤️ BD ❤️ BD ❤️ |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Comment 48 is a clear example of how emotional self-disclosure can often be multifunctional, with several social functions co-occurring within a single contribution. The repeated expressions of “love” directed at the video and the YouTuber (“Love love love your unboxing video”) perform social validation by offering endorsement, while the affective evaluation of the product (“Love the colour of your phone 🥰🥰🥰”) simultaneously fulfils a self-expressive function. The request “Please make more videos of your phone and phone

cases please” can be interpreted as a form of social control, as it attempts to influence the content creator’s future behaviour through pleading. In addition, the reference to personal circumstances (“I am using my Android phone for the last 6 years can’t afford a new phone”) and the explicit mention of geographical origin (“Lots of love from Bangladesh”) contribute to identity clarification, situating the commenter socially, economically and culturally within the interaction, while indexing feelings of financial constraint and cultural belonging. Finally, the commenter’s expression of affection towards the YouTuber and the use of emojis contribute to relational development, as they function to establish a sense of interpersonal closeness and emotional alignment with the creator, even if such rapport is unlikely to be reciprocated given the asymmetrical nature of YouTube interactions.

To provide a general overview of how emotional self-disclosure operates pragmatically in the corpus, Figure 4 below presents the distribution of the five social functions across the dataset.



**Figure 4.** Distribution of social functions of emotional self-disclosure.

Self-expression is by far the most prevalent social function of emotional self-disclosure in the corpus, appearing in 68% of the comments. This finding suggests that YouTube comment sections on smartphone unboxing videos primarily operate as spaces for users to

articulate personal feelings, evaluations and experiences, often motivated by an intrinsic need to express affect, regardless of the thematic orientation of emotions. Social validation (22%) and social control (21%) also emerge as important functions, reflecting the interactive nature of the platform: commenters frequently use emotional language to endorse content creators, align with shared evaluations, or indirectly influence future content, users' potential behaviour and normative expectations. Identity clarification, present in 19% of the comments, further highlights the role of emotional self-disclosure in positioning the self, often through brief personal references embedded within evaluative discourse. By contrast, relational development appears least frequently (6%), which can be explained by the largely asymmetrical and weak-tie nature of YouTube interactions, where sustained interpersonal relationships are less common than momentary expressions of affiliation or support. In addition, the low frequency of this function may also be partly shaped by the methodological decision to exclude reply threads from the dataset. Relational development tends to unfold sequentially and reciprocally, and is therefore perhaps most visible precisely in the kind of back-and-forth exchanges that top-level comments alone cannot capture. The relatively low frequency of this function should then be interpreted with this in mind.

In the following sections, each of these social functions will be examined in turn through the analysis of representative examples. For reasons of analytical clarity, the discussion will focus on one social function at a time, even though the examples discussed may simultaneously illustrate additional social functions beyond the one being examined.

#### 4.2.1. Self-expression

Self-expression emerges as the most frequent social function of emotional self-disclosure in the corpus. In this function, commenters primarily use emotional language to articulate personal reactions, feelings and evaluations prompted by the unboxing video, the product itself or their own consumption experiences. These disclosures appear motivated mainly by the need to verbalise an affective stance and make one's emotional response publicly visible, as illustrated by the following comments taken from the corpus.

|                   |                                                                                         |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 49</b> | I almost died on the drop 😬                                                             |
| <b>Comment 50</b> | loool I literally just went from the 8 plus to a 12 the size different is killing me 🤯🤯 |

Several comments illustrate how users draw on exaggeration, humour and pictorial resources to express spontaneous emotional reactions. In Comment 49, the hyperbolic formulation (“I almost died on the drop 😬”) conveys shock or anxiety at a particular moment in the video. Similarly, Comment 50 relies on expressive exaggeration and crying emojis (“the size different is killing me 🤯🤯”) to communicate a high level of discomfort at the change in phone size following an upgrade. In both cases, emotional self-disclosure functions as a way of externalising a personal affective experience, without explicitly addressing other users or the content creator.

|                   |                                                                                               |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 51</b> | Whoa I'm early. I'm genuinely curious with the reviews. Not sure if I want to buy one though. |
| <b>Comment 52</b> | Me watching this on my iPhone 6+: 🙄💋🙄                                                         |

Other comments foreground emotional self-expression through the articulation of uncertainty, anticipation or ambivalence. Comment 51 combines curiosity with hesitation (“I'm genuinely curious with the reviews. Not sure if I want to buy one though”), allowing the commenter to publicly negotiate their own stance towards the product. Likewise, Comment 52 (“Me watching this on my iPhone 6+: 🙄💋🙄”) uses a visual meme-style emoji sequence to index a feeling of disbelief or helplessness, implicitly contrasting the much older device owned by the user with the new model unboxed in the video. In these examples, emotional self-disclosure serves to frame the user’s internal response to the video, while also exploiting shared digital conventions to make that response recognisable to others.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 53</b> | After this charger fiasco I've gone ahead and ordered a note 20. Paying \$1,500 for an iPhone 12 pro max that I still have to buy a charger for is stupid. Even the phone will end in a landfill at some point. What about people getting iPhones for the first time? |
| <b>Comment 54</b> | I didn't realize the sides are pink shit already pre ordered                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

Other forms of self-expression can be seen in comments where emotional disclosure is embedded within evaluative narratives. Comment 53, for instance, expresses frustration,

disappointment and moral concern in response to Apple's decision to exclude chargers from the box. The commenter's emotional stance ("Paying \$1,500 [...] is stupid") is intertwined with broader reflections on environmental impact ("Even the phone will end in a landfill") and consumer fairness ("What about people getting iPhones for the first time?"). Although the comment implicitly critiques corporate practices, its primary pragmatic function lies in the articulation of a strongly felt personal reaction, grounded in the commenter's own purchasing decision ("After this charger fiasco I've gone ahead and ordered a note 20"). Moreover, Comment 54 conveys surprise and negative affect or frustration at a design feature ("I didn't realize the sides are pink shit"), with the emotional response emerging only after the purchase has already been made ("already pre ordered"). In both cases, the personal experience narrated in the comment is precisely what triggers the emotional stance, rendering self-disclosure inseparable from lived engagement with the product.

These comments show that self-expression in YouTube unboxing video comments often involves the public externalisation of emotions such as surprise, excitement, frustration or uncertainty. Emotional self-disclosure here serves as a means of stance-taking and personal positioning, allowing users to narrate and evaluate their own experiences in ways that extend beyond the product itself. While such disclosures may incidentally invite alignment or recognition from others, their primary pragmatic role lies in reinforcing self-expression as a central function of emotional self-disclosure and affective feedback in this context.

#### 4.2.2. Social Validation

Social validation reflects users' tendency to express emotions in ways that seek approval, confirmation or alignment from others, while simultaneously allowing them to offer validation to content creators and peers through affective endorsement. In this function, emotional self-disclosure is explicitly interactional, as commenters position their feelings and evaluations in relation to the content creator or the wider community, anticipating agreement, recognition or supportive responses. The examples below illustrate how emotional expressions in the corpus function as resources for seeking and offering social validation as a form of feedback.

|                   |                                                                                                 |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 55</b> | I love his charisma. He's so entertaining to watch.                                             |
| <b>Comment 56</b> | I love your video. Your content. Already subscribed your channel 🤩. Free iphone 11pro for me? 🙏 |

Several comments illustrate social validation through positive emotional alignment with the YouTuber. Comment 55 expresses affective appreciation (“I love his charisma. He’s so entertaining to watch”) that functions to validate the content creator’s persona and performance. Comparably, Comment 56 combines explicit praise (“I love your video. Your content”) with affiliative actions such as subscribing (“Already subscribed your channel 🤩”), reinforcing a supportive stance towards the channel. In both cases, emotional self-disclosure operates as a means of publicly endorsing the creator, thereby contributing to the visibility and legitimacy of the content within the platform’s attention economy.

|                   |                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 57</b> | Im getting the iPhone 11 and now im litterally STALKING the iPhone 11Like if u r too hahaEdit: I GOT IT AHHHHH (i have a white one :D) |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Social validation can also be directed towards peer users. In Comment 57, the user seeks validation by explicitly inviting others to like the comment (“Like if u r too haha”), which explicitly fosters alignment from other viewers who share the same emotional state of anticipation and excitement. The subsequent edit (“I GOT IT AHHHHH”), made at a later point in time, reinforces this shared affective trajectory, transforming a personal experience into a communal one, as the user comes back to their comment to edit it and provide updated information to others. Here, emotional self-disclosure allows the commenter’s feelings to be embedded within a perceived collective experience, thus seeking validation through similarity and shared enthusiasm.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 58</b> | I'm gonna buy iPhone 12, but a little worried about battery life, what do you think about it, help me pleaseeeeee                                                      |
| <b>Comment 59</b> | Yoooo! Ok so, I'm kinda super impressed by this camera! I was thinking of upgrading to the 11, but I'm not sure anymore! It may be worth me just going to the 12... 🤔🤔 |

Other comments illustrate how emotional self-disclosure is used to solicit evaluative support or reassurance. Comment 58 openly expresses concern and uncertainty (“a little worried

about battery life”), directly requesting input from the community or the content creator (“what do you think about it, help me pleaseeeee”). The affective tone and elongated spelling (“pleaseeeee”) heighten the emotional appeal, framing the request as a plea for validation and guidance. A similar dynamic can be observed in Comment 59, where enthusiasm (“super impressed by this camera!”) coexists with indecision about upgrading (“but I’m not sure anymore!”, “🤔🤔”). The emotional disclosure of uncertainty implicitly invites confirmation or corrective feedback from others, positioning the commenter as seeking reassurance before making a purchasing decision.

Overall, these examples show that social validation in this context is frequently realised through emotional self-disclosure that invites agreement, offers endorsement or seeks support. By publicly sharing enthusiasm, concern or indecision, commenters can orient their emotional expressions towards others, transforming personal feelings into interactional resources. Besides expressing affect, emotional self-disclosure thus functions to seek and provide recognition and alignment within the YouTube community, showing the importance of social validation as a pragmatic function of feedback in this genre.

