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Use and forms of metadiscourse features in COVID-19 Malaysian news

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Metadiscourse features are fundamental for coherence and cohesion to be achieved by the writers in the texts. Writers might have employed metadiscourse widely, but they might have used it incorrectly, causing the texts to be disjointed. Numerous studies have been carried out in various academic contexts in the use of metadiscourse. However, there are still limited studies in news settings. Hence, the most common types, functions, and forms of metadiscourse features in coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) news are identified through Dafouz-Milne's model. Fifteen COVID-19 news articles were collected from *The Star* and *The Edge*, respectively from November 2021 to March 2022. The study is conducted to examine the comparison between textual and interpersonal functions and their forms. This is done to examine the engaging content in COVID-19 news from *The Star* or *The Edge* to create awareness for the journalists. The findings revealed that interpersonal metadiscourse was used more than textual metadiscourse for *The Star*, but textual metadiscourse was used more than interpersonal metadiscourse for *The Edge*. The findings also displayed the significance of metadiscourse in COVID-19 news, and a glossary of metadiscourse forms in COVID-19 news would expose the COVID-19 journalists and practitioners to the employment of metadiscourse.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak occurred at the end of 2019 before it became a pandemic, newspapers both locally and globally were rife with all kinds of COVID-19 related information [1]. COVID-19 significantly impacted the world's population, making it nothing short of the Bubonic plague or the Black Death as experienced in Europe in the 14th century [2]. The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is thought to be extremely contagious and was found in Wuhan, China in December 2019, is what causes COVID-19. It attacks the lungs and causes respiratory problems. In most cases, this infection comes across as a severe flu due to the symptoms [3].

In general, university journalism students often struggle to employ the proper metadiscourse in their writing, especially when it comes to writing news. They are not aware that metadiscourse elements are used in news [4]. As such, Perreault and Perreault [5] elucidated that journalists discursively placed themselves in a

responsible yet exposed position within the media ecology during COVID-19. The inability of the journalists to convey news in a way that is interesting to lay readers may be the root of the news on COVID-19's confusing content. Thus, by giving readers more specific reading signals and examples, the journalists could use metadiscourse to explain health words and jargon in a straightforward, as well as reader-friendly manner.

The idea that interaction includes the exchange of information, goods or services, as well as the qualities, feelings and expectations of individuals who are interacting is best shown by metadiscourse [6]. Furthermore, metadiscourse is seen as interpersonal as it considers the readers' understanding, as well as encounters and processes requirements. By doing so, it provides the writers with an array of linguistic demands to fulfil the given goals [6]. Hyland and Tse [7] characterised metadiscourse as the utilisation of language procedures by authors to structure works, connect with the audience and pass their sentiments on to both their readers and their source material. Placing metadiscourse in the fuzzy category due to its heterogeneity [8], there are two major categories, namely, textual with its interactive resources and interpersonal that covers the interactional resources. The textual metadiscourse serves to guide the readers through the text, while the interpersonal metadiscourse gets the readers involved in the argument of the text.

Journalists employ metadiscourse, which is a linguistic tool, to interact with their readers [9]. It is a crucial component of writing as it helps in organising and forming arguments while also reflecting the writers' position on the subject matter and the audience. Numerous studies have been conducted on metadiscourse indicators. Few of them have looked at COVID-19-related items; the majority of them have concentrated more on opinion, editorial and other academic publications. Based on the study done by Rathnayake and Suthers [10], in order to assess the width of discourse, there were only three hashtags used as a medium to gather information. Rathnayake and Suthers's [10] study focused on one type of social media known as Instagram, in which other platforms which provide hashtag functionality may provide a variety of findings related to metadiscourse. Other than that, the study conducted by Aszeli *et al.* [11] exposed that there were only limited sample sizes used in the interactional metadiscourse (interpersonal metadiscourse), hence, providing space to expand the field of research to the interactive metadiscourse (textual metadiscourse). In addition to that, the research was limited to online news articles from the perspective of interactional resources, thus, leaving possibilities that both the tools of metadiscourse can be researched using the offline method to accomplish more awareness of the use of metadiscourse taxonomies. When analysing the media literacy articles related to COVID-19, Vraga *et al.* [12] outlined the need for a deeper understanding of news literacy (NL), as well as its connection and application to behaviour which was imperative as changes were continuously taking place in the news environment and becoming increasingly tougher to direct.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of COVID-19, as it is more commonly known, has jolted the world into a new normal. The field of journalism around the world too took a swift shift in reporting on COVID-19. Headlines focusing on various issues concerning the pandemic became customary [13]. News on the healthcare system, statistics on death cases, the economic crisis, the deterioration of the education system, the need for gadgets to transition into the virtual world, and the debate on vaccines were among the prominent topics discussed in various newspapers around the world [13], [14]. In this manner, news has turned into a source of data on COVID-19 for the general society.

