POWER OF AMPLIFICATION: LINGUISTIC BOOSTERS IN MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPOREAN PRIVATE HEALTHCARE INFORMATIVE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTINGS

Siti Nurafiifah ZULKIFLI[*1]
Maizura Mohd NOOR[2]
Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Malaysia
[1]afiifahzull03@gmail.com
[2]maizu567@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategic use of boosters, a type of interactional metadiscourse, in informative social media postings within the culturally diverse contexts of Malaysia and Singapore. Drawing on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, this qualitative study examines 30 informative social media (*Instagram*) postings from two private medical centres: Subang Jaya Medical Centre and Mount Elizabeth Hospital. Both private medical centres strategically use boosters to highlight expertise, assert authority, and influence the public's perception, particularly in promoting advanced technology and positive health outcomes. Due to the cultural differences, the use of booster varies between these two, with Malaysia favouring superlatives and Singapore employing more affective language, reflecting the influence of cultural and market factors. This study highlights the persuasive nature of the informative social media postings and the healthcare industry's reliance on assertive language to establish credibility and influence health-related decisions. This study contributes to an understanding of how cultural differences and genre conventions intersect in shaping persuasive language within online healthcare communication.

Keywords: advertising; boosters; cultural values; informative social media postings; interactional metadiscourse

Introduction

Prioritising health is essential, as it plays a critical role in improving well-being and preventing illness. In today's fast-paced society, providing reliable health information to the public is more important than ever to support informed decision-making and promote positive health behaviours. Advertising, particularly through informative social media postings, has emerged as a powerful channel for delivering health-related knowledge to the public. These postings, also referred to advertising, are widely accessible and have become an influential part of modern health communication (Pelet & Ettis, 2022). Informative social media postings can motivate healthy choices (Hsu, 2023), empower consumers to make informed healthcare decisions (Park et al., 2023), and significantly influence public health behaviours when persuasive strategies are effectively employed (Simpson, 2017).

However, informative social media postings differ fundamentally from traditional, face-to-face communication. Unlike direct interactions, informative social media postings lack non-verbal cues such as eye contact, facial expressions, and body language, which are essential for building trust and conveying meaning (Johansson, 2018). This presents a unique challenge as the effectiveness of social media health communication depends entirely on how the message is written. To successfully engage and persuade the public, health advertisements must be carefully crafted to compensate for the absence of physical presence and personal interaction (Lee & Ande, 2023), especially when dealing with complex medical terminology that may be unfamiliar to the general audience (Gandolf, 2023).

This is where metadiscourse becomes essential. Metadiscourse refers to the linguistic strategies writers use to organise content, build relationships with readers, and shape how information is interpreted (Hyland, 2005; Love et al., 2023). When applied effectively, metadiscourse can bridge the gap between complex health information and public understanding. It helps writers engage readers, highlight important points, and guide them through the message, ultimately making the communication more persuasive and accessible (Hyland, 2005; Ibrahim, 2021). Boosters is a type of interactional metadiscourse that can foster writer-reader engagement (Qiu e al., 2024).

If informative social media postings are not written effectively, the risk of miscommunication and misleading information increases. Misleading content can have serious consequences, prompting consumers to make poor health decisions based on inaccurate or exaggerated claims (Bailey et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2023). Such misinformation can erode public trust, contribute to ineffective or harmful health practices, and widen existing health disparities (García-Nieto et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). These risks were especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when accurate and persuasive health communication was crucial for promoting preventive behaviours (Isalambo & Kenneth, 2020).

Although metadiscourse has been widely examined in academic writing, its role in advertising is underexplored (Lai, 2023), and scholars have called for further work across diverse genres (Ibrahim, 2021). This study examines the influence of culture on the use of boosters in informative social media postings by Malaysian and Singaporean medical centres to engage and persuade the public. By doing so, it aims

to support more effective, ethical, and trustworthy health communication on social media.

Literature Review

Interactional Metadiscourse and Boosters

Hyland (2004) categorises metadiscourse into two main categories: interactive and interactional. While interactive metadiscourse focuses on textual organisation, interactional metadiscourse fosters engagement between the writer and the reader (Hyland, 2004). Figure 1 summarises the framework.

Figure 1
Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005)
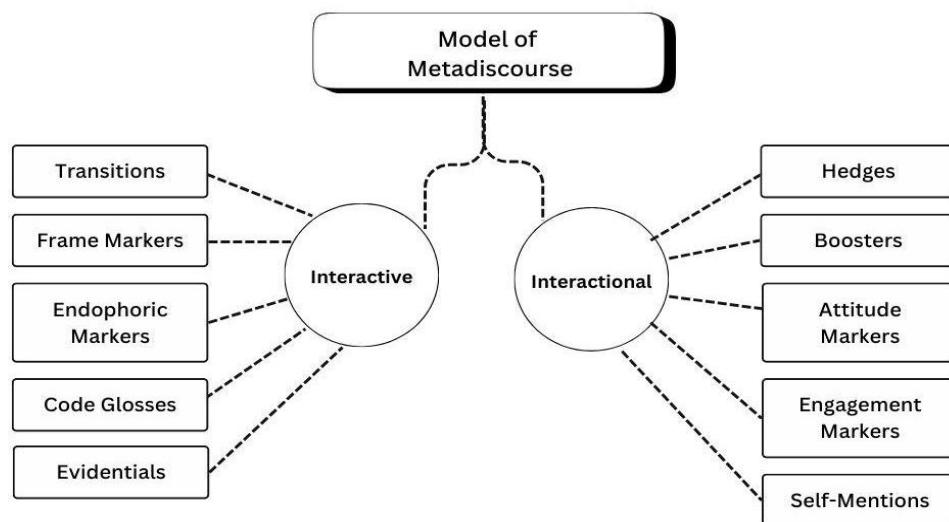
This study focuses on interactional metadiscourse, particularly boosters (certainty markers), and its role in informative social media postings where concise language and persuasive techniques are essential. Boosters, a key element of interactional metadiscourse, are linguistic devices used to add emphasis (Dontcheva-Navrátilová, 2016; Tanveer et al., 2023), strengthen claims (Hyland, 1998), reflect confidence (Carrió-Pastor & Albalat-Mascarell, 2022), balance the assertion of truth with one's perspective (Yuvayapan & Peksoy, 2023), and enhance persuasiveness and enthusiasm (Mokhtar et al., 2021). Through the use of boosters, writers can strengthen their arguments, increase the persuasiveness of their claims, and minimise potential reader doubts (Aziz et al., 2016). Given the persuasive nature of informative social media postings and the need to convey health information convincingly, this study posits that boosters play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and influencing health-related decisions within informative social media postings.

