Metadiscourse and Persuasion in Expert-Written Online Product Reviews

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ABSTRACT

As online shopping becomes more widespread, consumers often rely on expert reviews to sift through countless product options and make smart purchasing decisions. Expert-written reviews, particularly those from reputable sources like Wirecutter, are viewed as more authoritative and trustworthy compared to user-generated reviews, making them a significant genre for analysis. This corpus-based study investigates the use of metadiscourse in expert-written online product reviews from The New York Times' Wirecutter, focusing on how reviewers construct persuasive appeals through credibility (ethos), emotion (pathos), and rational (logos). Employing Hyland's (2005a) Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse, the analysis examines interactive markers (transitions, code glosses, endophoric markers, evidentials, frame markers) and interactional markers (self-mentions, attitude markers, hedges, boosters, engagement markers). The findings reveal a predominance of interactional metadiscourse, with self-mentions occurring most frequently, followed by engagement markers, attitude markers, hedges, and boosters. Among interactive markers, transitions were most common, followed by code glosses, evidentials, frame markers, and endophoric markers. This distribution highlights the dual focus of expert reviewers: establishing a credible authorial presence through self-mentions and ensuring coherence through transitions. The strategic use of self-mentions not only enhances credibility (ethos) but also fosters a sense of connection with readers, projecting the reviewers as authoritative yet relatable voices. Transitions aid in comparing products and structuring evaluations, ensuring clarity and rational appeal (logos). These findings shed light on the rhetorical strategies in expert reviews, contributing to linguistic and metadiscourse analysis. This study also offers practical guidance for crafting persuasive digital content, highlighting how metadiscourse supports effective persuasion.

Keywords: Corpus-based; interactive metadiscourse; interactional metadiscourse; persuasion; expert-written online product reviews

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INTRODUCTION

Reviews serve as a critical genre for evaluating products, services, and even art, offering insights into their strengths and weaknesses in areas such as quality and pricing (Robinson et al., 2021). Writing a review blends research and personal perspective, balancing accuracy with an informal tone to engage readers and establish trust (FAQ: What Are the Types of Media Writing? (And Who Uses Them), 2024). With the rise of digital communication, online reviews have emerged as a dominant form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), playing a pivotal role in shaping consumer decisions (Crowston & Williams, 1997; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Vásquez, 2014).

Li et al. (2013) identified two primary types of online reviews: expert-written reviews, which rely on professional testing (Chen & Xie, 2008; Situmeang et al., 2014), and consumer reviews, valued for their authentic, personal insights into established products (Bae & Lee, 2011; Duke, 2023). While online product reviews are widely studied in marketing, economics, and tourism (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Vásquez, 2014; Shengli & Fan, 2019), their linguistic and discourse aspects remain underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by examining metadiscourse and persuasive strategies in expert-written online product reviews.

Hyland (2005a) defines 'metadiscourse', a term introduced by Zellig Harris in 1959, as language used to guide a reader's interpretation of a text. It involves commentary on ongoing discourse, reflecting information exchange and the communicator's attitudes and assumptions (Hyland, 2005a; Ädel, 2006). Hyland's interpersonal metadiscourse model, widely adopted for its comprehensiveness (Mengyu, 2019; Erarslan, 2021), categorises metadiscourse into interactive (transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, code glosses, and evidentials) and interactional devices (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions).

Additionally, Hyland (2005a) shows that metadiscourse aligns with Aristotle's principles of persuasion (rhetoric): (logos) through logical connections, (ethos) by establishing authorial credibility, and (pathos) by engaging the audience. His analysis of scientific and business texts reveals that both interactive and interactional markers can convey ethos, interactive markers support logos, and interactional markers evoke pathos.

This study adopts Hyland's interpersonal model as a theoretical framework to investigate how expert reviewers on Wirecutter use metadiscourse to construct persuasive appeals. By classifying markers as interactive and interactional, the analysis demonstrates how each type of marker highlights its rhetorical function. This model offers a structured lens to understand how metadiscourse organises content, fosters reader engagement, and enhances persuasion in expert reviews.

Metadiscourse, extensively studied in academic and business writings, is also key in professional communication (Hyland et al., 2021). In magazine advertising, it helps structure discourse, engage audiences, and attract consumer interest, making it vital for persuasion (Al-Subhi, 2022). Advertisements aim to inform and persuade large audiences, often in collaboration with copywriters (Sholikha, 2019). Similarly, with their promotional nature, online product reviews provide opportunities for analysing interpersonal metadiscourse and are recognised for their persuasive influence on consumer decisions (Hong et al., 2020).

This study aims to explore the language and discourse used in online product reviews written by expert reviewers, focusing on interpersonal metadiscourse and persuasion (rhetoric). While it primarily contributes to metadiscourse research, the findings may hold potential relevance for other promotional discourses and expert-written texts, where persuasive language plays a key role in shaping audience perception and decisions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How are interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers distributed in expert-written online product reviews on Wirecutter?
2. How do expert reviewers on Wirecutter employ metadiscourse markers to construct persuasive appeals based on ethos, pathos, and logos?

