

Persuasion through Metadiscourse: Examining the Textual Metadiscourse Used in the Malaysian Universities' Digital Promotional Materials

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ABSTRACT

Promotional booklets are central to how universities persuade prospective students. This study examines how textual metadiscourse realises persuasion in Malaysian universities' digital promotional materials. We compiled two sub-corpora from official university websites: 10 booklets from Malaysian public universities and eight from Malaysian private universities. Textual content bearing persuasive intent (e.g., welcomes, institutional overview, "why choose us," facilities, testimonials) was extracted and analysed in AntConc software. A functional, manual coding determined whether candidate items performed metadiscoursal work, and categories followed Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model (interactive vs. interactional). Frequencies were normalised per 1,000 words. Across the combined corpus, interactive resources slightly outnumbered interactional resources. For the interactive resources, transitions were the most frequent interactive device, followed by code glosses and frame markers, reflecting the need to connect dense promotional information coherently. Within interactional resources, attitude markers and self-mentions were most common, signalling institutional stance and persona, with engagement markers also prominent. Private-university materials displayed a higher overall density of metadiscourse and a smaller gap between interactive and interactional resources than public-university materials, suggesting a more balanced "guide + engage" approach. These patterns indicate a persuasive blend of logos (via text-organising resources) with pathos/ethos (via stance and reader alignment). The study contributes corpus-assisted evidence on promotional discourse and offers practical implications for crafting persuasive, reader-friendly university marketing texts.

Keywords: Corpus-assisted analysis; Malaysian universities; metadiscourse; persuasion; promotional materials

INTRODUCTION

As a material that is typically used as a university's marketing instrument, promotional material has expanded its function in becoming the quintessential material in addressing prospective students (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). Even though the university websites are more commonly used and visited by prospective students to search for the university's information, products, and services, it is the university's promotional materials-such as prospectuses, brochures or pamphlets-that provide the crucial information needed by prospective students prior to applying for the

institution. Bano and Shakir (2015) assert that universities' promotional materials are sought after as these materials manifest similar yet concise information about the universities. Despite the space limitation, these materials convey “*institutional symbols of values and priorities*” (Anctil, 2008, p.79) and thus act as persuasive appeals to attract prospective students and, ultimately, increase their admission rate. The prominence of the university prospectus among promotional materials warrants closer examination of the persuasive resources in Malaysian universities' digital promotional materials.

Malaysia's higher-education ecosystem has grown quickly and competitively, with public and private higher education providers (HEPs) courting overlapping domestic and international segments. Public universities carry national mandates (access, nation-building, research), while private providers are strongly tuition-dependent and brand-competitive. In this crowded market, prospective students face dense, highly similar information, i.e. graduate outcomes, industry linkages, scholarships, and facilities delivered across print and digital channels. In response, Malaysian HEPs deploy integrated marketing strategies in which printed and digital promotional materials perform pivotal credibility work. They translate institutional value propositions into concise, reader-friendly narratives, establish ethos through tone and evidentials, scaffold logos through text-organising cues, and invite pathos via inclusive address. Among these artefacts, promotional booklets are especially potent: they circulate widely, condense the “why choose us” case, and travel easily across digital platforms, making them a practical site to examine how persuasion is textualised.

Understanding the persuasive element in a textual form is important, as this element significantly influences the behaviour of an individual. Miller (2013) asserts that persuasion is an important process as it can shape, reinforce and change an individual's responses that will eventually lead to attitude change. Nonetheless, studies conducted on the universities' promotional materials were restricted to the linguistic variation in a cross-cultural perspective using multidimensional analysis (Shahid et al., 2023) and the university's marketisation, identity and power dynamics by using semiotic analysis (Shahnaz & Suleman, 2023). Since these previous studies focused on the rhetoric of universities' promotional materials, there is a gap in research on the persuasive strategies employed in university promotional materials from a metadiscourse perspective.