#### 4.2.3. Social Control

Social control refers to the use of emotional self-disclosure to influence others’ behaviour, evaluations or future actions. In the corpus, this function is realised when commenters draw on affective language to make requests, offer advice, express preferences or implicitly guide both content creators and fellow viewers. While many comments may appear supportive or informative on the surface, they pragmatically function to shape norms, expectations and decision-making within the YouTube comment space, as exemplified below.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 60</b> | Would like to see the Pro/ProMax reviewed first as it's the more "upgraded" version. Also would like to know if there's a way to set the refresh rate for the screen. I know it's dynamic but being able to choose, 30hz, 60hz or 120hz would be very nice, even though it might drain the battery faster. If you can lock the refresh rate, it would be nice to see the difference in battery life compared between the options. |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Several comments illustrate social control directed at the content creator through emotionally framed requests and suggestions. In Comment 60, the commenter expresses

interest and anticipation while outlining in detail what they would “like to see” in future reviews. The repeated use of evaluative language (“would be very nice”, “it would be nice to see”) softens the directive force of the request, yet clearly attempts to influence the creator’s future content choices. Emotional self-disclosure here functions to legitimise the request by framing it as user enthusiasm and concern, rather than as overt instruction.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 61</b> | Good day Arun, I followed you both on Instagram and on Facebook and I've already subbed to your youtube channel awhile now so I'd be very happy to win one of your giveaways. Just hope one of them fall on me lol 🙏😄 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Social control can also operate through platform-specific practices and participation norms. Comment 61, while playful and humorous (“lol 🙏😄”), positions the commenter as a loyal follower who expresses a desire to win a giveaway (“I’d be very happy to win one of your giveaways”). By highlighting subscription (“I’ve already subbed to your youtube channel”) and cross-platform engagement (“I’ve followed you both on Instagram and on Facebook”), the commenter frames such actions as valuable forms of participation, attempting perhaps to influence the creator’s selection process by presenting themselves as a deserving candidate. In doing so, the comment also reinforces normative behaviours expected within the channel’s community, subtly encouraging both the creator and other users to value loyalty and engagement as legitimate paths to reward.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 62</b> | Not a fan of cases, they hold the heat and absorb heat, you want to disperse heat as it's not good for battery or electronics. The cooler they run the better, with less chance of failure. After all you get a new car, you don't keep it wrapped in bubble wrap. I never use cases, they are bad for not letting any heat escape quickly and make your phone run hotter |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Other examples show social control operating through emotionally charged advice-giving. In Comment 62, the commenter strongly discourages the use of phone cases by adopting a confident and dismissive stance, framing their evaluation as self-evident and technically grounded. Although the comment is initially presented as personal preference (“Not a fan of cases”), the use of categorical statements and explanatory reasoning (“they hold the heat [...] you want to disperse heat as it's not good for battery”) constructs an expert-like voice, positioning alternative practices as misguided. The ironic comparison between using a phone case and “wrapping a new car in bubble wrap” further introduces an affective

dimension of ridicule, appealing to common-sense reasoning while simultaneously delegitimising opposing views. Through this combination of irony, certainty and evaluative language (“I never use cases, they are bad”), emotional self-disclosure functions to make the commenter’s stance appear obvious and authoritative, thereby encouraging viewers to adopt the same evaluative stance and usage practices: a subtle but often effective form of social control.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 63</b> | your video always the best justineee. i got my new iPhone 13 in starlight and seriously it's so pretty and gorgeous!!! 💜 i upgraded from an iPhone 7 btw, so i think it's really worth:) please do check my unboxing video hehe 🍷                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Comment 64</b> | I got this phone the day it came out. Best phone ever. I absolutely love it. I had a Galaxy S7 for about a year and a half and then got an iPhone XR. Thought I would like the iPhone more. Turns out I like Samsung more because after a few months of having the XR, I went back to Samsung. I recommend this phone to anyone who's looking to upgrade their phone. |

Social control may also be achieved through emotionally positive endorsement coupled with explicit direction. Comment 63 opens with praise for the YouTuber (“your video always the best”) and enthusiastic product evaluation (“seriously it’s so pretty and gorgeous!!! 💜”), drawing on self-disclosure to establish an affectionate and engaged tone. This positive framing then sets the stage for an invitation to engage with the commenter’s own content (“please do check my unboxing video hehe 🍷”), subtly leveraging affection and enthusiasm to encourage reciprocal attention. Similarly, Comment 64 employs positive emotional evaluation (“Best phone ever. I absolutely love it”) to influence purchasing decisions, explicitly guiding other viewers’ attitudes towards the product (“I recommend this phone to anyone who’s looking to upgrade their phone”).

These examples demonstrate that social control can be frequently realised through emotionally softened directives, recommendations and evaluative statements. Emotional self-disclosure allows users to exert influence without appearing confrontational, embedding control within expressions of enthusiasm, concern or expertise. As such, social control emerges as a pragmatic function of affective feedback closely intertwined with self-expression and social validation, yet distinct in its focus on shaping behaviour and expectations within the community.

#### 4.2.4. Identity Clarification

Identity clarification refers to the use of emotional self-disclosure to position the self socially, culturally or ideologically within the interaction. In the corpus, commenters frequently draw on affective language to signal who they are, what they value and how they relate to both the product and the YouTube community. Emotional self-disclosure thus functions as a resource for making aspects of personal identity publicly visible and interactionally relevant as a form of feedback.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 65</b> | Hey man, love the video! I saw you colab with Linus Tech Tips, couldn't stop laughing, i really enjoyed it. btw 'Im also from Jersey, not to far from Maplewood either. keep up the awesome work man! |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Some comments illustrate identity clarification through expressions of shared background and affiliation among users, which acquire an affective dimension in context. In Comment 65, the commenter combines positive emotional evaluation of the video and the creator's content ("love the video", "I saw your colab with Linus Tech Tips, couldn't stop laughing, I really enjoyed it", "keep up the awesome work man") with a reference to geographical origin ("btw, 'Im also from Jersey, not far from Maplewood either"). This reference is itself affectively motivated, as the deliberate foregrounding of shared location acts as a bid for closeness and interpersonal recognition rather than a neutral biographical detail. In other words, by embedding this geographical self-disclosure within an overall positively evaluative and enthusiastic stance, the commenter attempts to establish a more personal connection, thereby transforming geographical information into an affective resource for identity clarification which signals in-group membership.

|                   |                                                                                              |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 66</b> | I don't even like to watch this is kind of videos but you are different and a ✨ king ✨ man💖💖 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Identity clarification may also be achieved through affective self-positioning in relation to media consumption practices. Comment 66 uses emotional admiration to mark the commenter as someone who typically distances themselves from the genre ("I don't even like to watch this is kind of videos"), while simultaneously constructing a positive exception

(“but you are different and a ✨king✨ man💖✨”). This affective contrast allows the commenter to define their tastes and preferences, positioning themselves as discerning while still affiliating with the creator through praise and emotional endorsement.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 67</b> | Nice, another phone I can't afford to buy 👍👍                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Comment 68</b> | Very excited about this phone 📱 I'm getting two Grey and white for me and my lady, since we don't consume iPhones or anything Apple since they became censor friendly, fudge them. |

Other examples foreground identity clarification through emotionally charged references to economic or ideological positioning. In Comment 67 (“Nice, another phone I can't afford to buy 👍👍”), the use of ironic evaluation and emojis conveys resignation and frustration, while simultaneously situating the commenter within a specific economic identity. In addition, Comment 68 combines excitement about a device (“Very excited about this phone 📱”) with explicit ideological distancing from Apple as a corporation (“we don't consume iPhones or anything Apple”), using emotional language (“fudge them”) to articulate values and beliefs that go beyond the product itself. In both cases, emotional self-disclosure functions to clarify how the commenters situate themselves within broader consumer and ideological landscapes.

|                   |                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 69</b> | Sorry...I've to dislike this video because of Apple. I don't like both apple- fruit and company. But I love you Justine |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Finally, identity clarification can coexist with ambivalent or seemingly contradictory emotional stances. In Comment 69, the commenter explicitly expresses a negative attitude towards the video and Apple (“I've to dislike this video because of Apple”) while simultaneously declaring affection for the YouTuber (“But I love you Justine”). The additional, humorous reference to disliking both Apple as a company and as a fruit (“I don't like both apple- fruit and company”) adds a touch of humour while also contributing an affective layer of exaggeration which intensifies the commenter’s stance and reinforces the ideological distancing. The emotional contrast expressed here allows the commenter to differentiate between corporate identity (dislike for Apple) and personal connection (love for

the YouTuber), constructing a nuanced self-image that accommodates strong ideological rejection alongside interpersonal attachment.

Emotional self-disclosure in this context can therefore frequently serve to clarify aspects of the commenters' identity, whether through shared background, personal taste, economic positioning or ideological stance. By publicly articulating emotions tied to these or other personal dimensions, users make their identities interactionally salient, reinforcing identity clarification as a distinct pragmatic function of feedback within the corpus.

#### 4.2.5. Relational Development

Relational development refers to the use of emotional self-disclosure with the intention of establishing, maintaining or strengthening interpersonal bonds between users or between viewers and content creators. In the corpus, this function is often subtle and considerably less frequent than others, suggesting that while emotional connections may emerge in YouTube comment sections, these spaces are not primarily oriented towards sustained relationship building. Instead, interactions tend to remain brief and loosely connected, limiting opportunities for long-term relational development. Some comments nonetheless illustrate attempts to foster relational closeness through emotionally framed interaction, as shown by the following examples taken from the corpus.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 70</b> | Question: can I use wireless charging exclusively for a year until the next iphone? I never once wirelessly charged my iPhone because I'm afraid it'll degrade the battery. Is this a fact? I'm planning on getting rid of cables. |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Comment 70 goes beyond a simple request for technical information by disclosing a specific fear regarding battery health ("I'm afraid it'll degrade the battery"), thereby revealing a personal stake in the answer. By combining emotional self-disclosure with direct questions ("can I use [...]?", "Is this a fact?"), the commenter invites a personalised response, momentarily shifting the interaction towards a more relational mode. While the primary purpose of the comment remains informational, the inclusion of personal feelings opens a small but meaningful interpersonal dimension, suggesting that emotional self-disclosure can serve relational ends even when embedded within functional exchanges.

|                   |                                                             |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 71</b> | Fun facts: we all love watching things we can't afford.. 😂😂 |
| <b>Comment 72</b> | I love the Phantom Black color. Who else does?              |

Other examples foreground relational development through inclusive or affiliative emotional appeals. Comment 71 (“we all love watching things we can’t afford.. 😂😂”) uses humour and shared self-deprecation to construct a sense of collective identity among viewers, functioning as an implicit invitation for alignment, shared recognition and interpersonal connection. In parallel, Comment 72 explicitly invites participation through a two-step movement: first, the commenter expresses an affective evaluation (“I love the Phantom Black color”) and then extends this stance to others by inviting shared alignment (“Who else does?”), transforming a personal feeling into a basis for collective engagement.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 73</b> | Hey, I commented on your last video that I would like to see the side icons on the side get changed a little bit, and they are perfect in this video, did you by any chance read my comment? Either way this is the best way to highlight different points and I can actually determine where I actually am, thanks! |
| <b>Comment 74</b> | If you are reading this, may you attract everything you've been patiently waiting for & be passionate to pursue it whole-heartedly. It will naturally flow into your life when you are ready to receive it. Hope our channel helps you on your journey 🙏                                                             |

Relational development may also be oriented specifically towards the content creator or an unspecified audience. In Comment 73, the commenter addresses the YouTuber and refers to a previous interaction (“I commented on your last video”), seeking acknowledgement of having been noticed (“did you by any chance read my comment?”). Additionally, they express positive evaluation (“they are perfect”, “this is the best way”) as well as appreciation and gratitude (“thanks!”). The combination of positive evaluation and gratitude adds an emotional tone, while the explicit reference to past engagement positions the interaction as ongoing rather than isolated, suggesting an attempt to establish continuity and mutual recognition with the creator. Comment 74 further illustrates relational development through an explicitly supportive message addressed to a generalised audience (“may you attract everything [...]”, “Hope our channel helps you on your journey 🙏”). By combining encouragement, well-wishing and expressions of hope, the commenter fosters a sense of solidarity and emotional connection that extends beyond the immediate context of the video,

though the reference to "our channel" also hints at a self-promotional dimension that complicates the purely relational reading.