These questions support a dual focus: comparing the use of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in expert-written online product reviews on Wirecutter, and examining how these markers are employed to build rhetorical appeals that enhance the persuasiveness of these reviews.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ONLINE PRODUCT REVIEWS

Online product reviews have been extensively studied across fields like marketing, economics, and computer science (Vásquez, 2014). Researchers have examined various aspects, such as review characteristics (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010), the impact of review attributes on market outcomes (Wang et al., 2021), and their influence on sales and consumer behaviour (Guo et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2015). Studies have also explored how reviews affect consumer trust, intentions, and attitudes (Elwalda et al., 2016; Lee & Ro, 2016). However, the linguistic aspects of online reviews remain underexplored, with much of the focus on marketing strategies and consumer behaviour, leaving the language style of reviews largely unaddressed (Wang & Karimi, 2017; Liu et al., 2020).

Vásquez (2014) explores the concept of 'reader addressivity', which refers to the imagined interaction between the reader and writer in online reviews. Her research highlights how writers use discursive resources, such as interactive metadiscourse, to create a conversational tone, directing attention to new topics with phrases like 'oh' or 'don't even get me started'. She also touches on interactional metadiscourse, which connects the reviewer and reader, as in 'let me tell you'. While this research offers valuable insights, further exploration is needed to better understand interactive and interactional metadiscourse use in online product reviews.

Online product reviews, categorised into expert and consumer reviews, significantly impact purchasing decisions (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Chen et al., 2022). While expert reviews typically rely on objective methods like lab testing (Chen & Xie, 2005), consumer reviews are based on personal experiences. Recent studies, such as Guo et al. (2022), suggest expert reviews have a greater influence on purchase decisions, especially when positive. However, most studies focus on behavioural outcomes, leaving linguistic aspects underexplored. Hong et al. (2020) recommend deeper interdisciplinary inquiry into the persuasive mechanisms of online reviews, particularly from a linguistic standpoint. In response, this study will analyse expert reviews through a linguistic lens, focusing on interpersonal metadiscourse to understand how language shapes persuasion.

METADISCOURSE AND RHETORIC (PERSUASION)

Hyland (1998) examined how metadiscourse enhances persuasion in business writing, leading to further exploration of its role in genres such as policy documents, emails, and literary texts. Ho's (2016) analysis of Hong Kong government education policy documents identified a moderate use of interactive markers and interactional markers. The study revealed that ethos and pathos were achieved through interactional markers such as hedges, engagement markers, and self-mentions, while logos relied on interactive markers like transitions, endophoric markers, and code glosses.

Ho's (2018) study on workplace emails found that professionals favoured interactional metadiscourse, including self-mentions, hedges, and boosters, which appeared less prominently in genres such as CEO letters and academic articles. Metadiscourse was shown to enhance persuasion through ethos, pathos, and logos, with 'I' being the most frequent self-mention in the education, IT, and business sectors. AlJazrawi and AlJazrawi (2021) analysed metadiscourse in the literary criticism of T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Stanley Fish, revealing that interactive markers reinforced logical appeals, while interactional markers established credibility and fostered emotional connections.

Previous studies have highlighted the persuasive role of metadiscourse across a range of genres, yet there remains a noticeable gap in research focusing on its use within expert-written online product reviews. In particular, the linguistic mechanisms through which expert reviewers construct persuasive appeals are still underexplored. This is especially true for Wirecutter, a product review platform known for its rigorous testing, editorial independence, and detailed recommendations. Despite its influence on consumer decision-making, little is known about the rhetorical strategies embedded in its expert-written reviews.

This study addresses this gap by examining how Wirecutter reviewers use interpersonal metadiscourse to persuade readers. Adopting a corpus-based approach, the study quantitatively analyses and compares the use of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers. It also qualitatively investigates how these markers help reviewers construct persuasive appeals based on ethos, pathos, and logos. By focusing on a trusted and influential source like Wirecutter, this research offers new insights into expert persuasive communication within the online review landscape.

METHOD

THE CORPUS

This study adopted a corpus-based approach combining quantitative and qualitative analyses. The corpus comprises 99 expert-written online product reviews (hereafter expert reviews), totalling 365,981 word tokens. These reviews were sourced from The New York Times' Wirecutter, a well-regarded product recommendation platform known for its in-depth and meticulously researched reviews of a wide range of consumer goods. Its strong credibility and a loyal monthly readership of 12 million as of 2021 (Haggin, 2021), made it an ideal data source, ensuring authenticity and reliability.

Stratified random sampling method was employed, commonly used in quantitative research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) and metadiscourse studies (e.g., Cao & Hu, 2014; Kim & Lim, 2013; Sun, 2024). The reviews were drawn from three prominent product categories (strata)- Fashion, Mobile and Tech Devices, and Kitchen and Dining- chosen due to their prominence in

Forbes Advisor's 2024 list of profitable dropshipping products and their growing market value (Baluch, 2024).

The selected expert reviews, published between early 2023 and November 2024, reflects recent market trends and up-to-date expert evaluations of popular consumer products. Wirecutter's practice of regularly updating its reviews based on product availability and market conditions further guarantees the relevance of the selected data. In constructing the corpus, care was taken to balance data sufficiency with practical considerations such as software performance and human analytical capacity (Sinclair, 1991; Sinclair, 1992). Corpora ranging from 10,000 to several hundred thousand words are especially valuable for Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) research (Bowker & Pearson, 1990 as cited in Bianchi, 2012). Accordingly, the final corpus size meets established benchmarks while remaining manageable for analysis using the LancsBox X corpus analysis software. TABLE 1 below presents the data of the study.

