THE PERSUASIVE ROLE OF META-DISCOURSE MARKERS IN DIGITAL ADVERTISING

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Abstract

This study investigates the persuasive use of interactive and interactional meta-discourse markers in digital advertising, employing Hyland's (2005) model. Interactive meta-discourse encompasses transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential, and code glosses, while interactional meta-discourse includes hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. The process of data collection includes extracting data from websites with digital advertisements, analyzing the use of meta-discourse markers in these ads to understand their context and purpose, and categorizing these markers into interactive and interactional categories. Data analysis involves identifying and examining the presence of these markers in digital advertising, interpreting how they contribute to persuasion in the text, and presenting the findings by categorizing interactive and interactional meta-discourse markers while explaining their persuasive significance. The research reveals that in advertisements for beauty products and luxury cars, transition markers are the sole category of interactive meta-discourse used. In contrast, interactional meta-discourse exhibits a broader range of categories in advertising, encompassing attitude markers, self-mention, engagement markers, and boosters.

Keywords: Interactive, Interactional, Meta-discourse, Persuasive, Digital Advertising

INTRODUCTION

One promotional strategy that plays an essential role in altering social behavior is advertising. It is a form of promotion that seeks to persuade a certain audience to purchase a good or service. It also aims to persuade its target market to either buy, sell, or carry out a particular action. Bovée (cited in Frolova, 2014) defined advertising as a form of nonpersonal communication of information that is usually paid for and persuasive in nature about products (goods and services) or ideas by identified sponsors mediated through various media. Therefore, as a promotional medium, an advertisement must utilize compelling language or expressions to entice people to read and believe in the contents of the advertisement.
Traditional advertising has historically used print, television, and radio as its mediums. Among these, print advertising, which involves distributing ads through flyers, newspapers, and mail, is often seen as highly effective for businesses. With the widespread adoption of the internet, advertising is now categorized into traditional and digital forms. Digital advertising encompasses all online advertising activities, allowing companies to promote their brands or products across various digital platforms and media. This strategy seeks to persuade consumers to make purchases through social networking sites, apps, blogs, and other digital channels.

Online advertisements, due to their broad reach, target audiences of all ages and genders. Therefore, the language used should appeal to a diverse readership. To effectively convey the ad's message, advertisers need a solid grasp of persuasive language. Several persuasive language strategies can be employed in advertising to achieve marketing objectives, aligning with Woods' (2006) perspective that advertising primarily functions as a promotional tool. Its goal is to grab people's attention and maintain the appeal and presence of a specific product, service, or brand in their minds. To accomplish this, an ad should first engage its potential audience and then captivate them with an appealing and memorable message.

One of the linguistic features that are widely used in advertising expressions is meta-discourse. It is a novel idea in the field of discourse analysis which is related to writers and readers. Language serves to provide information through the structuring of the text as well as to interest readers in order for them to understand it (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001). Meta-discourse is a relatively new method of discourse analysis that refers to how writers or speakers project themselves into their works in order to connect with their audience. Meta-discourse is crucial for persuasive writing as it helps align with the expectations and standards of the audience. Understanding the link between language and context has sparked interest in this field. It emphasizes that writing and speaking go beyond conveying ideas; they are social interactions that influence how ideas are presented and understood. Meta-discourse aids communication, supports positions, enhances readability, and connects with readers (Hyland, 2000). Given these characteristics, meta-discourse markers can be used in advertising to emphasize meaning, persuade readers, and convey the advertisement's purpose, making it a valuable tool for achieving persuasive goals.

This study seeks to analyze the role meta-discourse markers play in providing persuasive impact in advertising texts. So as to demonstrate that these markers are present not only in academic writing but also in non-academic writing. Numerous prior studies on this topic pointed out the
researchers’ interest in meta-discourse study. In 2014, Shahab et al. conducted a study titled "The Pragmatic Roles of Meta-discourse Markers in the Attainment of Persuasion: A Study of an Iranian Newspaper Advertisements Headline." This study aimed to examine the persuasive function of meta-discourse markers in the headlines of the Iranian newspaper Hamshari, using Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2001)’s framework, which is rooted in the Jakobsonian communication model of advertising discourse and their framework for meta-discourse functions in English advertising. The study's findings suggest that while textual meta-discourse aids in interpreting headlines within the constraints of genre and epistemology, interpersonal meta-discourse strikes a balance between informing and convincing readers. Additionally, the study identifies various meta-discourse strategies employed by advertisers to persuade potential customers, including person markers, hedges, emphatics, endophoric markers, and evidence.

