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## “Don’t Shop Here”: A Metadiscourse Analysis of Customer Reviews on Social Media

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### ABSTRACT1

“Don’t Shop Here” is the title of a Facebook group that posts authentic customer reviews, written by Egyptians, on different products and services. Since these posts are a form of communication that takes place via electronic devices on the internet, it is considered a Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD), also known as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). From the group title, the consumers’ posts that are published in the group are mostly negative, with a live interaction and comments by the group members, who sometimes include product/service providers among them. This study focuses on consumers’ interpersonal behavior that reveals their attitudes and evaluations. This is believed to be achieved by applying Hyland’s (2005) Metadiscourse Model. The model comprises several analytical tools that include engagement markers, hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention that assist in describing the different relationships between customers and their audience, on the one hand, and customers and product/service providers, on the other hand.

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## 1. Introduction

Online consumer reviews are posts that are written by consumers in reaction to their in-hand experience of various products and services. These reviews are posted via different channels, starting from the product/service websites, online shopping websites like Amazon and Alibaba to specialized websites like TripAdvisor that publishes reviews basically on hotels. Social media channels like Twitter and Facebook are social networks where people publish posts about their personal experiences, opinions in life and many other topics. However, the purpose of social media has evolved over the years. It is being used for different purposes, either business or social ones. One of these purposes is product reviewing that is written by customers. Some Facebook groups are dedicated to customer complaints where Facebook users, who are members of the group, are eligible to write their negative or positive experiences with the different goods and services. One of the very widely known Egyptian Facebook groups that includes over 620 thousand members is “Don’t Shop Here – A list of Untrustworthy Shops in Egypt). The difference between reviews that are written on Facebook and the ones on other channels is the length of the posts, since Facebook does not have limitations on the number of characters used in the posts. In addition, the variety of products and services that are reviewed by the group members is vast and is not confined to a specific industry either locally or internationally. Moreover, the live interaction between the group members on the posted reviews enriches the experience and adds more dimensions to the validity of the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is extracted from the first author’s Ph.D. thesis that is being conducted.

reviews, especially with the existence of some product/service providers as members in the group. The present study sheds light on customer reviews on social media as a form of Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD) by applying Hyland's (2005) Metadiscourse Model to investigate consumers' attitudes and feelings through their use of the different Metadiscoursal tools in the reviews.

## **2. Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD)**

With the evolution of technology, communication through computers has developed to become part of almost everyone's life to achieve social, professional or academic objectives with a wide range of platforms and communication channels. Research in CMD goes back to the late 1980's by Murray (1985) and Severinson (1986). However, researching CMD has begun to go rapidly in 1991 with the publication of "Interactive Written Discourse as an Engagement Genre" by Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore. Herring (2004) uses this term to encompass all kinds of interpersonal communication that is carried out through chat-channels, emails, instant messaging, and discussion boards. Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) assert that "[T]he study of computer-mediated discourse is a specialization within the broader interdisciplinary study of computer-mediated communication (CMC)." (p. 127) Herring (2001) adopts the term CMD as part of a more broader term of computer-mediated communication CMC to refer to any kind of language use within a computer networking. Crystal (2004) proposes his term of Netspeak to refer to linguistic communication on the internet, where it focuses on the medium. On the other side, he describes electronic discourse as an interactive dialogistic type of computer-mediate discourse. Crystal (2004) considers Netspeak or CMD a language variety that differs based on the different situations where it is used. He proposes six major categories based on computer-communicated situations and the medium of text transmission with its facilitations, limitations and restrictions: **Electronic Mail, Chatgroups, Virtual Worlds, World Wide Web (WWW), Instant Messaging, and Blogging.**

Crystal (2004) adds that there are some linguistic features that govern the CMD classification. These features include the following:

1. **Graphic features** include the text presentation and organization in terms of design of the page, spacing choice, colors... etc. It is a variety that is concerned with written language.
2. **Graphological features** have to do with the writing system of language in how it looks like in terms of bold italics to show emphasis or the use of certain punctuation marks like parentheses to give commentary information.
3. **Grammatical features** refer to the wide range of syntactic and morphological choices that offer the language user with distinctive style that appears in word order and sentence structure.
4. **Lexical features** include the vocabulary and idiomatic choices of a language that are used in a special variety of language to reflect the distinctiveness of that variety.
5. **Discourse features** reflect the whole organization of a text in terms of coherence and relevance as well as the logical organization of ideas and thoughts.