TABLE 1. Description of the analysed data

Product Category	Number of Reviews	Number of Words
Fashion	33	119,266
Mobile and Tech Devices	33	118,182
Kitchen and Dining	33	128,533
Total	**99**	**365,981**

Following Carradini and Swarts (2023), we constructed a balanced and diverse corpus by selecting 33 expert reviews evenly distributed across three major product categories: Fashion, Mobile and Tech Devices, and Kitchen and Dining. This sampling strategy enhances the dataset's validity and facilitates efficient editing and annotation processes. The corpus comprises 365,981 words, distributed relatively evenly across the categories: Fashion (119,266 words), Mobile and Tech Devices (118,182 words), and Kitchen and Dining (128,533 words). This design ensures that the corpus authentically represents the linguistic and rhetorical characteristics of expert-written reviews (Egbert et al., 2022).

In line with Carradini and Swarts (2023) and the practicality considerations of corpus analysis, we analysed interpersonal metadiscourse across the entire dataset as a unified whole. This holistic approach revealed overarching trends and patterns of metadiscourse markers that transcend individual product categories. This method enables the development of generalisable insights into the use of interpersonal metadiscourse in expert-written reviews by streamlining the analytical process and minimising redundancy. As a result, the findings are robust and broadly applicable across diverse contexts, reducing the risk of overgeneralisation from a single domain.

DATA ANALYSIS

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to examine interpersonal metadiscourse markers in expert reviews across three major product categories, with LancsBox X (version 3.0.0) (Brezina & Platt, 2023) serving as the primary corpus tool for analysis.

The KWIC (Key Word in Context) function was used to identify and quantify interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers, as outlined by Hyland (2005a, 2005b). Each concordance line was manually inspected twice for accuracy. Frequencies were normalised to per 10,000 words, with a context size of 10 tokens on each side for interpretation. To prevent inflated counts from

grammatical items, coordinating conjunctions like 'and' and 'or' were excluded from transition markers, following Hyland and Jiang (2018) and Lee and Hong (2024). Intra-sentential connectors such as 'because', 'although', and 'since' were also omitted, as they are considered syntactic rather than metadiscursive (Cao & Hu, 2014).

For the qualitative analysis, the KWIC tool and manual inspection were used to examine how metadiscourse markers functioned within broader discourse contexts, ensuring accurate interpretation of their rhetorical roles. The GraphColl function further identified frequent collocates, revealing how markers co-occur with other lexical items to enhance persuasion. This dual approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how expert reviewers strategically use interpersonal metadiscourse to achieve persuasive goals in their reviews.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings on the distribution and rhetorical functions of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in expert reviews on Wirecutter. Guided by the two research questions, the analysis explores the quantitative patterns and the persuasive strategies employed by expert reviewers through metadiscourse, with reference to the rhetorical appeals. As noted earlier, a total of 99 expert reviews were analysed, with 33 reviews from each product category: Fashion (119,266 words), Mobile and Tech Devices (118,182 words), and Kitchen and Dining (128,533 words), making a combined total of 365,981 words (see Table 1 above). The analysis revealed that the corpus contains a total of 40,363 interpersonal metadiscourse markers, as shown in TABLE 2 below.

TABLE 2. Frequency and percentage of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the corpus

Metadiscourse Markers	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency per 10,000 words	Percentage
Interactive	7,575	206.97	18.77%
Interactional	32,788	895.90	81.23%
Total	**40,363**	**1102.87**	**100%**

It is evident that in the corpus of 365,981 words, interpersonal metadiscourse markers occurred 40,363 times, forming 11.03%. This reveals that in every 100 words of the corpus, 11 words are employed as metadiscourse markers, and in every 10,000 words, 1102 words have metadiscursive functions. As for the distribution of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in the analysed texts, the analysis showed that interactional markers were relied on more heavily with 32, 788 times (81.23%) when compared to interactive markers, which only occurred 7,575 times (18.77%).

INTERACTIVE METADISCOURSE MARKERS

As shown in TABLE 2, interactive markers appear 7,575 times. These occurrences are unevenly distributed among five categories of interactive markers: transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, code glosses, and evidentials, as detailed in
TABLE *3*.

TABLE 3. Frequency and percentage of interactive metadiscourse

Categories	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency per 10,000 words	Percentage
Transitions	4909	134.13	64.81%
Code Glosses	1289	35.22	17.02%
Evidentials	556	15.19	7.33%
Frame Markers	552	15.08	7.29%
Endophoric Markers	269	7.35	3.55%
Total	**7575**	**206.97**	**100%**

Transitions are the most frequently used interactive markers, appearing 4,909 times in the corpus (64.81% of all interactive markers) and 134 times per 10,000 words in the corpus. Previous studies across various text types consistently identify transitions as the most common metadiscourse markers (AlJazrawi & AlJazrawi, 2021; Lee & Hong, 2024). This prominence can be attributed to the functional nature of transitions. According to Cao and Hu (2014), transitions facilitate sentence flow, guide readers through ideas, and clarify connections.

