

## Expressing Stance in Brand Posts on Facebook: A Cross-cultural Investigation

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### ABSTRACT

*The research cross-culturally investigates the expression of stance in the Facebook posts of large multinational automobile corporations in two countries, namely Egypt and the United Kingdom. It seeks to identify the ways stance markers differ from one culture and language to another and interpret the possible influence of culture on these metadiscourse choices. Accordingly, a contrastive analysis is performed in which the Arabic and English Facebook pages are compared. Data are collected over a period of 5.5 months yielding a corpus of 214 Facebook posts. In order to analyse and interpret the data, the study adopts Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse with a particular focus on the stance category and explores the possible influence of each culture on the interpersonal markers employed using the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010). The results of the study show that stance markers are significantly more common on the Egyptian pages. However, no striking variations are found in the general distribution of the stance markers across the various categories. While some similarities in the choice of the stance markers can be associated with the promotional genre, the results also reveal some differences dictated by the context and core values of the cultures under investigation. Hence, the findings of the study demonstrate that both culture and genre are two essential aspects that cannot be ignored when studying interactional discourse. The study has profound implications for corporations both nationally and internationally with regard to building solidarity with potential consumers and managing their corporate image in computer-mediated communications since country-specific content enhances usability, accessibility and interactivity.*

**Keywords:** *language and culture, Facebook posts, interactional metadiscourse, stance, cultural dimensions, Facebook brand pages*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media have led to a revolution in communication. Nowadays, the number of social media users has exceeded 4.26 billion worldwide and the number is projected to increase to almost six billion in 2027 (Statista 2022b). Across cultures, people use social networks for different purposes. As a result, network formats may differ from one culture to another (De Mooij 2022). In fact, "cultures communicate with the Internet and with social media in ways that reflect the values of that culture" (Jandt 2021, 33). Social media have also revolutionised marketing around the globe. Businesses have taken advantage of this popular

communication method to reach out to customers globally (Belch and Belch 2021; Dwivedi et al. 2021; Jandt 2021). Social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, allow companies to connect with their customers, provide more information on their products, market for new products and receive their customers' feedback. This can be easily done by placing brand posts containing videos, messages, quizzes, information, and other media on their pages. With such a global change, the role of culture in communication cannot be neglected since the way people utilise new media today reflects significant aspects of culture (Jandt, 2021). Still, few studies have conducted a cross-cultural investigation

of the linguistic and interpersonal strategies that companies use on social media and the extent to which they conform to the cultural characteristics of different societies, especially Arab societies.

The investigation of cross-cultural corporate communication in digital media has been the subject of several research studies. However, these studies often rely on content analysis using Hall's (1976) and Hofstede's (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010) cultural models to identify cultural orientations observed in communication appeals. Many of these studies have focused on corporate websites (Cesiri 2011; Kang and Mastin 2008; Singh and Baack 2004; Singh, Zhao, and Hu 2005; Zhang, Tian, and Miles 2014), but only a few have examined corporate Facebook pages (Copuš and Čarnogurský 2017; Lo, Waters, and Christensen 2017; Tsai and Men 2012; Waters and Lo 2012). In addition, many of the studies that address the influence of culture on customer behaviour and the success of marketing strategies on social media have been carried out from a business management perspective using social media analytics tools (Goodrich and De Mooij 2014; Khan, Dongping, and Wahab 2016).

Several studies have examined the linguistic, textual and discursive strategies that international companies employ on social media whether to communicate with their audience and persuade them or to construct their own identities (Garzone 2015; Mehmet 2014; Miri 2016). Nevertheless, few studies have examined the impact of cultural values on linguistic choice and how cultural values are linguistically manifested, particularly in cross-cultural comparisons (Bjørge 2007; Chang 2015; Cucchi 2019b; Ivorra Pérez 2014a, 2014b; Kochetova 2016).

Since interpersonal communication is one of the main functions of language and a crucial component of promotional discourse used to persuade potential consumers, it is highly important to understand how various companies utilise interpersonal markers and how they vary from one culture or language to another. Despite the existence of several studies that cross-culturally examine the use of interpersonal markers within academic discourse (Alotaibi 2015; Alramadan 2020; Alshahrani 2015; Lafuente-Millán 2014; Lorés-Sanz 2011; Mur-Deñas 2014), little research has explored the use of these interpersonal strategies in non-academic discourse, particularly in digital communication (Carrío-Pastor 2019; Incelli 2017; Ivorra Pérez 2014b; Ivorra Pérez and Giménez-Moreno 2018; Suau-Jiménez 2019). Accordingly, the aim of the study is to analyse the interpersonal metadiscourse

markers, particularly the stance markers, companies use in their Facebook posts to influence the potential customers, and to investigate how these metadiscourse devices reflect the cultural values of the intended customers.

## 2. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

One of the primary means through which people communicate their knowledge, ideas, thoughts and beliefs is language. Yet, language cannot exist apart from "the influence of the cultural context in which it is used" (Robinson and Altarriba 2015, 240). The sociocultural context can affect or be affected by language use, form, and function. In other words, language influences culture and reflects cultural orientations. Goodenough (1957) in line with his definition of culture maintained that knowing a language involves knowledge of everything needed to communicate in a way acceptable to its native speakers. In this sense, language is an aspect of culture; it is an integral part of culture and culture has a great impact on language use. Accordingly, language can be used as a means through which cultural differences can be observed and investigated.

Discourse data enable researchers to perform thorough analyses of the ways people create and maintain culture in their daily practices, and how they construct their identity, communicate meaning and build mutual understanding. In these activities, language is a key resource for exploring the deeper cultural meanings which are usually not directly stated but can be indirectly inferred since speakers use discursive resources to link what they say to the larger context of culture (Keating and Duranti 2011). Nowadays, advances in electronic technology have made it possible to reach various cultures and study their discursive practices in a variety of communicative situations.

## 3. METADISCOURSE

There has been a growing interest in the ways writers and speakers use linguistic resources to express their opinions and interact with their potential readers. Vande Kopple defined metadiscourse simply as "discourse about discourse or communication about communication" (1985, 83). Hyland regarded the view of metadiscourse as "discourse about discourse" as "very partial and unsatisfactory" (2019, chap. 2). According to Hyland, metadiscourse refers to "the interpersonal resources used to organise a discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader" (2015, 997). Metadiscourse is based on the

viewpoint that language is not only used to convey and exchange information, but is also used to organise and comment on what is being said and present the text in a way suitable to the target audience. In other words, the metadiscursive devices depend on the context and vary according to the genre and language used (Hyland 2017). Therefore, "metadiscourse must be analysed as part of a community's practices, values and ideals" (Hyland 2019, chap. 3). Hence, it is highly important to give special attention to the participants' cultural background when examining the use of metadiscourse in speaking or writing.

A variety of metadiscourse taxonomies have been proposed, such as those developed by Vande Kopple (1985), Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen (1993) and Hyland and Tse (2004). Since the research is concerned with the ways marketers engage and persuade their readers through the relatively short Facebook posts, Hyland's (2005) model is selected with a particular focus on *stance* as a part of the *interactional metadiscourse*. Thompson described Hyland's model as comprehensive, coherent and robust, and argued that its categories are "well grounded theoretically, and they form a coherent set" (2008, 139). Therefore, Hyland's model has been widely adopted in studies of metadiscourse (Wei et al. 2016).

Although Hyland's (2005, 2019) metadiscourse model has been developed for academic contexts, it has been adopted in non-academic contexts as in newspapers (Yeganeh, Heravi, and Sawari 2015), job postings (Fu 2012), social media (Xia 2020), corporate websites (Incelli 2017; Ivorra Pérez 2014b; Ivorra Pérez and Giménez-Moreno 2018) and others, which suggests its appropriateness for other discourses.

#### 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research aims to perform a cross-cultural contrastive analysis of the stance markers used in the Facebook posts of two large multinational automobile corporations, namely Kia and Renault, in both Egypt and the United Kingdom. The study seeks to identify the ways these markers differ from one culture and language to another. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What kind of stance markers are employed in the English and Arabic corporate Facebook posts to promote products and services, influence, and persuade the target audience?

2. To what extent do the stance markers used on the Egyptian (Arabic) Facebook pages differ from those used on the UK (English) Facebook pages?
3. To what extent do cultural differences between Egypt and the United Kingdom influence the companies' stance markers?

### 5. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1. Data

The study explores the cultural differences in the stance markers used on Facebook, the largest and most widely used social media platform (Statista 2022a). For many marketers, Facebook has become a "must have" medium of advertising and sales promotion (Belch and Belch 2021, 494). The Facebook posts of two multinational automobile manufacturers, Kia Motors and Renault, both in Egypt and the United Kingdom were selected for the study. To select the suitable multinational brands for the analysis, the Forbes and Fortune global lists of the largest and most valuable companies were consulted (Forbes 2020; Fortune 2020; Murphy et al. 2021). Data were collected over a period of 5.5 months from 24/12/2020 to 11/5/2021, yielding a corpus of 214 Facebook posts. The Facebook posts were extracted using Facepager (Version 3.10) (Jünger and Keyling 2019). Table 1 shows the number of posts collected from each Facebook page and their total word count.

Table 1: Corpora Used for the Study

Facebook Page	Number of Posts	Word Count
Kia UK	52 Posts	2,923
Renault UK	56 Posts	(3,666 Tokens)
Kia Egypt	40 Posts	3,545
Renault Egypt	66 Posts	(4,012 Tokens)

To identify and classify the interactional metadiscourse markers, the corpora of Facebook posts were manually examined. Each feature was carefully identified and annotated with the category it belongs to. Since a metadiscoursal marker in one rhetorical context can express propositional material in another, it was necessary to investigate each item in context to determine its function. The collected corpora were then fed into Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) to aid the analysis, especially in terms of concordance lists and frequency counts. Finally, the results were submitted to statistical analysis through the chi-square test of homogeneity using IBM SPSS software package version 20.0 (Kirkpatrick and Feeney 2013). In order

to establish the statistical significance of the results of the comparable corpora analysed, the p-values were also calculated with significance taken as  $p \leq 0.05$ .

### 5.2. Methodology

To avoid generalisations the study adopts a bottom-up approach. It starts by examining the *stance features* of the corporate Facebook posts, using Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of interactional metadiscourse (see

Section 3). Stance has to do with the writer-oriented features of interaction. It is connected with the ways writers present themselves, express their opinions and attitudes, comment on the credibility of a statement or an argument, and show their degree of commitment to a proposition. Authors utilise stance markers to project an image of "authority, integrity and credibility" (Hyland 2005, 188). Stance comprises four main elements: *hedges*, *boosters*, *attitude markers* and *self-mentions*. These can be realised through a set of resources as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Hyland's Framework of Stance

Category	Function	Examples
<b>Hedges</b>	reduce commitment, express uncertainty and open dialogue (Hyland 1998, 2019)	Modal auxiliaries ( <i>could; may</i> ), lexical/epistemic verbs ( <i>suggest; indicate; seem</i> ), modal adverbs ( <i>apparently; slightly</i> ), modal nouns ( <i>claim; assumption</i> ), and modal adjectives ( <i>possible; apparent</i> ) (Hyland 1998) Epistemic, lexical and possibility hedges ( <i>about; most; kind of; perhaps</i> ), downtoners ( <i>fairly; almost; simply</i> ), adverbs of frequency ( <i>often; frequently</i> ), and assertive pronouns ( <i>any; some</i> ) (Hinkel 2005)
<b>Boosters</b>	express certainty, display commitment and emphasise the force of propositions (Hyland 1998, 2019)	Modal auxiliaries ( <i>will; must</i> ), lexical verbs ( <i>show; reveal</i> ), adverbials ( <i>definitely; obviously</i> ), and adjectives ( <i>evident; clear</i> ) (Hyland 1998). Amplifiers ( <i>totally; always</i> ), emphatics ( <i>certainly; demonstrate; really</i> ), and universal and negative pronouns ( <i>all; each</i> ) (Hinkel 2005)
<b>Attitude markers</b>	express writer's attitude to proposition (surprise, obligation, agreement, importance, etc.) (Hyland 2019).	Attitude verbs ( <i>agree; prefer</i> ), sentence adverbs ( <i>unfortunately; surprisingly</i> ), and adjectives ( <i>appropriate; logical; remarkable</i> ) (Hyland 2019).
<b>Self-mentions</b>	refer to the degree of explicit authorial presence in a text (Hyland 2019)	first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives ( <i>I, me, mine, exclusive we, our, and ours</i> ).

Following the analysis of interpersonal resources, the study proceeds to investigate how the companies adapt their metadiscursive options to suit the culture of the target audience using Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) *dimensions of national culture*. The cultural framework relies on specific value categories, also referred to as cultural dimensions, since values, rather than practices, are the stable element of culture. These cultural dimensions exhibit societal rather than individual characteristics. Hofstede's (2010) cultural framework is one of the most influential and widely used classifications of cultural values, especially when performing large-scale comparisons of cultures (Kirkman, Lowe, and Gibson 2006). The framework has been widely accepted and adopted for two main reasons. The first is the availability of

scores for a large number of countries and the second lies in the relative simplicity and straightforwardness of the dimensions (Goodrich and De Mooij 2014). Additionally, several studies have replicated Hofstede's research, validating the dimensions and country scores (see Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 35).

The study focuses on the four original dimensions of cultural difference which have been validated through the six major replications of Hofstede's research (see Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 35). These are the main dimensions usually referred to when investigating linguistic variations based on cultural differences: (a) *individualism versus collectivism (IDV)*: individual uniqueness, needs and desires versus

family and group needs, goals and achievements; (b) *power distance (PDI)*: the extent people within a certain culture accept unequal power distribution; (c) *uncertainty avoidance (UAI)*: society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; (d) *masculinity versus femininity (MAS)*: the behavioural traits and motives of a society (see Appendix for more information). Each dimension can be depicted in the form of a scale and each country receives a score on each scale based on certain statistical data. The present research perceives the proposed cultural dimensions as descriptive, rather than prescriptive, categories used to describe and explain the dynamic features of specific discourse.

## 6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the corpora shows that the expression of stance is an important feature of advertising discourse, with a total of 714 occurrences in both the Egyptian and UK corpora. As Fig. 1 displays, the most common stance markers detected in both the Egyptian and the UK corpora were attitude markers (361 markers, 50%), followed by self-mentions (212 markers, 30%) and boosters (98 markers, 14%), while hedges (43 markers, 6%) were the least frequent stance markers identified. The Egyptian corpora exhibit a statistically significant higher inclusion of stance markers than the UK corpora. Table 3 provides a detailed distribution of the frequency, percentages and results stemming from the chi-square test of the interactional metadiscourse features that express authorial stance in the corpora of Facebook posts.

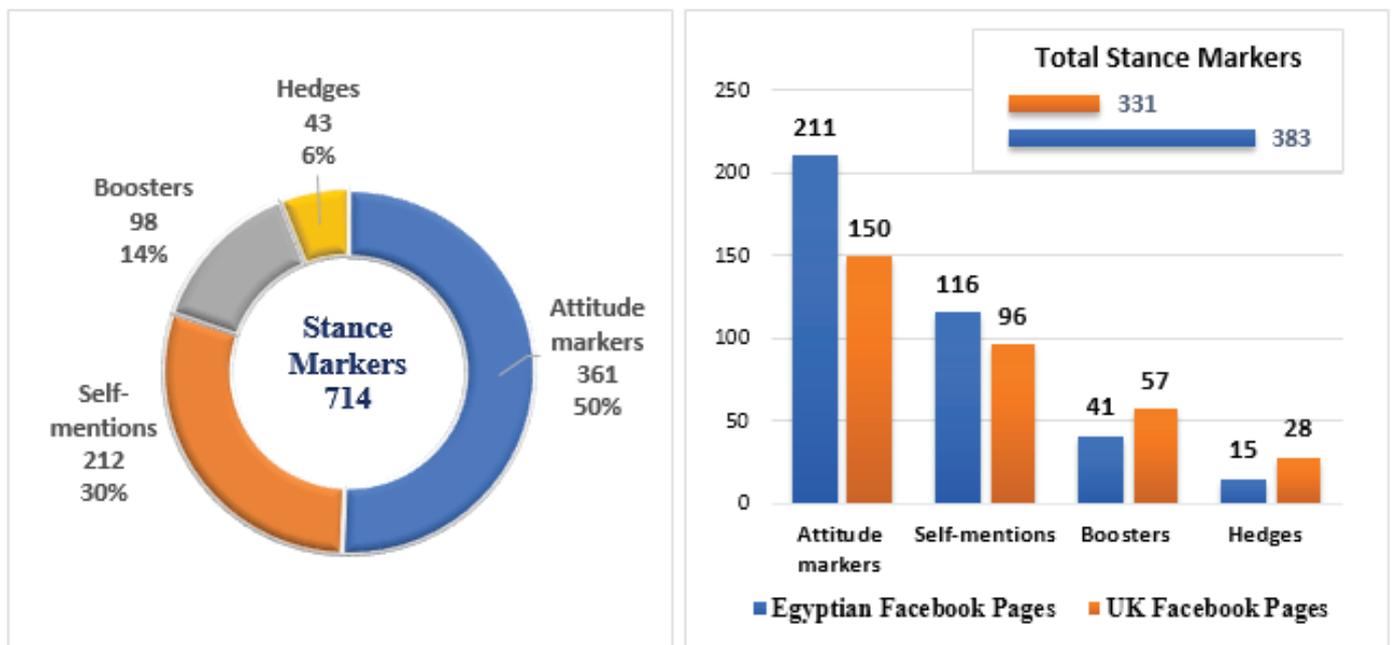


Figure 1: Stance Markers in the Corpora of Facebook Posts

Note. Fig. 1 displays the frequencies of the four main categories of stance detected in both the Egyptian and the UK Facebook pages.

Table 3: Distribution of Stance Markers in the Corpora of Facebook Posts

	Kia UK	Renault UK	Total UK Corpora	%	Kia Egypt	Renault Egypt	Total Egyptian Corpora	%	$\chi^2$ p-value
	Absolute Frequency N= 3119				Absolute Frequency N= 3091				
Attitude Markers	54	96	150	45%	94	117	211	55%	11.536* (0.001*)
Self-mention	53	43	96	29%	45	71	116	30%	2.145 (0.143)
Boosters	23	34	57	17%	21	20	41	11%	2.510 (0.113)
Hedges	17	11	28	9%	10	5	15	4%	3.841* (0.049*)
<b>Total Stance Markers</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>4.825* (0.028*)</b>

$\chi^2$ : Chi square test

p-value: for comparing UK and Egyptian Facebook Pages (per total no. of words)

\*: Statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

Generally speaking, as shown Table 3, no striking variations were found in the general distribution of stance markers across the various categories in both the UK and Egyptian corpora. While a total of 331 stance markers were detected in the UK corporate Facebook pages, 383 stance markers were identified in the Egyptian corpora. The most frequent interactional markers were attitude markers with 150 markers and 211 markers spotted, making up 45% and 55% respectively of the total stance markers recognised. These were followed by self-mentions, which amounted to roughly 29% (96 markers), 30% (116 markers), respectively. Boosters were less frequently used with 57 and 41 markers detected constituting almost 17% and 11%. Since the corpora belong to the promotional discourse whose aim is to persuade the audience, hedges were the least frequent markers, representing nearly 9% (28 markers) and 4% (15 markers) of the total stance features spotted.

### 6.1. Attitude Markers

The study examined the markers that express the advertiser's (a) attitudes and opinions, or (b) emotions and feelings (expressing joy, love or concern) towards *the company, the customer and the products/services offered*. It focused on the analysis of explicit attitudinal features. The context was carefully examined to ensure that the evaluative items identified actually function as attitude markers, convey the author's voice, and contribute to the theme of the

text. Evaluative lexis that does not contribute to the theme of the text and does not convey the writer's attitude towards the company, the customer and the products/services offered, was disregarded as in examples 1, 2 and 3.

1. Check out what inspired Luis Garcia to become a **world-class** footballer! (*Kia UK*)
2. Oscar was selected as Kia's Official Match Ball Carrier to meet and greet his **favourite** players ahead of their **important** match. (*Kia UK*)
3. In light of recent sustained **discriminatory abuse** towards footballers and other sportspeople across a number of social media platforms... (*Renault UK*)

Attitude markers were the most frequent stance feature detected in both the Egyptian and the UK corporate Facebook pages (361 markers, 50%), which highlights the important role they play in this digital genre. Attitude markers were significantly more common in the Egyptian corporate Facebook posts. Whereas 211 (55%) markers were identified in the Arabic corpora, 150 (45%) markers were detected in the English corpora. In line with Mur-Dueñas's (2010) findings, attitudinal nouns in addition to attitudinal verbs, adjectives and adverbs were found to express

the author's attitude. These were mainly positive evaluative markers that promote the excellence of the company and the distinctive qualities of the products. Most of the markers used were single-word attitude markers, except for a few phrases/expressions used to evaluate the products. What was quite noticeable is the standardisation of the slogans of both companies across the English and Arabic corpora to maintain a

consistent brand image, resulting in the use of similar or synonymous attitude markers in both corpora. This was evident in the repetition of the slogans "movement that inspires" "حركة تلهمك" for Kia and "nouvelle vague" (i.e., a new wave) "موجتنا الجديدة" for Renault in both corpora. Table 4 points out some of the attitudinal markers used in the Egyptian and UK Facebook posts.

Table 4: Examples of Attitude Markers Used in the Facebook Posts

Purpose	Verbs	Adjectives	Nouns	Adverbs	Phrases
Excellence of the company and its products Novelty and advanced technology	adapted awarded evolve won	award-winning latest modern new reinvented state-of-the-art	achievement award award-wins change leaders transformation		5 stars
		جديد / <i>jadīd</i> / new عصري / <i>ʿaṣrī</i> / modern متطورة / <i>mutaṭawirah</i> / advanced/ sophisticated أحدث / <i>aḥdath</i> / latest	تحول / <i>taḥawwul</i> / transformation حدثاء / <i>ḥadāthah</i> / novelty		5 نجوم / <i>nujūm</i> / 5 stars
Distinctive qualities of the products	customize personalize	attractive dynamic elegant safest smooth spacious stylish	comfort	safely smoothly	in style doesn't make you compromise
		مميز / <i>mumayyaz</i> / distinct أنيق / <i>anīq</i> / elegant قوي / <i>qawī</i> / powerful أفضل / <i>afḍal</i> / best	رفاهية / <i>rafāhiyah</i> / luxury سلامة / <i>salāmah</i> / امان / <i>amān</i> / safety إتقان / <i>itqān</i> / proficiency حرفية / <i>ḥirafiyah</i> / craftsmanship		يعبر عن السرعة / <i>yu'abbir 'an</i> <i>assur'ah</i> / expresses speed تخطف أنظار الشارع <i>takḥṭaf anzār</i> <i>ashārī</i> / catches all eyes
Emotional judgments	inspire	delighted enjoyable electrifying proud	freedom joys pleasure		
	تلهم / <i>tulhim</i> / inspire يبهر / <i>yubhir</i> / impress تستمتع / <i>tastamti</i> / enjoy تتمنى / <i>tatamanā</i> / wish	مذهل / <i>mudhḥil</i> / outstanding			
Quality of the after-sales service		معتمدة / <i>mu'tamadah</i> / accredited مضمون / <i>maḍmūn</i> / guaranteed اصليّة / <i>aṣliyah</i> / genuine	سهولة / <i>suhūlah</i> / ease إتقان / <i>itqān</i> / proficiency		راحة البال <i>raḥat albāl</i> / peace of mind

The advertisers mainly relied on attitude markers that provided a reason or motive for purchase. In addition, a few superlatives were used in both the Egyptian and UK pages to emphasise the advanced technology the companies rely on and stress some of the distinctive qualities of the advertised vehicles. Special attention was given in the Egyptian corpora to the after-sales service centres in an attempt to instil trust and confidence in the target audience. This was evident in the use of positive attitude markers to evaluate the service centres. For instance, Kia Egypt described the service centres as /mu'tamadah/ معتمدة 'accredited' and 'guaranteed' and the spare parts offered as /aşliyah/ أصلية 'genuine'. Renault Egypt also offered "new discounts" for those who wish to maintain their cars and stressed the skilfulness and high proficiency of their car servicing centres.

Only a few emotive attitude markers were used to express emotional judgments which allow the companies to bring themselves closer to their audience. These attitude markers achieve persuasion by appealing to emotion. Unlike the English corpora, the emotive marker /tatamaná/ تتمنى 'wish' was repeated in both Arabic corpora where it occurred three times in Kia Egypt, and six times in Renault Egypt. It was used by the advertisers to send their greetings for special occasions, such as Christmas and the holy month of Ramadan.

## 6.2. Self-mentions

Self-mentions came in second place (212 markers, 30%). They were used to foreground the companies, display their commitment and pride in their products, and stress their continuous availability for customer service and support. This in turn instils confidence and trust in the target audience. Self-mention markers occurred somewhat more frequently in the Egyptian corporate Facebook posts with 116 (30%) and 96 (29%) self-mention markers identified, respectively. Self-mention took various forms in the corpora. Table 5 below shows the self-mention markers encountered in both the Egyptian and UK Facebook posts.

Table 5: Self-mention Markers Detected in the Corpora

Self-mentions in UK Corpora	Freq	Self-mentions in Egyptian Corpora	Freq
Exclusive 1 <sup>st</sup> person plural pronouns	58	Exclusive 1 <sup>st</sup> person plural pronouns	58
We	22	Detached pronoun نحن /naħnu/ (We)	3

Our	19	Attached pronoun -نا /nā/ (We, Our, Us)	55
Us	17		
<b>Name of the company</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>Name of the company</b>	<b>58</b>
Kia	19	كيا	20
Renault	19	رينو	38

Note. Product names that included the name of the company, such as Kia EV6, Kia Sorento, Renault 4, Renault ARKANA, etc., were not counted since these refer to particular products.

Exclusive first-person plural pronouns and possessive adjectives were used to *personalise* the huge and impersonal corporations (Myers 1994), identify the product or service with the company (Fuentes-Olivera et al. 2001), and portray the staff of the company as a team (Fu 2012; Ivorra Pérez 2014b). Additionally, brand names (i.e., *Kia* and *Renault*) were constantly used to draw the audience's attention to the brand since they directly reflect the brand identity. This is particularly necessary for Facebook posts where a person can follow and receive posts from different brands. Reference to the companies by name is a *depersonalisation strategy* (Ivorra Pérez 2014b) which added some formality to the posts. The use of both personalisation and depersonalisation strategies in the corpora creates an atmosphere of formality necessary when giving serious product information and the informality associated with the advertising genre.

The most frequent of self-mention markers occurring in the UK corporate posts were the exclusive first-person plural references (58 instances) while the third-person references, i.e., brand names, were less common (38 instances). In addition to the use of the first-person pronoun "we" as a personalisation strategy, the company associates itself with its customers using the pattern *we + verb + you/your/the customer* (e.g. "We gave some lucky fans the chance to welcome their footballing heroes" *Kia UK*). This is an engagement strategy that aims to involve and produce a sense of solidarity with potential customers (Fuentes-Olivera et al. 2001).

As for the Egyptian corpora, exclusive first-person plural pronouns, particularly attached rather than detached pronouns, as well as third-person references (i.e., brand names) were almost equally used (58 instances each). The detached first-person plural subject pronouns "we" and the colloquial Egyptian form /iħnā/ احنا were only spotted three times in the corpora. The limited occurrence of the first-person subject pronoun is mainly attributed to the fact that the subject pronoun "we" is usually an implicit pronoun

in Arabic that can only be inferred from the structure of the verb. The pattern *we/the company + verb + you/the customer* was also extensively used in the Egyptian corpora as shown in the following example:

نحن نعمل من أجلك. (رينو)

**We work for you. (Renault Egypt)**

The use of depersonalisation strategies was quite evident in the Arabic corpora where the companies were referred to by their names. An interesting observation is the way the Egyptian companies clearly associated themselves with the region where they operate, namely Egypt, especially in greetings for special occasions. This was particularly evident in the posts of Renault where the company name *Renault Egypt* رينو مصر occurred four times. *Kia Egypt*, likewise, frequently employed the hashtag #KiaEgypt in its Facebook posts, and the company clearly mentioned its name as “the agent of Kia in Egypt”. Another interesting finding is the way Renault Egypt highlighted the role of its employees viewing them as “a family” and regarded itself as “the partner of the Egyptian family” as shown in the example below.

أسرة رينو تهدي أرق التهاني لأمهات مصر العظام كل عام وأنتم بخير رينو  
شريك الأسرة المصرية (رينو)

The Renault family expresses its heartiest good wishes to the great mothers of Egypt. Renault, the partner of the Egyptian family (Renault Egypt)

### 6.3. Boosters

Boosters were much less commonly utilised in the corpora (98 markers, 14%). They were used to express certainty, emphasise the force of propositions, instil trust and confidence in the target audience, and thus persuade the consumers to buy what is being offered (Fuertes-Olivera et al. 2001; Hyland 1998, 2019). Boosters in the English posts were slightly more common than in the Arabic posts. In fact, 57 (17%) boosters were identified in the UK corpora while 41 (11%) were detected in the Egyptian corpora. Table 6 highlights some of the boosters used in both the Egyptian and the UK Facebook posts. For the purpose of the study, the modal verb “will” was excluded from the analysis as it was mainly used in the corpora to indicate future time.

Table 6: Examples of Boosters Used in the Corpora

Type of Booster	Purpose	Examples
<i>Amplifying adverbs</i>	modify gradable adjectives and verbs and intensify their meanings	always, perfectly, very, totally, hugely, never, constantly, fully
<i>Emphatic adjectives</i>	reinforce the truth value of the proposition and display a high degree of the writer’s conviction	all-new, full, huge, true كامل /kāmīl/ full/total شامل /shāmīl/ comprehensive عال /‘āl/ high الحقيقي /alḥaqīqī/ true
<i>Quantifiers</i>	indicate large quantities	plenty, a lot, thousands, millions متعددة /‘adīd/ عديد /kathīr/ كثير /muta‘adidah/ a lot/many/several
<i>Universal pronouns/determiners</i>	imply total inclusion or exclusion, project a hyperbolic impression and enhance the persuasive force of the proposition	all, every, everyone, everywhere, no جميع /jamī‘/ كل /kul/ all/every/each مفيش /mafīsh/ ليس /laysa/ no/nothing

Same as attitude markers, boosters were used to emphasise the excellence of the company, its remarkable transformation, the novelty of the products, their distinctive features and the advanced technology they rely on. Emphatic adjectives, particularly the adjective “all-new”, were the most frequent lexico-grammatical category of boosters

found in the English corpora. These were followed by universal pronouns/determiners and amplifying adverbs. As regards the Arabic corpora, the use of universal pronouns/determiners, which imply total inclusion or exclusion, was quite remarkable. This was evident in the frequent use of the boosters /kul/ كل and /jamī‘/ جميع ‘all’, ‘every’ and ‘each’. Besides,

quantifiers that indicate large quantities and emphatic adjectives were used to strengthen the writer's claims.

#### 6.4. Hedges

Hedges were the least utilised stance markers in both corpora (43 markers, 6%). Hedges in the English posts were significantly more commonly used than in the Arabic posts. 28 (9%) hedges were identified in the UK corpora while only 15 (4%) were detected in the Egyptian corpora. These devices signal "the writer's reluctance to present propositional information categorically" and open the dialogic space for alternative views (Hyland and Tse 2004, 168). Accordingly, they can be used to demonstrate honesty, modesty and integrity, which in turn help establish credibility (Hyland 2019). Even though hedges usually tone down the message and express doubt and uncertainty, what was quite remarkable is the use of some hedges in both corpora to generalise claims and reinforce the truth value of the proposition. This seems to be connected with the nature of the advertising genre whose aim is to amplify the advantages and distinctive qualities of the offered products/services. Table 7 displays some of the hedges used in both English and Arabic corpora.

Table 7: Examples of Hedges Used in the Corpora

Type of Hedging Device	Purpose	Examples
Adverbs	tone down the message reinforce the truth value of the proposition	simply, only, just, almost
	reinforce the truth value of the proposition	فقط / <i>faqat</i> / وحيدة / <i>wahīdah</i> / only
Assertive pronoun/determiner and Vague quantifiers	generalise claims	any, anything, anyone, anywhere some, most
		أي / <i>ay</i> / any
Modal auxiliaries	express doubt and uncertainty tone down the message	may, could, can

As far as the English corpora are concerned, in addition to the use of modal auxiliaries as mitigating devices that tone down the message, vague quantifiers (e.g., "some" and "most") and assertive pronouns/determiners, especially "any-" words, were utilised to impart vagueness and generality to propositions (Hinkel 2005). Besides, restrictive adverbs, such as "only" and "just", were used. These serve an emphatic

function since they "focus on the part of the clause for which the truth value is most important" (Biber et al. 1999, 798). As for the Arabic corpora, hedges mainly occurred in the form of the vague quantifier /ay/ أي 'any' essentially used to generalise statements. Restrictive adverbs were also used, such as the words /*faqat*/ فقط, /*wahīdah*/ وحيدة and the colloquial word /*bas*/ بس that correspond to the English adverb 'only'. They "emphasize what the product really is or does associating what they say about the product to shared knowledge" (Fuentes-Olivera et al. 2001, 1300).

## 7. CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Examining the findings of the stance devices reported in the study, this section explores the extent to which the companies adapt their linguistic choices to suit the cultural preferences of the target audience. It addresses the similarities and differences identified in the Egyptian and the UK corpora using Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) cultural framework.

### 7.1. Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)

In line with the different scores of Egypt (IDV Egypt= 35) and the UK (IDV UK= 89) on the dimension of individualism (Hofstede Insights, n.d.), the Egyptian companies may identify themselves as more collectivist entities than their UK counterparts. Some stance markers that particularly reflect collectivist cultural values were observed on the Egyptian pages, being a collectivist society. The first observation is the *limited occurrence of the detached first-person subject pronoun* in the Egyptian corpora, which is usually an implicit pronoun in Arabic that can only be inferred from the structure of the verb. This reflects Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) observation that languages spoken in collectivist cultures allow first-person pronouns to be omitted. Secondly, the Egyptian companies clearly *associated themselves with the region* where they operate, namely Egypt. Renault Egypt, in particular, viewed the employees as "a family" and regarded itself as "the partner of the Egyptian family". Contrarily, the region in the UK corpora was only mentioned once in Renault UK to show the company's support for the sporting community. Accordingly, the posts reflect some of the collectivist values, stressing group belonging, family needs, and national identity (De Mooij 2022; Singh, Zhao, and Hu 2005).

A key distinction relevant to the individualism dimension is the *communication style*. A high-context

communication (HCC) style is common in collectivist cultures while a low-context communication (LCC) style is typical in individualist cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). The verbs associated with the advertisers in the UK corpora were basically *activity verbs*, such as the verbs "provide", "share" and "help"; yet, the most common verb types in the Egyptian corpora were *mental verbs* that express emotional meaning, particularly evident in the repetition of the verb /tatamaná/تتمنى 'wishes'. The use of personal attribution together with the attitude verbs plays a significant affective role and contributes to the development of a relationship with the reader (Hyland 2019). This is of special importance for HCC societies that value trust and relationship with the company (De Mooij 2022; Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). Moreover, the use of the elaborate verbal style (De Mooij 2022), common in collectivist and HCC cultures of moderate to strong UAI, was evident in the more frequent use of attitude markers in the Egyptian corporate posts. The Egyptian companies provided detailed information and relied on positive evaluative lexis in their posts in order to attract and persuade potential customers.

### 7.2. Power Distance (PDI)

In accordance with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Egypt scores high on the power distance dimension (PDI Egypt= 80), whereas the UK has a low power distance score (PDI UK= 35) (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). As a result, the Egyptian companies may exhibit a higher power distance than their UK counterparts. Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) maintained that the power distance dimension usually negatively correlates with the individualism dimension. Accordingly, both high IDV and low PDI scores are often associated with more *personalisation*. High PDI together with low IDV, alternatively, can explain reduced personalisation since a *more implicit* and *less direct* communicative style is favoured (Cucchi 2019a, 2019b; De Mooij 2022; Ivorra Pérez 2014b). Egypt's high score on the PDI index was partially reflected in the formality of some of the posts on the Egyptian pages depicted in depersonalisation and third-person references being used more often in discourse. This was evident in the more frequent use of company names (Kia كيا and Renault رينو) particularly in Renault Egypt.

### 7.3. Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)

While Egypt scores 55 on the uncertainty avoidance index, showing a slight preference for avoiding uncertainty, the UK's score is 35 (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). In the light of Egypt's slightly high score on the UAI index, customers may show reluctance to buy new products or accept new technologies (Hofstede,

Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). This leads to a preference for explanations and details, a strong belief in expertise, and high regard for technology and design (Cucchi 2010; De Mooij 2022; Katan 2006). Therefore, in an attempt to reassure customers and reduce their perceived uncertainty (Lin, Swarna, and Bruning 2017), the Egyptian pages used *positive attitude markers* and highlighted the efficiency of the *after-sales service*. This was evident in the use of positive evaluative markers, which were significantly more commonly observed in the Egyptian corporate posts, to attract and persuade potential customers. In addition, the positive evaluation of the service centres reflects the importance of customer service to high UAI cultures (Lin, Swarna, and Bruning 2017; Singh, Zhao, and Hu 2005) since it instils trust and confidence in the target audience. This was observed in the use of positive attitude markers, such as the adjectives /mu'tamadah/معتمدة 'accredited'/'guaranteed' and /aşliyah/أصلية 'genuine', in addition to stressing the skilfulness and high proficiency of the car servicing centres.

### 7.4. Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)

Both Egypt and the UK are considered masculine societies. Whereas Egypt receives a score of 55, suggesting the presence of slightly more masculine than feminine elements, the UK has a score of 66, indicating that the society is highly success-oriented and driven (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Being masculine societies can explain some of the similarities in the metadiscoursal choices of the Egyptian and the UK companies. The use of *superlative forms* in both the Egyptian and the UK corpora and the focus on *prizes and material rewards* reflect the masculine societies' value for assertiveness, competitiveness, recognition, and material success. These findings are consistent with Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) and De Mooij (2022) who associated high MAS scores with hyperboles, superlative forms, and the emphasis on winning, awards and achievement. They also support Katan and Taibi's (2021) claim that Arabic exhibits several overstatement features, such as the use of superlatives, hyperbole, lexical couplets, etc. However, unlike the UK corpora, awards were mentioned only once on the Egyptian pages, which could relate to the unparalleled qualities of the vehicles advertised on the UK pages that may not be present in the Egyptian market.

Nevertheless, several cases were spotted that show that cultural orientations do not necessarily influence linguistic choices. For instance, although the UK companies belong to an individualist culture, they attempted to project a socially responsible corporate

image in the form of donations to refugees, showing support against discrimination and stressing environmental awareness. This was evident in some verbs associated with the companies, such as the verbs "donate", "stand with" and "strive". Another significant observation is the limited occurrence of hedges, which soften the interpersonal imposition, in the Egyptian corpora despite the preference of high-context collectivist cultures for indirect communication. Besides, the hedges used either generalise statements or reinforce the truth-value of the proposition. Same as the Egyptian pages, hedges were the least common stance markers found in the UK pages. This could be connected with the aim of the Facebook posts as a form of promotional discourse used to market the brand and persuade prospective customers to buy the products offered.

## 8. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the study provides valuable cross-cultural insight into Facebook as a form of digital corporate communication. It also contributes to the understanding of metadiscourse, highlighting its role on Facebook as a promotional discourse. The findings suggest a strong reliance of advertisers on stance markers in the corporate Facebook discourse to construct forceful arguments, project an image of authority, integrity and credibility, and convey a persuasive message under an informative mask. Despite the statistically significant higher percentage of stance markers reported on the Egyptian pages, the distribution of the markers across the various categories was similar in both the Egyptian and the UK corpora. Such similarities illustrate the efforts of the corporations to keep their global branding strategies consistent across cultures in order to maintain a uniform brand image in the minds of their consumers (De Mooij 2022). The most common stance features detected in both the Arabic and English corpora were attitude markers, particularly positive evaluative markers that provide a motive for purchase. These were followed by self-mentions used to foreground the companies and display their commitment and pride in their products. Even though boosters were much less common, they were used to instil confidence and strengthen the persuasive force of propositions. Hedges, which tone down the message, in contrast, were the least utilised stance markers. They were even sometimes used to generalise claims and reinforce the truth value of the proposition through vague quantifiers, assertive pronouns/determiners and restrictive adverbs.

From a cross-cultural standpoint, the results suggest that multinational corporations may utilise different

linguistic practices and communication styles in different cultural contexts to attract their Facebook fans. The context and core values of the cultures under investigation, particularly individualism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance, can account for some of the variations encountered in the selection and use of the stance markers. As reported by De Mooij (2022), the most important dimension, which has been found to significantly influence many of the metadiscourse choices, was the individualism/collectivism distinction. This was particularly evident on the Egyptian pages in the limited occurrence of the detached first-person subject pronouns, the use of inclusive first-person pronouns, and the expression of national identity and family needs, all of which reflect collectivist values. The findings also reveal that certain linguistic features can be associated with more than one dimension. For example, Egypt's high context of communication, low IDV and high PDI scores can explain the frequent use of depersonalisation strategies and third-person references since a more implicit and less direct communicative style is favoured. In addition, the frequent occurrence of positive attitude markers in the Egyptian corporate posts, used to develop a relationship with and instil trust and confidence in the target audience, may be influenced by Egypt's HCC, low IDV and high UAI. On the other hand, the relatively similar scores of the two cultures along the masculinity dimension can account for some of the similarities recognised on the Egyptian and the UK corporate pages, displayed in the use of superlative forms and the emphasis on achievement.

Accordingly, Hofstede's model and cultural dimensions can be regarded as a valid approach to interpret and account for some of the variations in language use. Nevertheless, it is necessary to take into consideration that the Facebook pages belong to the promotional genre and that the study focuses on the linguistic choices, particularly the interactional metadiscourse, of the same multinational corporations in two different countries. These factors have a considerable impact on the discursive options examined. Hence, the findings of the study demonstrate that both culture and genre are two essential aspects that cannot be ignored when studying interactional metadiscourse.

The study has profound implications for corporations both nationally and internationally with regard to building solidarity with potential consumers and managing their corporate image in computer-mediated communications since a country-specific content enhances usability, accessibility and interactivity (Singh, Zhao, and Hu 2005). Additionally, it reveals the usefulness of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to discourse analysis and utilising Hofstede's cultural

dimensions to interpret the possible influence of culture on metadiscursive strategies in digital corporate communication. An awareness of the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences involved in interactional discourse can improve cross-cultural understanding, and ultimately can contribute significantly not only to studies in the fields of linguistics and translation but also to studies in marketing and intercultural communication.

Further research can be conducted on larger corpora in order to extend and verify the findings and allow for more generalisable results. The research can also be supplemented with a multimodal analysis and other cultural dimensions may be investigated. In addition, it would be interesting to compare the use of stance and

engagement in the Facebook posts as the two broad categories of interactional metadiscourse. Besides, research can be extended to other countries to explore the extent of variation in interactional metadiscourse across cultures. Future research can also consider collecting Facebook posts from a wider range of businesses in other industrial sectors, such as food, cleaning, beauty products, etc., to shed light on the similarities and differences in metadiscursive choices. Native English and English as a lingua franca (ELF) can also be compared to find out if any linguistic differences could be identified based on national identity. Finally, cross-cultural variations in metadiscursive resources can be explored on other social network sites, such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.

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## APPENDIX

### Hofstede's Four Basic Dimensions of National Culture

Cultural Dimension	Features	
<b>Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)</b>  has to do with individual uniqueness, needs and desires versus family and group needs, goals and achievements.	<i>Individualist Societies</i>	are "I" conscious, stress privacy, prefer low-context of communication, direct and explicit verbal communication
	<i>Collectivist Societies</i>	are "we" conscious, emphasise group belonging, maintain harmony, prefer high-context of communication, indirect communication and saving face
<b>Power Distance (PDI)</b>  has to do with people's perception of power and the extent people within a certain culture accept unequal power distribution.	<i>High PDI Cultures</i>	family ties are strong, social hierarchy is accepted, status and appearance are important.
	<i>Low PDI Cultures</i>	believe that inequalities between people should be reduced and the emotional distance between subordinates and their superiors is relatively small.
<b>Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)</b>  has to do with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.	<i>Strong UAI Cultures</i>	feel uncomfortable in unstructured and unfamiliar situations, have a prevailing sense of stress and urgency, a strong belief in expertise and little trust in people and institutions. Customers show reluctance to buy new products or accept new technologies and advertisements frequently display experts who recommend the product.
	<i>Low UAI Cultures</i>	accept familiar and unfamiliar risks, enact fewer regulations, are more tolerant of extreme ideas, have a low sense of stress and urgency. Humour is often used in advertisements
<b>Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)</b>  has to do with the behavioural traits and motives of a society.	<i>Masculine Societies</i>	value assertiveness, competitiveness, recognition, and material rewards for success. Customers show a preference for status brands and luxury products that display success and social status
	<i>Feminine Societies</i>	show a concern for relationships and for the living environment, value cooperation and teamwork, and appreciate beauty and quality of life.

Note. The information within the table is obtained from De Mooij (2022), Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), and Hofstede (2011).