

Original Article

Reviewing the Reviewers: Are Technology Reviews Being Influenced by Marketing Budgets?

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Abstract - The paper will look into the growing consumer tech-products industry and the impact on marketing budgets and technology reviews on the quality of reviews, their perspective, and the perception of end-consumers on the final product. The paper goes on to analyze six different products, ranging from phones to headphones, comparing the reviews of social media influencers and other reviews, as well as consumer reviews. This was followed by a short review of the company's budgets on marketing, research, and development. The research found a positive correlation between research and development budgets and positive reviews, and also varied results on the impact of marketing budgets. As a whole, the paper will study whether marketing budgets and product influencers influence Technology reviewers, and how this impacts the integrity of their reviews.

Keywords - Marketing, Partnerships, Influencers, Budgets, Reviews.

1. Introduction

When people choose which technology to purchase, online reviews are becoming increasingly more significant for the general public. These days, social media and YouTube videos have become essential tools for these kinds of choices. The reliability of tech assessments has been called into doubt, though, particularly since influencers and brands have begun collaborating. It is still unclear if the growing quantity of sponsored content has an impact on evaluations, even though many reviewers still claim to maintain their neutrality. According to research, while disclosure of sponsorships can help to maintain transparency, it leads to decreased trust and believability among viewers (Eisend and others, #344-366). It is still found that while paid reviews can exhibit better detail, viewers are likely to view them as being more biased towards the product, suggesting that seen authenticity seems to be more valuable than the real review (Kim and others. #114-124).

Because of brands distributing prerelease units to content creators for the sole purpose of reviewing them, the tech industry has become easily susceptible to bias. Further research shows that hidden sponsorships effectively decrease trust in consumers towards the brands (Colliander and Erlandsson #110-124). Furthermore, it is discussed that sponsorships cause consumers to see influencers more as paid ads rather than as independent tech reviewers (Audrezet and others. #557-569). As a result, tech reviews, once highly regarded by consumers as being reliable and significant, may now be utilised more frequently by businesses to serve as marketing tools to help promote their new tech products. The purpose of this research is to examine whether marketing

tactics such as sponsorships and product placements undermine the credibility of tech reviews, as well as to understand how this potential bias caused by big brands and tech reviewers can impact the public's trust in them.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Aim

Researching whether marketing budgets and product influencers influence Technology reviewers, and how this impacts the integrity of their reviews.

2.2. Data Collection

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as a research approach to collect, synthesize, and appraise the findings of all available evidence on the topic to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on this topic. This process involved using a systematic and transparent approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant studies to minimize bias and ensure the reliability and validity of the review.

An online search was conducted on various databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and JSTOR to discern the most relevant literature published in English ever on this topic. Furthermore, we conducted our own survey comparing reviews available on Amazon and reviews by popular "tech-influencers" who have a history of taking promotional deals and collaborations. Later on, we also studied a correlation between the marketing budget of particular companies and the reviews by popular deal-making tech-influencers.



2.3. Data Analysis

We first selected our six target influencers through SLR and selected Mrwhosetheboss, Marques Brownlee (MKBHD: Quality Tech Videos), TechWiser, WhatGear, Sillycorns, and ShortCircuit. We then chose six products across various categories, all of which were released between late 2022 and 2024. The products included two smartphones, the iPhone 16 and the OnePlus One (Foldable), one laptop, the ASUS Vivobook 16, one PC, the Alienware Aurora R16 Gaming Desktop, a television, the LG Easel TV, and finally, a pair of headphones, the Sony WF-1000XM5.

The products were compared through viewing reviews both by the influencers and the public. Followed by this, the average ratings were graphed using Microsoft Excel. Other data has also been compiled using Microsoft Excel.

2.4. Ethics

This project was done with secondary data. Everything was appropriately referenced, and there was no AI-generated content.