Metadiscourse provides the functional machinery for this credibility work—interactive resources organise dense copy (transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, code glosses), while interactional resources enact stance and alignment (attitude markers, self-mentions, engagement markers, boosters, hedges). Yet, despite extensive work on academic genres, corpus-assisted evidence on how Malaysian HEPs mobilise metadiscourse in promotional materials—and how this differs between public and private providers—remains limited. Without such profiling, we risk attributing persuasion to brand “style” rather than to systematic textual choices that can be measured, compared, and improved. Accordingly, this study profiles the metadiscourse of Malaysian university promotional booklets and interprets how these functional choices support persuasion across provider types. By linking distributional patterns to reader-oriented effects (guide + engage), the study clarifies which resources are doing the persuasive heavy lifting and where public vs. private institutions diverge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PERSUASION

The literature on persuasion begins with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which identifies three appeals: ethos (speaker credibility), pathos (audience affect), and logos (reasoned argument). Persuasion motivates action (Lerbinger, 1972) and, as Roloff and Miller (1980) argue, communicative language is persuasive to the extent that it shapes, strengthens, or redirects responses. Contemporary accounts converge: persuasion is a communicative process culminating in attitude change (Ahmad & Ali, 2018), occurring "*through communication in a circumstance*" (O'Keefe, 2002, p. 5). Virtanen and Halmari (2005) further frame this in linguistic terms as choices that affect or reinforce others' behaviour and beliefs.

Metadiscourse plays a key role in achieving persuasion. Hyland (1998) defines textual metadiscourse as the arrangement of ideas into convincing, coherent discourse. In practice, interactive resources shape textual relationships, while interactional resources express stance and invite agreement. Together, they put into action the three appeals: logos through cohesion and clarity, ethos through stance and credibility cues, and pathos through alignment and invitation. On that note, empirical studies show persuasive effects across academic genres, including research articles (Khedri, Heng, & Ebrahimi, 2013), postgraduate dissertations (Hyland & Tse, 2004), and undergraduate essays (Ho & Li, 2018). Persuasion, on the other hand, occurs through the writer's stance and the reader's engagement (Hong & Cao, 2014).

Extending beyond academic texts, Hooi et al., (2020) show that strategic metadiscourse increases perceived reader engagement. Their findings underscore the value of balancing interactive resources (to organise information) with interactional resources (to project stance and invite alignment), supporting the present study's expectation that promotional booklets combining "guide" and "engage" moves are more compelling. The same functional pay-offs plausibly transfer to market-oriented texts aimed at prospective students. Likewise, Musa et al., (2019) demonstrate how interactional choices—attitude markers, boosters, hedges, and self-mentions—calibrate credibility and proximity. Although their corpus is academic rather than promotional, their analysis clarifies the benefits that our booklet corpus adapts to a marketised setting (e.g., projecting confidence while maintaining inclusive reader address). Thus, it's the deliberate use of metadiscourse that carries persuasion: interactive resources scaffold coherence and interactional resources build trust and rapport, producing a balanced, reader-centred message.

By contrast, literature on metadiscourse is scarce in promotional discourse, as only a few metadiscourse studies have been conducted on advertising language (Al-Subhi, 2022). In brief, scholarship on metadiscourse in promotional communication has tended to privilege global, brand-centred advertising contexts, with comparatively little attention to Malaysian higher-education materials. This imbalance constrains our understanding of how local institutions textualise credibility and engagement for domestic audiences. By assembling a Malaysian corpus of university promotional booklets, the present study addresses this contextual gap and provides empirically grounded, nationally relevant evidence.

METADISCOURSE

Metadiscourse was coined by Zellig Harris in 1959 as an academic concept to understand the language in use, specifically the way that the writer or speaker uses to guide the perception of the reader. However, this concept was only made known in 1981 when Sinclair proposed a distinction

between autonomous and interactive planes of discourse. Fundamentally, Sinclair (1981) expanded the representation function of language from a mere semantic representation of the word (autonomous) to a more pragmatic concept in which the authors use the language to interact and negotiate with the readers (interactive). These planes are set as a defining feature of metadiscourse.

Vande Kopple (1985) devised a full description of metadiscourse. The author declares that metadiscourse “*does not add propositional material but helps our readers organise, classify, interpret, evaluate and react to such material. Metadiscourse, therefore, is discourse about discourse or communication about communication*” (Vande Kopple, 1985, p.83). He introduced the ‘textual’ and ‘interpersonal’ categories of metadiscourse and proposed seven types of metadiscourse under these categories. Text connectives, code glosses, illocution markers and validity markers are categorised under the textual function and narrators, attitude markers and commentary fall under the interpersonal category.