Newspaper reporting is a predominant source of data which carries both positive and negative values. People rely on news articles to make decisions [15], [16]. In a study conducted by Pavlik [14], he found that countless people around the globe have shifted to online newspapers as access to the internet allows people to retrieve information in a matter of seconds [17], [18]. People are also able to verify the news from different resources [14], [16], [19]. However, when the news is presented, it can cause psychological distress. For instance, the news that there is no cure for COVID-19 does raise concerns about the virus's future threat to health and well-being [20]. Hence, it creates turmoil and distortion in COVID-19 news among the readers. Therefore, it is pertinent to prepare the journalists for real and hands-on experience of language in any setting on how far they can engage the readers in authentic interpretation, meaningful interaction, and proper communication.

Since COVID-19 news is vital to be read, metadiscourse plays an important role in news texts. Dafouz-Milne [21] conducted a research study on metadiscourse markers in editorial news. The Spanish *El Pais* and the British *The Times* were selected as the study's subjects because of their prominence and rhetorical and political effect on their respective national cultures. The outcomes showed that textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers were both present in the English and Spanish paper segments, despite the fact that there were contrasts in their dissemination, especially for textual categories. The informants were in agreement with the need for a balanced mixture of interpersonal and linguistic indicators to make the text persuasive and reader-friendly. Henceforth, Dafouz-Milne's [21] findings could be adapted as the analytical framework in the current study which highlights the syntactic and pragmatic aspects of metadiscourse features in COVID-19 news.

Metadiscourse has a significant impact in written documents. To provide a framework for analysing the language resources of intersubjective positioning, Hyland and Jiang [22] examined a corpus of 2.2 million words from top journal articles. Numerous studies have now proven that written texts represent interactions between authors and readers. The writer's projection of a position towards the text's references and to a lesser extent, the techniques used to assume the addressee's active participation are influenced by a variety of linguistic elements. This indicates that the current study, which analyses metadiscourse elements in COVID-19 news, is not similar to Hyland and Jiang's [22] study, in which it examines metadiscourse aspects in academic writing.

Apart from that, Hyland and Jiang [23] investigated the extent of the evolution of metadiscourse in specialised writing in several fields over 50 years in a study that adopted an interpersonal viewpoint. The results showed that interactive metadiscourse features (textual metadiscourse features) had significantly increased, while interactional metadiscourse features (interpersonal metadiscourse features) had decreased. Surprisingly, there was an increase in the usage of interactional metadiscourse in the Science disciplines when compared with the discursive soft knowledge sectors, in which there was a decline. These studies were focused on metadiscourse features in academic writing, which are different when compared with the current study, in which textual and interpersonal metadiscourse features are analysed syntactically and pragmatically in COVID-19 news.

Another study by Nugroho [24] evaluated how metadiscourse was used in news. Two corpora of news, which were *Washington Examiner* and *The Jakarta Post*, were chosen for the study. Interactive metadiscourse features (textual metadiscourse features) were used more predominantly when compared with the interactional metadiscourse features (interpersonal metadiscourse features). It can be inferred that both the discourse type and culture of the authors impact the use of these features. While Nugroho's [24] study has compared both *Washington Examiner* and *The Jakarta Post*, there is no comparison between the two corpora of news from different languages in this current study. A comparison of two different sets of news on the same theme from two news portals is also done in this current study. This comparison is imperative to fill in the gap in literature because to date, there have been no studies conducted to analyse the comparison of metadiscourse features in COVID-19 news from two Malaysian news portals.

Similar research was conducted by Hastomo and Aminatun [25], who examined metadiscourse in online news media. The study looked at how metadiscourse features were used in Tempo.co political news. The samples of the study consisted of 14 articles discussing Jokowi. The study's findings showed that the news pieces displayed a wide range of metadiscourse indicators with a high frequency. The highest frequency was shown by transition markers (logical markers) for interactive metadiscourse (textual metadiscourse), while the highest frequency was displayed by engagement markers (commentaries) for interactional metadiscourse (interpersonal metadiscourse). Hastomo and Aminatun's [25] study focused on the use of metadiscourse in political news that were centred on the life of Jokowi, which is incomparable to the current study. This is on the grounds that metadiscourse highlights were dissected as far as their structures in hard news.