Overall, while the corpus includes limited and often subtle instances of emotional self-disclosure fulfilling the purpose of relational development, the examples discussed here show that this specific social function of feedback is nonetheless present in this genre and can be activated in moments where users seek interpersonal connection beyond mere evaluation or information exchange.

The analysis of the five social functions suggests that while affective feedback in YouTube comment sections is frequently motivated by a genuine need for self-expression, it is rarely limited to that alone. Across the different functions, emotional self-disclosure operates as a flexible resource through which users give voice to personal feelings, manage visibility, negotiate alignment and position themselves in relation to others, the content creator and the product. This underlines the extent to which affective feedback is embedded in broader processes of interaction, where expressing emotion also entails performing identity, enacting norms and shaping participation within the platform.

### 4.3. Discourse Analysis: Resources for Emotional Self-Disclosure

After having analysed what emotions are oriented towards and the social functions they fulfil, this section shifts the focus to a related question: how are these emotions discursively constructed as feedback? In other words, which specific resources do YouTube commenters exploit to make their emotional self-disclosure recognisable and interactionally meaningful? To address this question, the analysis is organised across three levels: linguistic resources, pictorial resources and discursive resources.

Before exploring these resources in detail, however, it is useful to note two recurrent evaluative patterns that structure most of the emotional self-disclosure observed in the dataset: praising and complaining. Regardless of whether emotions are directed towards the self, the community or the product, positive emotions frequently materialise as praise, whereas negative emotions tend to be articulated through complaints. These patterns are

not treated here as rigid categories, but rather as broad discursive orientations that frame how affect is made visible. Across the dataset, praising typically involves expressions of enthusiasm, satisfaction or admiration, while complaining is commonly used to convey frustration, disappointment or dissatisfaction. The following examples illustrate these two patterns.

|                   |                                                                          |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 75</b> | I just see your beautiful nails..                                        |
| <b>Comment 76</b> | Cool all the color of the iPhone andI like the color blue is my favorite |

Comments 75 and 76 are examples of how positive emotional self-disclosure materialises as praise. Comment 75 constitutes a brief but affectively loaded contribution, with the evaluative adjective “beautiful” indexing positive appraisal. In this case, the commenter is praising the YouTuber and evaluating an aesthetic aspect of her on-screen presence. This effect is reinforced by the use of the adverb “just”, which suggests a narrowing of perceptual focus and implies that the nails are so striking that they eclipse other elements of the video. Comment 76 further illustrates an instance of praise, but in this case, the object of evaluation is the smartphone, not the YouTuber. The comment includes evaluative lexis (“cool”, “like”, “favorite”), foregrounding personal taste as a form of emotional positioning.

|                   |                                                          |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 77</b> | Honestly, I came here for a camera review. Disappointed! |
| <b>Comment 78</b> | I hate how it costs 1250 euros or 1525 dollars in europe |

By contrast, Comments 77 and 78 illustrate how negative emotional self-disclosure is realised through complaint. In Comment 77, the user expresses dissatisfaction with the content of the video by first establishing an expectation (“I came here for a camera review”) and then offering a negative evaluation for the outcome (“Disappointed!”). In addition, the stance adverb “honestly” foregrounds sincerity and frames the complaint as a truthful personal reaction. The brevity and separation of the final word, as well as the use of an exclamation mark, visually and pragmatically highlight the emotion, turning it into a salient form of affective feedback directed at the video and content creator. Additionally, Comment 78 constructs complaint through the explicit affective verb “hate”, which foregrounds emotional stance before introducing the reason for dissatisfaction (“I hate how it costs 1250 euros or 1525 dollars in europe”). In this case, emotional self-disclosure is

oriented towards the product and the consumer experience, with frustration discursively framed as a personal and economically grounded evaluation.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 79</b> | nice video, but you are too quick at the begining!!! I had to play at x0.75 to undertand you XD                                                                                                           |
| <b>Comment 80</b> | I had a iPhone 11, but it wasnt rilly good so I transferred to samsung s10 plus, and it's an amazing phone. You can even change the themes and it has better quality than iPhone 11, also great video! ❤️ |

Finally, Comment 79 and 80 demonstrate how positive and negative evaluations may coexist within a single comment. In the case of Comment 79, the initial praise (“nice video”) mitigates the subsequent criticism introduced by the adversative conjunction “but”. This balancing strategy softens the complaint (“you are too quick at the begining!!!”) while maintaining relational politeness. Emotional intensity is reinforced through multiple exclamation marks (“!!!”) and through the use of the emoticon “XD”, which signals humour and mitigates potential face-threatening force. Comment 80 provides a more extended narrative form of emotional self-disclosure in which the object of both praise and complaint is the smartphone instead. This comment combines autobiographical narrative with evaluative comparison. The use of first-person pronouns (“I had”, “I transferred”) foregrounds personal experience as the basis for evaluation, thereby enhancing authenticity. The contrastive and comparative structure (“but it wasnt rilly good”, “it has better quality than iPhone 11”) constructs a trajectory from dissatisfaction (or complaint) to satisfaction (or praise), positioning the commenter as a knowledgeable consumer who has undergone a process of assessment. The heart emoji at the end (“❤️”) consolidates the emotional tone of the comment and reaffirms relational positivity towards the video and content creator.

These examples illustrate the two broad evaluative patterns of praising and complaining around which emotional self-disclosure tends to cluster. They also anticipate that emotional self-disclosure emerges from the interplay of different kinds of resources such as evaluative lexis, stance markers, punctuation, adversative structures, narrative framing and emojis, among others. The following sections examine these resources more systematically, beginning with linguistic features that index emotional stance at the micro-level of the text.

### 4.3.1. Linguistic Resources

At the linguistic level, emotional self-disclosure is primarily constructed through evaluative lexis, repetition and intensification strategies, punctuation, capitalisation and orthographic variation. These resources frequently co-occur, producing layered expressions of affect.

A frequency overview of the most common lexical items in the corpus provides useful contextual insight into the discursive environment in which emotional feedback is produced. As shown in Table 4, the most frequent words are strongly related to the product under discussion (e.g. “iphone”, “phone”, “apple”, “charger”, “samsung”, “camera”) or to consumer practices such as acquisition and use (“get”, “buy”, “use”, “money”). This confirms that the comment section operates primarily as a space for product evaluation and consumer discussion. At the same time, several high-frequency items function as stance markers or evaluative verbs, including “like”, “love”, “want”, “need”, “think” and “hope”. Such lexical choices foreground personal perspective and contribute to the expression of subjective positioning, which constitutes an important dimension of emotional self-disclosure.

| #  | Word    | Count | #  | Word     | Count | #  | Word     | Count |
|----|---------|-------|----|----------|-------|----|----------|-------|
| 1  | iphone  | 12425 | 18 | samsung  | 2347  | 35 | time     | 1340  |
| 2  | phone   | 7568  | 19 | got      | 2299  | 36 | also     | 1273  |
| 3  | one     | 5280  | 20 | max      | 2292  | 37 | getting  | 1269  |
| 4  | like    | 5149  | 21 | still    | 2067  | 38 | camera   | 1260  |
| 5  | just    | 4972  | 22 | now      | 2044  | 39 | ultra    | 1234  |
| 6  | apple   | 4636  | 23 | need     | 1985  | 40 | much     | 1223  |
| 7  | pro     | 4365  | 24 | think    | 1966  | 41 | usb      | 1185  |
| 8  | get     | 4227  | 25 | see      | 1817  | 42 | make     | 1184  |
| 9  | love    | 3824  | 26 | know     | 1802  | 43 | year     | 1176  |
| 10 | want    | 3065  | 27 | phones   | 1663  | 44 | brick    | 1174  |
| 11 | new     | 2894  | 28 | watching | 1657  | 45 | wait     | 1169  |
| 12 | please  | 2796  | 29 | use      | 1498  | 46 | charging | 1101  |
| 13 | video   | 2782  | 30 | good     | 1429  | 47 | lol      | 1092  |
| 14 | buy     | 2667  | 31 | even     | 1408  | 48 | money    | 1088  |
| 15 | give    | 2605  | 32 | s21      | 1354  | 49 | first    | 1081  |
| 16 | really  | 2568  | 33 | people   | 1344  | 50 | hope     | 1046  |
| 17 | charger | 2552  | 34 | videos   | 1343  |    |          |       |

**Table 4.** Most frequent lexical items excluding function words.

However, it should be noted that many of these items are polyfunctional (e.g. “like”) and may take on different grammatical categories and meanings depending on context. Consequently, frequency alone cannot be taken as evidence of affective expression, and a closer qualitative analysis is required to understand how emotional stance is linguistically constructed in individual comments, such as the following ones.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 81</b> | I've had the 13 for 4 months. It's terrible. The glass of s WAY too sensitive at the edges. I'm always hitting the touchscreen by accident. I hate this phone.                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Comment 82</b> | looks bad! very bad will never use iphone or never used one! looks like 5s with extra cameras at the back! no full display with something new for ff camera no power brick or no headphones..... bad bad badalso i use my s20 ultra i charge without removing the case or buy special one just to magnet my charger to it.... you use apple pay not wallet anymore.... |
| <b>Comment 83</b> | Absolutely wicked wicked wicked unboxing experience... well done you... by far the best I have seen till date 🙌                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Comment 84</b> | Oh and also I just HAVE to say that I effing love ur cat and how it likes to chill next to you and in front of ur camera haha! Being a cat lover, I just love seeing and hearing them!                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Comment 85</b> | YASSS I LOVE YOUUUU 🥰🥰                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Comment 86</b> | I got an alert woke me up and clicked sooooo fast 🤖 I have been waiting for this!!!!!!!!!!!!!!                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

One of the most salient mechanisms is the use of explicit evaluative lexis, particularly adjectives and affective verbs. Comment 81, for instance, employs unmitigated negative evaluation through the adjective “terrible” and the verb “hate”. Moreover, Comment 82 repeatedly uses the adjective “bad” (“looks bad! very bad”, “bad bad bad”), demonstrating how evaluation alone can carry the emotional weight of the comment. Positive evaluations operate in parallel ways. Comment 83 combines slang intensifiers (“Absolutely wicked wicked wicked unboxing experience”) with the superlative construction “the best I have seen”, constructing heightened admiration. Comments 84 and 85 both centre their emotional self-disclosure around the affective verb “love”, which functions as a direct and clear index of positive affect. In comment 84, the self-categorisation “cat lover” further anchors the evaluation in identity, positioning the commenter as someone whose affection for cats forms part of their self-construction. Across these examples, emotional stance is linguistically encoded through the strategic selection of affect-laden lexis.

Emotional intensity is further amplified through repetition and intensification. In Comment 81, the repetition of first-person structures (“I’ve had...”, “I’m always hitting...”, “I hate...”) anchors the complaint in the disclosure of personal experience and feelings, reinforcing subjectivity. In Comment 82, the tripling of “bad” visually and rhythmically

reinforces dissatisfaction. Comment 83 similarly repeats “wicked” three times, creating cumulative emphasis. Comment 85 (“YASSS I LOVE YOUUUU”) and Comment 86 (“sooooo fast”, “this!!!!!!!!!!!!”) rely on elongated vowels and multiple exclamation marks to index excitement. Such repetition of letters and punctuation marks does not add propositional content, but it iconically represents heightened emotional involvement.