3. Results

3.1. Results

The following section illustrates the reviews by both the public and social media influencers for our 6 selected products. Observations have been noted from the summaries of these summaries and have been given in the Discussion section.

3.2. iPhone 16

3.2.1. Social Media Influencer's Opinion

The iPhone 16 received favourable reviews from top tech analysts. Mrwhosetheboss praised its improved thermal performance and the new "Capture Button," noting that it enhanced camera usability (Mrwhosetheboss, 2024) ("iPhone 16 / 16 Pro Unboxing"). MKBHD applauded the brighter display and more efficient chip, though he criticised the minimal innovation from the previous generation (Brownlee, 2024). TechWiser appreciated the extended battery life and better AI-assisted photography. ShortCircuit liked the design refinements but found the pricing steep. What Gear and Sillycorns echoed sentiments about its polished experience, but mentioned it felt more like an iPhone 15s. PCMag rated it 4.5/5, highlighting the performance bump and ecosystem refinements (Zeman, 2024). Overall, the iPhone 16 continues to deliver a premium iOS experience with incremental upgrades.

3.2.2. Public Opinion

Public response to the iPhone 16 has been broadly positive, especially from long-time Apple users. Many praised the improved battery life, responsive display, and video stabilisation. The new Capture Button was appreciated by both casual users and mobile content creators. However, several customers found the upgrade from iPhone 14 or 15

unnecessary, citing too few design changes. Some reported mild heating issues and questioned the device's value compared to the Pro models. Nonetheless, with an average Amazon rating of 4.4/5, the iPhone 16 is largely seen as a refined, reliable flagship for those seeking a balanced performance and camera-centric phone within the Apple ecosystem.

3.3. OnePlus One (Foldable)

3.3.1. Social Media Influencer's Opinion

The OnePlus Open foldable has received strong acclaim for being a practical and refined folding phone. MKBHD admired its near-zero crease, light weight, and excellent inner display (Brownlee). Tech Radar gave it a 4.5/5, citing the quality of both screens and the fluidity of OxygenOS. Mrwhosetheboss liked its multitasking features and fast charging, though he found the camera slightly behind Samsung's Z Fold (Mrwhosetheboss). TechWiser and What Gear appreciated the build quality and outer display usability (TechWiser). Sillycorns praised its hinge mechanism, while ShortCircuit highlighted real-world use cases like extended app compatibility (ShortCircuit).

3.3.2. Public Opinion

Public feedback has been largely positive, with users loving the nearly invisible crease and tablet-like experience. Multitaskers praised its productivity features, like split-screen and floating windows. The fast charging and bright display were recurring highlights. Some users mentioned that the camera's performance lagged slightly behind expectations in low-light scenarios. Foldable sceptics also commented on concerns over long-term durability. That said, with consistent ratings such as 4.5/5 from retailers like Reliance Digital, it's seen as one of the most polished foldables in the market.

3.4. ASUS Videobook 16

3.4.1. Social Media Influencer's Opinion

The ASUS Vivo Book 16 received mixed-to-positive feedback. Mrwhosetheboss and TechWiser noted its lightweight design and decent performance for students and office use (TechWiser). Laptop Mag gave it 3.5/5, highlighting a good keyboard and decent thermals, but criticised the lack of a high-refresh-rate display and subpar speakers. MKBHD didn't formally review it but acknowledged its affordability (Brownlee). What Gear and ShortCircuit noted was its solid SSD performance, but pointed out plastic build quality (ShortCircuit) (WhatGear). Sillycorns recommended it as a budget daily driver for casual users and light content creators (Sillycorns).

3.4.2. Public Opinion

Consumers find the Vivo Book 16 reliable for day-to-day tasks like browsing, word processing, and online classes. Battery life and lightweight design are appreciated, especially by students and remote workers. Complaints

include mediocre audio, basic display quality, and occasional lag when multitasking. Many praised its value-for-money ratio and ASUS's software support (Tabari). Its 4.0/5 Amazon rating suggests general satisfaction, though users seeking gaming or high-end creative performance often prefer alternatives.

3.5. Alienware Aurora R16 Gaming Desktop

3.5.1. Social Media Influencer's Opinion

The Alienware Aurora R16 received high praise from reviewers like MKBHD and TechWiser for its futuristic design, excellent airflow, and top-tier gaming performance (Brownlee). Mrwhosetheboss admired the customisable RGB and compact form factor, noting that it balanced thermals and performance well (Mrwhosetheboss). What Gear emphasised was its quiet operation and clean internal components. ShortCircuit was impressed with the upgradability and sleek cable management. PCMag gave it a solid 4/5 for consistent 4K gaming and workstation-level specs. The only repeated drawback noted was its premium pricing and occasional BIOS update glitches.

3.5.2. Public Opinion

Gamers and creative professionals alike lauded the Alienware Aurora R16 for its smooth multitasking, quiet fans, and outstanding 1440p/4K gaming experience. On Amazon, users frequently mentioned how well it handled demanding titles like Cyberpunk 2077 and COD Warzone at ultra settings. The AlienFX lighting, combined with tool-less entry, was praised by enthusiasts. Some criticisms revolved around Dell's bloatware and higher-than-average power draw. Despite the steep price tag, its 4.5/5 Amazon rating reflects strong satisfaction among gamers and power users.

3.6. LG Easel TV

3.6.1. Social Media Influencer's Opinion

The LG Easel TV, part of LG's Objet collection, was praised for its artistic, furniture-like design. Gadgets Now gave it a 4.7/5, applauding its stunning OLED evo panel and subtle aesthetic integration into living spaces. Gizmodo's 4.0/5 review noted its cinematic visuals and innovative rollable-like fabric front. TechWiser and Sillycorns liked the split-view functionality and gallery mode, though they felt the price was high compared to flagship OLEDs with similar performance. MKBHD and ShortCircuit acknowledged their niche luxury appeal. Reviewers agreed it's best suited for premium interior-focused buyers.

3.6.2. Public Opinion

Since the LG Easel TV isn't widely available on Amazon, user ratings are scarce. However, public opinion across forums and LG's official retailers appears enthusiastic. Buyers admire its ability to double as home décor and the attention to detail in material finish. Given similar specs, some felt it lacked value compared to LG's G-series OLEDs. Early adopters, though, describe it as a

conversation starter and centrepiece-worthy screen, appreciating its blend of design and function.

3.7. Sony XH-1000XM5

3.7.1. Social Media Influencer's Opinion

Reviewers overwhelmingly appreciated Sony's WH-1000XM5. Mrwhosetheboss praised the sleek new design and even better noise cancellation. MKBHD noted the comfort during long use and battery life improvements (Brownlee). TechWiser emphasised the crystal-clear calls and soundstage, while What Gear rated the ANC and LDAC support highly (TechWiser)(WhatGear). CNET gave it a 4.4/5, pointing out the more natural sound signature and reduced bass bias. Sillycorns and ShortCircuit found the companion app useful, but noted they missed the folding mechanism from the XM4 (ShortCircuit). Across the board, the headphone was seen as a top-tier choice for travellers and audiophiles alike.

3.7.2. Public Opinion

Consumers were highly impressed with the WH-1000XM5, especially its active noise cancellation, which most found to be industry-leading. The long battery life and quick charge features have received universal praise. Audiophiles appreciated the wider soundstage and customizable EQ. Some users noted the non-foldable design was less portable than the previous generation, and a few experienced Bluetooth pairing hiccups on Windows. However, with an average Amazon rating of 4.7/5, public sentiment is strongly positive, cementing it as a premium headphone pick.

3.8. Research and Development vs Marketing Budget for the products of the selected companies

3.8.1. Apple Inc. (iPhone 16)

Apple does not publish product-level budgets. Instead, we use company totals. In FY2023, Apple spent \$29.9B on R&D (~8% of net sales) against \$24.9B on selling and administration (SG&A, ~7% of sales). SG & A includes marketing. Thus, roughly half of Apple's product-related work is on developing (R&D) and half on marketing. In other words, for each time Apple spent on R&D, it spent \$0.83 on marketing. No data specific to the iPhone 16 is public, but Apple's overall R&D vs expenses (~54% vs ~46% of the income) provides a clear picture.

3.8.2. OpenPlus Technology (Shenzen) Co., Ltd. (OnePlus Open Foldable)

No public breakdown exists for OnePlus or its parent (BBK/Oppo) on a per-product basis. We find no data for the OnePlus marketing vs development budgets. (In 2019, Oppo announced a \$7 B R&D investment over 3 years, but marketing figures were not disclosed.) Therefore, we cannot provide percentages for the OnePlus Open itself – only that OnePlus relies on BBK's overall R&D (and typically lean marketing) strategy.

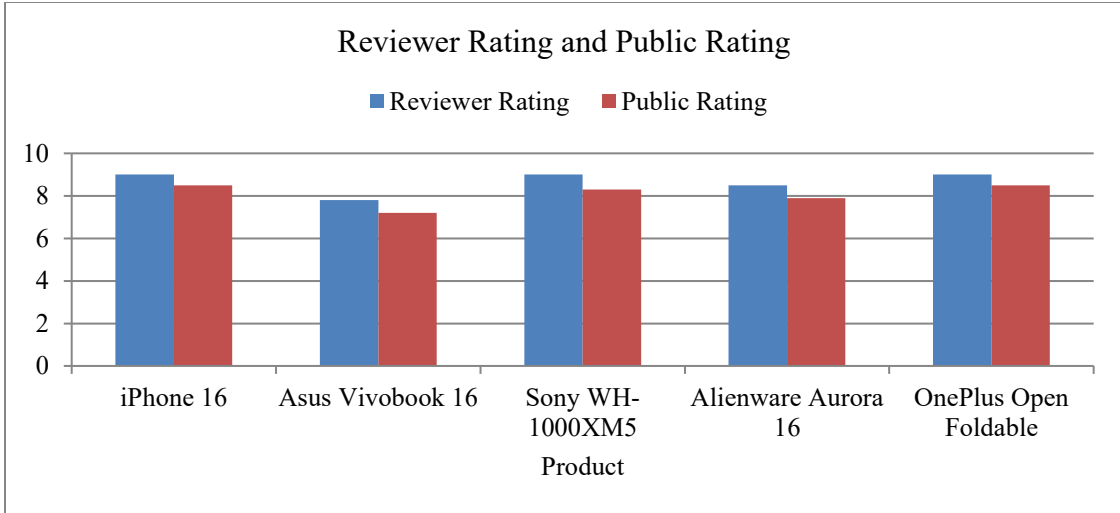


Fig. 1 The figure shows the comparison between the average public rating and influencer rating of all devices, excluding the LG TV, for which public ratings were not available.

3.8.3. ASUSTeK Computer Inc. (ASUS Vivobook 16)

ASUS’s 2023 annual report shows R&D and SG&A as percentages of revenue. In FY2023, ASUS had marketing expenses of ~6% of its income and R&D expenses of ~4%. (This correlates to about 6:4 or 60% marketing versus 40% growth of ASUS’s operating budget). Again, this is corporate-wide; product-level info(like for the Vivobook 16) is not revealed. We have cited the consolidated finances: selling/marketing was 6% and R&D was 4% of revenues.

3.8.4. Dell Inc. (Alienware Aurora 16)

Dell’s SEC filings show the group’s total R&D and SG&A. In FY2024, Dell reported \$2.801 B in R&D (about 3.2% of income) and about \$12.9B in marketing expenses(~14.5% of income). Thus, about 18% of Dell’s combined operating budget was for R&D, and 82% was for

SG&A(including marketing). (The real marketing portion of SG&A isn’t itemised, but SG&A dominates.) For the Alienware desktop line, no product-specific figures exist, so we use the corporate R&D (~3.2% of sales) SG&A vs total (~14.5%) split as a stand-in in

3.8.5. LG Corporation (LG Easel TV)

LG Electronics publishes separate statements. In 2021, LG’s sales(ongoing ops) were 27.778 T KRW. That year, they spent 654.5 B KRW on advertising and 183.5B on promotions(total ~838.0 B KRW), against 270.7 B KRW on R&D. As a share of sales, this is about 3.0% on marketing versus 1.0% on growth. In other words, LG spent about three times more on advertising than on R&D in 2021. (These numbers include all the company’s TVs, appliances, etc., not just Easel TV products).

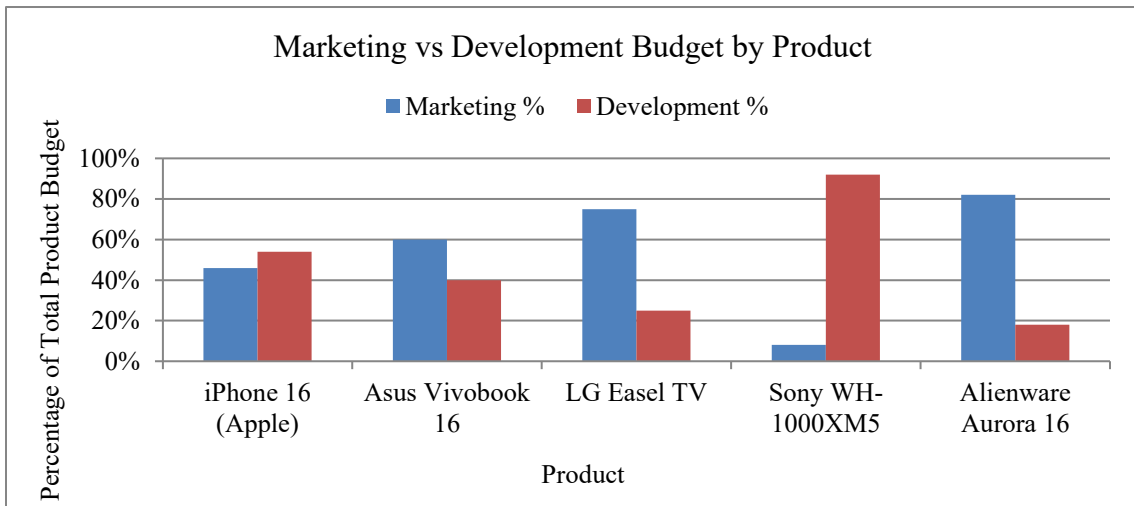


Fig. 2 Here’s the comparative bar chart showing the percentage of the total product budget allocated to marketing and development for each of the five products (excluding OnePlus Open due to lack of data). Each percentage represents the combined marketing and development (“product budget”) slice, not sales. (For example, Apple’s ~54% development vs ~46% marketing reflects 8% vs 7% of revenue.) where actual percentages are not given (OnePlus), we note that only high-level R&D targets are known.

3.8.6. Sony Group Corporation (Sony WH-1000XM5)

Sony does not break out budgets by using the headphone model. Sony's R&D group's advertising spend can be used as a guide. In FY2023, Sony used about \$4.97B on R&D and \$0.423 on advertising. This implies that roughly 92% of that combined budget was spent on R&D and only 8% was spent on marketing. (Put differently. Sony spent an order of magnitude more on R&D than on advertising in 2023.) This is a worldwide figure for all Sony electronics; no XM5-specific split is available.