Based on Cao and Hu's (2014) classification, transitions are categorised into additive, comparative, and inferential categories. Our analysis shows comparative transitions are the most frequent, typically realised through 'but'. Additive transitions are dominated by 'also', while 'of course' is frequently used as an inferential transition.

The following are the relevant examples:

1. *Companies like to claim their nonstick surfaces are durable against metal, **but** that's not the case for longevity.*
2. *The company **also** stresses that the servers were built by Apple, and that there are some transparency tools to validate these claims.*
3. ***Of course**, you can deal with the speaker limitation by adding a portable Bluetooth speaker to get more volume.*

The examples above show that comparative transition 'but' explicitly marks a contrast or opposition between two ideas, guiding the reader through the argument. 'Also' as an additive transition adds information cohesively while reinforcing logical connections within the text. The inferential transition 'of course' signals shared knowledge and implies the suggestion is logical and expected.

From a rhetorical perspective, transitions are pivotal in enhancing rational appeals (logos) (Hyland, 2005a). In this context, expert reviews play a crucial role in structuring arguments and clarifying the message, thereby increasing the overall persuasiveness of the discourse. This is particularly evident in the use of transitions such as 'also', 'but', and 'of course', which guide readers through the reviewers' reasoning with precision and clarity. These markers not only create seamless connections between individual points but also highlight logical relationships, enabling readers to understand how various ideas contribute to the overall evaluation. By providing coherence and reinforcing the logical flow of arguments, transitions significantly strengthen the persuasive power of expert-written reviews, ensuring that readers can follow and trust the reasoning presented.

Code glosses are the second most frequently used type of interactive marker, appearing 1,289 times in the data and accounting for 17.02% of all interactive markers. According to Hyland (2005a), writers employ code glosses to ensure readers fully understand their points by rephrasing,

explaining, or providing additional details. Similar to transitions, code glosses serve rhetorical functions within a text. Specifically, they help persuade readers through rational appeals (logos) by clarifying and emphasising the significance of particular information, often through by expanding an item to ensure the intended meaning is understood (Hyland, 2005a).

Based on Hyland's (2007) classification of code glosses, as outlined by Nausa (2019), our analysis found that code glosses in the exemplification category, such as *like* and *such as*, were the most frequently used. The second most frequently used code glosses came from the reformulation category, particularly the subtype involving explanations, exemplified by the use of *called* and *specifically*.

The following examples are drawn from the data:

4. ***Like*** *all Wirecutter journalists, I review and test products with complete editorial independence.*
5. *Some are due to human error, while others are due to subpar manufacturing,* ***such as*** *those aforementioned stand issues, which could make a fryer prone to tipping over.*
6. *Their coating is not actually ceramic but instead a ceramic-like coating* ***called*** *sol-gel (short for "solution-gel").*
7. *In wood boards* ***specifically****, we also look for the following: Domestic wood (mostly): All of the woodworking experts we spoke to recommend sticking to domestic woods like maple, walnut, or cherry, because the US has stricter forestry laws and regulations than many countries overseas. These woods are much more expensive than most non-domestic.*

Exemplification code glosses 'like' and 'such as' provide specific instances of a general category. In this context, 'like' provides an example or clarification of the category the writer belongs to (Wirecutter journalists), making the statement more specific, while 'such as' clarifies broader categories, such as manufacturing problems, by specifying relevant examples.

Reformulation code glosses 'called' and 'specifically' add details to enhance understanding. 'Called' explains terms like "ceramic-like coating", while 'specifically' highlights a focused subset (wood boards) within a broader category, drawing readers' attention to specific contexts.

Therefore, it is evident that these markers are crucial in enhancing rational appeals (logos) by facilitating the reader's comprehension of complex or technical information. Through exemplification and reformulation, code glosses not only improve textual clarity but also strengthen its persuasive impact by ensuring that readers grasp the writer's intended meaning and the importance of the details provided.

Evidentials rank third among interactive markers, occurring 556 times and accounting for 7.33% of the total. According to Thomas and Hawes (1994), as referenced in Hyland (2005a), evidentials help guide readers' understanding by attributing information to sources or supporting arguments with research, particularly in academic contexts. Ling and Elgort (2023) emphasise that evidentials enhance credibility by linking the writer to reliable sources, though readers ultimately decide the trustworthiness of these sources. Evidentials are thus effectively employed to create credibility appeals (ethos) and enhance text persuasiveness (Hyland, 2005a). From the data, the evidential 'said', categorised as an integral citation by Cao and Hu (2014), appeared most frequently.

The following example is drawn from the data:

8. *Aric A. Prather, a professor of psychiatry at the University of California San Francisco Weill Institute for Neurosciences,* **said** *that, in general, most wearable devices are capable of accurately estimating total sleep time and sleep fragmentation, but "this is less true when it comes to sleep architecture, like minutes in deep sleep for instance."*

In the example above, 'said' integrates the cited source into the text, allowing the writer to present expert evaluation directly. Rhetorically, 'said' strengthens the argument by quoting a credible authority, enhancing the argument's credibility (ethos). By citing an expert, the text becomes more persuasive, increasing the expert review's reliability and gaining the readers' trust.