In 2023, Lai, X. published a study titled "A Study of Interactional Metadiscourse and Its Persuasive Function in Advertising Discourse." This research investigated the use of interactional metadiscourse within Cosmopolitan's 2022 content and its role in persuasion. The study analyzed 50 advertisements using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The results revealed that attitude markers and engagement markers were the most commonly used metadiscourse elements, emphasizing their effectiveness in persuading consumers. The study concluded that interactional metadiscourse effectively fulfills its persuasive role, enhancing the effectiveness of advertisements.

In contrast to prior studies, this research delves into the role of meta-discourse markers in emphasizing persuasive language within digital advertising. Thus, it suggests that linguistic elements can sway readers and enhance communication in both spoken and written forms. This study is poised to offer valuable insights to English learners regarding the significance and function of meta-discourse in written texts. Additionally, it aims to furnish advertising content creators with guidance on leveraging linguistic features to enhance written communication.

**METHOD**
This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine meta-discourse markers in online advertising and their persuasive impact. The research gathers data from digital advertisements on websites featuring beauty products and luxury cars, targeting both male and female consumers. Utilizing Hyland's (2005) models, the research data contains expressions with meta-discourse markers, particularly interactive and interactional meta-discourse, to investigate their role in influencing readers to engage with and purchase these products.

The data collection process involves multiple steps. First, data is gathered from websites featuring digital ads for high-demand products aimed at a diverse audience. Next, a detailed analysis of digital ad expressions is conducted to identify the use of meta-discourse markers within their text and context, following Hyland's (2005) meta-discourse model, specifically interactive and interactional meta-discourse. Lastly, the data is categorized into interactive and interactional meta-discourse groups.

Data analysis, the subsequent stage following data collection, comprises various steps. Initially, it involves identifying and scrutinizing the meta-discourse markers within digital
advertising. These markers are then categorized into Hyland's (2005) interactive and interactional meta-discourse categories. The subsequent phase involves delving into the meaning of these metadiscourse markers within the text, and discerning their persuasive role in digital marketing. Lastly, the results of the data analysis are presented, highlighting interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in advertisements and their persuasive functions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings
Metadiscourse in digital advertising involves linguistic techniques to engage and persuade audiences across various digital content types. It fosters trust, guides, and enhances communication. This study examined online advertisements for cosmetic products and luxury cars, using Hyland's (2005) model. The identification and data collection revealed that among the analyzed advertisements, only one type of interactive metadiscourse—transition markers—was identified. In contrast, the usage of interactional metadiscourse was more varied, comprising four subcategories: attitude markers, self-mention, engagement markers, and boosters.

Interactive Metadiscourse
In contrast to interactional metadiscourse, transition markers stand out as the least frequently employed category in research data. These markers in advertising are primarily designed to improve message delivery, ensuring a smooth narrative flow, sustained viewer engagement, efficient information conveyance, emotional impact, and adaptability to different media platforms and formats, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of advertising campaigns.

Transition Markers
The following empirical findings pertain to the use of transition markers in digital advertising.

Text 1:
"GO EASY WITH THE FOUNDATION: I believe using less makeup is best on mature skin, so I recommend focusing on the areas where you truly need the coverage and avoiding expression lines. Try using a lighter formula foundation and then building coverage where needed, or try using a concealer rather than 'blanketing' the skin and creating a blank canvas. Lean into smarter formulations and use less."

The provided text is sourced from a website featuring advertisements for beauty makeup. Within the context of this advertisement, there is a discernible use of transition markers, including so, and then, or, and rather than. Notably, the initial transition marker employed is so, as demonstrated in the clause: “so I recommend focusing on the areas where you truly need the coverage.”