Building on Vande Kopple's taxonomy, Crismore et al. (1993) then reappraise the taxonomy, removing ambiguous categories and introducing a clearer two-part organisation into textual (text-organising) and interpersonal (writer–reader) markers. In this view, textual metadiscourse signals how the message should be processed in relation to its content and structure (e.g., transitions, frame markers, endophorics, evidentials, code glosses), whereas interpersonal metadiscourse encodes authorial stance and audience alignment (e.g., hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, self-mentions).

In relation to Crismore's distinction between discourse and metadiscourse, Hyland (1999) divided the metadiscourse into two categories, which are the textual and interpersonal metadiscourse. Textual metadiscourse is a resource that helps with the coherence of the propositional content of the text, and interpersonal metadiscourse is the words, phrases or sentences that help the writers to present the text. Hence, this leads to the notion that all metadiscourse markers are interpersonal in nature and the author must consider the relationship between the text, author and the reader (Hyland & Tse, 2004). Consequently, Hyland (2005) proposes a new metadiscourse model that unites the text, author and reader. New categories of interactive and interactional resources were introduced, which are defined as the use of linguistic cues to help the reader understand the text better and the resources that help the reader engage with the text better, respectively. It is also important to note that this is the most influential model to date and thus has been used as a basis for this study. Table 1 shows Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse.

TABLE 1. Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse (2005)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Help to guide the reader through the text	Resources
Transitions	express relations between main clauses	in addition; but; thus; and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	finally; to conclude; my purpose is
Endophoric markers	refer to information on other parts of the text	noted above; see Figure
Evidentials	refer to information from other texts	according to X; Z states
Code Glosses	elaborate propositional meanings	Namely; e.g; such as; in other words
Interactional	Involve the reader in the text	Resources
Hedges	withhold commitments and open dialogue	Might; perhaps, possible about
Boosters	emphasise certainty or close dialogue	in fact; definitely; it is clear that
Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly
Self-mentions	express reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	consider; note; you can see that

Hyland (2005) also argues that metadiscourse supports the three rhetorical appeals proposed by Aristotle. Logos or rational appeal can be achieved by transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers and code glosses. As for the pathos or the affective appeal, this could be realised through engagement markers, attitude markers, hedges and self-mentions and finally, the logos or the credibility appeal can be gained through hedges, boosters, engagement markers and evidentials.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method to analyse the frequency of metadiscourse markers that appeared in Malaysian universities' digital promotional materials, with a focus on persuasion. A content analysis was conducted to determine the overall occurrence of metadiscourse markers in the promotional materials as this approach enhances the researchers' understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, content analysis offers a greater understanding of this study, as this type of analysis serves as a framework for processing a high amount of textual data. Furthermore, this method also facilitated the identification and categorisation of metadiscourse markers through a systematic interpretive process.

To ensure the reliability of this study, two coders independently annotated a stratified 15% subsample of Malaysian public and private universities texts. We assessed inter-coder agreement using Krippendorff's α for category assignment ($\alpha = 0.91$). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consolidation of a refined coding guide.

RESEARCH SAMPLES

A total of 18 digital promotional materials were selected from the websites of Malaysian public and private universities. We included university-authored booklet-format promotional materials (PDF/web booklet) written in English and aimed at prospective students. Eligible titles comprised *Prospectus*, *Programme/Programmes*, *International Student Brochure*, and *General Guide*. In the case of where both undergraduate and postgraduate versions existed, we retained the postgraduate booklet to ensure language and audience comparability: postgraduate materials are routinely in English and target broader (including international) readers, whereas several undergraduate booklets, particularly from public universities, are produced in Malay for local applicants. This sampling controls for genre, language, and audience, thereby supporting valid cross-institutional metadiscourse comparisons.

The selected materials were accessible on the respective universities' websites between June 2023 and February 2024. It was anchored to the SPM results announcement, when universities typically refresh promotional materials, and extended into the following year to capture the most recent documents. Based on these set criteria, ten digital promotional materials from Malaysian public universities and eight from private universities were included in the study. Since the focus of this research is to analyse the metadiscourse markers in the Malaysian universities' promotional materials from the perspective of persuasion, only the content containing persuasive elements was considered. Any persuasive content specific to faculties, academies, institutes, schools or colleges was excluded, as the aim of this study was to examine persuasive strategies at the institutional level, rather than those of individual entities within the universities. Therefore, textual elements from the cover page, welcoming message from the vice chancellor,

provost or the director, reasons to study in Malaysia and the institutions, facts and figures of the university, testimonials, facilities or infrastructures and modes of learning were included in the analysis.