Frame markers, occurring 552 times and comprising 7.29% of the total interactive markers, play a crucial role in organising arguments and guiding readers through the unfolding discourse (Hyland, 2005a; Cao & Hu, 2014; Hyland & Zao, 2020). Similar to transitions, they enhance a text's persuasiveness through rational appeals (logos). According to Cao and Hu's (2014) classification, frame markers are categorised into sequencers, labellers, goal announcers, and topic shifters. Among these, 'we recommend', a goal announcer, occurs most frequently, followed by 'then' (sequencer), 'overall' (labeller), and 'now' (topic shifter). Consider the following examples:

9. **We recommend** *using a tripod mount with your projector, as a mount makes it easier to accommodate uneven ground surfaces and precisely adjust the image height.*
10. *To test Espro's extraction-stopping claim, which is unique among the presses we tested, we brewed coffee in the P3 and poured half of it into a mug; we* **then** *let the other half stand in the press for two hours, tasting it at regular intervals.*
11. **Now** *these wearables are becoming more high-tech with each release, equipped with features like personalized workout programs and the advertised ability to monitor stress or sleep quality.*
12. **Overall,** *these sandals were pleasant to wear, mostly due to the suppleness of the leather and the fact that the ankle strap can be adjusted to your liking.*

The phrase 'we recommend' serves as a goal announcer, signalling the writer's intent to guide the reader toward specific actions or solutions. It fosters an authoritative tone while connecting with the reader's informational needs. The word 'then' functions as a sequencer, structuring the testing process and enhancing the text's coherence by clearly marking the progression of steps. 'Now' acts as a topic shifter, smoothly transitioning to the discussion of the latest advancements in wearable technology. Finally, 'overall' serves as a labeller, summarising the main points and providing the reviewer's final evaluation of the sandals.

These frame markers contribute to the rational appeal (logos) of the text by organising information, guiding the reader's attention, and reinforcing the clarity and persuasiveness of the review.

Endophoric markers are the least frequent interactive markers, occurring only 269 times and making up 3.55% of the total. These markers refer to other parts of the text, highlighting additional ideas and making them more accessible to readers. In expert reviews, the most commonly used endophoric marker is 'based on', classified as a linear reference (Cao & Hu, 2014). This marker links to the preceding text, providing context for the unfolding argument. Consider the following example from the data:

13. ***Based on*** *these tests, we can say that the Archer AX3000 Pro won't keep you waiting, even when multiple family members are using the Wi-Fi at the same time.*

Here, the reviewer uses 'based on' to reference prior test results, grounding the claim in evidence. Endophoric markers, like transitions, code glosses, and frame markers, contribute to the persuasiveness of the text through logos. In this context, 'based on' helps to establish a logical connection between the evidence and the conclusion, reinforcing the argument's validity and enhancing the overall persuasiveness of the review.

INTERACTIONAL METADISCOURSE MARKERS

As shown in Table 2, interactional markers appear 32, 788 times. These occurrences are unevenly distributed among five categories of interactive markers: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers, as detailed in TABLE 4.

TABLE 4. Frequency and percentage of interactional metadiscourse markers

Categories	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency per 10,000 words	Percentage
Self-mentions	11236	307.01	34.27%
Engagement Markers	10384	283.74	31.67%
Attitude Markers	7003	191.35	21.36%
Hedges	2085	56.97	6.36%
Boosters	2080	56.83	6.34%
Total	**32,788**	**895.90**	**100%**

Self-mentions, particularly the use of first-person pronoun 'we' and possessive adjective 'our' are the most prevalent interactional markers in the corpus, accounting for a substantial 34.27% of all interactional markers. This equates to a frequency of 307 occurrences per 10,000 words. As Hyland (2005a) observes, self-mentions serve as a rhetorical device employed by authors to establish a personal connection with their readers. By incorporating first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives, writers can project a sense of authority and expertise, thereby strengthening their arguments and building personal ethos.

In the analysed reviews, the frequent use of 'we' and 'our' is a strategic choice by Wirecutter journalists, who often collaborate to test and evaluate products. This collective authorship allows them to present a unified front, reinforcing their credibility as a team of experts. By employing these self-mentions, the writers not only strengthen their claims but also foster a sense of shared experience with the reader, making the review more engaging and persuasive. For instance, consider the following examples:

14. *With a few exceptions,* ***we*** *found in our testing that most cast-iron skillets perform similarly at basic tasks like searing a steak or frying eggs.*
15. ***Our*** *research has shown that even high-quality kettles can have a somewhat short lifespan.*

The self-mentions 'we' and 'our' are more explicit and strategic, highlighting the collaborative nature of the review process and the expertise of the reviewers. By employing these techniques, the writers can effectively establish their credibility (ethos) and persuade readers to trust their recommendations.