Closely related is the use of capitalisation and orthographic variation as paralinguistic cues. In Comment 81 (“The glass of s WAY too sensitive”) and Comment 84 (“I just HAVE to say”), the use of capital letters marks intensity and emotional urgency. Likewise, the expression “I effing love” adds emphasis through the use of the adjective “effing”, which is a euphemistic alteration of “fucking”. In comment 85, affect is also visually amplified through full capitalisation (“I LOVE YOUUUU”), while traditionally non-standard spellings such as “YASSS”, “sooooo” or abbreviations like “ur” contribute to informality and immediacy. These orthographic strategies simulate prosodic emphasis in a written medium, compensating for the absence of spoken intonation.

Finally, punctuation and fragmentation act as additional affective markers. Multiple exclamation marks (“this!!!!!!!!!!!!” in Comment 86) and ellipses (“unboxing experience... well done you...” in Comment 83) create rhythm and emphasis, shaping how the emotional stance is perceived. In Comment 81, short declarative sentences (“It’s terrible”, “I hate this phone”) produce a blunt and forceful tone, mirroring the speaker’s frustration.

Taken together, these examples illustrate that emotional self-disclosure emerges from the strategic deployment of evaluative vocabulary, repetition, orthographic creativity and punctuation. These resources allow commenters to simulate prosody, intensity and immediacy within the constraints of written digital interaction, making their emotional stance highly visible and interactionally salient. This is consistent with what has been documented in the broader literature on Internet-mediated communication.

Nevertheless, there is an observation that is worth adding in relation to this specific YouTube genre. In the context of smartphone unboxing videos — a space deeply embedded in commercial logics — these linguistic features do more than compensate for the absence of

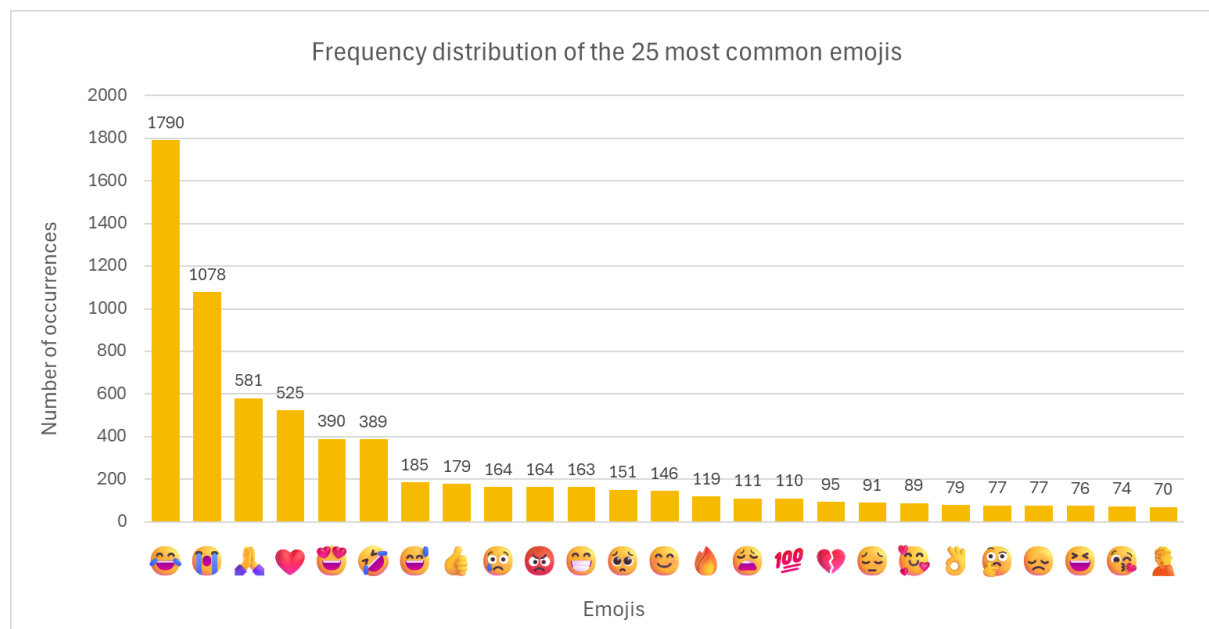
spoken intonation. They actively construct an appearance of spontaneity, signalling that the emotion being expressed is unfiltered and therefore authentic. A comment saturated with capitalisation, elongated vowels and fragmented syntax looks unedited (even though these are themselves deliberate choices), and in a genre where authenticity is valuable, that appearance carries real interactional weight. In this sense, the linguistic resources examined here are not merely expressive tools; they are also credibility devices, through which users present their emotions as genuine expressions of personal experience within a heavily monetised digital environment. This observation connects the micro-level analysis of orthographic choices to the broader dynamics of YouTube as an emotional ecology and anticipates the more extended discursive strategies examined in the sections that follow.

#### 4.3.2. Pictorial Resources

In addition to linguistic resources, emotional self-disclosure in the corpus is frequently realised through pictorial elements, most notably emojis. As discussed in Chapter 2, emojis constitute a flexible semiotic repertoire that allows users to signal affect, reinforce evaluative stance and index interpersonal alignment in text-based interaction. In the context of YouTube comments, they function as salient visual markers of emotional involvement, often accompanying or intensifying explicitly self-disclosing statements.

From a quantitative perspective, emojis are highly recurrent in the dataset. Using an automated Python-based counting procedure, a total of 10,196 emoji tokens were identified across the 16,034 emotionally self-disclosing comments analysed. This figure alone suggests that pictorial resources are not peripheral embellishments, but rather integral components of emotional meaning-making in this digital genre. However, it is important to note that when repetitions are excluded and only distinct emoji types are counted, the corpus contains 313 different emojis. This distinction between tokens and types reveals two complementary tendencies. The presence of 313 different emojis points to a considerable degree of semiotic variety, suggesting that users draw on a wide pictorial repertoire to articulate their emotions. At the same time, the high overall token count indicates that certain emojis are repeatedly and intensively used, resulting in a strong concentration around a relatively small core set.

Figure 5 below presents the frequency distribution of the 25 most frequent emojis in the corpus. These 25 emojis account for 6,973 tokens, representing approximately 68% of all emoji occurrences identified in the dataset. In other words, just over two-thirds of all pictorial realisations of emotion are concentrated in a relatively small subset of items. This concentration justifies the analytical focus on the 25 most frequent emojis, as they constitute the core pictorial repertoire through which emotional self-disclosure is routinely enacted in this context.



**Figure 5.** Distribution of the most frequent emojis.

The data reveal a markedly uneven distribution. The emoji 😂 is by far the most frequent pictorial resource, occurring 1,790 times, followed by 🤔 with 1,078 occurrences. Together, these two emojis alone account for a substantial proportion of all emoji tokens in the corpus, as their use alone represents 28% of all emoji occurrences. These two emojis are followed, at some distance, by 🙌 (581), ❤️ (525), 🥰 (390) and 🤪 (389). Beyond these top items, frequencies gradually decrease, with emojis such as 🤩 (185), 👍 (179), 🙄 (164), 🤡 (164), 😊 (163), 🙈 (151), and several others appearing less than 150 times each.

This distribution points to several preliminary observations. First, emojis conventionally associated with strong affect — particularly laughter (😂, 🤪), crying (🤔), affection or love

(❤️, 😍, 🥰), and gratitude or pleading (🙏, 🥺) — dominate the pictorial landscape of the corpus. The prominence of these items suggests that commenters frequently rely on visually intensified expressions of joy, amusement, admiration, longing or frustration when articulating their emotional reactions to the product, the reviewer, the community or their own personal circumstances.

Second, the presence of both positively and negatively connoted emojis among the most frequent items (e.g. 😄 and 😞; ❤️ and 💔; 😍 and 😡; 😊 and 😓) reflects the emotional heterogeneity already observed in the sentiment analysis presented earlier in this chapter. While positive emotional self-disclosure is numerically dominant in the dataset, the distribution of emojis confirms that negative and ambivalent affective stances are also recurrently marked through pictorial means.

Third, the quantitative prominence of emojis such as 👍, 🔥, 100 and 🙌 suggests that pictorial resources are also used to signal evaluation and endorsement in highly condensed form. In these cases, emojis may operate as shorthand expressions of approval, admiration or alignment, sometimes replacing verbal elaboration altogether and at other times reinforcing an explicitly self-disclosing statement.

Overall, these quantitative patterns indicate that emojis constitute a central semiotic resource in the construction of emotional self-disclosure in YouTube comments, and they contribute systematically to the affective texture of the comment space. Nonetheless, it is also important to examine how these emojis interact with linguistic material and how they modulate emotional intensity, to better understand how they participate in the discursive construction of feedback.

A close reading of individual comments shows that emojis play different semiotic roles in the discursive construction of emotional self-disclosure. As illustrated by the following examples, emojis may reinforce, specify, substitute or even reframe the emotional meaning conveyed linguistically.

|                   |                                                  |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 87</b> | Hey can you give it to me plz i want this 🥺🥺🥺🙏🙏🙏 |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------|

In Comment 87, emojis function primarily as intensifiers and affective amplifiers. The linguistic material expresses a request (“can you give it to me plz I want this”), but the addition of 😞 and the repeated use of 🙏 and 🙏 transform the utterance into a highly dramatized plea. The repetition of emojis increases emotional intensity, visually enacting desperation or longing. Here, emojis do not introduce new propositional content; rather, they modulate the illocutionary force of the request, reinforcing the self-disclosure of desire.

|                   |                                                                |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 88</b> | I have the s10 I love it 🤩 I love Samsung 🤩👍 I hate iPhone 🤬🤬🤬 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|

Comment 88 illustrates how emojis may combine reinforcement with evaluative specification. The positive statements (“I love it”, “I love Samsung”) are accompanied by 🤩, 🤩 and 👍, which reinforce enthusiasm and approval. Conversely, the negative evaluation (“I hate iPhone”) is intensified through 🤬, 🤬 and 🤬. Here, emojis function as affective markers aligned with explicit evaluative lexis, visually polarising the comment and strengthening its stance-taking. The pictorial resources help construct a strongly positioned identity — one aligned with Samsung and disaligned from Apple — thus contributing simultaneously to emotional self-disclosure and social positioning.

|                   |                                      |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 89</b> | Me on iphone 6 „Am I a failure 🤔😂🤔😂🤔 |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|

Comment 89 demonstrates how emojis may signal ambivalence and irony. The alternation of 🤔 and 😂 creates a hybrid emotional stance that oscillates between self-deprecation and humour. While the question “Am I a failure” could be interpreted as genuine negative self-evaluation, the inclusion of 😂 mitigates the seriousness of the statement, suggesting ironic self-mockery. In this case, emojis are not simply intensifiers; they guide interpretation and regulate tone, preventing the comment from being read as purely self-critical.