Another approach to classifying CMD is that of Herring (2007) where she points out to the importance of discourse classification since it gives the analyst an opportunity to identify the properties of the text under investigation. She proposes a model of classification based on sets of features or what she calls 'facets'- a term used by library and information system field to describe a method of classification and categorization- which she groups into technological (medium) and social (situation) features. She believes that there are different social and technical aspects of CMD that determine the way it is used among participants. The first group of categories is represented in the technological characteristics of the computer-mediated communication systems.

These factors include “messaging protocols, servers and clients as well as the associated hardware, software and interfaces of users’ computers.” (p. 11)

The second group of factors is rather situational including information about users involved in the communication, their relationship with one another and the purposes and motives for having such communication. In addition to this, the topics of the communication and the language they choose to use to achieve their communicative goals are important social factors, as well. Herring (2007) asserts that these two categories are not limited; they are rather open-ended, where other additional factors and elements can be added to give more insights about CMD.

### 3. Metadiscourse

The term Metadiscourse refers to a field of language studies that pays much attention to the organization and production of texts. It plays a vital role in realizing persuasive communication through the use of various linguistic elements in texts. Metadiscourse indicates that text production is not a mere task of communication of ideas but rather a social interaction between producers and interlocutors. "Metadiscourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goods or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating" (Hyland, 2005, p. 3) He continues to assert

Metadiscourse is therefore an important link between a text and its context as it points to the expectations readers have for certain forms of interactions and engagement. It highlights the dialogic role of discourse by revealing a writer's understanding of an audience through the ways that he or she addresses readers and their needs. These expectations are social, affective and cognitive, based on participants' beliefs and values, their individual goals and their experiences with similar texts in the past. (p. 13)

Metadiscourse is the art of describing the ways in which readers and writers interact in discourse. It has a major purpose: to show how individuals use language to understand each other and explain themselves in communication. This, in turn, results in clarifying the intended meaning of utterances in discourse.

Metadiscourse views speaking and writing as a social and communicative engagement that helps text producers understand the ways they present their ideas and intentions through their texts. Through the use of different Metadiscourse resources, text producers and interlocutors are able to reach a better understanding of the ‘authorial self-awareness’ and reflect this on the communication. Thus, Hyland (2005) stresses the fact that “Metadiscourse analysis is indicative rather than comprehensive” (p. 58) He pinpoints that it is one way to make propositional content coherent and persuasive to a particular audience where it is employed to “express social relations and establish bonds with others.” (p. 39)

According to Vande Kopple (1985), in Metadiscourse, “we do not add propositional material but help our receivers organize, classify, interpret, evaluate and react to such material. Metadiscourse, therefore, is discourse about discourse or communication about communication.” (p. 83)

Although it is a new approach to language analysis that has gained its popularity in the past two decades, the term “Metadiscourse” is well-rooted in the studies presented by Vande Kopple (1985), Crismore (1989) and Williams (1981).

Hyland (2005) proposes his Metadiscourse Model by defining its principles and resources. He sets forward three principles which he builds his model on. These principles are:

1. that Metadiscourse is distinct from propositional aspects of discourse;
2. that Metadiscourse refers to aspects of the text that embody writer-reader interactions;
3. that Metadiscourse refers only to relations which are internal to the discourse. (p. 159)

Category	Function	Examples
<b>Interactive</b>	<b>Help to guide the reader through the text</b>	<b>Resources</b>
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 in other parts of the text	noted above; see Fig; in section 2
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
<b>Interactional</b>	<b>Involve the reader in the text</b>	<b>Resources</b>
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogues	might; perhaps; possible; about
Boosters	emphasize 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	explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	consider; note; you can see that

Hyland's (2005) Metadiscourse Resources. (p. 49)

The current study focuses on interactional resources of metadiscourse, since they provide insights about the interpersonal relations that exist in the selected data.

#### 4. Methodology

The data of this study encompasses 25 consumer reviews that are posted on an Egyptian public Facebook group: "Don't Shop Here – A list of Untrustworthy Shops in Egypt). The data is selected to cover reviews on different products and services from November 2018 to April 2019 (six months). The 25 reviews vary in length and the collective word number of the whole data is 8129 words. The interactional tools, based on Hyland's model, are detected in the reviews. Then, a qualitative analysis of their use in context is presented to unveil the customers' attitudes and evaluations, as well as persuasive and engaging strategies. In some cases, a quantitative analysis is applied to detect the frequency of occurrence of some tools, which yields interesting results to the current study. The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How are people's different evaluations revealed through social media posts?
2. How can Metadiscourse resources help reveal customers' attitudes and evaluation of topics?

#### 5. Analysis and Discussion

The discourse metarepresentation is demonstrated in customer reviews in many ways that indicate the interpersonal relations between review writers and their audience and review writers and product/service providers. Metarepresentation creates relevance to attitudes, evaluations and stances. It plays an important role in revealing the power relations in discourse, customers' feelings and discourse objectives. This section is divided based on the different communicative purposes that the different metadiscourse tools reveal: Addressitivity and Engagement, Assertion and Doubt, and Expressionability.

##### 5.1 Engagement Markers: Addressitivity

There are different ways in which addressitivity is achieved in reviews; one of them is questions that are addressed to the audience or the product/service providers.

(R:5) 😊 هو ال بيحصل دا طبيعي ولا انا ال مأفور الموضوع

/hwa ?el bjhsʕal ɖa ʕabi si wala ?ana ?el m?avwar ?elmawdʕu:ʕ/ 😊

Is what is going on normal? Or I'm overreacting? 😊



In the same way, the customer in this review poses his question at the beginning of the post in reference to a sandwich photo that he attaches to the post. He uses the question together with the photo in order to express his astonishment about what he gets when he orders the sandwich. The photo is a collage of three pictures; one for the sandwich he ordered, another for the sandwich in the ad and the final is for the receipt, as a form of evidence. He ends his question by a laughing emoji. This semiotic tool at the end of the question and at the beginning of the review reflects the customer's high spirits in this negative situation, in addition to a sense of sarcasm of what he gets in comparison to the original ad for the sandwich. In fact, the customer's question, together with the photo, is validating more than engaging to the audience, which is presented in a sarcastic sense with the mention of the product provider, Zack's in this case. In spite of the fact that the customer's question has no manifest answer that is articulated in the post, the logical sense that is revealed at the pictorial level represents the answer he intends to convey to create a sense of alignment and shared perspective with the readers. Thus, the interpretation of the question has two basic levels: the first is the relevant utterance interpretation that is posed in the use of the question with the emoji. This utterance interpretation relies on a reference assignment procedure from the part of the audience, on one hand. On the other hand, it reveals the customer's intended meaning in urging his audience to draw a comparison between the photo and the real sandwich, which is considered as the contextual implication of the utterance itself. The second level of interpretation is related to the function of the question as an engaging for of addressivity where the customer takes the part of one of the participants in the conversation that he assumes with the audience. This form of conversation leaves the floor to the audience to decide the validity of the review.

انا بجد بجد عايزة اعرف تطبيق زي Otlob بجد اخذ حقي منه ازاى (R:16)

/?ana bigad bigad ?ajza ?a?raf tat ?bi:q zaj Otlob bigad ?axod ?a?: minu ?izaj/

I really really need to know how to take my right from Otlob application?

Another review that begins with a question is a complaint about Otlob application, a food delivery application. In this question, the customer puts forward her question in the form of an inquiry before even starting to describe her problem with the service provider. The question at the beginning of the review has mainly two functions: the first function is engaging the audience in her problem which plays an encouraging role for the audience to proceed in reading the review. The other function of the question is the proposed assumption about the review that is made manifest in the question itself. The customer presupposes that the problem is with the application and that she needs to get back her lost rights by addressing her question to the audience at the beginning of the review

The question in this case is an assumption of an imagined conversation with the audience with an expectation of getting answers. The customer puts herself on the first participant role and expects the audience to play the second participant role, in an attempt to engage them in the problem she has with the application.

## Coffeeshop Company

(R: 4) احترموا الناس شوية

/ʔiħtirmu: ʔilna:s fwaja/

### Coffeeshop Company

Have some respect to people.

The customer uses the imperative form to address the proposition to the products' providers. This form of address indicates two points: the first is the customer's awareness of the power of social media that her/his message will reach the target audience in this case. The second point is the customer's attitude and feelings towards the providers. In both excerpts, the customers use the verbs with the second-person pronouns "احترموا الناس" to show his furiousness and disappointment from the service they receive. Thus, the source of power for this proposition comes from the direct addressivity through the use of the direct imperative to the service provider.

### 5.2 Hedges and Boosters: Assertion and Doubt

In order to validate the truthfulness of the propositions they present in their reviews; customers tend to use lexical choices that indicate their confidence or doubt in their reviews. These devices include hedges and boosters that are used in texts to represent the customers' stance towards the propositions of the reviews. In validating their reviews, customers use boosters as a source of assertion to the truthfulness of their experience. Hence, they gain the audience' support to their claims. They are also used to suppress alternative ideas or claims and offer commitment to the proposed thoughts. On the other side, hedges are used to mitigate the tone of the text and to pose a weak validation of the proposition. Thus, it is the use of hedges and boosters in online reviews that guides the readers to believe what customers want them to believe and doubt what they want them to doubt. They take the readers to the customer's side in an attempt to gain support and seek validation. In the analysis of hedges and boosters, it is believed that they have different functions in discourse to express the following: commitment and certainty; and detachment and doubt.

#### • Assertion (Boosters)

Boosters are used to indicate confidence in the truthfulness of the proposition.

روحنا للهانم في الاتيليه بتاعها في مصر الجديدة الساعة ٤ بالظبط. ماكانتش موجودة (R: 9) !!!!

/ruhna lilhanim fi: ʔilʔatili: bitaʕha fi: masr ʔilgidi:da ʔilsa:ʕa 4 bilðʕbtʕ ma:kanitʕ mawgu:da/

We went to the lady in her atelier in Heliopolis at 4:00 sharp. She was not there!!!

In this excerpt, the customer uses the adverbial "بالظبط" to express precision and commitment to the time that the designer indicates in their appointment. This booster supports his claim about the designer's disrespect to her customers, which is the core complaint of the review. The booster here in this context indicates the customer's commitment in the situation while implicating the opposite about the designer. This creates relevance to the customer's intended meaning of how he decides to present himself in the review against the designer.

Boosters are not always used to show the customer's own commitment or confidence. Sometimes, they are used to reflect on the impression they get from the product/service providers.

و قالولنا لازم يتم الكشف عليها من مهندس تاني (R: 2)

/wʔalu:lna lazim jitim ʔilkaff ʕali:ha min muhandis ta:ni:/

They told us that it must be examined by another engineer again.

In this extract, the customer uses a booster to show commitment that the car agency imposes on the customer. The use of the modal auxiliary "لازم" indicates the dictation of action that the customer feels, especially with the use of the adverbial "تاني",

which explains that it is not the first time that the car gets examined. The customer basically complains about the sense of refractoriness that he receives from the agency. His use of this combination of modal auxiliary and adverbial explains it. The implications that are presented in this extract echo the customer's latent feelings and evaluation of the situation and to that commitment.

Negation boosters are also used mostly in combination with advice.

ويا تدفع يا تسيب العربية مرمية كدة لا تتحرك تماما ! لا انصح احد ان هو يشتري VW تماما (R: 3)

/wja: tidfaʃ ja: tisi:b ʔilʃarabja marmja kida la: tataharak tama:man! la: ʔansah ʔahad ʔin hwa jiftiri: vi: dabilju: tama:man/

It's either you pay, or you leave the car thrown away like this, not moving at all! I don't advise anyone to buy a VW at all.

In this excerpt, the customer uses the adverbial "تماما" as a precision booster to indicate the total break-down her car gets, in the first sentence. However, in the second part of the excerpt, she uses it as a marker of negation to strengthen her advice to the readers for not to purchase the same car, which builds solidarity with the readers and adds a persuasion sense to her claim. Moreover, negation boosters are mostly used in combination with advice in the reviews to strengthen the proposition of advice that is offered in the posts.

Another type of booster assists in expressing affirmation and assertion. The use of such boosters indicates the customer's confidence in the truthfulness of the propositions she demonstrates in discourse.

المشكلة التانيه و هي انهم بقوا بيتأخروا بالتلت ساعه و اكثر و طبعا انت لازم تقف فى الشارع مستنى (R: 1)

/ʔilmuʃkela ʔilta:nja wa hja ʔinuhum baʔuw bjitʔaxaru: biltilt sa:ʃa wa ʔaktar wa tʃabʃan la:zim tuʔafʃi: ʔilʃariʃ mistani:/

The second problem is that they are being late for 20 minutes and more. And of course you have to stand in the street waiting.

قلتله انا دايمًا بركب من هنا بقالى اكثر من سنه (R: 1)

/ʔulteluh ʔana da:jman barkab min hina baʔali: ʔaktar min sanah/

I told him I always ride from here for more than a year.

حطولى 100 جنيه فى المحفظه و قالولى لو تحبى تستخدميمهم . انا فعليا هعتذر عن استخدامهم (R: 1)

/hatʃu:li: 100 gini:h fi: ʔilmaʃfaðʃah wa ʔa:lu:li: law tihibi: tistaxdimi:hum ʔana fiʃlijan haʃtazir ʃan ʔistixdamhum/

They put a 100 EGP in the wallet and told me if I wish to use them. I will substantially apologize about for using them.

In this review, the customer commits herself to the truthfulness of the propositions that she is presenting in the review using emphatics "طبعًا، دايمًا، فعليًا". The reviewer anticipates the presence of the audience in her post by addressing them using the second-person pronoun "طبعًا انت لازم تقف فى الشارع مستنى", which entails her presumption of having the audience to her side of the situation. The use of this particular booster with this direct form of addressivity not only engages the reader in the problem but is also a means to gain their support since the same situation can happen to them. The second booster from this review "دايمًا" is an amplifier that indicates the customer's trust in what she is presenting in the review based on her past experience with the same bus service. This is achieved through combining the aforementioned amplifier with the use of the perfect tense in "دايمًا بركب من". The final booster in the above excerpts is the emphatic "فعليًا", which anticipates the customer's future behavior regarding the incident.

#### • Doubt

Customers employ hedges in various ways to leave an impression of vagueness in their reviews about the situation being narrated. Some of these hedges are intended to show doubt in the truthfulness of propositions and create this assumption to share it with the audience who read the posts.

المدام لقيت المنظر دة فى كيس شوربة خضار جيفركس والمفروض انها شركة محترمة (R: 12)

/ɔilmada:m laʔit ɔilmanðsar dah fi: ki:s fu:rbaʔ xuda:r givriks wilmafru:dʒ ɔinaha: ʃirkah muħtaramah/

My wife found this in a Givrex veggies soup pack, and this is supposedly a respectful company

(R: 17) فتقوم الشركة الي المفروض ان هي حاجة كبيرة وحاجة عالمية ماتحترمش العميل بناعها وتديله كوبايات بيضه ساده مالهاش لوجو

/fatʔu:m ɔilʃirkah ɔili: ɔilmafru:dʒ ɔin hja ħaga kibi:rah wa ħaga ʃa:lamijah ma:taħtarimʃ ɔilʃami:l bita:ʃha: wa tidi:luħ  
ku:baja:t bi:tʃah sa:dah ma:lha:f lugu/

Then the supposedly big and global company doesn't respect its customer and give him white plain cups with no logo.

In two different situations, two customers use the lexical device “supposedly” to express lack of confidence in the truthfulness of the propositions in which it appears. In (R: 12) and (R: 17), both customers implement the sense of doubt in the company's reputation by the use of “المفروض” preceding the proposition that presents a well-known fact about both companies. This use of hedges is an attempt to change the audience's opinions about the service provider to the opposite. This contradiction is achieved by adding the lexical device that is used as a hedge to the agreed upon proposition. In addition, the customer deliberately inserts the hedge “المفروض” to discredit the action that the service company claims to have been taken by him. Moreover, reference assignment is a relevance strategy to reach a full interpretation of what the customer intends to convey. This is apparent in the use of the demonstrative pronoun “ده” to refer to a picture attached to the post. In the other excerpt, reference assignment is required to fulfill what the customer intends by the word “الشركة”.

(R: 1) الكلام كان حلو و لطيف اتمنى يتحقق و نشوف خدمة سويفل راجعه زى الاول

/ɔilkala:m ka:n ħiluw wa latʃi:fʔatamana: jithaʔaʔ wa niʃu:f xidmit swivil ra:gʃah zaj ɔilʔawal ta:ni:/

The talk was sweet and nice. I wish it gets accomplished and we see SWVL service again line before

واحنا بناكل ده حصل

(R: 10) واتمنى اكون وضحت كل حاجة

/wiħna: bina:kul dah ħasal/

/watmana: ɔaku:n wadʃaħt kul ħa:g/

This happened while we were eating

I hope I made everything clear

Another form of mitigation using hedges is the mitigation of expectations. In (R: 1) and (R: 10), customers use the verb “أتمنى” to mitigate their expectations; in (R: 1) from the service provider and in (R: 10) from the audience. In the first excerpt, the customer describes the promises she receives from SWVL's customer service which she follows by her wishes to see their good service back again. In the second excerpt, the customer addresses the audience by expressing his wish that he fulfills their expectations in clarifying the whole situations to ensure that no misunderstanding takes place. In both cases, the use of the verb “أتمنى” functions as a compensation to the missing parts of the posts. In addition, the use of this kind of hedge implies a sense of uncertainty that the customer holds for the situation or the audience s/he addresses.

Expressions of possibility are manipulated in various ways in customer reviews. The following excerpts represent how customers use such hedges on behalf of the service providers they encounter situations with.

(R: 14) اخر عذر قالهولى الاستاذ سيد ان تلاجة الساندوتشات فيها ستارة علشان اشمس بس يمكن انهارة نكون نسيناها و منزلنهاش ..... اسفة لكل الاعذار الخايبية

/ʔa:xir ʃuðr ʔa:ħuli: ɔilʔusta:ð sajid ɔin talagit ɔilsa:ndwitfa:t fi:ha sita:rah ʃalafa:n ɔilʃams bas jimkin ɔilnaha:rdah niku:n  
nisi:na:ha: wa manazilnaha:f ..... ʔasfah likul ɔilʔaʃzaða:r ɔilxa:jbah/



The final excuse that Mr. Sayed said to me is that the sandwiches fridge has a blackout curtain to prevent the sun but “maybe today we forgot it and didn’t put it” ..... I’m sorry for all useless excuses

(R: 24) ويعدين لما ردوا قالو ان الضمان سنة واحدة ودة ممكن يحصل وان دي مش مسئوليتنا

/wubaʕdi:n lama: radu: ʔa:lu: ʔin ʔildʕama:n sanah wa:ħdah widah mumkin jiħsʕal wiʔin di: mish masʔulijitna:/

And then, when they replied, they said that the guarantee is only one year and this can happen. And “this is not our responsibility”

In the first excerpt, the customer quote what the agent in this case communicates. In the first quote in (R: 4), the agent uses the hedge “احتمال” to mitigate his commitment to the proposition. The customer echoes the agent’s wording to show the latter’s lack of confidence. In the other excerpt, the customer describes how the agent mitigates the mistake that causes the whole problem by using “يمكن” along with the verb “تسببها” to reduce the effect of the mistake. However, in the excerpt from (R: 24), the customer quotes the provider’s reply to the complaint in which the latter uses the hedge “ممكن” to minimize the problem size and the damage that the customer describes while at the same time justifies what happens to the customer’s product, TV in this case.

Hedges		Boosters	
<b>Modal Auxiliary</b> (e.g. يمكن)	4	<b>Universal Pronouns</b> (e.g. أي حد، محدش)	18
<b>Adjectival/nominal adjectives</b> (e.g. ممكن، عادي)	26	<b>Amplifiers</b> (e.g. الحقيقة)	9
<b>Approximates of degree and quantity</b> (e.g. تقريبا، المفروض)	13	<b>Emphatics</b> (e.g. طبعا، فعلا، برضه)	94
<b>Lexical Verbs</b> (e.g. أتمنى، اعتقد)	3		
<b>Compound Hedges</b> (e.g. لعل وعسى)	1		
<b>Total</b>	47	<b>Total</b>	121

Table 1.

The results in Table 1. indicate a higher frequency of the use of boosters in customer reviews than that of the hedges. This reflects the degree of assertion that customers tend to convey in their posts to maintain credibility of the information they share with their audience about their experiences with the different products and services. In their use of hedges, the highest frequency of hedges type is that of approximation. This type of hedge is used in the context of describing the service providers’ attitudes, reputation, and the way they are marketed. This reveals the sense of hesitation that the customers intend to reveal about the companies. On the other side, the use of boosters is intrinsic since the highest frequency of boosters is seen in the use of emphatics, which indicates the assertive and affirmative tone that customers intend to convey to their audience. Universal pronouns are always present in the reviews in a negated form, either to warn others from going with similar experiences or to void out any positive behavior by the providers. All in all, the number of boosters outweighs the number of hedges in the data which reflects the customers’ assertion and confidence in the information that they provide. It also functions as a persuasive technique by which the customers gain the audience’s confidence in the truthfulness of the reviews’ propositional meaning, seeking to offer validity of their content and invalidate the providers’ claims.

### 5.3 Attitude Markers: Expressionability

The expressionability level that customers choose to employ in their reviews depends on the amount of emotions that they decide to translate into words inside the review. This is obvious in customers’ use of attitude markers. Having the data in hand as a group of customer complaints, the expressed emotions and attitudes are mostly negative varying from anger, frustration, and

regret. Having the data in hand as a group of customer complaints, the expressed emotions and attitudes are mostly negative varying from anger, frustration, and regret. Agreement is only expressed in the quoted narrative dialogue between the customers and the product/service agents during the experience itself. Thus, they are presented as an evidential of the customer's positive attitude during the experience and the no-conflict attitude from their side.

- **Agreement**

In some parts of the complaints, customers add some attitude markers that express agreement to the service provider. This appears at the beginning of the complaints to show how the service starts off. In addition, they show agreement to some of the providers' mistakes to show indicate their tolerant and cooperative attitude in the problem.

الموضوع بقي كأنك راكب اتوبيس نقل عام و قديم كمان  
و قلت مش مشكله برضه اهن من النقل العام (R: 1)

/pilmawsʕu:ʕ baʔa: kaʔinak ra:kib ʔutu:bi:s naʔl ʕa:m wiʔadi:m kama:n/  
/wiʔult mif muhim bardʕuh ʔahwan min ʔilnaʔl ʔilʕa:m/

It became like riding an old and public transportation bus. I said 'no problem', still it (SWVL bus) is better than public transportation.

In this review, the customer expresses her stance towards the beginning of the deterioration of the bus service. She uses the negated form "مش مشكلة" that indicates her incomplete satisfaction with the service. However, she justifies her agreement with adding the comparative form "أهن" in comparing SWVL bus service to another one, that she would never use.

مفيش مشكلة حولناها و قامت ادتلنا معاد يوم السبت الساعة ١ الظهر. (R: 9)

/mafi:f muʕkilah hawilna:ha: wa ʔamit ʔiditlina: maʕa:d ju:m ʔilsabt ʔilʕa:ʕah 1 ʕilðʕuhr/

No problem, we transferred it (money amount) and she gave us an appointment on Saturday at 1:00 p.m

Similarly, the reviewer expresses his agreement using the same negated lexical choice "مفيش مشكلة". The customer uses it to show how he has fulfilled all the fashion designer's instructions. Thus, his expression of agreement is not articulated in the post to express his actual sense of "agreement" through that discourse marker; it is rather to indicate his compliance with the place's rules.

- **Shock and Surprise**

Feelings of surprise and shock are directly expressed in the reviews by using various lexical items. They vary from the use of nouns, verbs and adverbials that express such feelings.

ومسكنا الطريق عشان نرجع سوهاج واتفاجننا أن النفذه قاعده زي ما هي (R: 2)

/wimisikna: ʔiltʕari:ʔ ʕalafa:n nirgaʕ su:ha:g witfagiʔna: ʔin ʔilnaʕdʕah ʔa:ʕdah zaji ma: hija/

We started the way to go back to Sohag and we were surprised that the car is still shaking.

In (R: 2), the customer uses the verb "اتفاجننا" to describe the unexpected performance of his car after getting it fixed by the agency. Using the collective object pronoun with the verb "اتفاجىء+نا" to demonstrate that the problem with the car has been expected by him and the people accompanying him to be solved by the agency. This implies their confidence in the car agency that has been shaken by the surprise they encounter on the way back.

- **Advice and Warning**

One more attitude that customers employ in their reviews is the advice attitude. In doing so, they directly address their audience to make them feel the significance of the post in exposing an experience that others can avoid.

(R: 3) VW عايزة احذر الناس كلها من عربيات

/ʔana: ʕa:ʒzah ʕaħaðar ʔilna:s kulaha: min ʕarabija:t VW/

I want to warn everyone from VW cars

انصحكوا ما تتعاملوش معاها (R: 9)

/ʔansʕaħku: ma: titʕa:mlu:f maʕa:ha:/

I advise you not to deal with it.

In (R: 3), the customer uses the highest level of advice, using the verb “احذر” to offer his audience with a warning from buying VW cars. In (R: 9), the customer uses the stative form of advice “advise” followed by the direct address form “you” in “انصحكم” in an attempt to convey his feelings to the audience and at the same time engaging them in the post. Meanwhile, the customer inserts the negation form in the main action verb of the sentence “متعاملوش”, which stresses the meaning of the advice.

- **Regret**

One prevailing attitude that is found in the reviews is that of regret. Customers induce their negative feelings towards the experiences that they encounter in the posts through lexical choices such as “unfortunately” that is used in the three excerpts below.

للاسف كان عندي شاشة ٤٢ بوصة عا برضه وفجأة عطلت ووديتها المركز برضه

انا للاسف معرفتش اخذ حقى بس هنصح كل الناس انها ميبتنصبش عليها زيى (R: 13)

/ilʔasaf ka:n ʕandi: ʕa:ʕah 42 bu:sʕah LG bardʕuh wifagʔah ʕitʕlit wiwaditha: ʕilmarkaz bardʕuh/

I unfortunately couldn't get back my right, but I'll advise all people that they do not get exposed to fraud like me

Unfortunately, I also had a 42 inches LG monitor and it disrupted suddenly and I also sent it to the center

In the two excerpts from (R: 13), the customer uses the adverbial “للاسف” to express his regret; once for purchasing the product itself, and the other time for not being to take back his right. In both cases, the customer expresses his regret towards actions that are substantially related to his decision and ability. Latently, he puts the blame on himself and regrets it. Consequently, in the second extract, he offers advice to the audience so as not to commit the same mistake as his.

#### 5.4 Self/Other-mention

The use of pronouns in customer reviews indicates how customers demonstrate their presence in the reviews and how they choose to position service providers in the situations that they narrate.

Self-mention		Other-mention
(I, me, my)	(we, us, our)	(they, them, their)
190	191	139
<b>Total: 381</b>		<b>Total: 139</b>

Table 2.

Table 2. shows the difference in use of personal pronouns in the reviews. Self-mention singular pronouns that refer to the customers themselves in addition to the plural first-person pronouns that refer sometimes to the customers and the people accompanying them in the situation and some other times to the customers and their audience exceed the number of other-

mention third-person pronouns in the reviews. However, the context in which the self-mention pronouns are used is mostly on the right-defense side, while the other-mention pronouns are always on the attacked side of the arguments.

(R: 18) الأستاذة هبة من قسم الشكاوي كلمتني وقالتلي ان المفروض ان انا ماضي على عقد على شروط العرض

/ʔilʔusta:ħah hibah min qism ʔilfaka:wi: kalimitni: wiʔwa:liti: ʔin ʔilmafru:dʕ ʔin ʔana: ma:dʕi: ʕala ʕaʔd ʕala: furu:ʕ  
ʔilʕardʕ/

Ms. Heba, from the customer complaints department called me and told me that supposedly I signed a contract of the offer's conditions.

(R: 19) وبما ان بنتي في الفريق وكنا بنستعد لبطولة الجمهورية, فكان عندنا تمرين يوم الجمعة الساعة 9 الصبح

/wibima: ʔin binti: fi: ʔilfari:ʔ wikuna: binastaʕid libuʕu:lit ʔilgumhu:rajah faka:n ʕandina: tamri:n ju:m ʔilgumʔah ʔilsaʕah 9  
ʔilsʕubħ/

Since my daughter is in the team and we were getting ready for the national competition, we had a training on Friday, 9 a.m.

(R: 21) انا مش بحب اشترى اون لاين و المحل قدامي سيولنا حاجه نشترىها

/ʔana: miʕ bahib ʔaʕtiri: ʔunla:jn wilmahil ʔuda:mi: si:bu:lina: ħagah niʕtiri:ħa:/

I don't like to buy online while I can buy from the store. Leave use something we can buy

In the three excerpts, the customers exploit personal pronouns in different ways. In (R: 18) excerpt, the customer uses the first-person pronoun “أنا” together with the hedge “المفروض” to stress out that what Vodafone's agent claims about the contract signature that the customer has not done. Since the customer echoes the agent's propositional message about his signature, he uses the assertive “I” pronoun to show that claim. In (R: 19), the customer is the mother of an athlete, who encounters a misbehaving action and negative attitude by the club where her daughter is trained. She uses the plural personal pronoun “we, كنا” to refer to herself and her daughter as one side of the problem. The collective “ن” in the verb “نتدرب” in the excerpt substantially refers to the girl, not the mother. However, the customer considers herself as one party while putting the academy on the other side. In (R: 21), the customer uses the plural object pronoun “us, نا” in “سيولنا” in addressing online sellers. Although her complaint is mainly a concern of hers only, she uses the plural first-person pronoun in an attempt to put the audience on her side of the problem against those online sellers. These three examples of using personal pronouns in online reviews demonstrate the variety in meaning they offer in the texts.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study sheds light on how customers' feelings and attitudes are revealed in the analysis through the application of a metadiscourse model that offers insights on the interpersonal functions in the posts, which answers the first question of the current study. People use evaluative language in their posts on social media. The second question is answered by detecting the interpersonal functions that are characterized through several strategies, including the use of addressitivity (engagement) markers, expressionability (attitude) markers, assertion and doubt (hedges and boosters) and self/other-mention (pronouns). The incorporation of the interactional metadiscourse tools into customer reviews is believed to be an expressive strategy that is employed by customers to unleash their evaluations, attitudes and feelings in their reviews. Hence, an analysis of such tools provides an insightful view of both the customer reviews, as a genre, and the Metadiscourse model as an analytical tool.

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**Online Appendices:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YBIH9Qj-SU1pNfXMSW46QqdQsQAMsVbl/view?usp=sharing>