In another study conducted by Hooi *et al.* [26], metadiscourse features were analysed in business news articles. This study aimed to investigate the types, functions and linguistic realisations of metadiscourse features by using Dafouz-Milne's [21] metadiscourse model as the analytical framework in Malaysian business news. The results revealed that *Focus Malaysia* journalists used both textual and interpersonal aspects more frequently than *Star Online* journalists. This demonstrated that *Focus Malaysia* placed a priority on truthfulness, humility and appropriate caution while reporting facts, in addition to informational precision and correctness [27]. In *Star Online*, metadiscourse was frequently employed to accurately and exactly express the idea. However, *Focus Malaysia* journalists largely used metadiscourse to entice the readers to interact with the content. Dafouz-Milne's [21] metadiscourse model was adapted as the analytical framework in Hooi *et al.* [26] study because it is comprehensive. Similarly, this analytical framework is employed in the current study because editorial news is almost similar to COVID-19 news.

This study investigates the function of metadiscourse in business news. The purpose of this study is to research the forms of metadiscourse features in COVID-19 news from *The Star* and *The Edge*. Both news portals were compared to ascertain whether *The Star* is on par with *The Edge* in terms of the quality of its news reporting, particularly with regards to COVID-19 news. To ensure that the research objective is fulfilled, a research question, which is framed in this current study is as follows: "What are the forms of metadiscourse features found in *The Star* and *The Edge* news during the pandemic era?"

3. METHODOLOGY
3.1. Sample
Fifteen COVID-19 news items from *The Star* and *The Edge* respectively were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: similarity of themes and number of words. Each news item was also required to contain a similar number of words, approximately 200 to 500 words, in order to reduce discrepancies in

the results. The total number of words for *The Star* news items was 4,882, while for *The Edge* news items, it was 4,913 words.

3.2. Analytical framework

The metadiscourse model developed by Dafouz-Milne [21] was used as an analytical framework in the current study, which is a small component of a broader study. This model, which is similar to Hyland's [6] model, is detailed as it includes both syntactic and pragmatic aspects of metadiscourse features. In contrast, Hyland's [6] model could not be adapted in the current study as it is used only to analyse metadiscourse features in academic writing. In Dafouz-Milne's [21] metadiscourse model, the textual and interpersonal elements make up the two main components. The textual dimension is divided into seven categories: logical markers, sequencers, reminders, topicalisers, code glosses, illocutionary markers, and announcements. The interpersonal component, on the other hand, is divided into five categories: hedges, certainty markers, attributors, attitude markers, and commentaries. The categories of metadiscourse and a few types are shown in Table 1 of Dafouz-Milne's [21] metadiscourse paradigm.

Table 1. Dafouz-Milne's [21] metadiscourse model

Textual metadiscourse	
Categories	Examples
Logical markers:	
- Additives	and, furthermore
- Adversatives	however
- Consecutives	therefore
- Conclusives	finally,
Sequencers	first, second
Reminders	let us return to
Topicalisers	in political terms, in the case of the NHS
Code glosses:	
- Parentheses	when (as with the Tories now)
- Punctuation devices	Tax evasion: it is deplored in others, but not in oneself
- Reformulators	in other words, that is, to put it simply
- Exemplifiers	for example, for instance
Illocutionary markers	I propose, I hope
Announcements	there are many good reasons
Interpersonal metadiscourse	
Categories	Examples
Hedges:	
- Epistemic verbs	may, might
- Probability	probably, perhaps
- Epistemic expressions	it is likely
Certainty markers	undoubtedly, clearly
Attributors	X claims that
Attitude markers:	
- Deontic verbs	have to
- Attitudinal adverbs	unfortunately, undoubtedly
- Attitudinal adjectives	it is absurd, it is surprising
- Cognitive verbs	I feel, I think
Commentaries:	
- Rhetorical questions	What is the future of Europe integration or disintegration?
- Direct address to readers	dear reader
- Inclusive expressions	we all believe
- Personalisations	I do not want
- Asides	She seemed (ironically for Spencer) not of the establishment

3.3. Data collection and analysis procedures

Various procedures for data collection were employed. Firstly, the Chief Editors of *The Star* and *The Edge* were given letters of permission to obtain their approval to use their news, to which they agreed. It was then possible to conduct this research using data from these two news portals. Upon obtaining permission, *The Star* and *The Edge* news items were collected from December 2021 until April 2022. Fifteen COVID-19 news items from each news portal were chosen. There was a range between 200 and 500 words in each of the chosen COVID-19 news stories. The total number of words in *The Star* news items was 4,882, while for *The Edge* news items, it was 4,913. To differentiate the metadiscourse employed in the two news portals of different sizes, the discovered metadiscourse was normed to an occurrence of 1,000 words. The forms of each metadiscourse category which appeared in *The Star* and *The Edge* news texts were assigned in the coding list with their corresponding

frequencies obtained from the ATLAS.ti version 9 software. All the coding of the metadiscourse categories was done manually on ATLAS.ti before extracting the forms.