In this dataset, the transition marker "so" serves to introduce recommendations and logical consequences, highlighting the importance of focusing on specific areas needing attention. This technique guides the reader's focus and emphasizes the product's significance in achieving desired
beauty results. The use of "so" establishes a causal link between belief and recommendation, providing a strong reason, facilitating clear thinking, maintaining conciseness, and enhancing coherence. This strategic use of "so" effectively enhances the statement's persuasiveness by offering a logical and compelling justification for the advice. In summary, the intentional use of the transition marker "so" strengthens the persuasive impact of the sentence by emphasizing causality, reinforcing rationale, ensuring a seamless flow of ideas, and enhancing clarity and coherence.

The next transition marker is "and then" in the sentence "Try using a lighter formula foundation and then building coverage where needed". It plays a persuasive role by structuring the recommended actions into a clear sequence. This sequencing emphasizes the logical progression from using a lighter foundation to selectively building coverage, making the process easy to follow and comprehend. Additionally, it underscores the importance of addressing coverage only where necessary, promoting a more nuanced and conservative approach to makeup application, which can be convincing for individuals seeking makeup advice.

The transition marker "and then" serves a persuasive role by instilling a sense of order and responsibility. It presents steps sequentially, implying a duty for the reader or listener to follow the suggested course of action. This is persuasive as it aligns with the desire for structure and organization, increasing the likelihood of adopting the recommended makeup application method as a responsible and effective approach. In summary, "and then" in this context fulfills various persuasive functions, offering a clear sequence of actions and fostering a sense of order and responsibility, enhancing the perception of an organized and accountable makeup application process, ultimately increasing the likelihood of reader or listener adoption.

In the provided excerpt, the next transition markers "or" and "rather than" serve a distinct and persuasive function within the clause "or try using a concealer rather than 'blanketing' the skin and creating a blank canvas." These transition markers are integral components of persuasive discourse, contributing to the effectiveness of the recommendation presented.

The transition marker "or" provides readers with a choice, empowering them to make a decision between two options: using concealer or employing the 'blanketing' technique on their skin. This choice engages readers, encouraging them to consider which option aligns with their goals and preferences. "Or" functions persuasively by prompting readers to evaluate the presented alternatives critically. On the other hand, the transition marker "rather than" creates a sharp contrast between the two options, emphasizing the superiority of using concealer over 'blanketing' the skin. This contrast highlights the benefits of opting for concealer, making it the more attractive choice. "Rather than" guides readers toward a favorable course of action, effectively persuading them to choose the recommended approach for better results in skin preparation.

In conclusion, the transition markers "or" and "rather than" serve persuasive purposes within the clause, offering the reader a choice while emphasizing the superiority of one option over another. This persuasive language technique effectively guides the reader towards considering and potentially adopting the suggested approach of using a concealer for improved outcomes in skin preparation.
Text 2:
"EXFOLIATING IS THE KEY TO SMOOTH APPLICATION: Many women avoid exfoliating and end up looking like they’re wearing heavy makeup, because even the lightest application grabs onto dry patches (aka dead skin)."

In the provided text, there are two transition markers, specifically "and" and "because." Transition markers, including conjunctions like "and" and "because," hold significant persuasive influence within the given advertisement context. From a refined and scholarly perspective, these linguistic devices play an essential role in improving both the coherence and persuasiveness of the conveyed message. The conjunction "and," as a coordinating element, effectively links the action of avoiding exfoliation to the consequent result of achieving a complexion resembling heavy makeup. This connection underscores the importance of exfoliation as a practical solution to the perceived cosmetic concern.

Conversely, the subordinating conjunction "because" clarifies the reason behind the initial claim, specifically stating that even delicate makeup adheres well to dry, often called 'dead skin.' This clarification reinforces the initial statement and bolsters the credibility of the persuasive argument. In essence, these transitional markers collectively establish a persuasive cause-and-effect relationship between actions and outcomes, strengthening the discourse and encouraging the audience to adopt the suggested course of action: incorporating exfoliation practices to improve the appearance of heavy makeup.

Text 3:
"DITCH HEAVY FOUNDATION IN FAVOR OF A GOOD CONCEALER: If you have discoloration or broken capillaries, the right type of concealer coverage, just where needed, will help not only in lasting throughout the day but also will prevent you from having to apply a heavy foundation all over."