Engagement markers, accounting for 31.67% of all interactional markers, are the second most frequently used marker in the corpus, appearing 283 times per 10,000 words. These markers, as Hyland (2005a) suggests, explicitly aim to build a relationship with readers, enhancing a text's persuasiveness through affective appeals (pathos). For our analysis, we utilised Hyland's (2005b) classification of engagement markers as outlined by He and Abdul Rahim (2019). Based on this framework, we found that the reader pronoun 'you' appeared most frequently, followed by the directive 'have to,' and then by personal asides (parentheses) and questions.
The following examples are retrieved from the data:

16. *You **have to** use soft utensils (wood, silicone, heat-safe plastic) and avoid using high heat on nonstick pans to avoid damaging the nonstick coating.*
17. *There's no Smart Connector to hook up a keyboard, but **you** probably wouldn't like using a tiny keyboard with this iPad, anyway. **You** can pair the iPad mini with a Bluetooth keyboard if you really need physical keys.*
18. *Why did our engagement make us second-guess our current spatula, which for years had made fried eggs perfectly well**?** Why did betrothed households require Williams Sonoma**?** The registry tradition puzzled me. As a gift-giver, I've dodged the spatula skepticism—and the entire registry situation—by giving couples cash.*
19. *In fact, the technology **(if you can call it that)** hasn't changed much since hand-crank peelers were invented over 150 years ago.*

Reader pronouns are the most direct and explicit way to engage readers in the discourse. The pronoun 'you' is the clearest means for a writer to acknowledge the reader's presence directly. This personal touch makes the reader feel understood and considered.

Directives instruct readers to perform an action or perceive something in a way determined by the writer (Hyland, 2005b). They can guide readers to engage in three main activities: textual acts, physical acts, and cognitive acts (Ibid.). In this context, the directive 'have to' is often used to direct readers to engage in physical acts, providing instructions on how to carry out processes or actions in the real world. From our analysis, expert reviewers used 'have to' primarily to convey essential instructions or recommendations, fostering a sense of authority while making the reader feel understood and considered.

Personal asides provide a way for writers to address readers directly, briefly interrupting the argument to share comments, opinions, or insights (Hyland, 2005b). These asides not only express the writer's personality but also demonstrate a willingness to explicitly engage with the audience. In expert reviews, parentheses are often used as a device for personal asides, allowing reviewers to interject with humour, opinions, or additional context. This approach creates an informal tone that humanises the text and fosters a sense of connection and camaraderie with the reader, making the writing more engaging and relatable.

Questions arouse interest and encourage readers to explore unresolved issues alongside the writer as equals in a conversational partnership (Hyland, 2005b). They create curiosity, prompting readers to consider the argument actively. In this context, expert reviewers used questions to provoke thought and encourage reflection, aligning their curiosity with that of the reader.

By strategically employing these engagement markers, expert reviewers effectively appeal to the reader's emotions, making the text more persuasive and engaging. They foster a sense of shared experience, build trust, and create a more personal connection with the reader. This affective appeal, or pathos, is a powerful tool that enhances the overall impact of the review.

Attitude markers, comprising 21.36% of all interactional markers, are the third most frequently used marker in the corpus, appearing 191 times per 10,000 words. According to Hyland (2005a), these markers serve as interactional metadiscourse, expressing the writer's emotional stance toward a proposition by focusing on affective attitudes such as surprise, agreement, or frustration rather than the factual or evidential status of the information. Similarly, Ädel (2006) notes that attitude markers enable writers to convey genuine or feigned attitudes toward the subject matter or propositional content.

Azar and Hashim (2019) highlight that attitude markers function as evaluative tools, including adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and verbs. They express value, significance, and importance; highlight resource needs or gaps; provide evaluation; express emotions; and identify weaknesses or shortcomings. Additionally, these markers are often used as a persuasive strategy to convey the author's stance and secure readers' agreement. Hyland (2005a) similarly underscores the significance of attitude markers as a type of interactional metadiscourse in his analysis of CEOs' letters, highlighting their role in fostering affective appeals (pathos) whereby writers emotionally engage their readers by expressing emotions such as surprise, agreement, pleasure, or emphasis.

Our analysis, guided by Azar and Hashim's (2019) classification of attitude markers, revealed notable patterns in the use of attitude markers. Among attitudinal verbs, the verb 'feel' was the most frequently employed by the writers. In the category of attitudinal adverbs, the adverb 'fairly' occurred most often. The adjective 'best' dominated the attitudinal adjective category, while the noun 'issue' was the most commonly used in the attitudinal noun category.

The following examples are taken from the dataset:

20. *Without something to hold me in, I **feel** wild and untethered, like a toddler who's skipped nap time and might, at any moment, smack someone in the face.*
21. *If you want a budget tracker: The Amazfit Band 7 provides **fairly** accurate readouts and has a very strong battery life.*
22. *Anker's PowerPort III Nano is the **best**, most compact option for sending the fastest possible charge to most phones, capable of delivering 20 W over USB-C.*
23. *We didn't experience this **issue**, but if you're between sizes, consider sizing up to avoid it.*

Our analysis reveals that the verb 'feel' reflects the writer's emotional response, engaging readers on a personal level rather than merely stating a fact. The adverb 'fairly' conveys the writer's subjective evaluation of the accuracy of the readouts, indicating a moderate level of precision. This shows a balanced judgment that qualifies the strength of the claim, allowing the reviewer to express a measured opinion. The adjective 'best' conveys the reviewer's judgment of the product as superior, guiding readers toward a recommendation and bolstering credibility to influence purchasing decisions. Finally, the noun 'issue' highlights potential problems, demonstrating the reviewer's awareness of drawbacks. This allows the reviewer to provide a balanced perspective, acknowledging potential downsides while maintaining a positive overall assessment.

