| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

A Study of Interactional Metadiscourse and Its Persuasive Function in Advertising Discourse

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| **ABSTRACT**

Advertising plays an indispensable role in spreading information and it highly influences and persuades consumers to act in a variety of ways. This paper investigates the distribution and use of interactional metadiscourse in *Cosmopolitan* in 2022, as well as analyzes the role they play in the construction of persuasion. A total of 50 advertisements were included, and both qualitative and quantitive methods were used in the analysis. Based on the classification model of interactional metadiscourse proposed by Hyland (2005), this study calculated the frequency of interactional metadiscourse in ads and explained how the author used these metadiscourse markers to interact with consumers. Results revealed that attitude markers and engagement markers appeared most frequently. It means advertisers are primarily focused on consumers, as they are effective means of persuasion. The study concluded that interactional metadiscourse successfully fulfills its persuasive function and contributes effectively to the success of ads.

1. Introduction

As a kind of commercial discourse, advertising is a kind of public discourse communication in which advertisers transmit product or service information to consumers through mass media. As a persuasive discourse, the communicative purpose of metadiscourse in advertising is to persuade the audience to buy products. The term metadiscourse has gained increasing interest in various research fields. Many scholars have used the framework of metadiscourse to investigate interactions in different contexts, such as academic or professional writing, political discourse, and speeches. However, there are a few scholars studying metadiscourse in advertising texts, except Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2001). They analyze advertising slogans to find the persuasive function of metadiscourse. They also point out that genre affects rhetorical choices. Therefore, there is still room for research in metadiscourse in advertising discourse. So, how does metadiscourse exert the pragmatic function of persuasion in advertising discourse? This paper focuses on the interactional metadiscourse in the advertising discourse, and it attempts to explore how advertisers use different metadiscourse markers to lead the audience to the context and contextual effects they expect when it comes to persuading the audience to accept their views and achieve the communicative purpose of persuasion. Specifically, this study chooses 50 advertisements for women's products in *Cosmopolitan* in 2022, which is a well-known fashion magazine in British, and it counts the occurrence of five interactional metadiscourse markers based on Hyland's (2005) classification. Then combined with the specific context this study tries to explain how these interactional metadiscourse markers fulfill their persuasive functions.

2. Literature review
2.1 Studies on metadiscourse
Metadiscourse is the study of discourse itself. Metadiscourse is a means of expression that reflects the author's (or speaker's) self in a text, and it plays a role of negotiation and guidance, helps the author (or speaker) express his or her views and positions, and interacts with readers belonging to a particular community (Hyland, 2005, p. 37). Harris first put forward the concept of "metadiscourse" in 1959, and then many scholars (Willams, 1981; Vande Kopple, 1985; Crismore, 1989; Hyland, 2005; Chen, 2020) further developed this concept and expanded the classification category of metadiscourse. The interpersonal model of metadiscourse classification proposed by Hyland (2005) has been widely accepted.

The concept of metadiscourse has inspired a profusion of studies over the past 40 years. Recently, with many emerging studies and genre analysis studies, people have become interested in analyzing metadiscourse in various discourse types. Most published metadiscourse studies involve scientific, academic, or professional writing. Among these are Hyland and Tse (2004), Ädel and Mauranen (2010), Resendes et al. (2015), Jiang (2020a), Yoon (2021), and Sun (2021). In addition, other research has explored the role of metadiscourse in communicative function in different contexts. For example, Pan and Lin (2021) examined interactive metadiscourse in a self-built corpus of corporate reports of American enterprises. Xu and Liu (2020) took Putin's 2019 State of the Union speech as an example to study the rhetorical persuasion function of metadiscourse in Russian political discourse. Jiang (2020b) took TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) talks as the data and examined the categories and pragmatic functions of audience-oriented metadiscourse to reveal the metapragmatic awareness reflected by audience-oriented metadiscourse from the metapragmatic perspective. However, there is a paucity of metadiscourse literature on advertising.

2.2 Advertising discourse
Due to different purposes, advertising can be divided into different types, such as commercial advertising for profit, political advertising for policy publicity, public service advertising to promote good social norms and behavior, etc. Among them, commercial advertising is the main way for businesses to establish product image. Effective commercial advertising can have a positive impact on consumers' purchasing behavior, promote product sales and prosper the market economy. Advertising language, with its unique linguistic features and social functions, has been widely concerned by the academic community. Advertising is a unique form of cultural and social discourse that undoubtedly has the power of influencing audiences by using various creative and persuasive methods (Al-Subhi, 2022, p. 37). According to Hyland (2005), one of the clearest examples of the rhetorical role of metadiscourse is found in advertisements. Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2001), for instance, show that metadiscourse is extensively used in advertising slogans and headlines to convey a persuasive message under an informative mask.