Within the analyzed data, the transition marker "not only... but also" prominently stands out as a linguistic device in advertising discourse. Transition markers such as this one hold significant persuasive influence in advertising by employing parallelism to spotlight dual benefits associated with a product or service. In the featured advertisement, this specific phrase emphasizes two distinct advantages. It first underscores the concealer's capacity for long-lasting coverage, suggesting a durable and effective performance feature that enhances user convenience. Additionally, it highlights the concealer's ability to eliminate the necessity for heavy foundation application, catering to individuals seeking a more streamlined and efficient makeup routine.

This linguistic strategy, when used judiciously, enhances the product's appeal by articulating its multifaceted utility, thereby increasing its persuasive effectiveness in the eyes of potential consumers. Consequently, it contributes to the overall rhetorical success of the advertisement.

Interactional Metadiscourse
In the context of this research, four distinct categories of interactional metadiscourse have been identified within digital advertising. These categories encompass attitude markers, self-mention, engagement markers, and boosters. This dataset serves to demonstrate the presence and expression of these three distinct interactional markers.

**Text 1:**
"GO EASY WITH THE FOUNDATION: *I believe* using less makeup is best on mature skin, so *I recommend* focusing on the areas where *you truly need* the coverage and avoiding expression lines. Try using a lighter formula foundation and then building coverage where needed, or try using a concealer rather than 'blanketing' the skin and creating a blank canvas. Lean into smarter formulations and use less."

In the provided data, three distinct types of interactional markers are evident: the use of "*I believe*" as an attitude marker, self-mention with "*I*," and the engagement marker "*You truly need.*" The use of "*I believe*" in the advertisement text serves as a persuasive tool. It establishes the speaker's credibility and fosters trust in the discourse. This linguistic technique positions the speaker as an authoritative figure in skincare and makeup, enhancing their persuasive impact. It also softens the assertiveness of the message, making it more accommodating. This is particularly effective in persuasive communication, where imposing viewpoints can lead to resistance. Additionally, "*I believe*" encourages critical engagement with the information, highlighting its subjectivity and emphasizing the personalized nature of skincare and makeup choices. In summary, this linguistic device significantly boosts the advertisement's persuasiveness by enhancing the speaker's credibility, building trust, and promoting a more consumer-centric approach to skincare and makeup recommendations.

Another form of interactional metadiscourse in the text is the use of self-mention, specifically the pronoun "*I*." In the realm of persuasive advertising, strategically including "*I*" serves several purposes. Firstly, it establishes the speaker as an authority, reinforcing their credibility by stating "*I believe.*" Secondly, it adds a personal touch, creating a connection with the audience and making the advice more tailored. Additionally, it provides concrete recommendations with phrases like "*I recommend,*" prompting readers to pay attention to the advice. The use of "*I*" humanizes the discourse, creating a relatable and approachable tone that resonates effectively, especially in beauty and skincare discussions. Through self-mention, the speaker implies a foundation of practical knowledge, further enhancing the persuasiveness of their recommendations. Ultimately, the strategic use of "*I*" motivates action through actionable steps, fostering a compelling and influential discourse that encourages the audience to consider the skincare and makeup guidance provided.

Furthermore, the engagement marker "*You truly need*" in the advertisement text plays a persuasive role. It underscores the critical nature of the recommendations, builds trust with the reader, tailors the advice to individual needs, and actively engages the audience in decision-making. This strategic language usage aims to persuade the reader to embrace the suggested makeup
approach for mature skin, making it more compelling and relevant to their unique needs and concerns.

Text 2:

“DON'T BE AFRAID OF A LITTLE SHINE: I like to add a little bit of a sheen on more mature skin. It helps to keep your complexion looking youthful.”

In the provided data, two distinct forms of interactional metadiscourse are evident through the use of the attitude marker "I like to" and the engagement marker "your complexion." The use of "I like to" in the advertisement text serves a persuasive purpose by introducing a sense of personal endorsement and relatability. Beginning a statement with "I like to" implies a genuine personal experience with the product, enhancing its appeal to potential customers. This relatable approach suggests that adding a sheen to mature skin is an easy and enjoyable practice that anyone can incorporate into their routine. Furthermore, it establishes a positive association by linking the action to the desirable outcome of maintaining a youthful complexion. Essentially, "I like to" adds a personal dimension and bolsters the persuasive appeal of the message by portraying the action as enjoyable and beneficial.