**Persuasion Through Informative Social Media Postings**

Unlike other genres, informative social media postings operate within a persuasive paradigm, targeting a diverse audience with varying needs and understanding (Mohammed, 2022). This requires carefully crafted messages to persuade the public to view the advertised product or service favourably (Bex, 1993). Therefore, understanding informative social media postings as a persuasive genre and utilising genre conventions is crucial for advertisers to effectively achieve their communicative goals.

The use of social media advertising has risen sharply as it allows businesses, institutions, influencers, and followers to build relationships through engaging content (Breves et al., 2021). However, engagement alone does not guarantee persuasion (Breves et al., 2021). Informative social media postings must also be persuasive to motivate audiences to purchase products or services (Hidarto & Andrieza, 2022). Persuasion is a key aspect of social interaction and operates as a linguistic strategy to shape attitudes, reactions, beliefs, and agreement (Kashiha, 2022). Interactional metadiscourse strengthens the persuasive force of arguments (Hyland, 2005) and, in informative postings, supports not only sales but also rapport building and brand recognition (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019). Metadiscourse is therefore rhetorically significant in crafting impactful messages (Hyland, 2005), and the strategic use of interactional metadiscourse is essential for giving informative social media postings real persuasive power.

While research on metadiscourse has been prevalent in academic writing (Hayisama & Adnan, 2019; Hu & Cao, 2011; Korkmaz, 2022; Lo et al., 2021; Nugroho, 2019), studies exploring its use in advertising is limited (Lai, 2023). However, existing research across various fields, including politics (Esmer, 2017; Etemadfar & Namaziandost, 2020), literature (AlJazrawi & AlJazrawi, 2021), and advertising (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Lai, 2023; Roslan et al., 2021), highlights the persuasive power of interactional metadiscourse. Specifically, boosters are effective in expressing certainty (Hyland, 2005) and enhancing persuasion (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016). Thus, boosters can be particularly important in informative social media postings, where the goal is to inform and persuade (Hu & Cao, 2011; Noorian & Biria, 2010).

Malaysian and Singaporean Cultural Values

Figure 2 illustrates the values of Malaysia and Singapore across six dimensions as outlined by Hofstede et al. (2010): Power Distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Masculinity-Femininity (Motivation towards Achievement and Success), Uncertainty Avoidance, Short-Long-Term Orientation, and Restraint-Indulgence. Note that Malaysia is represented in orange, while Singapore is in grey.

Figure 2
Comparison Scores Across Cultural Dimensions for Malaysia and Singapore

(Source: https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool)
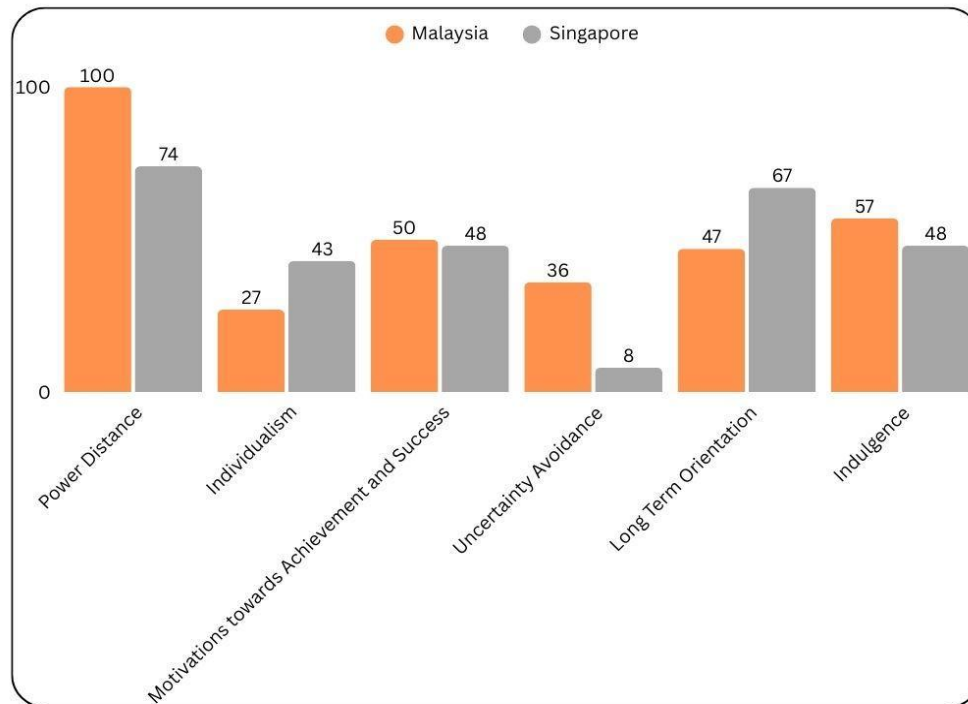
Firstly, concerning Power Distance, both countries exhibit high scores, with Malaysia scoring even higher than Singapore. This indicates that they not only accept but also expect hierarchies and power imbalances in their societal structures. Secondly, on the Individualism-Collectivism dimension, Malaysia leans heavily towards collectivism, which prioritises group harmony, social connections, and the well-being of the community over individual needs. Singaporeans, while still leaning towards collectivism, might be more receptive to individual acts and desires. Thirdly, on the Masculinity-Femininity (Motivation towards Achievement and Success) dimension, both Malaysia and Singapore have a balanced emphasis on achievement-oriented values. This suggests that there is a balance between striving for success and maintaining a positive work-life balance. Fourthly, in terms of Uncertainty Avoidance, Singapore shows a strong tolerance for ambiguity and flexibility. While rules are followed, this is more due to hierarchical respect than a desire for predictability (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Malaysia also demonstrates comfort with uncertainty, though to a slightly lesser degree, reflecting a preference for some structure without being overly rigid (Tehseen et al., 2021). Fifthly, the Short-Long-Term Orientation scores show a striking difference with Malaysians leaning towards a short-term orientation, reflecting a normative culture, characterised by a strong respect for tradition, a focus on quick results, and a relatively low tendency to save for the future (Haq, 2020). Normative societies, which score low on this dimension, prefer to uphold time-honoured customs and norms, often viewing societal change with suspicion, and

are concerned with establishing the absolute Truth (Hofstede Insightsm 2023). In contrast, Singaporeans demonstrate a long-term orientation, prioritising perseverance, adaptability, and future planning. Finally, the scores on the Indulgence-Restraint dimension present Malaysians as those who value life's pleasures. In contrast, Singapore demonstrates a more restrained approach with a slightly greater emphasis on prioritising practicality over immediate pleasure.