There are many scholars from different perspectives studying advertising discourse. For instance, Zhang and Zhan (2011) discussed the dynamic construction process of multimodal metaphor and metonymy in advertising and their relationship in advertising discourse; Li (2008) analyzed a medicine advertisement and found that intertextuality in the text reflects the hegemony struggle between advertising discourse and medical regulation discourse; Baig (2013) applied methodological approaches of Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the "power relations and struggles" among product-producers and product-consumers, to gauge the level of psychological dominance exercised through the advertising discourse; Zhang and Wu (2018) analyzed the discourse of perfume advertisement of men and women based on the Theory of Attitude.

In general, these different research perspectives reflect the interdisciplinary characteristics of advertising discourse, but the study of advertising discourse from the perspective of metadiscourse is slightly inadequate.

3. Definition and Classification of Interactional Metadiscourse
According to Halliday, the interpersonal function of language enables users to participate in communicative acts with other people. As mentioned before, Hyland's classification of metadiscourse is widely accepted by many scholars, so this study adopts the category of interactional metadiscourse proposed by Hyland (2005). He classifies metadiscourse into interactive and interactional metadiscourse. Interactive metadiscourse helps the writer to manage the information flow and reflects his/her awareness of the readership and shows the ways of organizing discourse to constrain a text to meet the needs of involving readers. Interactional metadiscourse concerns the ways writers conduct interaction by intruding and commenting on their message. The writer wants to involve readers in the text by allowing them to respond to the text. Metadiscourse here is essentially evaluative and engaging, expressing solidarity, anticipating objections, and responding to an imagined dialogue with others. It reveals the extent to which the writer works to jointly construct the text with readers (Hyland, 2005, p. 50).

There are five broad sub-categories in interactional metadiscourse: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. Hedges are devices such as "possible", "might", and "perhaps", which indicate the writer's decision to recognize alternative voices and viewpoints and so withhold complete commitment to a proposition. Hedges imply that what writer's statement is not that certain, and can be questioned. Boosters allow writers to close down alternatives, head-off conflicting

views and express their certainty in what they say, such as "clearly", "obviously", and "in fact". Boosters emphasize certainty and construct rapport by marking involvement with the topic and solidarity with an audience, taking a joint position against other voices (Hyland, 1999, p. 3). Attitude markers indicate the writer's affective, rather than epistemic, attitude to propositions, for example, attitude verbs (agree, prefer), sentence adverbs (unfortunately, hopefully), and adjectives (appropriate, logical, remarkable). Self-mentions refer to the degree of explicit author presence in the text measured by the frequency of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives (I, me, mine, exclusive we, our, ours). The use of self-mention is the writer's conscious choice to adopt a particular stance. Engagement markers explicitly address readers, either to focus their attention or include them as discourse participants in a text through second-person pronouns (you, your, exclusive we), imperatives (consider, note that), question forms, and asides.

4.0 Methodology
4.1 Research questions
Based on Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse, the current study seeks to demonstrate the distribution of metadiscourse and its persuasive function in advertising discourse. Thus, there are two research questions in this study:

1) What kind of interactional metadiscourse is used in *Cosmopolitan* in 2022?
2) How do these interactional metadiscourse markers in *Cosmopolitan* in 2022 fulfill their persuasive function?

4.2 Data collection
Data is based on 50 advertisements for women's products in the British fashion magazine *Cosmopolitan* in 2022. Not only the headlines and slogans but also the whole text from 50 ads will become the object of study. Those ads only containing headlines or slogans are out of consideration, for they are considered incomplete in this study. All the selected ads were commercial ones. Commercial advertising is a form of marketing communication that employs paid promotional messages that are used to make a product or a service known and persuade people to buy it.

4.3 Procedures and analysis
In this study, the corpus retrieval tool AntConc 4.1.2 was used to retrieve and extract data. In the first step, based on the classification of interactional metadiscourse by Hyland (2005), keywords of interactional metadiscourse are refined and retrieved according to the characteristics of the corpus in this study, and manual reexamination is carried out to calculate the frequency of different types of interactional metadiscourse in the corpus. The second step is to analyze how these interactional metadiscourse markers achieve the persuasive function in advertising discourse based on the specific corpus.

5.0 Findings and discussion
5.1 Frequency of interactional metadiscourse in Cosmopolitan in 2022
According to Hyland's interactive meta-discourse classification model, the corpus is analyzed and sorted out, and the number and frequency of interactional metadiscourse are shown in table 1.