4. RESULTS

Each metadiscourse category can be expressed in a variety of forms, referred to as forms, because language is associated with creativity [28]. This section presents the outcomes which respond to the research question. The number of occurrences of metadiscourse features in COVID-19 news is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of types of metadiscourse features in COVID-19 news

Metadiscourse features	The Star (Total number of words: 4,882)		The Edge (Total number of words: 4,913)	
	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words
Textual metadiscourse	110	22.5	136	27.7
Interpersonal metadiscourse	120	24.6	121	24.6

In the 15 *The Star* news, the total frequency of use of textual metadiscourse was 22.5 occurrences per 1,000 words, while for interpersonal metadiscourse, the frequency of occurrence was only 24.6 occurrences per 1,000 words. The result showed that interpersonal metadiscourse was used more frequently than textual metadiscourse. On the contrary, textual metadiscourse (27.7 occurrences per 1,000 words) was used more frequently than interpersonal metadiscourse (24.6 occurrences per 1,000 words) in *The Edge* news. The findings illustrated that both *The Star* and *The Edge* journalists were able to use both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse to guide and show acknowledgement towards the readers by creating solidarity through interaction in the text. Textual metadiscourse emphasises on the clarity of the content in COVID-19 news. To determine the clarity of the selected COVID-19 news from *The Star* and *The Edge*, the frequencies of the textual metadiscourse categories were compared for both news portals as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of categories of textual metadiscourse in COVID-19 news

Categories	The Star (Total number of words: 4,882)			The Edge (Total number of words: 4,913)		
	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words	% Of total	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words	% of total
Logical markers	46	9.4	41.8	27	5.5	19.9
Sequencers	0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
Reminders	0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
Topicalisers	7	1.4	6.4	19	3.9	14.0
Code glosses	57	11.7	51.8	90	18.3	66.2
Illocutionary markers	0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
Announcements	0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
Total	110	22.5	100.0	136	27.7	100.0

Table 3 shows that *The Edge* had more instances of textual metadiscourse (27.7 occurrences per 1,000 words) than *The Star* (22.5 occurrences per 1,000 words). Based on the findings, *The Edge* journalists had better awareness of the usage of textual metadiscourse in COVID-19 news than *The Star* journalists. From Table 3, code glosses had the highest occurrences in *The Star* (11.7 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (18.3 occurrences per 1,000 words), followed by logical markers in *The Star* (9.4 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (5.5 occurrences per 1,000 words), and finally, topicalisers in *The Star* (1.4 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (3.9 occurrences per 1,000 words). Sequencers, reminders, illocutionary markers, and announcements did not appear in both the news portals. The reason that code glosses had the highest occurrences could be due to the fact that the journalists were aware of the readers they were addressing; therefore, they were more prone to include reading cues and examples to simplify jargons and terminologies in news [21]. This could ensure those readers to be able to extract specific important information from the news especially when it comes to COVID-19 news. Examples of code glosses in *The Star* and *The Edge* will be further discussed in Table 4.

The results in Table 4 showed that parenthesis had the highest frequency in both *The Star* (8.6 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (10.6 occurrences per 1,000 words). The forms of the parenthesis found in *The Star* and *The Edge* are illustrated in their contexts below:

a) … COVID-19 Antigen rapid test kits *[(self-test kits)]*, says Domestic Trade and
b) … recommending the Pfizer *[(Comirnaty)]* vaccine as it offers a higher level of

(*The Star*)

a) … number of patients in the intensive care unit *[(ICU)]* remain under control
b) … as well as the RTK-Ag *[(professional)]* test within 24 hours upon arrival   (*The Edge*)

For both *The Star* and *The Edge*, the parenthesis was placed after noun phrases. The use of parentheses displayed that code glosses were not realised by words alone. The parenthesis is used in the sentences for both the news portals to provide explanations on what the journalists wrote in the text.

Table 4. The forms of code glosses in *The Star* and *The Edge*

No.	*The Star* (Total number of words: 4,882)			*The Edge* (Total number of words: 4,913)		
	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words
1	( )	42	8.6	( )	52	10.6
2	punctuation device	11	2.3	punctuation device	19	3.9
3	including	1	0.2	especially	4	0.8
4	include	1	0.2	such as	4	0.8
5	includes	1	0.2	including	2	0.4

Table 4 displays that punctuation device exhibited the second highest frequency for both *The Star* (2.3 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (3.9 occurrences per 1,000 words). The punctuation device is represented by "," and "–". Pertaining to the punctuation device that is represented by ",", the forms found are shown as follows:

a) … weddings *[, which are currently only allowed to fill up 50% of the venue occupancy].*
b) … in key places *[, making it harder for the immune system to recognise the virus].*   (*The Star*)

a) … phase *[, which will see various sectors given more flexibility to enable the people…].*
b) … phase *[, subject to an announcement by the World Health Organisation (WHO)].*   (*The Edge*)