|                   |                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 90</b> | imagine all this big number of chargers purchased and their boxes & plastics the ruin our environment.well played Apple 🍏👉👉👉 |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Comparably, in comment 90, where negative evaluation is directed towards Apple, the repeated use of the emoji 👉 plays a crucial interpretative role as a stance marker. The

expression “well played Apple” would, in isolation, conventionally index praise. However, the thumbs-down emojis and the linguistic context override this literal reading and signal that the utterance is to be understood ironically. In this sense, the emoji sequence functions as a pragmatic cue that reverses the apparent illocutionary force of the statement, reframing praise as criticism and reinforcing the complaining stance.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 91</b> | When you shook the charger with the iPhone attached you made my anxiety levels go:<br>📈📈📈📈📈📈📈📈📈📈                                                         |
| <b>Comment 92</b> | I think that fucking Steve jobs need more 💰 after building apple's new museum he is broke .so, he needs us to buy extra every thing from them seperately |

In other cases, emojis may also contribute additional propositional meaning. In Comment 91 (“you made my anxiety levels go: 📈📈📈📈📈📈📈📈📈📈”), the repeated chart-increasing emoji replaces a verbal description of escalation. Without the emoji sequence, part of the meaning would be lost. Here, the pictorial element acts as a semantic substitute, visually representing rising anxiety. The repetition of the emoji further dramatizes the emotional response, transforming a brief statement into a vivid depiction of affective escalation. In the case of comment 92, the emoji 💰 is used in place of a lexical item such as “money”. This emoji operates simultaneously as a semantic shorthand and as an intensifier of criticism, as it adds a visual dimension to the commenter’s negative evaluation.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 93</b> | Getting the 13 Pro Max for my 18th bday next week 🎂🎉                                                                                                   |
| <b>Comment 94</b> | I have 12 pro max and I will not upgrade is all the same. And maybe the battery 🔋 and this people that do this they work whit Apple so people upgrade. |

By contrast, in Comment 93, emojis such as 🎂 and 🎉 duplicate and visually reinforce the celebratory context already expressed linguistically (“my 18th bday”). In this case, the emojis operate as stance markers that index excitement and may invite shared celebration, contributing to the positive affective atmosphere of the comment without fundamentally altering its propositional content. A comparable pattern can be observed in Comment 94, where the emoji 🔋 appears immediately after the word “battery”. Here, the emoji operates as a case of lexical duplication, visually reiterating the referent already expressed verbally. While it does not introduce new semantic content, it foregrounds the topic and adds a

multimodal layer of emphasis. Rather than being purely decorative, the emoji strengthens the salience of the battery as an important evaluative parameter in the discussion.

Collectively, these few examples illustrate that emojis are multifunctional resources. They may intensify affect through repetition, clarify evaluative polarity, mitigate or signal irony, visually represent abstract processes, duplicate lexical items or substitute for linguistic elements altogether. Their contribution to emotional self-disclosure therefore extends beyond decoration: they participate actively and decisively in meaning construction.

#### 4.3.3. Discursive Resources

From the point of view of discourse, emotional self-disclosure in the corpus is also shaped by specific discursive resources that frame, contextualise and render emotions meaningful within the interaction. While individual lexical items, punctuation patterns or emojis may signal affect at a more micro-level, users frequently rely on more extended discursive constructions to situate their emotions, dramatize their experiences or make their evaluations socially resonant. In other words, emotional self-disclosure is often embedded within larger rhetorical and narrative patterns that give structure and coherence to individual comments within the broader landscape of digital feedback.

What happens, then, when a commenter does more than simply state “I love this phone” or “I’m disappointed”? In many cases, users expand their emotional stance by invoking spatial contexts, by resorting to humour or irony, or by recounting personal anecdotes that anchor their feelings in lived experience. These discursive resources allow emotions to be staged and not just declared. They contribute to the construction of authenticity, relatability and interpersonal alignment, reinforcing the social dimension of emotional self-disclosure in the YouTube comment space, as well as its strategic value within the platform's engagement economy. The following sections therefore examine recurrent discursive resources identified in the dataset.

#### 4.3.3.1. Evocation of a Spatial Dimension

A recurrent discursive resource in the corpus involves the evocation of space as a means of articulating emotional self-disclosure. From a discourse-analytic perspective, references to place are sometimes far from neutral background details. Rather, they can function as emotionally charged frames through which users situate themselves, evaluate their circumstances and establish connections with others. Space, in these comments, is not only where things happen; it becomes a meaningful locus of desire, belonging, frustration or affiliation, as exemplified below.

|                   |                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 95</b> | I can't wait for mine to get here tomorrow!                                                                                |
| <b>Comment 96</b> | Okay yeah the new iPhones look amazing...But can we talk about the nature!! 🌄 That looks like a beautiful place to live! 🍷 |

In some cases, the spatial dimension is implicit or unspecified, yet remains affectively salient. In Comment 95 (“I can’t wait for mine to get here tomorrow!”), the anticipation of the phone’s arrival construes an imagined movement through space: from elsewhere to the commenter’s personal sphere, represented by the deictic adverb “here”. The excitement expressed is anchored in this projected movement and the anticipated arrival of the desired product. In this regard, “here” is no longer merely a spatial marker; it becomes a place of wanting, defined by the emotional charge of imminent fulfilment. Similarly, Comment 96 also foregrounds space as affectively meaningful, although it shifts attention from the device itself to the physical setting of the video (“But can we talk about the nature!! 🌄 That looks like a beautiful place to live! 🍷”). Here, the natural landscape serving as the setting of the unboxing is constructed as an object of admiration and desire, acquiring an affective dimension through evaluative lexis and emojis. This space is thus recontextualised as a site of aspiration.

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 97</b> | Great job Justine! Haven't seen anyone else try light painting but it makes sense since it's doing a little bit of long exposure to get the image. Keep up the good work! I was literally just there in Santa Monica a few weeks ago. Love it there. |
| <b>Comment 98</b> | Hit me up bro! Send it on over to BC! Fellow Canadians gotta stick together!                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Comment 99</b> | I really enjoyed the music of Fryderyk Chopin (Szopen) in the background! Greatest Polish pianist and composer! Greetings from Poland Lew;) Lew in polish is lion;)                                                                                  |

In other instances, space is explicitly geographical and tied to lived experience. Comment 97 (“I was literally just there in Santa Monica a few weeks ago. Love it there”) constructs proximity between commenter and content creator by invoking shared spatial experience. The statement does more than locate the speaker; it performs alignment through place. Being “there” becomes a resource for claiming common ground and emotional affinity. Likewise, Comment 98 (“Send it on over to BC! Fellow Canadians gotta stick together!”) mobilises regional belonging as a basis for solidarity, with the expression “fellow Canadians” invoking a shared national identity that is implicitly anchored in a common territorial affiliation, thereby constructing a sense of connection between users. By the same token, Comment 99 (“Greetings from Poland”) foregrounds geographical location as part of the commenter’s self-presentation, linking this spatial reference with an important element of the video: the background music by Chopin, also Polish, which the user “really enjoyed”. This spatial reference thus acquires an affective dimension: being from the same place as Chopin becomes a source of cultural identification and, with it, a reason for the emotional engagement the commenter explicitly expresses. In these examples, geographical references function as markers of collective identity, evaluative stances and relational positioning. Place becomes a shorthand for shared values, culture or affiliation, while also functioning as an affective resource through which users express connection, familiarity and a sense of belonging.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 100</b> | Hi, I in Iran should always long to buy a new Apple 12 phone, because here it is very expensive and you can work for 24 months, equivalent to 2 years, you can not buy an Apple phone in Iran due to its high price and sanctions, and this is a great pain for He is young and his love is an Apple 12 Pro Max phone, I have had an Apple 6 for almost 9 years now and I will not be able to replace it... |
| <b>Comment 101</b> | I can't wait to go to the USA, here in Brazil the iPhone is very expensive!!                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

Spatial references can also index broader socioeconomic and political realities, thereby intensifying emotional self-disclosure. Comment 100 frames a geographical location as characterised by high prices and limited accessibility (“you can not buy an Apple phone in Iran due to its high price and sanctions”), transforming space into a site of frustration. The emotional weight of longing (“should always long to buy a new Apple 12 phone”) and pain (“this is a great pain”) is inseparable from the geopolitical context invoked. Additionally, Comment 101 contrasts Brazil and the USA in economic terms, using spatial comparison

to articulate desire (“I can’t wait to go to the USA”) and dissatisfaction (“here in Brazil the iPhone is very expensive!!”). In these cases, place is not simply descriptive; it projects aspects of socioeconomic identity and lived experience, anchoring emotion in structural conditions.

|                    |                                                                |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 102</b> | I love ur comment section because its so damn funny here lol 🤪 |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|

Importantly, the evocation of space is not limited to physical locations. Digital environments themselves may acquire emotional resonance. In Comment 102, the user positively evaluates the interactional space (“I love ur comment section”) and constructs it as a meaningful social space. The expression “its so damn funny here lol 🤪” further characterises the digital arena as a site of enjoyment, demonstrating that online interactional spaces can be discursively constructed as affectively valuable locations. What is particularly interesting about this example is its reflexive quality: the commenter is offering affective feedback about the comment section itself, the very space in which that feedback is being produced. This suggests that the interactional environment of YouTube is not just a backdrop for emotional self-disclosure but can itself become an object of affective evaluation.

In these examples, spatial reference operates as a resource for grounding emotional self-disclosure in context. Whether referring to an anticipated delivery, a scenic landscape, a hometown, a nation or even a comment section, users imbue space with affective meaning. By situating their feelings within specific or imagined places, commenters render their emotions more concrete and relatable. In this sense, the evocation of spatial dimensions can contribute to the construction of authenticity and belonging, reinforcing the inherently situated nature of emotional self-disclosure in YouTube feedback.

#### 4.3.3.2. Use of Humour, Irony and Sarcasm

Another salient discursive resource through which emotional self-disclosure is constructed in the corpus is humour, irony and sarcasm. Many commenters adopt a playful, exaggerated or mock-serious tone that allows them to convey enthusiasm, frustration, envy or brand

loyalty with varying degrees of straightforwardness. From a discourse-pragmatic perspective, humour and irony act as stance-taking devices: they enable users to position themselves affectively while simultaneously inviting shared interpretation and alignment from the audience.

|                    |                                                                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 103</b> | Bruh I don't think my android is happy w me seeing these videos 🤡 🤡 🤡 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|

A common strategy involves personification and playful exaggeration. In Comment 103, the commenter humorously constructs a scenario in which their current Android device is aware of the user's actions (i.e. watching an unboxing video of a competing product) and reacts negatively to that, as if watching videos about another phone brand constituted a form of disloyalty or betrayal. The device is thus represented as a sentient being capable of an emotional response such as jealousy or displeasure. This playful framing is further reinforced by informal address ("bruh") and the use of skull emojis (🤡 🤡 🤡), which have come to index intense laughter (i.e. "I'm dead" from laughter) and signal a non-serious stance. The humorous construction allows the user to express interest in a competing product — and the possibility of switching to it — without presenting this stance as a serious or definitive rejection of their current phone.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 104</b> | I am sure for iPhone 13 you will get empty box and then you will need to buy phone seperately. That's great!                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Comment 105</b> | I phone fans unboxing iPhone 13: OK let's see what's inside this box. It's £3000 so im expecting something good...Wait... Where's the phone? Oh it says here due to environmental issues the phone comes separately so we could only send the box. That's understandable |

Exaggeration also plays a central role in ironic criticism. Comments 104 and 105 mock Apple's decision to remove accessories from the box by projecting an absurd future scenario in which customers receive only an empty box and must purchase the phone separately. In comment 104, the irony is achieved through hyperbolic projection ("you will get empty box") and feigned approval ("That's great!"). In Comment 105, the narrative format intensifies the sarcastic effect: the imagined monologue mimics the conventions of an actual unboxing, such as the performative discovery ("OK let's see what's inside this box") or the spoken reaction ("Wait... Where's the phone?"), while subverting its expected outcome. This

captures the genre-mimicking quality of the comment. The humour relies precisely on the reader recognising those conventions and then watching them collapse when the phone turns out not to be in the box. The final line, “That’s understandable”, serves as a deadpan punchline, where apparent acceptance clashes with the implausibility of the situation. Here, sarcasm becomes a vehicle for expressing frustration and scepticism, while maintaining a playful tone.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 106</b> | I once hated it and now the first iPhone 11 unboxing and tests by Justine just made me love it even more <3 Selling my kidney pm me for details AHAHHA |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Similarly, Comment 106 combines exaggerated desire with absurd overstatement: “Selling my kidney pm me for details AHAHHA”. The hyperbolic proposal of organ-selling, anchored in a widely circulated meme in which “paying with a kidney” is presented as a possible payment method, dramatizes the commenter’s desire for the product. Crucially, the addition of “pm me for details” extends the joke by momentarily treating the absurd proposal as a legitimate transaction. This pseudo-serious formulation mimics the pragmatic structure of real online exchanges (e.g. arranging sales or negotiations), thereby increasing the comedic effect through incongruity. The laughter marker (“AHAHHA”) then re-frames the entire statement as overtly non-serious, preventing literal interpretation and signalling shared humour. Through this layered construction — exaggeration, simulated credibility and explicit laughter — the commenter intensifies their enthusiasm and positive evaluation while maintaining a playful, socially recognisable tone.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 107</b> | As I was watching this video my brother came in and says "why are you watching a s10 video that phone probly costs more then our rent" i said I CAN DREAM COLE 🤔😏😏 |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Humour also emerges through reported speech and the dramatization of everyday interactions and economic realities. In Comment 107, the commenter constructs a short narrative dialogue in which their brother remarks that the phone “probly costs more then our rent”. By framing the phone’s price in relation to housing costs, the comment renders its unaffordability clearly visible through an implicit contrast between consumer aspiration and everyday economic reality. The response “I CAN DREAM COLE” can be understood as both defiance and self-aware humour, while capitalisation indexes heightened emotional

intensity, mimicking spoken emphasis. The juxtaposition of aspiration and economic limitation, accompanied by laughing and crying emojis (😂😭😭), constructs a tone of playful resignation. The emotional self-disclosure (longing for an expensive device) is reframed as light-hearted as opposed to purely frustrated.

|                    |                                                                                             |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 108</b> | Arun: rickrolling us in every one of his videosAll of us: It is acceptable darth vader look |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Intertextuality constitutes another key mechanism through which humour and emotional alignment are constructed. In Comment 108, the humour relies on the evocation of two widely circulated Internet memes. “Rickrolling” refers to the practice of tricking audiences into unexpectedly watching Rick Astley’s *Never Gonna Give You Up*, a long-standing online prank associated with playful deception. By accusing the YouTuber of always rickrolling viewers (“Arun: rickrolling us in every one of his videos”), the commenter frames the creator’s recurring joke as a familiar and deliberate act of light-hearted trolling. The second reference (“It is acceptable darth vader look”) alludes to a meme derived from *Star Wars*, in which Darth Vader responds with the line “It is... acceptable” in a tone of reluctant approval. By scripting the audience’s reaction through this meme, the commenter constructs a mock-dialogue: the YouTuber playfully deceives viewers, and the viewers, in turn, theatrically grant their approval. The structure “Arun: ... / All of us: ...” stages a collective response, transforming individual amusement into communal stance-taking. From a discourse-pragmatic perspective, the humour is successful only if readers recognise these intertextual references. The comment presupposes shared cultural knowledge and invites readers to activate it. In doing so, it reinforces in-group solidarity: understanding the joke signals membership within a digitally literate community familiar with these meme templates. Emotional self-disclosure here takes the form of shared amusement and tolerant affection toward the creator’s humour.

|                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Comment 109</b> | I LOVES SAMSUNG 🙄 |
|--------------------|-------------------|

Finally, sarcasm may be signalled through orthographic and paralinguistic cues. In Comment 109 (“I LOVES SAMSUNG 🙄”), the use of capitalisation combined with the eye-roll emoji creates a clash between verbal content and visual cue. The emoji functions as a

pragmatic marker that reinterprets the statement as ironic rather than literal praise, demonstrating how multimodal resources interact with discourse to produce sarcastic meaning. Moreover, from the point of view of standard language, the verb conjugation “LOVES” constitutes a grammatical error, which may further enhance the mock tone.

Across these examples, humour, irony and sarcasm allow users to articulate emotionally charged positions in a socially nuanced manner: scepticism towards corporate decisions, longing for unaffordable products, brand loyalty or disloyalty, and affection for content creators. These resources enrich emotional self-disclosure, reduce interpersonal risk, enhance entertainment value and invite collaborative interpretation. In this way, a humorous or ironic tone becomes a clear feedback mechanism through which emotional stances are performed and negotiated within the YouTube comment space.

#### 4.3.3.3. Personal Anecdotes and Narratives

Personal anecdotes and narrative sequences constitute elaborate discursive resources through which emotional self-disclosure is realised in the corpus. Instead of expressing affect in isolated evaluative statements, commenters frequently embed their emotions within temporally structured accounts of lived experience. These narratives typically include orientation (who, when, where), a complicating event and an evaluative component through which the emotional meaning of the story is made explicit. In doing so, they frame emotion as justified, consequential and socially interpretable. The phone is no longer merely a product under review; it becomes a central element in a personal story involving effort, loss, aspiration or hardship, as illustrated in the following examples.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 110</b> | Got my first iPhone as a christmas gift Last year. Last month a guy in a motorcycle took it from me on my way home. This made me so sad! iPhone is such a great smartphone, unlike any other one i've ever had. And i'm talking about an iPhone 7, a 4 year old iPhone, which costs around 900 dollars here in Brazil (believe me). No way i can get an iPhone now, back to an intermediate Samsung that I used to love before, and it's a fact that iPhone spoiled me, i'm hating this Samsung now! Hehe.Still traumatized by The theft, but i'll survive, and maybe in 2 years from now, I might have The chance to get an iPhone again. |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

In Comment 110, for instance, emotional self-disclosure is structured around a narrative of gift, loss and projected recovery. The commenter recounts receiving their “first iPhone as a

Christmas gift Last year”, only to have it stolen by “a guy in a motorcycle”. As a result, the commenter had to return to a Samsung device, but still expresses hope of obtaining an iPhone again in the future, “maybe in 2 years from now”. The chronological sequencing (last year → last month → now → maybe in 2 years) constructs a clear temporal arc, transforming sadness into a story of resilience (“I’ll survive”). The theft acts as the narrative’s turning point, legitimising the explicit affective statement “This made me so sad!” and the stronger claim of being “Still traumatized”. Importantly, the anecdote also embeds socioeconomic context (“900 dollars here in Brazil”), thereby anchoring emotional attachment to material conditions. The closing projection of future hope (“I might have The chance to get an iPhone again”) mitigates the negativity and frames the self as enduring. Here, emotional self-disclosure is intertwined with identity construction. The commenter positions themselves as a victim of theft and a resilient survivor, as well as a transformed consumer. By stating that they “used to love” their Samsung phone but now “hate” it because the iPhone “spoiled” them, the commenter constructs their experience with the Apple device as having recalibrated their expectations. The narrative thus frames the iPhone as a benchmark that has altered the commenter’s evaluative standards.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 111</b> | Here’s a sad story I spent months working to save for this phone When I got it today, my clumsy self accidentally dropped it at the store and scratched the top after I paid.Not noticeable, but still there.Now it’s 3am here and the sound of my phone drop still rings in my ears causing me insomnia. |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

A more condensed yet equally affective narrative appears in Comment 111. Introduced explicitly as “a sad story”, the account narrates months of saving, followed by an accidental drop immediately after purchase: “my clumsy self accidentally dropped it at the store and scratched the top after I paid”. The dramatic effect relies on proximity between achievement and misfortune. The scratch is described as “Not noticeable, but still there”, suggesting that the emotional impact exceeds the material damage. In fact, the reference to insomnia functions as hyperbolic but relatable evidence of distress: “the sound of my phone drop still rings in my ears causing me insomnia”. Through this narrative framing, disappointment is elevated from minor inconvenience to lingering psychological resonance. The phone becomes a site of both aspiration and anxiety.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 112</b> | I'm extremely happy because my step dad told me a promise two years ago that if I placed top 10 in my competition I would get the newest phone that happened today and I'm getting the iPhone 11 my current phone is not bad at all (it's a 8 plus) but I'm getting a upgrade 🥳 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

In contrast, Comment 112 uses narrative to construct celebration and fulfilment. Here, the two-year promise made by the commenter's stepfather to reward good performance with a new phone establishes delayed gratification, while the achievement ("I placed top 10 in my competition") legitimises the reward ("I'm getting a upgrade 🥳"). The upgrade from an iPhone 8 Plus to an iPhone 11 is therefore framed not as necessity but as earned progression. This anecdote serves as a meritocratic success story, linking technological acquisition to effort, family support and personal accomplishment. Emotional self-disclosure is thus grounded in pride and gratitude rather than loss or frustration.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 113</b> | Idk if its my phone but every time i multi task for more than 30 minutes my S21 Ultra gives me a pop up and says my phone is too hot and it cancels my multi tasking. I dont even multi task aggressively. I go on a video call then minimise it on the screen while scrolling through Instagram. Really disappointed, just wondering if anyone else is having this problem. |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Comment 113 illustrates a different narrative orientation: experiential testimony aimed at validation. The commenter recounts repeated overheating notifications during multitasking, detailing the specific activities involved (videocalls, scrolling through Instagram). This descriptive precision constructs credibility and positions the speaker as reasonable ("I dont even multi task aggressively"). The closing question ("just wondering if anyone else is having this problem") shifts the narrative from individual frustration to collective inquiry. Emotional self-disclosure ("Really disappointed") is embedded within a detailed account of the issue, suggesting that narratives can function as a bridge between affect and communal troubleshooting, but also as a legitimising frame, through which emotion is presented not as venting, but as a well-founded reaction to a specific problem.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 114</b> | I wish i could have one of these but I'm from Chile and I don't have the money, actually my mom got me an iPad because I need a laptop and the ipad is a little more affordable but she bought in 36 dues so I think is too expensive for me (also I bought a pencil for my iPad on aliexpress because the apple pencil is too expensive), so it hurts when people make videos breaking their phones when you dosen't even have one |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Socioeconomic constraint and moral positioning are foregrounded in Comment 114. The narrative situates desire (“I wish I could have one of these”) within structural limitation: being “from Chile”, lacking financial means (“I don’t have the money”) and relying on instalment payments (“36 dues”). The mention of purchasing a cheaper stylus from AliExpress contrasts with the unaffordability of the Apple Pencil, reinforcing economic awareness. The emotional climax appears in the evaluative clause: “it hurts when people make videos breaking their phones when you dosen't even have one”. The anecdote thus expands beyond personal frustration to implicit critique of wasteful consumer practices. Emotional self-disclosure here combines longing, gratitude toward the mother and moral discomfort, demonstrating how personal stories can frame broader ideological stances.