Past Studies

Lai's (2023) study investigated the role of interactional metadiscourse and its persuasive effects in 50 advertisements in 2022 for women's products. The findings indicated that boosters in these advertisements, particularly in Cosmopolitan magazine, ranked second lowest compared to other markers. However, boosters play an important role in conveying certainty about the advertised products. Furthermore, the results indicate that the use of adverbs enhances the writer's voice, thereby making it easier to gain the consumer's trust.

Another study on metadiscourse in advertising was conducted by Giordano and Marongiu (2022), focusing on 30 public posters related to the coronavirus disseminated by healthcare organisations and institutions. Unlike Lai's (2023) study, which identified a lower prevalence of boosters, Marongiu (2022) revealed a substantial presence of boosters, including adjectives, adverbs, and superlatives. The writers found that the utilisation of boosters in these advertisements enhances the credibility and authoritative stance of the message, thereby reflecting the expertise of the organisations and institutions on this critical subject. This strategy not only serves to inform the public but also fosters confidence in the information presented during a crucial time.

Using Hyland's (2005) Model of Metadiscourse, Gustafsson (2018) examined the persuasive use of metadiscourse in online makeup advertisements from 20 prominent brands, resulting in a total of 74 advertisements analysed. The study revealed that boosters were among the most commonly used markers in these advertisements. Significantly, the writer highlighted the challenges associated with interpreting boosters, given their varied forms. Nevertheless, the writer successfully identified boosters within clauses or entire phrases, where they function to convey certainty and assertiveness, thereby enhancing the writer's confidence in the information presented about makeup products.

Cross-cultural studies further emphasise the influence of cultural factors on the use of interactional metadiscourse (Farnia & Mohammadi, 2018; Incelli 2017; Nugroho 2020). This research focuses on the employment of interactional metadiscourse, specifically boosters, in informative social media postings within the Malaysian and Singaporean contexts.

Although metadiscourse has been widely studied across genres, existing research has largely focused on academic writing (Hayisama & Adnan, 2019; Korkmaz, 2022; Lo et al., 2021), with limited attention to advertising contexts (Lai, 2023). Studies by Lai (2023), Giordano and Marongiu (2022), and Gustafsson (2018) have examined boosters in advertisements, but these were mainly situated in Western print media, leaving their persuasive role in digital advertising

underexplored. Cross-cultural research has also shown that cultural values shape the use of interactional metadiscourse (Farnia & Mohammadi, 2018; Incelli, 2017; Nugroho, 2020).

To address this gap, the present study analyses boosters in informative social media postings by Malaysian and Singaporean medical centres through the lens of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. By focusing on this genre and cross-cultural comparison, the study aims to advance understanding of how boosters function in culturally diverse healthcare communication on social media.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to explore how cultural influences shape the use of boosters in informative social media postings from Malaysia and Singapore. The aim is to understand persuasive linguistic choices through rich, contextual interpretation rather than numerical analysis (Brennen, 2021; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). A deductive content analysis was used, guided by Hyland's (2005) model of interactional metadiscourse. This deductive approach was suitable because the study aimed to identify theory-driven features, specifically boosters, which function to express certainty, reinforce claims, and enhance persuasiveness in health messaging (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022; Hyland, 2005).

Thirty English-language posts were purposely selected; 15 each from Subang Jaya Medical Centre (SJMC) in Malaysia and Mount Elizabeth Hospital (MEH) in Singapore, based on their informative, non-promotional content shared on Instagram between June and December 2023 (refer to Appendices 1 and 2). Instagram was chosen for its high public engagement and the accessibility of health content (Al-Subhi, 2022). Since all data were publicly available, ethical approval was not required (Huang et al., 2023).

Each post was transcribed and organised into a dataset. The coding process involved two cycles of manual coding (see Appendices 3 and 4). In the first reading, the researchers familiarised themselves with the content. In the second, boosters were identified, highlighted, and coded based on the functions of boosters discussed in the literature. We acknowledged that some markers could perform multiple booster functions and this approach was suitable as the study prioritised understanding function over marker frequency. Each coded item included notes to justify the classification in context. A second coder reviewed a subset of the data, and intercoder reliability was measured using Cohen's Kappa, yielding a result of 0.63, which indicates substantial agreement (Cole, 2023).

While Krippendorff's (2019) framework is widely used for quantitative content analysis with large samples and statistical validation, it was not applied here due to the small-scale and interpretive nature of this study. Instead, the focus was on in-depth, context-sensitive analysis that prioritised theoretical alignment and coding transparency over statistical generalisability. This rigorous, theory-driven approach ensured trustworthy and meaningful insights into how boosters are used to engage audiences and shape public understanding in cross-cultural healthcare communication.

Results and Discussion

The results are organised into three sections: first, the use of boosters in informative social media postings by the Malaysian medical centre; second, the use of boosters in informative social media postings by the Singaporean medical centre; and third, a comparative analysis of the identified boosters in light of cultural-value orientations.