From the examples shown for both *The Star* and *The Edge*, the punctuation device "," was used after noun phrases in the sentences to provide explanation for objects of the sentences. Similar situations could be seen for the punctuation device "–". The forms are illustrated below:

a) … against severe illness from Omicron among older adults *[– a high-risk group].*
b) … B.1.1.529 variant has 32 protein spike mutations *[– twice that of the Delta variant].*   (*The Star*)

a) … antiviral drugs *[– Merck's Molnupiravir and AstraZeneca's COVID antibody drug].*   (*The Edge*)

The use of the punctuation device had metadiscourse meanings, which allowed the journalists to explain what they wrote. The punctuation device was used in *The Star* and *The Edge* news to explain, rephrase or exemplify the textual content of the text. Similar to punctuation device ",", punctuation device "–" was used after noun phrases to provide explanations for objects of the sentences. The double punctuation device "–" was used by *The Edge* journalists as illustrated in the example:

a) … of 48,000 Paxlovid stocks *[– Pfizer's oral COVID-19 antiviral drug –]* have arrived   (*The Edge*)

From the example, *The Edge* journalist used the punctuation device after a noun phrase in the sentence. This shows that the journalist intended to guide the readers to interpret the words' and phrases' meanings.

Following that, referring to Table 3, logical markers had the second highest occurrence for *The Star* (9.4 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (5.5 occurrences per 1,000 words). Logical markers were the fundamental features that were utilised in the text to enable the readers to correctly grasp the journalists' intention [29]. Examples of logical markers are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. The forms of logical markers in *The Star* and *The Edge*

No.	*The Star* (Total number of words: 4,882)			*The Edge* (Total number of words: 4,913)		
	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words
1	also	9	1.8	also	3	0.6
2	however	7	1.4	due to	3	0.6
3	due to	5	1.0	as	3	0.6
4	while	4	0.8	but	2	0.4
5	but	2	0.4	if	2	0.4

From Table 5, the highest frequency was for logical marker *also* for *The Star* (1.8 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (0.6 occurrences per 1,000 words). The forms of the logical marker *also* found in *The Star* and *The Edge* are illustrated in their contexts below:

a) … Social distancing will *[also]* no longer be imposed at mosques and places of worship.
b) … He *[also]* urged employers to implement work from home or remote working, as a   (*The Star*)

a) … foreign travellers will *[also]* be able to enter the country without having to apply for
b) … Checks on social media *[also]* found that many were happy with the decision and   (*The Edge*)

The logical marker *also* was used together with epistemic verbs and verbs. It was used after epistemic verbs, which are also considered helping verbs, to show that there was an additional point in the sentences (see Example 1 from *The Star* and Example 1 from *The Edge*). The logical marker *also* was used before verbs (see Example 2 from *The Star* and Example 2 from *The Edge*) to link different ideas of the text.

For the third highest frequency, logical marker *due to* exhibited 1.0 occurrence per 1,000 words in *The Star*. However, it exhibited 0.6 occurrences per 1,000 words in *The Edge*, which was the second highest frequency. The forms of the logical marker *due to* found in *The Star* and *The Edge* are illustrated in the following contexts:

a) … time to start transitioning into the endemic phase *[due to]* the high vaccination rate
b) … said although there is a surge in COVID-19 cases *[due to]* the Omicron wave, the   (*The Star*)

a) … failing to do so in the past two years *[due to]* movement restrictions caused by the
b) … children below 12 years old this year *[due to]* the spread of the Omicron variant   (*The Edge*)

The logical marker *due to* was used after noun phrases to connect the preceding points of effects with the latter points of causes in the sentences for both *The Star* and *The Edge*. The journalists tried to help the readers to connect the interpretation between the causes and effects by using the logical marker *due to*. Table 3 displays that topicalisers exhibited the third highest frequency in *The Star* (1.4 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (3.9 occurrences per 1,000 words). It may be suggested that the use of topicalisers is not necessary to introduce a different subject in the news, given the short length of the news articles [21]. Descriptive data about the forms of topicalisers in *The Star* and *The Edge* are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The forms of topicalisers in *The Star* and *The Edge*

No.	*The Star* (Total number of words: 4,882)			*The Edge* (Total number of words: 4,913)		
	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words
1	on…	3	0.6	in…	5	1.0
2	in…	2	0.4	with…	1	0.2
3	as…	1	0.2	at…	1	0.2
4	for…	1	0.2	on…	1	0.2