To align with this study's objective, which is to examine how metadiscourse realises persuasion at the institutional level, we analysed only sections whose communicative purpose is overtly promotional, for example, pages that were designed to inform, position, and persuade prospective students about the university as a whole. These include the cover page, welcoming messages from the vice-chancellor or director, institutional facts & figures, testimonials, facilities, modes of learning, student support, industry linkages, internationalisations, rankings and awards. Conversely, content that was purely informative, such as faculty/academy or college -specific pages, programmes syllabi/tables, administrative or legal notice, fee tables without persuasive prose, application process, list of academic programmes, universities' achievements, universities' addresses, or declaration statements were excluded in the analysis as these do not fulfil the persuasive criteria and the institutional persuasion. All textual elements that fit the said criteria were then stored digitally in the txt. format for subsequent analysis.

CORPUS

The digital promotional materials from Malaysian public and private universities were compiled separately, and all of the textual elements that fit the notion of persuasion were converted into an electronic corpus. A corpus-assisted pipeline is well attested for persuasive public discourse in Malaysia. Abas and Abdul Aziz (2023) exemplify a corpus-assisted approach to persuasive public discourse in Malaysia. Their corpus-driven patterns underpin a critical reading of stance and evaluation, showing how frequency profiles can foreground ideational emphases and value positions. Methodologically, their work aligns with our CAMDA design: quantitative profiling guides targeted close readings of how institutions construct credibility and desirability. For this study, the corpus for Malaysian public universities' digital promotional materials contained 23,355 tokens, while the private universities' corpus contained 25,828 tokens. AntConc, a corpus analysis software, was used to store and analyse the metadiscourse markers in both corpora. Table 2 presents the types of digital promotional materials used by the public universities (PB) on their university's website, along with their word count.

TABLE 2. Types of Malaysian public universities' digital promotional materials

No.	Public Universities	Types of digital promotional materials	Word count
1	PB1	Postgraduate International Student Brochure	2,560
2	PB2	Postgraduate Programme	1,007
3	PB3	Prospectus	8,713
4	PB4	International Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes	636
5	PB5	International Postgraduate Education General Guide	1,202
6	PB6	Postgraduate Programmes	1,185
7	PB7	Postgraduate Prospectus	1,063
8	PB8	Postgraduate Prospectus	3,478
9	PB9	Postgraduate Programmes	2,872
10	PB10	Postgraduate Prospectus	639
TOTAL			23,355

Table 2 illustrates that Malaysian public universities utilised various types of promotional materials such as university prospectuses (PB3, PB7, PB8 and PB10), undergraduate and/or postgraduate academic programmes (PB2, PB4, PB6 and PB9), brochures (PB1) and education

guides (PB5). According to the table, the digital promotional material with the highest word count from the public universities was PB2, with 8,713 words, whereas PB4 had the lowest word count, containing only 636 words. The following section presents the details on the private universities' (PR) promotional materials.

Despite differing file names and layouts, the sampled texts are functionally equivalent. Each is produced by the university for prospective audiences, foregrounds value propositions (programmes, facilities, outcomes, support), and deploys stance/engagement resources typical of promotional discourse. Following a genre-as-social-action view, we therefore treat them as one promotional booklet genre and analyse them comparatively.

TABLE 3. Types of Malaysian private universities' digital promotional materials

No.	Private Universities	Types of digital promotional materials	Word count
1	PR1	Prospectus	2,424
2	PR2	General Guide	724
3	PR3	Postgraduate Studies	1,386
4	PR4	Postgraduate Studies	2,979
5	PR5	Education Guide	1,432
6	PR6	Prospectus	1,213
7	PR7	Prospectus	11,290
8	PR8	Prospectus	4,380
TOTAL			25,828

Similarly, for the private universities, the same pattern emerged, with the universities using the same type of promotional materials such as university prospectuses (PR1, PR6, PR7, and PR8), postgraduate studies (PR3 and PR4) and general or education guides (PR2 and PR5). In terms of the word count, private universities generally used more words compared to their public counterparts, with PR7 having the highest word count of 11,290 tokens, and PR2 having the lowest word count at 724 tokens.

PROCEDURE AND ANALYSIS

The analysis for this study followed several systematic procedures. The public and private universities' digital promotional materials were first downloaded, converted into an electronic corpus and categorised based on university type. A total of ten digital promotional materials from the Malaysian public universities were grouped together to form the Malaysian Public Universities Digital Promotional Materials Corpus (MPBU), while another eight digital promotional materials from the Malaysian private universities were compiled into the Malaysian Private Universities Digital Promotional Materials Corpus (MPRU). The unequal sample sizes reflect document availability during the sampling window (June 2023–February 2024) and our inclusion criteria (English-language, booklet-format, institution-level recruitment materials). We did not exclude any eligible items; rather, several private/public providers did not host a current booklet meeting these criteria at the time of collection. Both corpora were uploaded to AntConc, and the total number of words was calculated.

As a means to calculate the metadiscourse markers used in the digital promotional materials, a functional analysis was conducted on the corpora. This functional analysis was done to ascertain whether the specific words used in the digital promotional materials assumed the

function of metadiscourse or not. For instance, the word *about* can serve as a metadiscourse marker in two different ways: it can act as a hedges, where the university, as the author of the digital promotional materials, withholds their full commitment while presenting their proposition (a) or it can also specifically describe the proposition brought forth by the text (b).

- a) These findings have generated *about* RM24 million in sales and boosted the production capacity of rice farmers in the country and region. (PB3)
- b) UMP has lots of great and highly knowledgeable lecturers who are very passionate *about* their students' success. (PB9)

In (a), the university only insinuates the approximate number of sales garnered by the university without specifying the exact amount. This relative uncertainty shows vagueness, which leads the reader to form their own interpretation of the proposition brought by the university. In contrast, the word *about* in (b) denotes the specific function role played by the lecturers who are not only scholars but also care about their students' achievements. Hence, (b) does not insinuate uncertainty or approximation and was discarded from the analysis as it does not carry the metadiscourse function. This functional analysis was done by the author and was manually double-checked by a second coder, an experienced discourse analyst, to ensure that all expressions that performed the metadiscursive functions displayed in the promotional materials were accurately captured.

Subsequently, the words that assume the metadiscourse functions in both corpora were identified, calculated and categorised according to Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse (2005). Coding began with Hyland's (498-item) inventory. Following a targeted literature search on metadiscourse in promotional and adjacent genres, we supplemented this list with additional items explicitly attested in prior studies as performing metadiscoursal functions. Inclusion required (i) documentary support in the literature and (ii) functional evidence in context. Only items meeting both literature support and functional evidence were added. These additions were also reviewed by the second coder during reliability checks, and disagreements were resolved by refining decision rules before final counts. To provide a more accurate metadiscourse representation in the corpora, occurrences were measured per 1,000 words.

FINDINGS

Across both corpora (public and private universities), we identified 9,520 metadiscourse instances in 49,183 words. This equals about 194 metadiscourse items per 1,000 words (=19.4 per 100 words), indicating that metadiscourse is a frequent resource in these materials. The detailed breakdown of the metadiscourse markers for both types of universities is presented in the next section.

TABLE 4. Overall frequency of metadiscourse markers in Malaysian universities' digital promotional materials

Metadiscourse category	Malaysian public universities			Malaysian private universities		
	Raw occurrences	F per 1,000 words	Percentage	Raw occurrences	F per 1,000 words	Percentage
Interactive	2,219	95.01	51.2%	2,605	100.74	50.19%
Interactional	2,111	90.39	48.8%	2,585	100.08	49.81%
Total	4,330	185.4	100%	5,190	200.82	100%

As shown in Table 4, the MPBU contained 4,330 instances of metadiscourse markers across 23,355 tokens, yielding a normalised frequency of 185.4 per 1,000 words. Interactive markers occurred slightly more frequently (51.2%) than interactional markers (48.8%). This pattern aligns with Hyland and Tse (2004), who observed that interactive metadiscourse is typically more prevalent in written genres, whereas interactional markers are more characteristic of spoken communication (Mahmood & Kasim, 2019).

Although the difference between the interactive and interactional categories in the MPBU was 2.4%, a Mann–Whitney U test confirmed that this variation was not statistically significant ($U = 29.50, p = .37$). Hence, the small difference should be interpreted as a tendency rather than a meaningful contrast. Functionally, this slight preference suggests that public universities focus more on organising information and guiding readers through text (interactive use) rather than directly engaging or involving readers (interactional use) in persuasion.