Boosters in SJMC Informative Social Media Postings

Example 1 was published to educate the public about the facts and myths surrounding antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which occurs when bacteria, fungi, parasites, and viruses no longer respond to antimicrobial medications. The posting employs the strategic use of the booster key player in addressing AMR. It amplifies the importance of vaccinations in combating AMR, elevating vaccinations from being one of the available solutions to a pivotal choice in addressing the health challenge. This persuasive technique injects a sense of urgency for the public to prioritise vaccinations. The words "a key player" conveys a sense of certainty, authority, and confidence.
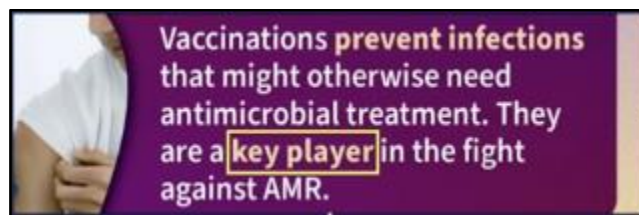
Example 1:

Example 2, published in conjunction with World Heart Day, provides another compelling illustration of booster usage. The posting aims to educate the public about heart disease in Malaysia by comparing CT angiograms with traditional angiograms. The posting highlights the urgent need for early heart disease detection through CT angiograms by highlighting its prevalence in Malaysia. The precise figure of *1.7 million* is used as a booster to persuade readers to prioritise their health and consider early detection methods. The statistic underscores the severity of the health condition and enhances persuasive power. Similar to Example 1, it adds a sense of urgency and authority, which convinces the readers to take the health threat seriously and consider the advertised CT angiogram. Note that No. 1 is another figure identified as a booster in the posting.
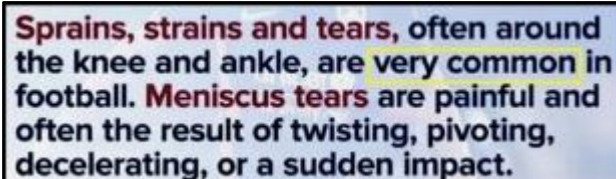
Example 2:

Published in conjunction with National Sports Day, Example 3 provides information on common sports injuries associated with badminton, diving, and

football. Example 3, which focuses on football injuries, illustrates how the booster "very" is used as a booster to emphasise the prevalence of such injuries in the sport. It amplifies the word "common" by emphasising the perceived likelihood of experiencing sprains, strains, and tears, potentially influencing readers about the risks and safety precautions. Highlighting the commonality of such injuries encourages readers to be more aware of the risks and take appropriate preventive measures.

Example 3:

Sprains, strains and tears, often around the knee and ankle, are very common in football. Meniscus tears are painful and often the result of twisting, pivoting, decelerating, or a sudden impact.
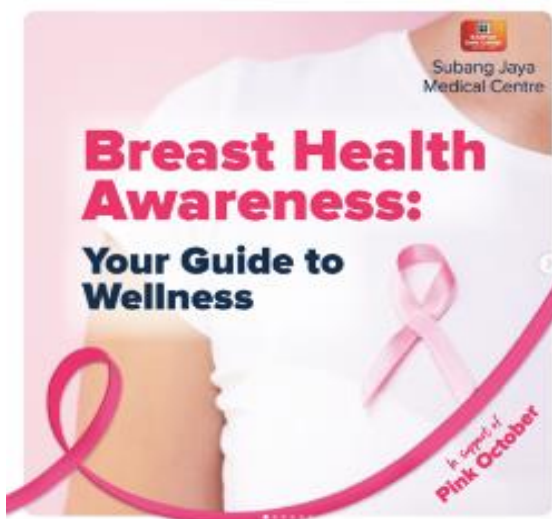
Example 4 was published in support of Pink October. The posting aims to raise awareness about breast health and underscore the importance of early detection. The posting promoting breast cancer awareness capitalises on two boosters: "early" and "higher". These boosters amplify the persuasive impact of the message. Correlating "early detection" with "higher survival" underscores the critical importance of proactive screening for improving survival rates. The booster "early" highlights the significance of timely detection and intervention, while the booster "higher" emphasises the comparative positive impact on survival rates. The concise equation highlights the life-saving potential of early detection.

Example 4:

Early Detection = Higher Survival!

Example 5 introduces an innovation in blood glucose monitoring to enhance patients' quality of life while emphasising the government's commitment in diabetes management. The posting employs the booster "highest" to emphasise that diabetes rates among Malaysians surpass all other nations in the region. The strategic use of the booster evokes a sense of urgency and concern among Malaysians, which will prompt them to take the health concern seriously, get tested, obtain further information, or even seek preventive measures.
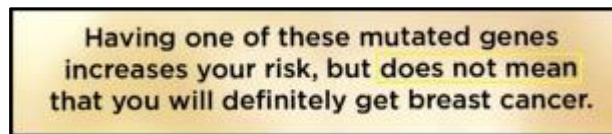
Example 5:

Malaysia has the highest diabetes rate in the Western Pacific region.

**Boosters in MEH Informative Social Media Postings**

Example 6 was published to address and clarify all the common questions the public has about breast cancer. The posting strategically employs the phrase "does not mean" as a booster to highlight that while having one of these mutated genes increases one's risk of breast cancer, it does not mean they will contract the cancer . The phrase creates a clear distinction between risk and certainty. Thus, the linguistic choice aims to alleviate potential anxiety and provide reassurance to educate the public about genetic predisposition to breast cancer.

Example 6:

Having one of these mutated genes increases your risk, but does not mean that you will definitely get breast cancer.

Example 7 encourages individuals to engage in proactive cardiovascular health management by implementing the practical guidelines provided by MEH and scheduling a heart screening. To encourage the public to quit smoking for heart health, the posting cites a compelling statistic: a 50% reduction in cardiovascular disease risk associated with quitting tobacco. This specific percentage, prominently displayed in the figure, supports the credibility of the claim and provides readers with a tangible sense of the benefits, making it more believable (Aziz et al. 2016). Prominently displaying this specific percentage supports the credibility of the claim, providing readers with evidence of the significant health benefits associated with quitting smoking.

Example 7:

50% reduced risk of Cardiovascular Diseases when you quit Tobacco.
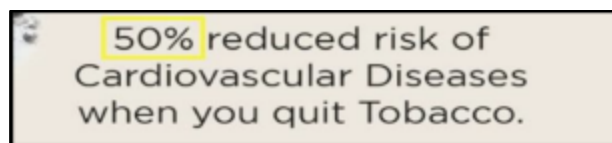
Example 8 addresses the misconception that lung cancer primarily affects a specific gender, aiming to educate the public with accurate information about the disease. The posting utilises a precise numerical phrase "three times more" as a booster to amplify the risk of smoking and encourage smoking cessation. This strategy draws on the persuasive power of concrete, quantifiable evidence in health communication. By providing a quantifiable measure of heightened risk, a memorable metric that underscores the long-term consequences of smoking, the posting appeals to logic and fear to motivate smokers toward behavioural change.