Furthermore, the use of "your complexion" in the text establishes a direct and personalized connection with the reader, fostering a sense of ownership. It implies that the reader already possesses the mentioned complexion and suggests that the product can help them achieve more youthful-looking skin. This phrase also addresses 'more mature skin,' making it relevant to a specific demographic and enhancing its persuasive impact.

Text 3:

“AVOID SPARKLY SHADOWS—OPT FOR SHIMMER INSTEAD: For the eyes I always hear my older clients say they want to stay clear of anything with a shimmer or sparkle in it. While I agree with the sparkle part, a little bit of shimmer can be nice on the lid. Just avoid the brow bone area.”

In this advertisement, the use of "I agree" as an attitude marker serves a persuasive purpose. It begins by establishing trust with the reader, acknowledging their concerns about shimmer and sparkle in products. Then, it introduces a counterpoint, suggesting that a subtle shimmer on the eyelids can be appealing. This approach aims to shift the reader's perception positively towards the promoted product. The advertisement closes with a practical tip, advising against using the product on the brow bone area, further enhancing its persuasive effect by offering specific usage guidance. In summary, the use of "I agree" contributes to a persuasive discourse that connects with the audience, validates their concerns, and encourages a favorable view of the product.

Text 4:
“Lexus LC: Easily one of the best luxury sports cars money can buy, the Lexus LC touts a downright striking, unibody design. Seriously, this top sports car is like a swift shark of welded steel and aluminum on wheels. Naturally, the interior is no less elegant, with supremely comfortable seats and all sorts of sophisticated details. Powering the ride is a 471 hp 5.0-litre V8 engine, joined by a 10-speed electronically controlled Direct-Shift transmission with magnesium paddle shifters. If you can afford it, you should buy it.”

The provided text, originating from a website featuring luxury car advertisements, showcases a noteworthy use of interactional metadiscourse. This is exemplified through the utilization of the booster word "seriously" and the engagement marker "you" within the context of the Lexus LC luxury sports car promotion.

The word "seriously" in the text plays a persuasive role by emphasizing and validating the exceptional attributes of the Lexus LC luxury sports car. It captures immediate attention and conveys unwavering certainty, enhancing the credibility of the information presented. Additionally, it intensifies the car's description as a "swift shark of welded steel and aluminum on wheels," making it even more impressive. Towards the end, "seriously" is used once more to issue a compelling call to action, emphasizing the significance of the decision to purchase this remarkable vehicle. This linguistic strategy, delivered in a conversational yet persuasive tone, engages the reader effectively, elevating the desirability and exclusivity of the Lexus LC luxury sports car.

Utilizing the engagement marker "you" in the text serves a persuasive purpose by creating a personal connection with the reader and implying membership in an exclusive Lexus LC owners' community, fostering a sense of prestige. The statement, "If you can afford it, you should buy it," directly addresses the reader and encourages them to consider owning a Lexus LC, amplifying the advertisement's persuasive appeal. In summary, the use of "you" effectively engages the reader, establishing a compelling connection to the product, and promoting the desire to own a Lexus LC.

Discussion

Metadiscourse markers are instrumental in digital advertising, serving multifaceted purposes. They captivate the audience's attention with engaging phrases, provide clarity and transparency in message delivery, enhance persuasiveness through credibility-building language, guide the audience through the content, introduce calls to action, and establish the brand's voice. Additionally, these markers influence emotional responses, manage expectations, highlight key information, and aid in navigation. Ultimately, they play an essential role in shaping the audience's perception and engagement with digital advertisements, contributing to the campaign's overall effectiveness.

The findings of this study indicate a singular category of interactive metadiscourse, namely transition markers, present in both beauty product and luxury car advertisements, encompassing the use of conjunctions to link words and sentences. Conversely, within the interpersonal metadiscourse realm, four distinct categories emerge in these advertisements: attitude markers, self-mention, engagement markers, and boosters. These components serve to convey the
advertiser's subjective stance, reference the advertiser within the discourse, and establish interaction with the audience, respectively. This analysis highlights the intricate use of metadiscourse elements in these advertisements, showcasing how interactive and interpersonal metadiscourse contribute to their communicative strategies.