For the forms of topicalisers, an overview of a paragraph before the topicaliser is shown in the examples to indicate the topic shift clearly in the news. Topicaliser with a preposition *on* had the highest frequency for *The Star* (0.6 occurrences per 1,000 words), while it only appeared once in *The Edge* (0.2 occurrences per 1,000 words). The forms of the topicaliser with the preposition *on* found in *The Star* and *The Edge* are illustrated in their contexts as shown:

a) Nanta said that the controlled price for oximeters and thermometers would be considered if there is a need for it.
    [On ensuring the quality of face masks that are being sold in the market], Nanta said the Ministry is also looking at imposing a minimum standard for face masks.   (*The Star*)
b) Scientists around the world are still trying to ascertain if this variant is more transmissible than the Delta variant.
    [On another matter], Khairy said the ministry will advise the government against holding the 15th general election soon.

a) Dr Noor Hisham said another 3,056 cases had recovered, bringing the cumulative number to 2,780,771 so far, while 14 new clusters were recorded and 301 still active.   (*The Edge*)

[On the infectivity rate (Rt) in the country], he said it was at 1.14 with Negeri Sembilan and Putrajaya recording the highest at 1.20 up to Saturday.

From the examples illustrated, the topicaliser with the preposition *on* was used together with attributors in *The Star* and *The Edge*. It served to introduce a brand-new story theme.

For the topicaliser with the preposition *in*, it exhibited the second highest occurrence in *The Star* (0.4 occurrences per 1,000 words), while it exhibited the highest frequency in *The Edge* (1.0 occurrence per 1,000 words). Its forms found in *The Star* and *The Edge* are illustrated in their contexts as shown:

a) "The point here is that there has been a rise in the number of paediatric cases," he said at a press conference on Thursday (Feb 17).
   [In light of this], Khairy said it was imperative for parents to voluntarily register their children, between the ages of 5 and 11, for vaccination under the PICKids immunisation programme.   (*The Star*)
b) He said CoronaVac will be available at selected vaccination centres from Monday (March 7).
   [In a Facebook post on Sunday], ProtectHealth Corporation said the Health Ministry is still *recommending* the Pfizer (Comirnaty) vaccine.

a) "The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) is in talks with all major countries for other destinations to recognise MySejahtera," he told a press conference on Tuesday.
   [In a statement made available on the EU's website], President of the European Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen said the COVID-19 vaccination and test certificates issued by Malaysia are in accordance with the Union's 'Vaccine Management System'.   (*The Edge*)
b) "The use of Paxlovid is another weapon against COVID-19, an antiviral drug used to treat COVID-19," he said.
   [In the infographic shared by him], the side effects of Paxlovid include muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, high blood pressure, and changes in the sense of taste.

From the examples presented, the topicaliser with the preposition *in* was used together with attributors in *The Star*. For *The Edge*, the topicaliser with the preposition *in* was used before an attributor (see Example 1) or a noun phrase (see Example 2). It was used to link the old information or topic with the new. There were many topics within the news. Since the readers might lose track of what they had read earlier, by using topicalisers, the text became more comprehensive and lucid. Apart from textual metadiscourse, interpersonal metadiscourse is pertinent as it focuses on engaging and involving the readers in the text. The details of the occurrences of interpersonal metadiscourse in both *The Star* and *The Edge* news are demonstrated in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of categories of interpersonal metadiscourse in COVID-19 news

Categories	The Star (Total number of words: 4,882)			The Edge (Total number of words: 4,913)		
	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 Words	% of total	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 Words	% of Total
Hedges	13	2.7	10.8	13	2.6	10.7
Certainty markers	0	0.0	0.0	2	0.4	1.6
Attributors	107	21.9	89.2	106	21.6	87.6
Attitude markers	0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
Commentaries	0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
Total	120	24.6	100.0	121	24.6	100.0

Table 7 reveals that there was a similar number of occurrences of interpersonal metadiscourse in *The Star* and *The Edge* (24.6 occurrences per 1,000 words). Based on the results, *The Star* journalists were similarly aware of the use of interpersonal metadiscourse as *The Edge* journalists. From Table 7, attributors had the highest occurrences in *The Star* (21.9 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (21.6 occurrences per 1,000 words), followed by hedges in *The Star* (2.7 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (2.6 occurrences per 1,000 words). Certainty markers which only appeared in *The Edge* exhibited the third highest frequency (0.4 occurrences per 1,000 words). Certainty markers, attitude markers and commentaries did not appear in *The Star*, while attitude markers and commentaries did not appear in *The Edge*. The reason that attributors had the highest occurrences could be that the journalists would want to encourage communication with the readers in the text because they involved communicative processes. These reputable references were referenced by the readers to support their arguments. Attributors can be realised through various forms. They are realised through the use of *X said, said X,*

says X, X added, and *according to X* in *The Star*. For *The Edge*, they are realised through the use of *X said, according to X, X added, said X,* and *X noted. X*, which is an element of attributors, represents either a noun phrase or a pronoun. Examples of attributors in *The Star* and *The Edge* will be further discussed in Table 8.