Table 1 Frequency of interactional metadiscourse in *Cosmopolitan* in 2022

Interactional metadiscourse	Frequency	Percentage
Hedges	5	2.31%
Boosters	21	9.72%
Attitude markers	56	25.92%
Self-mentions	45	20.8%
Engagement markers	89	41.20%
Total	216	100%

Table 1 shows many details. Data show that there are a lot of occurrences of interactional metadiscourse especially attitude markers and engagement markers. Hedges are the least used interactional metadiscourse in selected advertising discourse. Notably, attitude markers and engagement markers appear most frequently, suggesting that advertisers are primarily focused on consumers, as these characteristics are an effective means of persuasion.

5.2 Analysis of the persuasive function of interactional metadiscourse in Cosmopolitan in 2022
5.2.1 Hedges
Hedges have a relatively rare occurrence in *Cosmopolitan*. It is expected because hedges are usually used to tone down the truth value of the proposition to make them socially acceptable and to negotiate with. The use of hedges as a type of probability marker

will reduce claim acceptance and produce more negative cognitive responses relative to when no marker was used (Berney-Reddish & Areni, 2005). Most of the hedges in *Cosmopolitan* are used to soften the tone. Here are some examples:

(1) This pick feels v vintage and classic—meaning you'll **likely** keep it on rotation for years to come. (Yam Sun Choker)
(2) Start a 'we-can't-wait-to-go-on-our-hols-again' savings fund and you **could** win £100. (Nationwide Building Society)

Example (1) shows that some hedges tone down the truth value by lowering the force of the verb to shrink responsibility. The hedge "likely" here indicates some individuals may vary according to their condition as to whether keep this choker for years. Example (2) uses the modal auxiliaries "could" to tone down the message by lowering the force of the preposition.

5.2.2 Boosters

Boosters do not occur very often in *Cosmopolitan* and are used more often than hedges. Boosters imply certainty and emphasize the force of the proposition. In advertising discourse, boosters are frequently used to enhance the certainty of the functions of the product. This can be seen from the following example:

(3) If you love to sparkle, Lurelly is **definitely** worth checking out. (Lurelly)
(4) You **all** know an icon when you see, er, use one. (Est**é**e Lauder)

In example (3) Lurelly is a clothing brand and it is characterized by fancy style. The use of the adverb "definitely" strengthen the speaker's tone, making it easy to persuade consumers who like clothes with fancy style to buy Lurelly. In example (4) "all" means if consumers use this product, Advanced Night Repair Synchronized Multi-Recovery Complex, they will know Estée Lauder can be presentative in the field of skincare. Boosters are words allowing writers to close down alternatives, heading off conflicting views and expressing their certainty in what they say (Hyland, 2005, p. 52).

5.2.3 Attitude markers

Attitude markers are commonly used in *Cosmopolitan*. Attitude markers indicate the writer's emotion toward the proposition. They convey the writer's surprise, agreement, importance, obligation, and frustration toward the proposition. The attitude marker expresses the communicator's emotion toward the proposition, conveying his positive attitudes such as surprise, approval, and excitement, and his negative attitudes such as frustration and sadness. It includes attitude verbs (e.g., agree, prefer), adverbs that modify the whole sentence (e.g., unfortunately, hopefully), adjectives (e.g., appropriate, logical, remarkable, precipitous), interjections, and punctuation marks (Hyland, 2005, p. 53). Adjective attitude markers do occur very often in this magazine. Whereas the rest of the attitude markers: adverbs, verbs, and nouns were scarce. Below are some examples from the data:

(5) Love sequins? This is the **perfect** outfit for you. You'll be shimmering all night long in this midi. (Rotate)
(6) Not only is this a **great** everyday moisturizer, it's an **excellent** anti-ager as well. (Peach & Lily Collection)

In example (5) advertisers tell consumers Rotate's clothing is perfect for people who like sequins, allowing consumers to know the advantage of this clothing brand. In example (6) advertisers use "great" and "excellent" to compliment this product, urging consumers to add it to the cart. Therefore, through emotional disclosure rendering atmosphere, advertisers infect consumers to obtain emotional consistency and to achieve the purpose of persuasion. Advertisers' emotions are generally expressed as positive emotions such as surprise and joy at the effects of advertising products.

5.2.4 Self-mentions

Self-mentions are also used in the ads but they do not enjoy a high frequency of occurrence. Data show that self-mentions are realized by the use of the first-person pronoun. The singular form "I" and "my" are used to refer to a certain product, and the plural form "we" is used to indicate the advertising company. Consumer-friendly corporate bodies use personal pronouns such as we in their advertising to lend a friendly and personal image of themselves to the consumer (Christopher, 2012). Here are some examples:

(7) **We**'ve expanded from necklaces, earrings and rings. (Chanel)
(8) If you're looking to amp up the color in your wardrobe, be sure to check **our** Marrisa Wilson. (Marrisa Wilson)

Example (7) is an advertisement about the necklace and it indicates that Channel as a famous luxury brand has expanded to the jewelry industry, making consumers feel its charm is not limited to bags. In example (8) first-person pronoun is used to fulfill the same function, aiming at reminding consumers to add Marrisa Wilson's clothes to their wardrobe. The use or nonuse of first-person pronounces is deliberately chosen by advertisers, by doing so, they can adopt a particular stance and a contextually situated authorial identity. It plays a crucial role in advertising language.

5.2.5 Engagement markers

Engagement markers are devices that explicitly address readers, either to focus their attention or include them as discourse participants (Hyand, 2005, p. 53). Data show that engagement markers demonstrate remarkable results. They are the most commonly used category. The most direct motivation for advertisers to use such metadiscourse is to guide and encourage consumers to participate in the experience of product use through discourse propaganda. Such engagement markers are mainly manifested in the use of explicit performative sentences such as the second-person pronoun you and imperative sentences.

(9) **You**'ll always stand out in a bold print or floral pattern from Autumn Adeigbo. (Autumn Adeigbo)
(10) A nail-care brand centered around the idea of self-care? (Rooted Woman)

Example (9) uses the second-person pronoun "you" to point to consumers, and it helps to close the distance with consumers, allow consumers to get involved, and encourage them to accept the position of advertisers. Advertisers sometimes use some informal questions to let consumers get involved in the process of answering questions, just like in the example (10).

5.3 Discussion

This study investigated the use of various categories of interactional metadiscourse in advertising discourse. More specific and detailed discussion will be conducted as follows.

It has been found that categories of hedges were almost missing. It can be expected since hedges often appear to modify a noun phrase or a verb, reducing the objective meaning to mark the writer's reluctance to present or evaluate propositional content categorically. In contrast to hedges, enhancers are used to affirm and strengthen propositions. Boosters are far more frequently used in advertising discourse, we can tell that the use of boosters by advertisement writers can create a high-quality product image, and show their recognition of the product and their eagerness to share it, so that consumers can more believe in the quality and effect of the product, thus enhancing consumers' desire to buy. Slef-mentions are used more often than boosters. In part because self-mentions produce a sense of solidarity with the potential customers. Advertisers have the same problems or experiences as the customers; they know what customers need, just as the old saying goes: know the mutant, kill the mutant.

In addition, the study unveiled that the high frequency of engagement markers and attitude markers is in line with the communicative and persuasive purposes that the ads' designers want to achieve. They are employed by the advertisers to address the consumers directly and guide them to perform the desired action. The high frequency of the second-person pronoun "you" creates solidarity between advertisers and consumers, and increases the level of interactionality in the text (Al-Subhi, 2022). These engagement markers express a one-to-one relationship. Although advertisements reach a huge number of people at any one time, these pronouns or person markers lend a personal touch to the consumer (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001). Attitude markers play a key role in strengthening the persuasiveness of the ads as advertisers cast a positive light on the products through the inclusion of appropriate adjectives (Al-Subhi, 2022). Most of the attitude markers in the data belong to attitudinal adjectives. And they are used professionally in the ads to stress the quality of the advertised products and contribute effectively to the core message of the ad.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper has analyzed interactional metadiscourse makers in 50 advertisements of *Cosmopolitan* in 2022 and explored how the author uses them to interact with consumers in advertising discourse and stimulate their consumption desire. This study revealed that engagement markers and attitude markers exhibited higher frequencies than other interactional metadiscourse resources. It also indicated that advertiers use engagement markers to guide and encourage consumers to participate in the experience of product use, attitude markers to create an atmosphere that cannot be bought, self-mentions to close the distance with consumers, boosters to enhance the certainty of the functions of the product, and hedges to establish an objective and fair image for themselves. Finally, this study also has some enlightenment. For advertisement writers, this study can provide them with relatively effective language strategies to achieve the persuasive function of commercial advertisements. For consumers, it can improve their discrimination of advertising. the study explained how linguistic metadiscourse constructs persuasive messages and entices customers into buying products.

While this study generally extends the scope of discourse analysis, particularly the concept of metadiscourse, there is still much room for further future research. Future studies could compare and contrast the use of textual and visual metadiscourse. Other studies could also investigate metadiscourse in advertising in a different background, such as social media in which linguistic devices and visual elements can be considered together. Meanwhile, some scholars (Sun, 2017; Linag and Cao, 2019) point out that research on metadiscourse can be combined with identity construction, a recent hot topic in this field. Finally, future studies could examine larger samples of advertising discourse to prove the generalizability of the present finding.

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