From a rhetorical perspective, we believe these attitude markers play a crucial role in fostering affective appeals (pathos). By engaging readers' emotions through subjective evaluations and expressions of personal judgment, the reviewer not only informs but also builds a connection with the audience, persuading them to trust the assessment and consider the product favourably despite its flaws. This use of attitude markers helps strengthen the review's persuasive power and enhances its overall impact on the reader's decision-making process.

Hedges comprise 6.36% of all interactional markers, appearing 56 times per 10,000 words. According to Hyland (2005a), hedges are linguistic devices that express the writer's reluctance to fully commit to a proposition, presenting information as a subjective opinion rather than an indisputable fact. In his analysis of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Hyland shows how Darwin's frequent use of hedges contributes to his ethos as a cautious scientist, acknowledging the limits of his knowledge and emphasising careful consideration of evidence, especially in areas of uncertainty or probability. In business writing, particularly in CEOs' letters, hedges are used strategically to project a modest, trustworthy, and cautious leadership image (Hyland, 2005a).

Hu and Cao (2011) expanded on Hyland's (2005a) classification of hedges and boosters in their study of applied linguistics abstracts. Applying their framework, our analysis found that the modal auxiliary 'may' was the most frequently used hedge, followed by the epistemic adverb 'often' and the epistemic lexical verb 'tend to'.

Consider the following examples from the data:

24. *The Apple Watch Series 9 is no longer sold by Apple, but you **may** still see it around as stores try to sell their leftover inventory.*
25. *For that reason they're **often** touted as being "greener" or better for you, but neither claim has much evidence to back it up.*
26. *Better still, most people **tend to** have one or two of these pans in their pantry already.*

Based on our analysis, expert reviewers frequently used the modal auxiliary 'may' to express possibility or uncertainty, presenting claims tentatively while maintaining openness to alternative interpretations. The epistemic adverb 'often' showcases frequency or likelihood. It suggests that something happens regularly or frequently or is likely to occur. This usage conveys probability and indicates that the writer is being cautious.

The lexical verb 'tend to' appeared when expert reviewers generalised trends or behaviours without overstating certainty. This phrasing allowed them to highlight patterns observed in their analysis while avoiding overly assertive claims, thereby preserving credibility.

From a rhetorical standpoint, hedges help establish a credible ethos by reflecting the writer's caution and recognising potential variability (Hyland, 2005a). Expert reviewers used hedges strategically to present their evaluations as reasoned and considerate, avoiding an overly assertive tone. In summary, hedges like 'may', 'often', and 'tend to' allowed expert reviewers to present nuanced opinions, offer thoughtful evidence and engage readers with balanced arguments. This careful use of language reinforced their credibility and kept the text both approachable and persuasive.

Boosters were the least frequent, accounting for 6.34% of interactional markers. According to Hyland (2005a, 1998), these devices emphasise certainty, strengthen arguments, and convey conviction. They signal shared experiences and direct engagement with the audience. In business contexts, particularly in CEOs' letters, boosters project confidence and leadership, enhancing the CEO's credibility (Hyland, 2005a).

Following Hu and Cao's (2011) classification, our analysis found that the epistemic lexical verb 'find' was the most frequently used booster, followed by the modal auxiliary 'will' and the epistemic adverb 'very.' Hyland (2005a) highlights that boosters make texts more persuasive by enhancing credibility appeals (ethos).

The following examples are taken from the data:

27. *Proper storage will protect your bottles so the wine **will** taste as deeply complex and aromatic as possible whenever you decide to drink it.*
28. *So we **find** it hard to justify paying almost $350, even if you do get a 100-year warranty.*
29. *These sunglasses are **very** sturdy and flexible: They held up perfectly in our lens-scratching and frame-bending tests.*

Our analysis indicates that the modal auxiliary 'will' is often used to convey strong confidence or certainty about future outcomes. In the context of expert reviews, 'will' was used to assert outcomes or guarantees with assurance, emphasising the reliability and expertise of the writer's advice.

The epistemic lexical verb 'find' presents a strong evaluative statement based on personal experience or analysis. In expert reviews, 'find' was employed to convey conclusions drawn from informed assessments, encouraging readers to trust the reviewer's insights and judgment.

The epistemic adverb 'very' intensifies descriptions, highlighting the strength of a claim or evaluation. In the context of expert reviews, 'very' was used to emphasise key qualities of a product, ensuring that readers recognise its value or performance with heightened clarity and conviction.

From a rhetorical standpoint, boosters highlight certainty and enhance the writer's personal presence, making the text more persuasive and authoritative. Expert reviewers strategically used these markers to convey confidence in their evaluations, reinforce their expertise, and engage readers through appeals to ethos. By expressing assurance and highlighting shared logic or experience, boosters helped to solidify the credibility and persuasiveness of the reviews.

DISCUSSION

AlJazrawi and AlJazrawi (2021) observe that in earlier studies, interactive metadiscourse markers (e.g., transitions, frame markers) are more prevalent in written texts, where they help structure discourse and support the clarity of complex arguments. Conversely, interactional markers (e.g., hedges, boosters) are typically associated with spoken discourse for managing interpersonal relationships and fostering listener engagement.