4. Discussion

4.1. Comparison of Public vs Influencer Product Reviews

For the iPhone 16, reviewers praised the refined design and smooth performance, but criticised the lack of major innovation. The public echoed these sentiments, appreciating the polish but feeling underwhelmed by upgrades. While experts focused on technical merits, users emphasised value for money. On the other hand, tech reviewers lauded the design, hinge quality, and performance of the OnePlus Open Foldable, placing it among the top foldables. Consumers largely agreed, citing durability and functionality. However, reviewers critiqued camera consistency more than users did, who were generally more forgiving and focused on usability.

For the ASUS Vivobook, reviewers highlighted performance limitations and average build quality, especially for professional use. The public found it suitable for everyday tasks, valuing affordability. Experts tended to focus on its flaws, while consumers prioritised value and practical functionality for basic needs. On the contrary, reviewers praised the Alienware Aurora for the thermal upgrades and design, noting high pricing. Consumers were enthusiastic about gaming performance and ease of use. While reviewers analysed specs and cost, users emphasised real-world performance and the premium experience of a plug-and-play gaming setup.

The LG Easel TV suffered from many complaints for its practicality; however, critics appreciated the OLED quality and artistic design, calling it niche and premium. Users admired its aesthetic appeal and display, but found its practicality limited. Experts focused on technology and value, while consumers valued its uniqueness and visual integration into living spaces. For the Sony Headphones, reviewers emphasised ANC performance, comfort, and soundstage. Users praised the battery life and customisation options. Both groups were largely aligned, though consumers highlighted daily convenience and portability more than reviewers, who focused on comparisons to previous models and technical refinements.

Reading through the above reviews, we can see an overall unity in what both the reviewers are understanding and talking about, and the general public is. This correlation

shows us that despite paid promotions with social media influencers and a comparatively higher marketing budget compared to research and development in most companies, the public still tends to have overly positive reviews of firms. However, it can also be seen that firms like Sony Electronics and Apple Inc., which have an opposite turn of view where the research and development budgets are higher than the marketing budgets, we can notice that the overall quality of positive reviews of the product itself is higher from public audiences in both firms. Furthermore, for ASUS and LG, where the marketing budgets are far higher, the comparatively lower research and development expenditure shows the consistently bad quality reviews for both of their products. For Alienware, the situation is different, where an extremely high marketing budget allows them to offer it at a higher price, but still keeps higher quality, showing high-quality development and high-quality marketing at the same time.

Since data on percentage-by-percentage spending on paid partnerships is limited or unavailable, we still have some generic information. OnePlus actively distributed the OnePlus Open to various reviewers. For example, CNBC TV18 noted, "OnePlus shipped me the green variant for review." OnePlus began to host programs like "The Lab," offering select individuals the opportunity to review their devices. However, a few members conveyed their concerns about the limited number of units provided for previewing (Anand). Apple traditionally provides early access to its products, including iPhones, to select reviewers and media outlets under embargo agreements. This strategy ensures widespread coverage upon product release. Alienware does not directly engage with social media tech influencers, but rather with its target community of gamers, e-sport channels, and gaming partnerships. For ASUS, Sony, and LG, the data available is not verified and is limited. From this, we can say that even though certain brands engage in paid partnerships, the reviewers still generally prefer to speak on the truer side. Consumer opinion generally stands to be similar to reviewers. This goes on to show that marketing campaigns by firms targeting influencers rarely impact consumer opinion on the product.

5. Conclusion

The rise of paid partnerships and social media has really changed the dynamic of how companies spend their marketing budgets on influencers, who have far better influence on the general public than traditional advertising and marketing campaigns.

However, with the rise of this new age creator economy, some companies are still working on "good quality and good sales" rather than "average product and good sales", which is still the narrative of a few firms. Even after time, creators preserve integrity by providing a quality review of products with pros and cons rather than just the pros, even after paid

partnerships or collaborations. Similarly, public opinion is rooted in internal quality and pricing, rather than in watching paid reviews.

The paper concludes that there is minimal to no correlation between higher marketing budgets and better

reviews and opinions of the products within both the creator community and the general public.

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