Example 8:

Vaping raises lung disease risk. Plus, ex-smokers are three times more at risk of lung cancer than never-smokers, even 25 years after quitting.
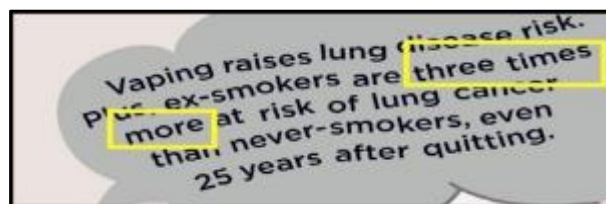
Example 9 aims to debunk common breast cancer myths and encourage early detection among women. The posting strategically employs the booster "crucial" to emphasise the importance of early breast cancer detection in achieving successful treatment outcomes. This linguistic choice elevates the perceived significance of early detection from mere importance to absolute necessity. By highlighting the critical link between early detection and effective treatment, the posting likely aims to evoke a sense of urgency among women, persuading them to prioritise breast cancer screening and potentially improve their chances of positive health outcomes.

Example 9:

Example 10 seeks to clarify misconceptions about cancer treatment, emphasising its safety and alleviating anxiety regarding treatment options. The use of the adverb "equally" functions as a booster by emphasising the comparable effectiveness of oral chemotherapy to other cancer treatment methods. This strategic linguistic choice likely aims to reassure patients about the efficacy of oral chemotherapy, particularly in comparison to more traditional intravenous methods. By explicitly stating that oral chemotherapy is "equally" effective, the posting seeks to reassure patients and instils confidence in this treatment option as a viable and successful alternative.

Example 10:

Comparative Analysis of the Boosters in Selected Informative Social Media Postings in SJMC and MEH

The analysis reveals similarities and differences in the use of boosters in the informative social media postings by both healthcare providers.

As both Singapore and Malaysia exhibit high Power Distance values, they utilise boosters to assert expertise and efficacy in their informative social media postings. This similarity stems partly from the persuasive nature of advertising itself (Breves et al., 2021), where establishing authority is paramount. Furthermore, the healthcare industry, which is often characterised by its specialised knowledge and high stakes, further necessitates assertive language to build influence and accordingly influence decision-making. Thus, boosters are strategically used to underscore specialised knowledge (Example 2), positive health outcomes (Example 7), and advanced technology (Example 4). For Malaysian and Singaporean readers who are accustomed to the more hierarchical doctor-patient relationship, boosters serve as a powerful tool for healthcare providers to establish trust and influence readers' perceptions (Mokhtar et al., 2021).

While both Malaysia and Singapore exhibit a low Uncertainty Avoidance score, suggesting a cultural comfort with ambiguity (Park & Kim, 2008), the use of boosters in the selected informative social media postings is notable (Examples 3 and 6). This contradictory finding suggests that boosters may serve functions beyond simply minimising doubts within the dynamic and competitive healthcare market (Gandolf, 2023). They are employed to highlight advanced technology and treatments as well as appeal to a wider healthcare market that may be receptive to a more assertive communication style. The private healthcare providers' strategic use of boosters in informative social media postings reflects their focus on market reach and profitability. By employing boosters, they can enhance their competitiveness and revenue generation.

While Malaysia is classified as collectivist and Singapore as individualistic, the findings of this study contrast with Pham's (2022) assertion that superlative boosters are more prevalent in individualistic contexts. SJMC postings, representing the Malaysian context, prominently featured superlatives like highest and No. 1, emphasising authority and factual claims, as noted by Yuvayapan and Peksoy (2023). Conversely, MEH postings, representing Singapore, unexpectedly employed affective boosters such as does not mean and crucial, which reflect the writer's personal stance and emotional engagement. This is particularly surprising, given Singapore's individualistic cultural orientation, which is typically associated with direct, fact-based communication rather than emotionally expressive language. This suggests that the relationship between cultural values and booster usage in informative social media postings may be more complex than previously assumed, warranting further investigation.

Both Malaysia and Singapore place moderate importance on achievement and success, although it should be noted that Singapore falls slightly on the femininity dimension (as shown by the Motivation towards Achievement and Success dimension in Figure 1). This cultural value, balancing ambition with quality of life, shapes their healthcare landscape. In this context, advertisers use boosters to subtly connect these aspirations with healthcare choices. For example, emphasising cutting-edge technology (Example 10) appeals to the desire for the best possible health outcomes, reflecting a proactive, achievement-oriented mindset. Similarly, highlighting personalised or preventative care (Example 4) resonates with the desire for control over one's well-being, aligning with a sense of agency often associated with achievement motivation. While both countries demonstrate this achievement orientation in their healthcare messaging, it's worth noting that the use of "appeal to fear", as seen in campaigns targeting smoking cessation (Example 8) and glucose monitoring (Example 5), suggests a parallel strategy that creates concern to motivate behaviour change (Simpson, 2017).

Despite Malaysia's relatively normative culture, which slightly leans towards immediate gratification, the use of boosters in informative social media postings shows similarities to those found in Singapore, a country with a more pragmatic, future-oriented culture. This could be attributed to overlapping cultural values, the universal appeal of certain persuasive techniques, or the influence of globalised marketing trends. For instance, both Malaysian and Singaporean informative social media postings employ statistics and expert opinions to enhance credibility and

persuasive power (Examples 2, 7, and 8). This demonstrates that both countries are adaptable to their current situations, which is a key characteristic of a pragmatic culture (Lee & Ande, 2023). While cultural dimensions play a role, further research is needed to fully understand how they interact with other factors to shape informative social media posting strategies in Malaysia and Singapore.

Finally, the Indulgence-Restraint dimension offers further insight into cultural differences in informative social media postings. Malaysia's higher indulgence score suggests a greater receptivity to campaigns that frame health choices as pathways to enjoyment and enhanced quality of life (Examples 1 and 4). While Singapore leans towards restraint, suggesting a preference for practicality, responsibility, and long-term benefits (Examples 7 and 9), enjoyment and leisure still hold importance. Informative social media posting operates within a persuasive paradigm, targeting a diverse audience with varying needs and understandings (Mohammed, 2022). Although appeals to indulgence may potentially be effective in both countries, Singapore may require a more tailored marketing approach.

Conclusion

This study investigates the use of interactional metadiscourse, specifically boosters, in informative social media posts by Malaysian and Singaporean private healthcare providers, using a qualitative content analysis approach. The findings show that both contexts strategically employ boosters to amplify urgency, assert expertise, and shape public perception. SJMC relies more on statistics and superlatives to project authority, reflecting a collectivist and competitive healthcare environment, whereas MEH, consistent with Singapore's more individualistic orientation, favours emotive enhancers. Despite these differences, both institutions promote preventive care and seek to enhance the perceived trustworthiness of their health messages. Overall, booster use in both countries extends beyond uncertainty reduction, serving broader persuasive and economic purposes within a landscape shaped by cultural values, global marketing practices, and healthcare competitiveness.

Boosters influence healthcare decisions by amplifying claims, appealing to emotion, and enhancing perceived trustworthiness. Healthcare organisations should therefore prioritise ethical and transparent communication that supports positive health outcomes while still recognising financial realities. Because booster use is shaped by cultural values, institutional goals, and marketing forces, communication must be culturally sensitive and context specific. Such ethically grounded messaging is central to building public trust and supporting informed decision making, particularly in individualistic settings like Singapore. Governments also play a key role in fostering confidence in the healthcare system through open, transparent communication. Finally, effective interaction between healthcare educators and patients is vital for knowledge acquisition, discussion of risks and treatment options, and the promotion of optimal self-management practices.

To improve the generalisability of the findings, future research should use larger, more diverse samples of healthcare marketing materials. Mixed-method approaches, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, are recommended to provide a multifaceted understanding of booster persuasive mechanisms.

Quantitative analysis could measure the actual impact of boosters on public attitudes and behaviours. Qualitative analysis could explore public interpretations and cultural factors influencing booster effectiveness. Combining these approaches can provide a more holistic understanding of how boosters function in Malaysian and Singaporean social media. In conclusion, understanding the complex interplay between culture, marketing, and persuasive language is paramount for effective healthcare communication.

References

Aziz, R. A., Chin, C. J., & Nordin, N. M. (2016). The use of interactional metadiscourse in the construction of gender identities among Malaysian ESL learners. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 22*(1), 207-220. https://doi.org/10.17576/3l-2016-2201-16

AlJazrawi, D., & AlJazrawi, Z. (2021). Metadiscourse as a way of achieving persuasion in literary criticism texts. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies, 21*(3), 245-263. https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2021-2103-14

Al-Subhi, A. S. (2022). Metadiscourse in online advertising: Exploring linguistic and visual metadiscourse in social media advertisements. *Journal of Pragmatics, 187*, 24-   40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.10.027

Bailey, R. L., Gahche, J. J., Miller, P. E., Thomas, P. R., & Dwyer, J. T. (2013). Why US adults use dietary supplements. *JAMA Internal Medicine, 173*(5), 355-361. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.2299

Bex, T. (1993). The genre of advertising. *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire, 71*(3), 719-732. https://doi.org/10.3406/rbph.1993.3900

Bingham, A. J., & Witkowsky, P. (2022). Deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative data analysis. In C. Vanover, P. Mihas, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data: After the interview* (pp. 133-146). Sage Publications.

Brennen, B. S. (2021). *Qualitative research methods for media studies* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Breves, P., Amrehn, J., Heidenreich, A., Liebers, N., & Schramm, H. (2021). Blind trust? The importance and interplay of parasocial relationships and advertising disclosures in explaining influencers' persuasive effects on their followers. *International Journal of Advertising, 40*(7), 1209-1229. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1881237

Carrió-Pastor, M. L., & Albalat-Mascarell, A. (2022). The use of boosters and evidentials in British campaign debates on the Brexit referendum. *Pragmatics, 33*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.21008.car

Cole, R. (2023). Inter-rater reliability methods in qualitative case study research. *Sociological Methods & Research, 53*(4), 1944-1975. https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241231156971

Dontcheva-Navratilova, O. (2016). Cross-cultural variation in the use of hedges and boosters in academic discourse. *Prague Journal of English Studies, 5*(1), 163-184. https://doi.org/10.1515/pjes-2016-0009

Esmer, E. (2017). Interpersonal metadiscourse markers in Turkish election rally speeches delivered by pro-Turkish and pro-Kurdish leaders. *Athens Journal of Social Sciences, 4*(4), 367-384. https://doi.org/10.30958/ajss.4-4-2

Etemadfar, P., & Namaziandost, E. (2020). An investigation of interpersonal metadiscourse markers as persuasive strategies in Donald Trump's 2016 campaign speeches. *Critical Literary Studies, 2*(4), 117-130. https://doi.org/10.34785/j014.2020.749

Farnia, M., & Mohammadi, N. (2018). Cross-cultural analysis of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in persuasive local newspaper articles. *Discourse and Interaction, 11*(2), 27-44. https://doi.org/10.5817/di2018-2-27

Fuertes-Olivera, P. A., Velasco-Sacristán, M., Arribas-Baño, A., & Samaniego-Fernández, E. (2001). Persuasion and advertising English: Metadiscourse in slogans and headlines. *Journal of Pragmatics, 33*(8), 1291-1307.

Gandolf, S. (2023, April 10). *Healthcare marketing and medical advertising for doctors, hospitals, healthcare networks & pharmaceuticals*. Healthcare Success. https://healthcaresuccess.com/blog/healthcare-marketing/doctors-please-watch-your-language-when-medical-jargon-kills-the-marketing-message.html

García-Nieto, M. T., Gonzálvez-Vallés, J. E., & Viñarás-Abad, M. (2021). Social responsibility and misleading advertising of health products on the radio: The opinion of the professionals. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(13), 6912. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18136912

Giordano, M., & Marongiu, M. A. (2022, May 3). Metadiscourse, rhetoric and the pandemic: A verbal-visual analysis of public information posters. *CERLIS Series*. https://aisberg.unibg.it/handle/10446/214387

Gustafsson, M. (2018, March 23). Metadiscourse in advertising: Persuasion in online advertisements of makeup brands. *DiVA Portal*. http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1191292&dswid=7764

Haq, Y. (2020). Malaysia culture and economy. *ResearchGate*. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.22569.42088

Hayisama, F., Shah, M. I. A., & Adnan, W. N. A. W. (2019). Rhetorical style across cultures: An analysis of metadiscourse markers in academic writing of Thai and Malaysian students. *LSP International Journal, 6*(1), 19-37. https://doi.org/10.11113/lspi.v6n1.76

Hidarto, A., & Andrieza, A. (2022). Gender differences in influencer advertisements on Instagram: A multimodal perspective. *Journal of Language and Literature, 22*(1), 220-237. https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.v22i1.4095

Hofstede Insights. (2023). National culture and organisational culture—How are they different and how do they interconnect. https://www.hofstedeinsights.com/country/malaysia/

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Hsu, C. (2023). Who and what messages are more suitable for health ads: The combined influence of endorsers and message framing on visual attention and ad effectiveness. *Aslib Proceedings*. https://doi.org/10.1108/ajim-03-2022-0108

Hu, G., & Cao, F. (2011). Hedging and boosting in abstracts of applied linguistics articles: A comparative study of English- and Chinese-medium journals. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43*(11), 2795-2809. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.04.007

Huang, J., Xiao, W., & Wang, Y. (2023). Use of metadiscourse for identity construction in tourist city publicity: A comparative study of Chinese and Australian social media discourse. *Heliyon, 9*(12), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e23122

Hyland, K. (1998). *Hedging in scientific research articles*. John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.54

Hyland, K. (2004). Disciplinary interactions: Metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 13*, 133-151.

Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.

Ibrahim, W. M. A. (2021). Exploring interactional metadiscourse in anti-obesity advertisements on Egyptian Facebook pages promoting sleeve gastrectomy: A multimodal approach. *Maǧallaẗ Al-Baḥṯ Al-ʿIlmī Fī Al-Ādāb, 22*(22), 1-39. https://doi.org/10.21608/jssa.2021.70156.1253

Incelli, E. A. (2017). A cross-cultural contrastive analysis of interpersonal markers in promotional discourse in travel agency websites. In *EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.13137/978-88-8303-913-3/18481

Isalambo, K. B., & Kenneth, O. (2020). Interactive multimodal metadiscourse in Covid-19 campaign posters by Ministry of Health, Kenya. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, 5*(5), 1592-1601. https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.55.38

Johansson, V. (2018). *Teaching writing as a process and product in the language classroom* (Doctoral dissertation, Linnaeus University). *DiVA Portal*. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1191292/FULLTEXT02

Kashiha, H. (2022). On persuasive strategies: Metadiscourse practices in political speeches. *Discourse and Interaction, 15*(1), 77-100. https://doi.org/10.5817/DI2022-1-77

Korkmaz, H. (2022). The use of epistemic modality markers as hedges in scientific research texts. *International Journal of Field Education, 8*(2), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.32570/ijofe.1116168

Krippendorff, K. (2019). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878781

Lai, X. (2023). A study of interactional metadiscourse and its persuasive function in advertising discourse. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, 6*(4), 79-84. https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2023.6.4.11

Lee, C. W., & Ande, T. (2023). Organizational behavior implication: Hofstede's perspectives in comparison—Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, and France. *Advances in Management and Applied Economics, 13*(4), 91-110. https://doi.org/10.47260/amae/1346

Lo, Y. Y., Othman, J., & Lim, J. W. (2021). Mapping the use of boosters in academic writing by Malaysian first-year doctoral students. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science & Humanities, 29*(3), 1917-1937. https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.3.23

Love, R., Darics, E., & Palmieri, R. (2023). Engaging the public: English local government organisations' social media communications during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Applied Corpus Linguistics, 3*(3), 1-13 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acorp.2023.100060

Mohammed, G. B. (2022). The linguistic features of advertising English. *Algerian Scientific Journal Platform, 5*(1), 545-553. https://asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/180066

Mokhtar, M. M., Hashim, H., Khalid, P. Z. M., Albakri, I. S. M. A., & Jobar, N. A. (2021). A comparative study of boosters between genders in the introduction section. *Arab World English Journal, 12*(1), 515-526. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no1.33

Noorian, M., & Biria, R. (2010). Interpersonal metadiscourse in persuasive journalism: A study of texts by American and Iranian EFL columnists. *Journal of Modern Language, 20*(1), 64-79. https://jml.um.edu.my/index.php/JML/article/view/3374

Nugroho, A. (2020). Investigating the use of metadiscourse markers by American and Indonesian writers in opinion and business articles. *Journal of English Language and Culture, 10*(2), 75-87. https://doi.org/10.30813/jelc.v10i2.2138

Nugroho, A. (2019). Exploring metadiscourse use in thesis abstracts: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of English Language and Culture, 9*(2), 113-127. https://doi.org/10.30813/jelc.v9i2.1689

Park, S., Yun, G. W., Cook, D. M., & Coppes, M. J. (2023). Consumer perceptions of information features in healthcare service advertisements and attitudes toward advertising. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing, 17*(2), 209-228. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijphm-02-2022-0016

Park, D., & Kim, S. (2008). The effects of consumer knowledge on message processing of electronic word-of-mouth via online consumer reviews. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, 7*(4), 399-410. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2007.12.001

Pelet, J., & Ettis, S. A. (2022). Social media advertising effectiveness. *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction, 18*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.4018/ijthi.2022010106

Pham, T. (2022). Individualism and collectivism in advertising – An overview. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 4*(1), 30-36. https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2022.4.1.3

Qiu, X., Wang, Y. (Arthur), Dartey, E. A., & Kim, M. (2024). Interactional metadiscourse in expert and student disciplinary writing: Exploring intrageneric and functional variation. *English for Specific Purposes, 73*, 124-140. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2023.10.007

Romanova, I. D., & Smirnova, I. V. (2019). Persuasive techniques in advertising. *Training, Language and Culture, 3*(2), 55-70. https://doi.org/10.29366/2019tlc.3.2.4

Roslan, N. W., Abdul Halim, H., Abdul Jabar, M. A., & Hassan, H. (2021). Presupposition towards metadiscourse in product centric Malaysian food & beverages television advertisements. *International Journal of Academic Research in*

Business and Social Sciences, 11(3). https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v11-i3/8671

Simpson, J. K. (2017). Appeal to fear in health care: Appropriate or inappropriate? *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies, 25*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12998-017-0157-8

Tanveer, S., Arslan, F., & Mahmood, M. I. (2023). Columnist insights: A corpus-based analysis of boosters and self-mentions in Pakistani English newspaper. *Pakistan Journal of Language Studies, 7*(1), 138-155. https://pjls.gcuf.edu.pk/index.php/pjls/article/view/242

Tehseen, S., Deng, P., Wu, B., & Gao, Y. (2021). Culture values and entrepreneurial innovativeness: A comparative study of Malaysian ethnic entrepreneurs. *Journal of Small Business Management, 61*(6), 2622-2655. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472778.2021.1934848

Vaismoradi, M., & Snelgrove, S. (2019). Theme in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(3). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.3.3376

Yuvayapan, F., & Peksoy, E. (2023). Hedges and boosters in 19th century British fiction. *English Studies at NBU, 9*(2), 225–238. https://doi.org/10.33919/esnbu.23.2.5

Zhang, X., Foo, S., Majid, S., Chang, Y., Dumaual, H. T. J., & Suri, V. R. (2019). Self-care and health-information-seeking behaviours of diabetic patients in Singapore. *Health Communication, 35*(8), 994-1003. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1606134

Zhao, W., Jin, Y., & Karinshak, E. (2023). Building trust and empowering informed decisions: Effects of risk disclosure and call to action on young adults' responses to dietary supplement advertising. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing, 17*(3), 249-264. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijphm-01-2023-0006

Appendix 1

The Selected advertisements from Subang Jaya Medical Centre (SJMC)

1) SJMC 1 (18/11/2023)

2) SJMC 2 (29/9/2023)

3) SJMC 3 (14/10/2023)

4)   SJMC 4 (3/10/2023)

5) SJMC 5 (14/11/2023)

Appendix 2

The Selected Advertisements from Mount Elizabeth Hospital (MEH)

6) MEH 6 (1/11/2024)
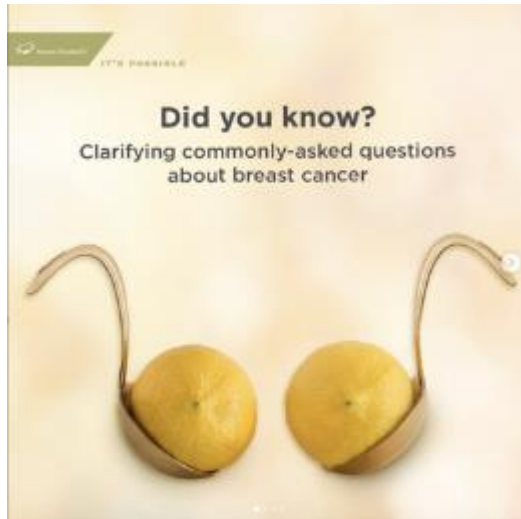
7)   MEH 7 (29/9/2023)

8)   MEH 8 (5/6/2023)

9) MEH 9 (3/10/203)

10) MEH 10 (30/12/2023)

Appendix 3

Coding Guidelines

	Coding Guidelines
1.	Study the Coding Schemes by studying the categories, examples and codes
2.	Prepare the necessary stationeries (pen, highlighters, etc)
3.	Study the Coding Guidelines by following the steps involved and tips on sections to the code and ignore
4.	Run through the date set - the advertisements
5.	Read the first posting to get overall gist of the whole posting the first time
6.	Read the first posting the second time for better understanding the whole posting
7.	Code the posting based on the coding schemes - first cycle of coding
8.	Include notes of initial impressions and important observations of the coded items
9.	Code the first posting again based on the coding scheme - second cycle of coding
10.	Examine the coded items by paying attention to the expression and context
11.	Record the coded items, if necessary
12.	Use highlighter to mark the booster markers For example: SJMC 1 Know The *Facts*.
13.	Identify items in context making sure that they are all related to each of the functions of the boosters.
14.	Note that: Every marker will have the same highlighter marker (green) at first as some of the markers might have more than one function. The functions will be explained in the data set in the 'notes' column. Then, each function will be coded based on the coding scheme in the data set. Example: TAE - To add emphasis

Coding Guidelines
TSC - To strengthen claims

15. Ignore the following:

    a. Phone numbers: +603-5639 1212 / +6019-317 1818
    b. Medical Centres' logos: Subang Jaya Medical Centre & Mount Elizabeth Hospital
    c. Pictures and graphics

16. Repeat the steps on all the postings from Subang Jaya Medical Centre and Mount Elizabeth Hospital

Appendix 4

Coding Scheme

Functions of Boosters	Description	Example	Code
To add emphasis (Dontcheva-Navrátilová, 2016; Tanveer et al., 2023)	Highlight or underscore a particular point, statement, or idea.	The study *demonstrates* the possibilities of using parallel English-Czech and Czech-English corpora to reveal quantitative differences…	TAE
To strengthen claims (Hyland, 1998)	Enable writers to confidently assert a proposition, making a strong claim about a given situation.	*"One important finding of our research* is the empirical validation of the relationship between corporate associations and consumer product responses."	TSC
To reflect confidence (Carrió-Pastor & Albalat-Mascarell, 2022)	Demonstrate confidence and convey the right amount of self-assurance to readers.	"We *certainly* haven't had it throughout this campaign. Britain deserves better than people who say they've got a quick fix but won't tell you what it *actually* means for Britain".	TRC
To balance the assertion of truth with one's perspective (Yuvayapan & Peksoy, 2023),	Writers are not just presenting information; they're showing that they personally believe what they're saying is a fact.	"You *must know* that I am a wandering beggar-girl, without home, parents, or friends…" "It was difficult *to know* what to do for the best for Mary."	TBA
To enhance persuasiveness and enthusiasm (Mokhtar et al., 2021)	To persuade readers	"We *have to* remain vigilant because I *strongly* believe that our leadership and our security cannot depend on our military alone."	TEP

*Note that the functions of booster can overlap