In comparison, the MPRU recorded 5,190 instances of metadiscourse in 25,828 tokens, equivalent to 200.82 per 1,000 words, indicating a somewhat denser use of metadiscourse than in the public universities' corpus. This finding is consistent with Swales and Feak's (2000) observation that longer texts tend to employ more metadiscourse to facilitate comprehension and manage reader cognition.

While both university types used more interactive than interactional markers, the difference in MPRU was smaller (0.38%) compared to the MPBU (2.4%), reflecting a more balanced integration of organisational and engagement functions in private universities' promotional discourse. This balance may demonstrate private universities' strategic attempt to combine informational clarity with audience involvement to enhance persuasion. However, the Mann–Whitney U results ($U = 22.00, p = .12$) indicate that, overall, the distributions of interactive and interactional metadiscourse were comparable across the two corpora.

INTERACTIVE METADISOURSE MARKERS USED BY MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES

To profile how universities organise information for reader navigation, this section reports the five interactive subtypes that include Transitions, Code-glosses, Frame markers, Evidentials, and Endophoric markers. The detailed frequencies and test statistics are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Frequency of use of interactive metadiscourse markers by Malaysian universities

	Public Universities	Private Universities	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Metadiscourse category	F per 1,000 words	F per 1,000 words		
Interactive				
Transitions	51.42	52.4	29.5	0.37
Code-glosses	35.45	39.02	28.5	0.33
Frame markers	4.28	7.19	27.0	0.26
Evidentials	3.13	1.59	55.0	0.20
Endophoric markers	0.73	0.54	43.00	0.83

Table 5 summarises the distribution of interactive metadiscourse across public and private university prospectuses, reported as normalised frequencies (per 1,000 words) and accompanied by Mann–Whitney U tests. In both corpora, Transitions are most frequent (Public = 51.42; Private = 52.40), followed by Code-glosses (Public = 35.45; Private = 39.02) and Frame markers (Public = 4.28; Private = 7.19). Evidentials occur relatively rarely (Public = 3.13; Private = 1.59), and Endophoric markers are minimal (Public = 0.73; Private = 0.54). Statistical comparisons show no significant differences between sectors for any subcategory. Transitions ($U = 29.5, p = .37$), Code-

glosses ($U = 28.5, p = .33$), Frame markers ($U = 27.0, p = .26$), Evidentials ($U = 55.0, p = .20$), and Endophoric markers ($U = 43.0, p = .83$). Taken together, the results indicate a shared organisational profile. Regardless of sector, institutions rely primarily on Transitions and elaboration devices to structure informational content, while citation-like referencing and intra-text pointing are used sparingly. This is consistent with the concise, self-contained nature of promotional discourse.

Transitions were the most prominently used in the promotional materials. This finding is not unexpected, as university promotional materials must integrate multiple strands of information—such as greetings, institutional overviews, academic programmes, facilities, and testimonials—to persuade readers effectively. Transitions link clauses and ideas by signalling addition, comparison, contrast, reason, consequence, and exception. Conjunctions such as *and* and *also* were frequently used to combine ideas, while connectors such as *for* and *therefore* were employed to express reasoning or consequence. These linguistic choices help ensure textual cohesion and smooth information flow across multimodal sections (Shahnaz, 2021). The following examples are derived from the data:

- a) Besides conventional lectures, our faculties implement innovative teaching and learning techniques with conducive classroom surroundings *and* a reliable e-learning system (PB8).
- b) It is *also* ranked the no. 1 most affordable study destination among international students (PB1).

The frequent use of Code Glosses in both corpora further supports this organisational function. Serving to elaborate on the propositional meaning in the promotional materials, symbols such as bullet (●), brackets () and dash (-) were highly used to list and restate the features, products, or awards received by the university. Below are the examples taken from the corpora:

- a) ● Specialist skills and applied experience (PB10).
- b) UCSI was the only university to receive the QS Recognition for Improvement Award – an award given to universities that improve the most ranks on average – at the 2023 QS EduData Summit in New York (PR5).

Frame markers refer to words or phrases that indicate discourse acts, sequences, or stages. The symbol hash (#) had the highest occurrences, and this is followed by numbering (i.e. 1,2,3 ...). Given the promotional effort by the university to showcase its prowess as compared to other institutions, code glosses and frame markers were typically used to ensure a clearer propositional idea could be presented and were easily understood by the readers (Kuswoyo & Siregar, 2019). In the corpus, the symbol “#” performs this organisational function when it indexes position in an ordered series (e.g., “#1”, “#1001–1200”), thereby labelling the item’s stage or rank in a recognised hierarchy (league tables, lists, headings). The following examples illustrate the use of frame markers in the corpora:

- a) # 1001-1200 World University Rankings 2024 (PR7).
- b) 1. A premier teaching university with a comprehensive range of disciplines (PB5).

The limited use of Evidentials reflects the promotional genre's tendency to construct a self-contained narrative rather than relying heavily on external citations. Evidentials or referring to other information outside the text were used to provide the evidence for the propositional content. This strategy is done to give support to the proposition by citing related literature (Hyland, 2005). Words or phrases like *visit* (website/homepage address) to get further information were commonly used in the promotional materials to back up the claims made by the universities, as illustrated in the following examples.

- a) For more information about the library and the services, *please visit* <https://umlib.um.edu.my/> (PB1).
- b) Interested students may apply for the scholarship *via* the Dong Zong official link at scholarship@dongzong.my (PR7).

Endophoric markers were the least used in both corpora. This is expected for promotional texts, which are typically short, self-contained sections that minimise internal cross-referencing. As González (2005) notes, such pointing is often outsourced to visuals (e.g., lists, boxes, tables, or figures), reducing the need for verbal Endophorics. In our data, Endophoric markers appear mainly as forward-pointing cues that introduce an immediate item or list, for example:

- a) *The following* are the available debate clubs in UPM (PB3).
- b) We have implemented *the following* procedures after obtaining self-accreditation status (PR7).

INTERACTIONAL METADISOURSE IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

This section profiles interactional metadiscourse subtypes that include Attitude Markers, Self-mentions, Engagement markers, Hedges, and Boosters for public and private corpora. The detailed distributions are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Frequency of use of interactional metadiscourse markers by Malaysian universities

	Public Universities	Private Universities	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Metadiscourse category	F per 1,000 words	F per 1,000 words		
Interactional				
Attitude markers	40.51	31.63	32.0	0.52
Self-mentions	24.19	30.43	18.0	0.06
Engagement markers	11.48	24.66	9.0	0.04
Hedges	7.96	7.36	41.0	0.96
Boosters	6.25	6.00	22.0	0.12

Table 6 reports interactional metadiscourse used in both corpora. Attitude markers are the most frequent (Public = 40.51; Private = 31.63), followed by Self-mentions (Public = 24.19; Private = 30.43) and Engagement markers (Public = 11.48; Private = 24.66). Hedges and Boosters are comparatively infrequent and closely matched (Public = 7.96 and 6.25; Private = 7.36 and 6.00). Generally, sectoral differences are small for most subtypes. Attitude markers ($U = 32.0, p = .52$), Hedges ($U = 41.0, p = .96$), and Boosters ($U = 22.0, p = .12$) are not significant. Self-mentions show a near-significant trend favouring private universities ($U = 18.0, p = .06$). The only significant difference is Engagement markers, which are substantially higher in the private corpus ($U = 9.0, p = .04$). Taken together, the table indicates broadly similar interactional profiles across

sectors, with the notable exception that private universities involve readers more directly through engagement resources, while public universities foreground stance via attitude expressions. Attitude markers that contain value-laden words, such as *best* and *new*, were highly used by the universities to act as a "moral evaluation" and to avoid any argument or debate (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Below are the examples for this category:

- a) We hope this Prospectus will assist you in making the *best* decision for your educational journey (PB3).
- b) We continue to focus on setting *new* standards in education and extending the frontiers of research (PR6).

Self-mentions most commonly appeared as the university's name and first-person forms (*we*, *our*, *us*). Both sectors used these to project institutional identity and authorial presence, foregrounding agency and commitment to prospective students. Such self-referencing frames offerings as value propositions rather than mere obligations (Bhatia, 1993). Examples of self-mentions can be seen below:

- a) *Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)* is the second-oldest university in Malaysia and one of the leading universities in the country (PB2).
- b) *The university* is renowned for its leadership in academic pursuits and engagement with industry and community (PR5).

Engagement markers were the third most used interactional metadiscourse in the Malaysian universities' promotional materials. This subtype includes second-person address (*you/your*), imperatives and invitations (e.g., *expand*, *apply*, *join*), questions directed at readers, and appeals to shared knowledge. The usage of first-person point of view, such as *our*, and the second-person point of view, *you*, indicates that the university is aware of its interaction with the reader (Fang & Zhuang, 2022). These can be seen in the examples below:

- a) *Expand* your study experience through our international linkages with overseas universities such as Northumbria University, Western Sydney University, University of Southern Queensland, Auckland University of Technology, Hull University, Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Essex and many more (PR3).
- b) They are equipped with laboratories that are important to allow *you* to perform research with convenience (PB9).

Hedges or cues that withholding the author's commitment was also used by the Malaysian universities. The highest usage of hedges includes *one of the ...* and *may* signify the representation of something without expressing any certainty. The usage of hedges acknowledges alternative viewpoints that may be held by the readers and thus shows politeness towards their readers (Hyland, 2005). The following examples illustrate the hedges used:

- a) The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is the manifestation of *one of the major aspirations* of Muslim scholars in Malaysia to have an Islamic university in Malaysia to lead the Muslim ummah in all branches of knowledge (PB4).
- b) A walk on the beach will offer an opportunity to collect beautiful seashells, and occasionally you *may* find tiny crabs struggling to find their way out of the sea (PB9).

Boosters assert strong certainty. Cognitive verbs such as *know* and intensifiers *more than* were among the examples of Boosters used in the corpora. Boosters enhance the author's certainty and commitment to their propositional claims. (Hu and Cao (2015) also agree that through the use of Boosters, it solidifies the author's status as "*privileged knowers in their disciplinary community*" (p. 20). Below are the examples of this subtype as used in the corpora:

- a) Because we *know* that it's important for our students to gain a deeper understanding towards their fields. (PR8).
- b) Our on-campus accommodation is *more than a place to stay* (PR2).

Overall, Malaysian university prospectuses are densely metadiscursive (=194 items per 1,000 words) and show a shared organisational profile across sectors. Interactive resources dominate the promotional materials. Transitions lead, with Code-glosses and Frame markers supporting textual navigation. Evidentials and Endophorics are rare, which is consistent with the visually supported genre. Interactional resources are also broadly similar. Attitude markers are most common, with Self-mentions and Engagement next, while Hedges and Boosters remain modest. Inferentially, most public-private differences are not significant; the one robust divergence is Engagement markers, which occur more often in private prospectuses (Mann-Whitney $U = 9.0$, $p = .04$). Taken together, the findings suggest that both sectors rely on information management and coherence to persuade, but private universities add a stronger reader-involving layer, directly addressing applicants and inviting action.

CONCLUSION

The descriptive profiles and inferential tests show that Malaysian university prospectuses are mainly organised through interactive resources. Transitions handle much of the work needed for coherence and cohesion. This structure relates to Aristotle's *logos*, indicating that universities depend on logical, text-structuring appeals to help readers navigate complex offerings. At the same time, the emphasis on Self-mentions and chosen Attitude markers reflects a secondary investment in *pathos*. This frames the university's identity, values, and commitments in ways that emotionally connect with prospective students. In contrast, signs of *ethos*, like evidence citation or strong authority claims, are more restrained here. This suggests that credibility comes more from clear organisation and tone instead of heavy use of evidence.

A key contribution of this study is identifying Engagement markers as the unique interactional tool in this genre. While most interactive patterns exist across sectors, this subtype is notably higher in private-sector texts. This shows a purposeful strategy to address readers directly, invite action, and encourage participation through commands, the use of "you/your," and invitations. In Aristotelian terms, private universities' promotional materials add a stronger emotional layer without losing logical appeal by involving readers as active participants. This

refines the current understanding of metadiscourse in promotional writing. It highlights that it is not just the volume of interaction that counts, but also where that interaction occurs. Identifying Engagement marker as the key difference advances theory within Hyland's framework and provides a clear focus for genre analysis in higher-education marketing.

For practical use, marketing teams can apply these insights to balance the logos, pathos, and ethos mix. They should maintain strong logos with clear sequencing from Transitions, Code-glosses, and Frame markers, while enhancing Engagement markers at strategic points such as headlines, calls to action, and program highlights to personalise offers and encourage responses. Ethos should be used selectively, focusing on credible specifics like awards, accreditations, and rankings rather than generic claims. This helps avoid clutter in the text while reinforcing trust. For academics and writing instructors, these profiles offer useful examples of how text-structuring tools can persuade, how Engagement markers shift interpersonal dynamics, and how slight changes in approach, like using imperatives versus descriptive statements, can influence perceived engagement.

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