Table 8. The forms of attributors in *The Star* and *The Edge*

No.	*The Star* (Total number of words: 4,882)			*The Edge* (Total number of words: 4,913)		
	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 Words	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 Words
1	X said	60	12.3	X said	33	6.7
2	said X	12	2.5	according to X	13	2.6
3	says X	7	1.4	X added	9	1.8
4	X added	6	1.2	said X	2	0.4
5	according to X	2	0.4	X noted	2	0.4

Table 8 illustrates that attributor *X said* had the highest frequency for *The Star* (12.3 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (6.7 occurrences per 1,000 words). The forms of the attributor *X said* found in *The Star* are illustrated in their contexts below:

a) ... *[Ismail Sabri said] with removal of business hour limitations, the ever-popular*
b) ... *[He said] although there is a surge in COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron wave, the*   (*The Star*)

a) ... *[He said] this in replying to a question from Cha Kee Chin (Pakatan Harapan-Rasah)*   (*The Edge*)
b) ... *[Dr Noor Azmi said] this vaccine will be offered at selected vaccination centres*

The examples found in *The Star* and *The Edge* showed that the attributor *X said* was placed before complement clauses in the sentences. It was used to specify information from other sources.

Attributor *said X* had the second highest frequency in *The Star* (2.5 occurrences per 1,000 words) when compared with the fourth highest frequency in *The Edge* (0.4 occurrences per 1,000 words). The attributor *said X* was used as shown in the following examples:

a) ... well,"*[said Deputy Health Minister Dr Noor Azmi Ghazali on Sunday (March 6)].*
b) ... "It will be irresponsible to hold the general election now," *[said Khairy].*   (*The Star*)

a) ... is dropped starting from Sunday, *[said Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin].*
b) ... effects of vaccination, *[said Deputy Health Minister Datuk Dr Noor Azmi Ghazali].*   (*The Edge*)

The examples showed that information in the text was supported by the attributor *said X* to make it more convincing. The attributor *said X* was used to provide quotations from the spokespersons to give a stance of authority.

Referring to Table 7, hedges exhibited the second highest occurrence for *The Star* (2.7 occurrences per 1,000 words) and *The Edge* (2.6 occurrences per 1,000 words). Hedges are useful to pique the readers' interest and arouse their curiosity. The readers would be engaged with the content of the news because they were interested to read the text, as well as curious about its content. The forms of hedges in *The Star* and *The Edge* are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. The forms of hedges in *The Star* and *The Edge*

No.	*The Star* (Total number of words: 4,882)			*The Edge* (Total number of words: 4,913)		
	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words
1	would	3	0.6	could	6	1.2
2	about	3	0.6	would	5	1.0
3	around	2	0.4	likely	2	0.4
4	could	1	0.2			

From Table 9, hedge *would* show the highest frequency for *The Star* (0.6 occurrences per 1,000 words), while it exhibited the second highest frequency for *The Edge* (1.0 occurrence per 1,000 words). The forms of the hedge *would* found in *The Star* and *The Edge* are illustrated in their contexts below:

a) … Cha had asked whether the Ministry *[would]* review and reduce the ceiling prices
b) … controlled price for oximeters and thermometers *[would]* be considered if there is

(*The Star*)

a) … oximeters and thermometers, Nanta said this *[would]* be implemented if necessary.
b) … the PGzerBioNTech's Comirnaty vaccine for health reasons *[would]* be offered the

(*The Edge*)

From the examples, *The Star* journalists used the hedge *would* after noun phrases in the sentences. For *The Edge* journalists, they used the hedge *would* after a pronoun (see Example 1) or a noun phrase (see Example 2) in the sentence. The hedge *would* was used as a helping verb in conjunction with a main verb in the sentences to express shades of time or mood.

Hedge *could* appeared once in *The Star* (0.2 occurrences per 1,000 words), while it exhibited the highest frequency in *The Edge* (1.2 occurrences per 1,000 words). The forms of the hedge *could* found in *The Star* and *The Edge* are illustrated in their contexts below:

a) … transmissible than the Delta variant and whether it *[could]* lead to severe illness.   (*The Star*)

a) … children, aged five to 11, who *[could]* not receive the Pfizer BioNTech's Comirnaty
b) … the May 15 deadline due to low demand which *[could]* lead to high vaccine wastage.

(*The Edge*)

The examples demonstrated that the hedge *could* was used as a helping verb in conjunction with a main verb in *The Star*. In contrast, it was used after pronouns in *The Edge*. The hedge *could* was used in the sentences to create solidarity between the journalists and the readers, as well as to share commonality of things with the readers.