However, our analysis of expert reviews challenges the typical pattern, showing a higher use of interactional than interactive markers. This aligns with studies in specific contexts, such as Aziz and Baharom's (2021) exploration of Bank Negara Malaysia Governor's speeches, which revealed a similar predominance of interactional markers in formal yet personally engaging texts. Similarly, Al-Subhi (2022) found interactional markers, particularly attitude and engagement markers, prominent in online advertising for their persuasive power. Further support comes from Ho's (2018) investigation of workplace emails, where interactional elements were key in maintaining professional relationships and enhancing the credibility of professionals. Farahani (2019) also noted the importance of interactional markers in facilitating engagement in academic English texts.

Differences in text types and genres can explain this divergence, as Ädel (2012) suggests. While academic writing often emphasises clarity and coherence through interactive markers (Hyland & Tse, 2004), genres like expert product reviews, online advertisements, and speeches

employ interactional markers to create a more engaging, persuasive tone. These findings underscore the dynamic nature of metadiscourse, which adapts to the communicative goals of specific contexts—whether to inform, persuade, or engage an audience.

Recent studies, including those by Lee and Hong (2024), Birhan (2021), and Aljazrawi and Aljazrawi (2021), have identified transitions as the most frequent interactive metadiscourse markers. This finding aligns closely with our analysis. Among transition markers, the comparative transition 'but' emerged as the most frequently used by expert reviewers. This prevalence can be attributed to the need for expert reviews to compare products and present evaluations clearly, ensuring their assessments are structured and logical for readers.

Al-Subhi (2022) observed that interactive metadiscourse categories were largely absent in social media advertisements, with only occasional transitions. This is unsurprising, as the brevity of ad copy—typically short, direct, and memorable—eliminates the need for metadiscourse to guide readers or clarify connections, focusing instead on persuasion and impact. Although expert reviews are also a form of promotional discourse like advertisements, their reliance on transitions is significantly greater. This stems from the need to organise the content coherently, making it easier for readers to follow. Furthermore, transitions enhance the logical flow of the argument, ensuring that the reviews appeal to the audience's sense of reasoning—an example of rational appeal (logos).

Our analysis also shows that self-mentions are frequently used as interactional metadiscourse markers, aligning with Ho's (2018) findings that they are the most common in email writing, where they emphasise personal initiative. In contrast, Chen and Chun (2023) noted their rarity in China Daily commentaries, likely reflecting cultural conventions that discourage explicit self-assertion. This contrast highlights the adaptability of language, as interactional metadiscourse markers, including self-mentions, vary across contexts, purposes, and audiences (Ädel, 2018).

Wirecutter journalists frequently use collective self-mentions such as "we" and "our." As Shen and Tao (2021) note, first-person plural pronouns project personal involvement and emphasise the writer's contribution to a field. This is particularly evident in Wirecutter reviews, where journalists use these pronouns to involve themselves in the discourse as a unified authorial identity while showcasing their collaborative approach to expert evaluation and product testing. The strategic use of self-mentions also fosters a sense of shared experience with readers, making the reviews more engaging and persuasive.

Additionally, the traditional rhetorical concepts of *ethos* and *persona*, as discussed by Cherry (1988) and mentioned in Hyland (2000), illuminate the dual dimensions of authority conveyed through self-mention. Credibility is established by presenting oneself as a competent member of a discipline, while trustworthiness is conveyed through rhetorical displays of reliability. In expert reviews, writers strategically use self-mentions to establish both expertise and a connection with their audience. For example, phrases such as "we found" or "our research has shown" project a sense of collective authority and competence while also inviting the reader into a shared discourse. These rhetorical choices reinforce the writers' authority and build trust by demonstrating transparency and accountability in their evaluations. As a result, these reviews become persuasive, credible, and aligned with the expectations of their readership.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hyland et al. (2021) highlight that metadiscourse research has predominantly focused on academic registers, leaving non-academic genres, like computer-mediated and promotional discourse, underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates expert reviews, a relatively neglected genre. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to examine how expert reviewers employ interpersonal metadiscourse to construct persuasive appeals based on ethos, pathos, and logos.

Our analysis reveals a notable departure from established patterns, with interactional markers appearing more frequently than interactive ones. Transitions (interactive) like "but" were most common, aiding in comparisons and logical flow, supporting logos. Self-mentions (interactional) were prominent allowing reviewers to project authority and connect with readers, enhancing ethos. These insights can help content creators and professional reviewers use metadiscourse strategically to improve user engagement and trust, thereby enhancing persuasion.

While this study offers insights into the rhetorical strategies of expert reviewers on Wirecutter, its scope is restricted to a single platform and genre. Additionally, it examines only English-language content, which may not fully capture metadiscourse nuances in other languages or cultural contexts.

Future research should examine expert reviews across multiple platforms (e.g., Best Buy, eBay) and other digital formats (blogs, social media, YouTube) in various languages. Longitudinal analyses could also trace how metadiscourse evolves with digital trends. These areas offer promising avenues for future research, contributing to both theory and practical applications.

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