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Comment 115</b> | I hope I can seek help from here, I lost my job due to covid. They shut down all the restaurants in Cook cavern which then led me to losing my apartment. I'm currently living out of my car which I try and make the best of. I've applied to a bunch of places I'm hoping to get a call back. if anyone could help me with whatever you could bc I'm needing stuff like hand warmers which I stuff my clothes at night when it's cold. Also cheap burgers/fastfood. I know times are tough for everyone these days but if you're able to help me. Please donate at paypal. Username @pay2winlife. If you're unable to help I totally understand God bless you. I have faith, things will get better. Thank you. |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Finally, in Comment 115, the user opens with an explicit appeal for assistance (“I hope I can seek help from here”), reframing the comment section as a potential support network, and proceeds to recount a series of adverse experiences, including job loss due to COVID-19, restaurant closures, loss of housing and current homelessness. In this case, the narrative conveys a state of vulnerability and hardship, while also incorporating elements of hope and perseverance (“I’ve applied to a bunch of places I’m hoping to get a call back”). Here, the phone review becomes the backdrop for a detailed autobiographical account that ends in an explicit appeal for financial assistance, as this comment moves from emotional self-disclosure to instrumental request (“Please donate at paypal”). Mitigation strategies are also visible: the acknowledgment that “times are tough for everyone”, expressions of faith (“I have faith, things will get better”) and blessings directed at readers (“God bless you”) all function to soften the request and invite empathy rather than scepticism.

This example, however, raises an analytical question that is worth acknowledging explicitly. As discussed in Chapter 2, emotional self-disclosure is not always a spontaneous or

transparent act; it can be selective, strategic and oriented towards specific interpersonal outcomes. Comment 115 may represent a genuine expression of hardship and a sincere appeal for community support, or it may constitute a calculated deployment of emotional narrative for financial gain (or both simultaneously). From a discourse-analytic perspective, this ambiguity is not necessarily a problem to be resolved. Whether or not the account is factually accurate, the comment draws on recognisable conventions of vulnerable self-disclosure to construct a credible and emotionally resonant narrative. What matters analytically is not the actual authenticity of the disclosed experience, but the discursive means through which authenticity is performed. In this sense, Comment 115 represents an extreme but instructive case of how personal narrative can be mobilised as a strategic resource within the YouTube comment space, extending the instrumental dimension of emotional self-disclosure well beyond product evaluation.

Throughout these examples, personal anecdotes and narratives serve to legitimise and intensify emotional self-disclosure. By embedding feelings within temporally organised accounts of effort, loss, aspiration or hardship, commenters transform subjective affect into socially meaningful experience. These practices provide coherence, justification and often moral framing. In the context of smartphone unboxing videos — a genre centred on consumption — these stories re-anchor the product within everyday life, revealing how technological objects intersect with family relationships, economic inequality, personal achievement and survival.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

The present study set out to examine how emotional self-disclosure is discursively constructed in feedback comments on YouTube smartphone unboxing videos. By combining thematic, pragmatic and discourse-analytic perspectives, the findings reveal that emotional self-disclosure is not a peripheral or accidental feature of user feedback, but a central communicative resource through which participation, evaluation and identity are negotiated in this digital genre.

## 5.1. Emotional Self-Disclosure as Affective Feedback

One of the main findings concerns the systematic and patterned presence of emotional self-disclosure in the dataset. The analysis shows that such disclosure displays recurring thematic orientations, pragmatic functions and discursive resources across the corpus. In this regard, emotional self-disclosure emerges as a structurally embedded and recognisable mode of textual feedback within this YouTube genre, confirming the first hypothesis.

More specifically, the findings indicate that emotional self-disclosure operates as a key resource for the production of *affective* feedback. In this context, feedback extends beyond the evaluation of the product itself to encompass reactions to the video, the content creator, the wider community and the commenters' own experiences. Instead of offering detached or purely technical assessments, users frequently articulate their responses through personal feelings and affective positioning. This shift foregrounds the experiential dimension of evaluation, transforming YouTube product reviews into emotionally resonant spaces. In line with Parini's (2026) conceptualisation of YouTube as a layered feedback landscape, viewers respond to first-order feedback (the video review) with second-order feedback that is often grounded in personal emotion. From this perspective, emotional self-disclosure becomes part of the macrotext collaboratively constructed around the product and its surrounding discourse.

The predominance of positive emotional expressions reflects the anticipatory and aspirational nature of smartphone unboxing videos, a genre built around novelty, desire and excitement. However, the comparatively greater length of mixed-emotion comments suggests that emotional ambivalence requires more elaborate discursive work. When users negotiate conflicting feelings, they seem to engage in more extended forms of self-disclosure. This supports a discourse-oriented view of emotion as something that is not simply expressed but interactionally managed and rhetorically elaborated.

Turning to the first research question, related to the orientation of emotions, the thematic analysis demonstrates that emotional self-disclosure in this context is multidirectionally oriented: towards the self, the community and the product, often in overlapping ways. This

supports the second hypothesis and aligns with Wharton and de Saussure's (2023) view of emotions as intentional states directed at particular objects or entities.

Theme-oriented emotional self-disclosure was particularly prominent in the dataset, confirming that smartphones are not treated as neutral technological artefacts but as affectively charged objects. Emotions "stick" to brands, models and features, echoing Ahmed's (2004) notion of affective attachment. At the same time, self-oriented and community-oriented disclosures reveal that YouTube comments function as more than spaces of product evaluation. Users disclose excitement about upcoming events, frustration about financial limitations, pride in ownership or gratitude towards others, all of which seem to emerge as recognisable and valued forms of feedback in this context. These disclosures demonstrate that feedback is also about positioning oneself within a network of viewers and shared experiences. Emotional self-disclosure thus contributes to the construction of what Papacharissi (2015) describes as affective publics: loosely connected communities formed around shared emotional investments.

Regarding the second research question, on the social functions of emotional self-disclosure, the data confirm that these are multiple and often simultaneous, which supports the third hypothesis. While self-expression emerged as a dominant function, particularly in comments where users clearly articulated excitement, disappointment or desire, the findings reveal that emotional self-disclosure can also serve other purposes. For instance, many comments seek social validation, inviting agreement, empathy or recognition from other users. Importantly, social validation in this context operates in both directions: while some commenters seek reassurance from others, many also offer validation through enthusiastic endorsement, transforming emotional self-disclosure into a form of affective recognition that benefits both parties.

Furthermore, emotional self-disclosure can take on a persuasive dimension and exert social control. By way of illustration, expressions of disappointment or indignation often do more than convey personal dissatisfaction; they implicitly evaluate corporate decisions, pricing strategies or design changes in ways that may influence other viewers. By framing emotions as justified reactions, commenters can position their stance as reasonable and invite others

to adopt a similar point of view. In this sense, emotional self-disclosure sometimes functions as an attempt to shape perceptions within the consumer community.

Identity clarification is also a recurrent function, and one that perhaps deserves closer attention. Across the corpus, emotional self-disclosure generates recognisable, recurring patterns of self-positioning that are closely tied to the genre and its thematic concerns. The user who discloses financial limitation alongside intense desire for the product constructs a very different self-image from the user who frames their purchase as earned reward, even though both are expressing emotions oriented towards the same object. Similarly, the long-term brand loyalist who expresses disillusionment occupies a discursively distinct position from the first-time converter nervously anticipating a brand switch. What emerges from these patterns is a set of emotionally constructed subject positions or affective personae — recurring ways of being a YouTube commenter in relation to consumer technology — that are made recognisable through the specific resources of emotional self-disclosure. This suggests that affective feedback in this genre is not only evaluative but also deeply identificatory: in disclosing how they feel, users simultaneously disclose who they are, or at least who they present themselves as being, within this digital space.

Although relational development has also been identified as one of the social functions of emotional self-disclosure in the corpus, this has been comparatively less common. This is partly consistent with the asymmetrical and weak-tie nature of YouTube interactions, where sustained interpersonal relationships are less common than momentary expressions of affiliation or support, and where disclosure is frequently oriented towards an imagined, potentially vast audience rather than a clearly defined interlocutor. In this light, emotional self-disclosure on YouTube functions more as a broadcasted act of positioning than as a strictly interpersonal exchange (a pattern that contrasts sharply with traditional models of self-disclosure originally developed for dyadic, reciprocal face-to-face interaction). At the same time, it is worth considering whether the low frequency of relational development in this dataset is also partly a consequence of the methodological decision to focus exclusively on top-level comments and to exclude reply threads. Relational development tends to emerge sequentially, and these dynamics are more likely to surface in extended comment exchanges than in isolated top-level contributions.

As for the third research question, concerning the resources through which emotional self-disclosure is constructed, the discourse-analytic findings demonstrate that these are visually salient and draw on a rich repertoire of linguistic, pictorial and discursive means. Intensifiers, evaluative lexis, capitalisation, repetition and expressive punctuation serve to amplify or adjust affective meaning, often compensating for the absence of prosodic cues. Emojis function as pragmatic markers that reinforce, soften or modulate emotional stance. These findings align with the fourth hypothesis as well as with previous research on computer-mediated communication (Yus, 2011; Herring, 2013) showing that digital environments do not impoverish emotional expression but reconfigure it. Moreover, the experiential quality of emotional self-disclosure can be enhanced through specific discursive resources. By embedding emotions within narratives, resorting to humour or irony, and assigning emotional relevance to the spatial dimension, users lend authenticity and credibility to their evaluations, rendering them more relatable.

In a platform shaped by commercial interests and algorithmic visibility, authenticity becomes a valuable resource, and emotional expression plays a key role in signalling sincerity and lived experience. Crucially, the resources through which emotional self-disclosure is constructed do not just express feeling; they also perform authenticity, as features such as capitalisation, expressive lengthening and fragmented syntax create an appearance of spontaneity and unmediated experience that carries real interactional and credibility value within a heavily monetised digital environment.

## 5.2. Emotions as Participatory Capital: Broader Implications

The findings suggest an entanglement of emotion and commerce in this genre. Smartphone unboxing videos exist within a highly monetised ecosystem in which emotional self-disclosure is actively encouraged and socially rewarded. Likes, replies and algorithmic amplification serve as feedback mechanisms that privilege emotionally resonant contributions, implicitly shaping what kinds of self-disclosure receive visibility and what kinds remain marginal. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that many users may become reflexively aware of the kinds of emotions they share, orienting their self-disclosures towards forms of expression that are more likely to be recognised, valued or amplified within the

platform. Emotion, in this sense, has become a form of participatory capital: a resource that users invest in order to gain visibility, alignment and a sense of belonging within the YouTube community.

This observation raises a question that goes beyond the scope of this study but is nevertheless worth exploring: where does genuine emotional expression end and strategic emotional performance begin? The very features that signal authenticity in this genre, such as orthographic variation or expressive punctuation, are themselves conventional. They are recognisable codes for spontaneity, deployed in a written, asynchronous medium where users have time to compose and revise. This does not mean that the emotions expressed are insincere. It means, rather, that sincerity itself has a discursive form, and that form is learnable, repeatable and rewardable within the platform's engagement economy. The line between feeling something and performing the feeling in a socially legible way is not a line that discourse analysis can draw with precision, and this is not a limitation of the method but a reflection of how emotion actually works in public, mediated interaction. What the analysis does show is that emotional self-disclosure in this context can be simultaneously expressive and strategic, personal and platform-shaped, felt and performed.

This blurring of authenticity and performance has broader implications for how we understand participatory culture in commercial digital environments. The "feedback society" that Jaworska and Vásquez (2026) describe is not simply a culture in which people are invited to share opinions; it is one in which the expression of emotion has become a normalised and expected mode of participation, embedded in platform design. Within this context, users who disclose emotions are not acting outside or against the commercial logic of the platform: they are, in many cases, enacting it, even when the emotions they express are entirely genuine. This suggests that the commodification of affect on platforms like YouTube may not be just a process imposed on users from above, but also one in which users are active participants, although not always fully aware. Emotional self-disclosure is thus one of the most personal things a user can do and, at the same time, one of the most structurally encouraged.

From a broader disciplinary perspective, these findings point to the value of bringing discourse analysis into conversation with platform studies and the sociology of digital culture. Linguistic and discursive approaches are well positioned to examine how emotional authenticity can be constructed at the level of the text. Platform studies, in turn, can illuminate the structural conditions that make certain forms of emotional expression more visible, more valued and more imitable than others. Bringing these perspectives together offers a more complete account of emotional self-disclosure as a phenomenon that is simultaneously bottom-up and top-down: produced by individual users in response to personal experience, but shaped, filtered and amplified by the technological architectures through which it circulates. This is what makes emotional self-disclosure in YouTube comments such a rich object of inquiry, and such a timely one, as the platforms that mediate everyday life continue to evolve in ways that give affect an increasingly prominent role in participation.

## 6. Conclusions

By adopting a thematic, pragmatic and discourse-analytic perspective, the study has shown that emotional self-disclosure is a recurrent and multifunctional resource that allows users to articulate textual feedback and negotiate identities in YouTube comments on smartphone unboxing videos.

The analysis has demonstrated that emotional self-disclosure in this context is oriented towards multiple targets. Users direct emotions towards themselves, towards other participants and the channel, and towards the smartphone in its multiple dimensions: as a consumer object, a design artefact, a technological device and a symbol of identity or brand affiliation. This multidirectionality reveals the relational complexity of YouTube comment spaces. Besides indexing private feelings, emotional expression positions the self within a network of products, brands, creators and audiences.

At a pragmatic level, emotional self-disclosure was shown to fulfil a range of social functions, including self-expression, social validation, identity clarification, social control and, at times, relational development. These functions contribute to the discursive construction of recognisable emotionally framed identities within the comment space. Through stance-taking, evaluations and emotionally marked narratives of aspiration, nostalgia, frustration and belonging, users construct what might be described as affective personae, such as the excited future buyer, the disappointed former user, the loyal brand supporter, the financially constrained aspirant or the knowledgeable insider eager to help others. These are more than emotional stances; they constitute recognisable social types, produced through the repeated deployment of specific linguistic, pictorial and discursive resources.

What makes them *affective* personae, rather than simply consumer identities, is that they are largely constituted through the expression of feeling: emotion becomes a primary resource through which identity work is accomplished. A commenter does not just state that they cannot afford the phone; they *express sadness* about it, and in doing so, construct a self that is vulnerable, aspirational and humanly relatable. A commenter does not merely report brand loyalty; they *perform enthusiasm* for it, and in doing so, position themselves as a genuine member of a community of shared values. Smartphones, in this sense, become far more than products under review; they become the occasion through which users narrate themselves into legibility within a platformed consumer culture.

From a broader perspective, the findings also underscore the interdisciplinary relevance of studying emotional self-disclosure in digital feedback environments. From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, the analysis illustrates how identities and alignments are discursively constructed in public, persistent and scalable spaces such as YouTube. From a media and communication perspective, it shows how affect operates within monetised and algorithmically structured ecosystems, where emotionally charged comments may enhance visibility and engagement. From a socio-cultural angle, it reveals how everyday technological consumption is entangled with affective economies, in which emotions circulate, accumulate and contribute to collective meaning-making. Emotional self-disclosure, in this way, provides a valuable entry point into understanding how individuals participate, evaluate and perform identities in contemporary platformed societies.

Importantly, this study is not concerned with accessing users' "true" emotional states. Rather, it has treated emotions as discursive achievements, i.e. as phenomena made visible, constructed and interpretable through language and other semiotic resources. This perspective is particularly relevant in digital contexts, where users adapt their self-disclosure practices to the affordances of specific platforms. As social networking sites become increasingly central to maintaining social networks, self-disclosure practices evolve in response to technological features such as comment threading, likes, emojis and algorithmic amplification. Emotional self-disclosure in YouTube comments must therefore be understood as both socially motivated and technologically mediated.

## 6.1. Limitations of the Study

As with any empirical investigation, the present study is subject to several limitations. First, the corpus is restricted to feedback comments posted under 50 smartphone unboxing videos, focusing specifically on iPhone and Samsung Galaxy series models. While these brands are highly popular and generate substantial engagement, the findings cannot be generalised to all product categories, all technological devices or all forms of YouTube content. Affective feedback and emotional self-disclosure practices may vary significantly in other genres, such as gaming, beauty, political commentary or lifestyle vlogs.

Second, the data were collected at a specific moment in time (August 2022). Given the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of digital platforms, both technological affordances and communicative norms may shift over time. Changes in interface design, moderation policies, algorithmic systems or emoji repertoires could influence how users express and circulate emotions in the future. The study therefore offers a snapshot of affective feedback and emotional self-disclosure practices within a particular temporal and technological configuration.

Third, the filtering procedure applied to the data relied on the presence of first-person pronouns and automated sentiment analysis. While this approach ensured a systematic and manageable dataset, it inevitably excluded instances of implicit self-disclosure or subtle emotional expression not captured by these criteria. As a result, the scope of the analysis

is necessarily limited to explicit, linguistically foregrounded forms of emotional self-disclosure, which is a productive starting point, but one that leaves room for future work to explore the more indirect modes of affective expression that fall outside its boundaries. Additionally, as with all qualitative research, the analytical categories and interpretations proposed here reflect the researcher's own reading of the data. While classifications were guided by identifiable linguistic and contextual cues, different analysts might reasonably arrive at alternative interpretations of individual comments, particularly in cases where emotional stance is ambiguous or implicit.

Finally, the analysis focused exclusively on the textual comment space. Although references were made to the audiovisual and pictorial dimensions of YouTube, the videos themselves were not subjected to a systematic multimodal analysis. Consequently, the intricate interplay between the emotional performance in the video and the emotional self-disclosure in the comments could only be addressed indirectly.

## 6.2. Future Lines of Research

The limitations presented here open up several promising avenues for future research. One potential direction would be to conduct comparative studies across different YouTube genres. For instance, how does emotional self-disclosure operate when giving textual feedback on gaming videos, beauty tutorials or political debates? Does the orientation and function of emotional self-disclosure shift depending on the thematic focus and community norms of each genre? A cross-genre comparison could shed further light on the relationship between communicative purpose, audience expectations and affective expression.

Another fruitful line of inquiry would involve a more explicitly multimodal approach. Future studies could systematically analyse the interaction between the audiovisual performance of the primary reviewer and the textual emotional self-disclosures in the comments. How do viewers uptake, echo or contest the emotional cues displayed in the video? To what extent does the video's emotional framing shape the tone and intensity of subsequent feedback? Exploring this dynamic interplay would contribute to a more holistic understanding of YouTube reviews as macrotexts co-constructed across modes.

Another promising direction for future research would be to examine emotional self-disclosure in YouTube textual feedback in relation to users' geographical location and macro-social variables, such as age, gender and socioeconomic background. These factors may influence how users express emotions and engage in affective feedback within online communities, and investigating these variables could therefore offer valuable insights into the sociolinguistic dimensions of emotional participation in digital environments. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that such variables are often difficult to identify or control in large-scale online datasets, particularly on platforms such as YouTube where user identities are frequently anonymised or only partially disclosed. Nonetheless, developing methodological strategies to account for these factors could help deepen our understanding of how affective practices in online discourse intersect with broader social structures.

Future research could also examine how affective feedback through emotional self-disclosure evolves over time, particularly as new technological affordances emerge. Platform updates, new reaction tools, AI-driven recommendation systems or changes in moderation practices may influence the visibility and circulation of emotions. In a volatile and constantly changing digital landscape, new affordances may reshape both how users disclose emotions and how these emotions are amplified or recontextualised.

Moreover, future studies could also adopt a more explicitly interactional perspective by examining comment threads rather than focusing solely on individual, top-level comments. While the present study has treated comments as relatively self-contained instances of affective feedback, replies within threads may offer a richer site for analysing how emotional self-disclosure unfolds sequentially and collaboratively. An interactional approach would make it possible to explore how users respond to and build upon each other's emotional expressions, potentially revealing more detailed patterns of alignment, disagreement, escalation or mitigation. Such analyses could also shed light on the co-construction of affective meanings and the emergence of micro-communities within comment sections, thereby complementing the present findings with a more dynamic understanding of emotional self-disclosure in context.

Finally, further research could adopt a comparative cross-platform perspective. How does emotional self-disclosure on YouTube compare to similar practices on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok or Reddit? Do differences in interface design, audience structure and algorithmic logic lead to distinct affective repertoires and disclosure strategies? Such comparative work would deepen our understanding of the relationship between technological affordances and the discursive construction of emotion.

These considerations point back to the broader significance of self-disclosure in human interaction. Self-disclosure has long been recognised as central to interpersonal relationships, fostering intimacy, trust and relational closeness, while also involving risks of judgement and vulnerability. In digital environments, these tensions become amplified: disclosures are made in public, persistent and potentially vast communicative spaces. The present study has shown that emotional self-disclosure plays an important role in how users participate, evaluate and position themselves in comments on smartphone unboxing videos, but such forms of affective feedback extend beyond this specific genre. As such, these interpersonal practices, fundamental to human experience in the contemporary feedback society, deserve sustained attention across a wider range of digital and commercial contexts of interaction.

By foregrounding the discursive construction of emotion, this dissertation contributes to a more nuanced understanding of online feedback practices. Emotional self-disclosure should not be understood as a mere by-product of enthusiasm or frustration, as it also emerges, in fact, as a strategic, socially meaningful and technologically shaped communicative resource. In examining how users articulate their feelings about devices, brands, creators, peers and themselves, this study ultimately highlights how contemporary digital life is increasingly lived, and publicly narrated, through emotion.

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