Interestingly, Table 7 demonstrates that certainty markers exhibited the third highest frequency in *The Edge* only, while they did not appear in *The Star*. Using certainty markers was important in reporting facts in COVID-19 news to make it credible and reliable. Readers would be anticipating reading the news because they were involved throughout the text. The forms of certainty markers in *The Edge* are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10. The forms of certainty markers in *The Edge*

No.		*The Edge* (Total number of words: 4,913)	
	Forms	Total hits	Occurrence per 1,000 words
1	severely	2	0.4

The Table 10 shows that certainty marker *severely* appeared twice in *The Edge* (0.4 occurrences per 1,000 words). The forms of the certainty marker *severely* found in *The Edge* are illustrated in their contexts below:

a) … tourism sector that had been *[severely]* impacted following the closure of the
b) … move, especially for sectors *[severely]* impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, such

(*The Edge*)

From the examples, *The Edge* journalists used the certainty marker *severely* in the sentences to modify verbs in the sentences. The use of the certainty marker *severely* was to accentuate the certainty of the propositions.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the research done, it was found that *The Star* news exhibited more interpersonal metadiscourse than textual metadiscourse. On the contrary, *The Edge* news displayed more textual metadiscourse than interpersonal metadiscourse. This demonstrates that *The Star* news was written in an audience-oriented manner, in which the news was presented in consideration of the readers' understanding and acceptance [14]. On the contrary, *The Edge* news stressed on the journalists' authority in reporting the news, in which the manner it was written may have caused psychological distress among the readers and may have an impact on the decisions made by them on a daily basis [15], [16], [20].

It was observed that there may be similarities to past research. In a study focusing on metadiscourse and comparing political news conducted by Hastomo and Aminatun [25], the results showed that for interactional metadiscourse (interpersonal metadiscourse), the highest frequency was exhibited by engagement markers (commentaries), while for interactive metadiscourse (textual metadiscourse), the highest

frequency was exhibited by transition markers (logical markers). This is similar to the textual metadiscourse features, such as code glosses that had the highest occurrence, followed by logical markers in *The Star.*

However, this current study's result indicated that textual metadiscourse had a higher frequency than interpersonal metadiscourse for *The Edge.* This result showed a resemblance to a growing trend that was suggested from the Hyland and Jiang's [23] study which examined the evolvement of metadiscourse in specialised writing in different areas over half a century. This result also displayed that interactive metadiscourse features (textual metadiscourse) had increased tremendously, while interactional metadiscourse types (interpersonal metadiscourse) had decreased vastly. Hyland and Jiang's [23] research revealed that writers used more features to lead readers through cohesive texts when using fewer features to emphasise their positions and interact with readers.

6. CONCLUSION

It was found that the journalists from both *The Star* and *The Edge* were able to use textual and interpersonal metadiscourse in their writing. The findings also showed that both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse were employed in the text which were similar to the Dafouz-Milne's findings. Based on the findings, interpersonal metadiscourse was used more than textual metadiscourse for *The Star*, but textual metadiscourse was used more than interpersonal metadiscourse for *The Edge.* With regards to textual metadiscourse features, code glosses had the highest occurrence, followed by logical markers, and finally, topicalisers for both news portals. Sequencers, reminders, illocutionary markers, and announcements did not appear in both news portals. Pertaining to interpersonal metadiscourse features, attributors had the highest occurrence, followed by hedges for both news portals. Certainty markers which only appeared in *The Edge* exhibited the third highest frequency. Attitude markers and commentaries did not appear in both news portals.

When analysing news related to COVID-19 news, media literacy and metadiscourse awareness, there are a few things which can be recommended to future researchers. In general, when conducting research on COVID-19 news, some of the main concerns are extending the sample size from a smaller scale to a bigger scale in the research, expanding the news and social media from one particular platform to another in order to create a better understanding and contribution. In addition to that, by using different kinds of methodology, replicating the previous research may be able to provide different findings. Moreover, when looking at media literacy, the experimentation of different models and knowledge gained can be used to generate diverse outcomes from the existing study. Furthermore, when analysing articles related to metadiscourse, it can be suggested that clear instructions would be needed for the writers and practitioners to create rapport with the readers. Aside from that, using proper metadiscourse would lead the readers to understand the intended meaning of the text better. By applying a broader corpus, as well as concentrating on different genres and disciplines, metadiscourse study could be applied to various types of writing, such as business letters, advertisements, postgraduate dissertations and other sub-genres which are related to journalistic writings and texts.

Despite the limitations, the glossary of forms of metadiscourse features in COVID-19 news. This will expose the COVID-19 journalists and practitioners to the forms for them to master the skill of COVID-19 news writing. This structured approach eases the students and professionals' problem in learning the expressions for the use of metadiscourse in COVID-19 news. This exposure also minimises the over-use of a limited range of familiar phrases. In addition, the results of the study contribute to important pedagogical implication in order to familiarise the journalists with the metadiscourse categories and to ensure that they will use the categories in COVID-19 news.

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