Transition markers, a type of interactive metadiscourse, are potent tools in the promotion of beauty products and luxury cars. These linguistic devices, including "so," "then," "or," "rather than," "because," and "not only... but also," are essential in structuring and enhancing the persuasiveness of advertising messages. "So" and "then" guide the audience through information sequences, "or" and "rather than" emphasize product superiority by presenting choices, "because" justifies the product's effectiveness, and "not only... but also" highlights dual benefits or features. Strategic use of these markers helps shape the message's structure, establish logical connections, and influence audience perception, driving consumer consideration and choice. This is corroborated by Liu and Zhang's 2021 research, which underscores the essential role of transition markers in creating cohesion and coherence in persuasive communication. Without these markers, the effectiveness of any persuasive message can be significantly compromised.

In the realm of interactional metadiscourse in beauty product and luxury car advertisements, attitude markers, like phrases such as "I believe," "I like to," and "I agree," play a vital role. They boost the persuasiveness of these ads by establishing the advertiser's credibility, aligning with the audience's preferences, and fostering a sense of connection with consumers. By shaping consumer beliefs and showing unwavering conviction in the product's quality, these markers encourage the adoption of corresponding viewpoints. Lai's (2023) research underscores the significance of attitude markers, indicating that advertisers prioritize consumer engagement, seeing them as effective tools for persuasion. In summary, attitude markers enhance the persuasive impact of ads, forging a deeper connection with the audience and influencing consumer interest and actions.

Moreover, the use of self-mention, such as the pronoun "I," serves as a powerful tool in beauty products and luxury car advertising. It creates a personal connection, building trust with the audience. "I" implies authenticity and sincerity, linking the benefits to real experiences. This also facilitates testimonials, bolstering social proof and influencing potential buyers. Lai (2023) suggests that self-mentions aim to bridge the gap with consumers. They paint relatable scenarios, encouraging consumers to see themselves using the product or car, conveying ownership and commitment. This enhances product quality and satisfaction, ultimately strengthening the persuasive impact of the advertising message.

Furthermore, engagement markers, such as phrases like "You truly need," "your complexion," and "you can afford," play a crucial role in digital advertising. These linguistic tools speak directly to the audience, personalize messages, and align with consumer needs, presenting the product as a solution. Phrases like "you can afford" boost the audience's confidence, serving as effective calls to action that encourage specific actions. Lai's (2023) research emphasizes the significance of these markers, indicating their prevalence in advertising. This suggests that advertisers strategically use them to guide and inspire consumer engagement with the product. In summary, engagement markers connect with consumers on a personal level, creating a direct link
between the product and their desires, enhancing the persuasive impact of advertising, and motivating consumer action.

Lastly, the use of the booster word was discovered in a single advertisement, notably in a luxury car promotion. The use of the word "seriously" as a boost in the line "Seriously, this top sports car is like a swift shark of precision-crafted steel and aluminum on wheels" is an effective luxury car advertising approach. Its job includes emphasizing the message's importance, capturing the reader's attention, and creating an air of sincerity. These words create an engaging, conversational tone, which boosts the endorsement's credibility and trustworthiness. This aligns with the conclusions drawn in Lai's (2023) research, which assert that in advertising discourse, boosters are regularly employed to bolster the certainty surrounding the product's functionalities. Simultaneously, they develop an image of exclusivity, portraying the luxury car as truly distinctive and unique, appealing to consumers' intrinsic demand for distinction.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of interactive and interactional metadiscourse in beauty products and luxury car advertisements reveals the profound influence of linguistic elements in shaping persuasive communication strategies. Transition markers form the structural backbone of these ads, guiding audiences, enhancing message coherence, and fostering engagement. Attitude markers add a personal touch, building credibility and relatability. Engagement markers directly engage the audience, framing the product as a solution and creating a sense of urgency. Self-mention enhances credibility and connection, while booster words intensify the impact and convey authenticity. Together, these metadiscourse elements are potent tools for crafting persuasive messages in the competitive world of beauty product and luxury car advertising, influencing consumer perceptions and choices.

REFERENCE:


