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THE ROLE OF METADISCOURSE IN ONLINE MENTAL HEALTH NEWS: A CORPUS-ASSISTED DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
Peran Metadiskursus Dalam Berita Daring Tentang Kesehatan Mental: Analisis Diskursus Dengan Korpus

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ABSTRACT

Background: The online dissemination of news articles about sensitive subjects, such as mental health, influences the perception of individuals with mental illness, service providers, and policies that shape their lives. **Purpose:** This study investigates interactional metadiscourse in online news reporting on mental health issues, focusing on how lexical choices shape readers' attitudes. **Methods:** Using Hyland and Jiang's (2016, 2021) interpersonal model of communication, which emphasizes disciplinary variation and writer–reader interaction in written discourse, we adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to analyze a corpus of 45 online news articles on mental health published between 2022 and 2024 in five mainstream Kenyan media outlets. The analysis identifies five categories of interactional metadiscourse markers: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. **Results:** Metadiscourse markers are not employed neutrally but frequently establish negative portrayals of individuals with mental illness. While interactional metadiscourse enhances textual cohesion and reader engagement, caution is needed to avoid reinforcing stigma and misinformation. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the need for careful language usage in news reporting on mental health to foster accurate public understanding and facilitate constructive policy discourse.

Keywords: interactional metadiscourse, mental health, news articles, online reporting

ABSTRAK

*Latar Belakang: Penyebaran berita artikel daring tentang subjek sensitif, seperti kesehatan mental, memengaruhi persepsi individu dengan penyakit mental, penyedia layanan, dan kebijakan yang membentuk kehidupan mereka. **Tujuan:** Studi ini menyelidiki metadiskursus interaksional dalam pemberitaan daring tentang isu kesehatan mental, dengan fokus pada bagaimana pilihan leksikal membentuk sikap pembaca. **Metode:** Menggunakan model komunikasi interpersonal Hyland dan Jiang (2016, 2021), yang menekankan variasi disiplin dan interaksi penulis-pembaca dalam wacana tertulis, kami mengadopsi desain metode campuran sekuensial eksploratif untuk menganalisis korpus 45 artikel berita daring tentang kesehatan mental yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2022 dan 2024 di lima media arus utama Kenya. Analisis mengidentifikasi lima kategori penanda metadiskursus interaksional: penegasan, penguatan, penanda sikap, penyebutan diri, dan penanda keterlibatan. **Hasil:** Penanda metadiskursus tidak digunakan secara netral tetapi sering kali membentuk penggambaran negatif tentang individu dengan penyakit mental. Meskipun metadiskursus interaksional meningkatkan kohesi tekstual dan keterlibatan pembaca, kehati-hatian diperlukan untuk menghindari penguatan stigma dan informasi yang salah. **Kesimpulan:** Studi ini menyoroti perlunya penggunaan bahasa yang cermat dalam pemberitaan tentang kesehatan mental untuk mendorong pemahaman publik yang akurat dan memfasilitasi wacana kebijakan yang konstruktif.*

Kata Kunci: Metadiskursus interaksional, kesehatan mental, berita daring, pelaporan online

INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital journalism has led to a marked increase in public participation in real-time deliberations concerning mental health news articles, thereby amplifying the media's capacity to influence the shaping of mental health attitudes (Liu *et al*., 2020; Park *et al*., 2018). While scholars in the field of mental health communication have underscored the imperative for precise communication of mental health-related news within the expanding public sphere (Graham & Wright, 2015), they have concurrently stressed the necessity of meticulous presentation to ensure the avoidance of potential misinformation (Starvaggi & Lorenzo-Luaces, 2024). Online metadiscourse enables news writers to influence readers' attitudes (Chen & Li, 2023) and to evoke emotional responses (Ruonan & Al-Shaibani, 2022). Metadiscourse markers have the capacity to influence public discourse on mental health within emerging media debate platforms. This study offers empirical evidence demonstrating the manner in which specific metadiscursive choices contribute to the framing of sensitive mental health issues, thereby shaping perceptions of individuals affected by mental health disorders.

Research has examined the function of metadiscourse markers in a number of different contexts, including books (Bal-Gezegin, 2016; Alyousef, 2018), student writing (Ho & Li, 2018; Lotfi *et al*., 2019), science popularizations (Farley, 2018), advertisements (Al-Subhi, 2022; Xia, 2020), and comparisons of mental disorders in online postings (Lyons *et al*., 2018). However, little attention has been given to the use of metadiscourse in shaping public attitudes in the genre of online discourse. The analysis of online mental health discourse is of significant importance in the contemporary context, characterized by the increasing influence of digital media in the articulation of social realities and the shaping of perceptions regarding critical issues such as mental health and social identity. In this research, we explore how interactional metadiscourse resources are employed in online news texts to influence readers' emotional responses toward people with mental health challenges. The utilization of metadiscourse markers in online mental health news items has the potential to influence two key aspects of public discourse. Firstly, these markers can shape the public's conceptualization of individuals with mental health conditions. Secondly, they can influence the framing and sustainability of public discourse on mental health.

The global burden of mental health disorders has been increasing over the years, a trend that has been further exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. According to the estimations provided by the World Health Organization (2016), approximately one in four individuals in Western populations encounter a mental health challenge. In the geographical region of sub-Saharan Africa, governments are confronted with competing priorities, including but not limited to malnutrition, low income, and a suboptimal quality of life. This poses significant challenges in addressing the mental health needs of the population, despite the fact that many conditions are preventable or treatable. Moreover, the dearth of mental health information among the general population hinders the timely diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions. This situation is further compounded by ineffective policy implementation, stigma, and online misinformation rooted in cultural beliefs (Gupta *et al*., 2023; Gurgun *et al*., 2024). According to the World Population Review, a considerable proportion of the Kenyan population is affected by mental health conditions. The country has been ranked 114th out of 175th globally in terms of mental

health, and it is experiencing an increase in the incidence of suicide (Ndetei *et al*., 2022).

The present article explores the nature of metadiscourse in digital mental health discourse, emphasizing the pivotal role of online news articles in countering misinformation, stigma, and shame associated with mental illness. Online news reports play a pivotal role in promoting public education, awareness, treatment, and prevention of mental health disorders. This phenomenon can be attributed to the growing public concern surrounding mental health in Kenya, a subject that has received disproportionately less attention from policy makers and the public discourse. As Ndetei *et al*. (2022) have demonstrated, mental health issues are pervasive throughout the country. However, the presence of stigma, limited awareness, and inadequate mental health infrastructure impede the effective diagnosis and treatment of these conditions. It is important to acknowledge that a considerable number of individuals grappling with mental health challenges often find themselves contemplating suicide due to a multitude of factors. These factors encompass a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics, mental health disorders, substance and alcohol dependence, and economic hardship. According to the World Health Organization (2020), the number of psychiatrists in Kenya is less than one per 500,000 people. This statistic highlights a pervasive systemic neglect of mental healthcare in the country. Moreover, the media's portrayal of mental health in Kenya has historically been deficient, frequently perpetuating stereotypes or neglecting to offer empathetic and informative narratives (Mutiso *et al*., 2019). However, recent shifts in online journalism have begun to offer more nuanced and humanizing portrayals, contributing to greater awareness and advocacy. As posited by Mutiso *et al*. (2022), the integration of culturally sensitive language and the incorporation of socio-economic factors in mental health reporting are imperative to effecting a change in public attitudes and a reduction in stigma. The objective of this study is to examine the function of interactional metadiscourse markers in the interpretation and emotional engagement of readers with mental health information.

METHOD

Literature Search Strategy and Data Collection

The present study employed a qualitative, literature-based method to examine the use of interactional metadiscourse in online news articles on mental health. This method entailed the systematic identification, selection, and close textual analysis of published digital news articles addressing mental health issues. The objective of this research was to understand how interactional metadiscourse resources are used to construct writer stance and engage readers. The analysis was guided by the interpersonal model of communication proposed by (Hyland & Jiang, 2016; Hyland & Jiang, 2021). Rather than measuring metadiscourse markers experimentally or statistically, the analysis focused on interpreting them in context. The method is predicated on the synthesis of insights from extant online journalistic texts, thereby enabling an interpretive understanding of how lexical and rhetorical choices shape public attitudes toward mental health.

A corpus of 45 news articles reporting on mental health was purposively selected and extracted from two mainstream online media publications. The purposive selection was guided by the need to include widely read and nationally influential news texts that regularly report on mental health issues and are therefore more likely to shape public attitudes and emotional responses. The sample concentrated on five major media

corporations based on readership metrics. The data collection process entailed the extraction of online news articles from media house websites. These articles were then compiled and converted into PDF format to facilitate analysis. The textual investigation centered on the utilization of interactional metadiscourse resources, including self-mentions, attitude markers, and engagement markers, by writers.

A purposive selection of 45 news articles on mental health was made from a sample of five prominent Kenyan online media outlets: The following newspapers were consulted for this study: Nation, The Standard, The Star, People Daily, and The Guardian (Kenya edition). The Media Council of Kenya (2021) identified these outlets as mainstream based on their national coverage, editorial credibility, and high online readership metrics. The criterion of "large corporations" is defined as follows: it refers to established media houses with national reach, verified digital platforms, and daily readership exceeding 500,000 unique visitors.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: The articles under consideration were published between 2022 and 2024, were written in English, focused primarily on mental health issues, and were authored by professional journalists or columnists employed by the respective media outlets. The exclusionary criteria encompassed opinion pieces, correspondence submitted for publication as a letter to the editor, and content that has already been published in duplicate.

The data were collected through the extraction and download of the selected articles directly from media websites. These articles were then compiled and converted into PDF format for analysis. The quantitative component entailed the identification and calculation of the frequency and distribution of interactional metadiscourse features. The qualitative component entailed a contextual analysis of the manner in which each category—self-mentions, attitude markers, and engagement markers—functioned rhetorically within the discourse to construct stance and audience engagement.

Research Design

Data analysis for the study was based on (Hyland & Jiang, 2016; Hyland & Jiang 2021) framework of metadiscourse markers. A thematic analysis was employed to systematically examine the written texts. This was carried out in two steps: textual analysis and contextual analysis. Textual analysis was used to identify the interactional metadiscourse markers according to Hyland and Jiang's (2021) taxonomy. The markers were labeled per category after contextual analysis. The labels were assigned as SEM for self-mentions, HG for hedges, ENG for engagement markers, AM for attitude markers, and BS for boosters. As emphasized by Hyland and Jiang (2016), the identification and classification of metadiscourse markers should be based on context.

Excerpts of the interactional metadiscourse markers within the articles were extracted contextually for illustration. The quantitative patterns were also interpreted qualitatively to assess their discursive functions. Quantitative analysis involved calculating the frequency and percentage of occurrence of the interactional metadiscourse markers. The frequency was computed as a percentage of the total. Content analysis was used to draw inferences from the presented data.

RESULT

Based on the research questions and corpus-assisted analysis of the news articles, this section presented and discussed results of

interactional metadiscourse markers identified in mental health news reporting. The analysis integrates both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Quantitatively, frequencies of markers were computed across the corpus. Qualitatively, sample extracts were examined to show how these markers function to construct stance, empathy, and engagement in the reporting of mental health issues.

Five interactional metadiscourse categories were identified following Hyland's (2005) model: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Interactional Metadiscourse Categories

Macro-category	Examples	Total number of items	Percentage
Hedges	may, could, possible, if, might, probably	130	26.97
Boosters	in fact, clearly, important, indeed	35	7.26
Attitude markers	unfortunately, sadly, difficult, critical, major, lack	79	16.39
Self-mention	we, our, my, myself-, I	70	14.52
Engagement markers	we, us, you, you, us-, questions, directives, asides (we all know), references to shared knowledge	168	34.85
TOTAL		482	100.00

Basis for Category Identification

The five categories were determined based on Hyland's (2005) interactional model of metadiscourse, which provides a framework for analyzing how writers project attitudes, identities, and relationships with readers. The quantitative aspect involved counting and categorizing each occurrence of the markers, while the qualitative aspect involved close reading of concordance lines and textual extracts to interpret their communicative role within the mental health discourse.

The analysis showed that engagement markers (34.85%) were the most frequently used, followed by hedges (26.97%), attitude markers (16.39%), self-mentions (14.52%), and boosters (7.26%). This distribution indicated that writers in online mental health news articles heavily rely on reader-oriented devices to engage audiences and project shared understanding, while also using hedges and attitude markers to manage stance and tone. Engagement markers such as you and we all know create empathy and normalize discussions around mental health, while hedges like may and might help convey caution and sensitivity in reporting. Attitude markers including sad and critical express emotional involvement and evaluative stance, humanizing the narrative. The use of self-mentions (I, we) enhanced credibility and authenticity, whereas boosters such as indeed and clearly reinforce confidence in key arguments. Collectively, these metadiscourse strategies demonstrated how journalists balance empathy, authority, and caution when communicating mental health issues to the public as discussed in the sub-sections below.

Hedges

The first of these categories refers to hedges, which help to express ideas in a less direct manner where the speaker or writer provides information without offering any certainty (Chaisiri *et al*, 2025). In the data analyzed, these markers were expressed through lexical items such as may, could, might, indicate, and likely, to express e epistemic and probability relationships between discourse stretches as shown in the excepts below.

1) ..the proposal may elicit a similar demand from other..

2) ..mobile health interventions could be feasible to alleviate mental health challenges faced by..

3) ..experts warn that persistent headaches might be a symptom of mental illness..

4) ..study findings indicate the need to establish structures including policies that promote..

5) ..are significantly more likely to experience mental health issues like...

Despite the fact that hedges should be used cautiously by writers to avoid overstatement, in this case they lean toward discourse overgeneralization. For instance, the use of hedges in examples 1–5 reflects a generalization strategy where the writers minimize their epistemic commitment to the propositional content. Hence, words and phrases like may, could be, might be, indicate, and likely are employed in a way that blurs the boundaries between caution and overgeneralization. In mental health news reporting, overgeneralized statements may risk misinforming the public or triggering stigma. For instance, in example 3, the use of the modal, might, introduces a possible interpretation without asserting a definitive causal link, leaving room for medical uncertainty and reader autonomy in interpreting the claim. Similarly, example 5, the use of, likely, suggests a correlation without affirming causation, thus maintaining overgeneralization.

Hyland & Jiang (2021) argued that hedges should allow writers to present their arguments deliberately to achieve specific reaction from readers, without overstating the facts. Hence, overgeneralization in news reporting may lead to ambiguous interpretation of the intended messages. Vague assertions may not only be confusing but also foster stigma and unnecessary anxiety among the target audience.

Boosters

As opposed to hedges, boosters demonstrate strong authorial presence and assertiveness. They expressed full commitment to the statements presented by the writer as presented in examples 6-8 below.

6) ..something must be off. In fact, experts say that suicidal people see…

7) ..mental health conditions. Indeed, and urgently so, the Kenyan government must ban shackling,

8) ..schools must be aware of how their systems can predispose young

While boosters are typically used to emphasize urgency and generate action, in excerpts 6-8, they often function to drive negative attitudes toward individuals with mental health challenges. For instance, in example 6, the use of, in fact, affirms solidly that people with suicidal are framed as abnormal or deviant, reinforcing stigma rather than reporting a possibility. Similarly, the repeated use of, indeed, and must in examples 7 and 8 frames mental health in terms of strict obligation and policy enforcement, which, while signaling urgency, risks reducing people to problems that demand control rather than support. These lexical choices overlook alternative frames that might trigger positive attitudes towards those affected. As Hyland & Jiang (2016) argues, boosters function to shut down rooms for negotiation of meaning. In this case they close a room for more balanced reporting. If boosters are not appropriately used in mental health news, there is risk of introducing stereotypes that can exacerbate stigma against affected people.

Attitude Markers

Attitude markers express the writer's affective values towards the reader and the content presented in the text. Linguistically,

these markers can adopt the form of deontic verbs as analyzed in examples

9) ..Unfortunately, many view it as looking for attention…..

10) ..It is critical to understand that mental health conditions…

11) Mental Health is one of the most difficult conversations to have today.

12) …pre-existing mental health challenges, no doubt, found it…

In the excerpts 9 to 12, attitude markers are used to show the authors' evaluations of propositional content. For instance, in excerpt 1, the attitudinal adverb, unfortunately, frames the ensuing information through the author's personal standpoint, highlighting disapproval. As Gavioli & Wadensjö (2019) observe, such markers serve the evaluative function in discourse, allowing authors to project their viewpoints clearly. Similarly, the adjectives, critical and difficult, in excerpts 2 and 3 indicate negative evaluations of the mental health discussion. These adjectives foreground the perceived complexity of the mental health state rather than presenting it in a descriptive manner.

Although attitude markers contribute to the interaction between writer and reader by making the author's standpoint shown, their inappropriate application may risk negative framings of people with mental health disorders. In the data analyzed, attitude markers do more than convey stance; they also shape how readers conceptualize mental health, often in ways that foreground negative attitudes.

Self-Mentions

Self-mentions markers help the writer to establish and maintain rapport with the audience by means of personalization as analyzed in examples 13-16 below.

13) … safety she told me that a neighbour and father was sexually abusing her."

14) …..spoke to my son, warning him against gambling and visiting……

15) At the end of the treatment we had about 12 to 20 per cent of patients…

16) …….and I quote, "The Bill decriminalizes attempted suicide to ensure that..

In examples 13-16, the use of first-person pronouns such as, me, my, we, and I highlight the writer's presence in the text. While such markers are typically intended to enhance authenticity and build rapport with readers (Hyland & Jiang, 2021) in these excerpts they often function to narrativize mental health issues in ways that reinforce negative or stigmatizing attitudes.

For instance, in Example 13, the phrase, she told me, personalized the account, yet it simultaneously placed the journalist at the center of the story, positioning the experience of a person struggling with mental health as secondary to the reporter's own authority. In Example 14, my son framed gambling primarily as a threat to family stability, thereby reducing individuals facing addiction to sources of harm rather than individuals in need of care. The use of we in Example 15 constructed a collective voice, yet it presented mental health struggles as problems to be managed by experts or institutions, distancing responsibility from those affected. Finally, in Example 15, I, elevated the journalist's role as interpreter of information, leaving little space for the voices of people with lived experience of mental illness.

Taken together, these self-mentioned strategies foregrounded the voice of the reporter over those of the subjects, frequently casting those with mental health challenges in passive or problematic roles. Instead of

fostering empathy, the overuse of self-mentioned contributed to a discourse where the authority of the journalist dominates, and individuals with lived experience were marginalized or depicted through deficit lenses. In this way, self-mention was far from simply engaging the reader. In fact, it can perpetuated negative social attitudes and reinforce stigma surrounding mental illness.

Engagement Markers

Engagement markers are interactional devices used to explicitly involve the reader in the unfolding discourse. They function to create proximity, encourage reflection and evoke a shared sense of responsibility or understanding between the writer and the audience.

17) …. Are we effectively playing our roles as individuals, communities…..

18) ……..It's time we raise our collective voice for mental health – advocating

19) ……….We all know of, or have heard of, someone who……

In Example 17, the use of we in rhetorical question superficially positioned mental health as a collective responsibility, but it implicitly blamed the public for systemic failures, shifting attention away from structural challenges such as inadequate funding or policy neglect. Similarly, in Example 18 the use of, our, mobilizes readers, but by framing mental health primarily through urgency and advocacy, it can inadvertently dramatize the issue, reinforcing the perception that those affected were a social burden in need of collective management rather than individuals deserving of rights and dignity. Example 19 invoked shared knowledge with, we all, but such generalizations perpetuated stereotypes by assuming common negative experiences of mental illness, thereby normalizing stigma under the guise of inclusivity.

Although engagement markers were often celebrated for reducing distance between writer and reader (Hyland & Jiang, 2016; Hyland & Jiang, 2021), in these cases they risk manipulating readers' emotions, oversimplifying complex realities, and reinforcing stigma rather than dismantling it. Instead of encouraging informed dialogue, their overgeneralized and prescriptive use contributed to the circulation of reductive narratives about mental health.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how interactional metadiscourse markers functioned in online mental health news reporting, with particular attention to how linguistic choices shape writer stance, writer–reader relationships, and representations of mental health. Drawing on (Hyland & Jiang 2016; Hyland & Jiang, 2021) interpersonal model, this discussion focused on the interpretive implications of metadiscourse use rather than the numerical distribution of markers, which was addressed in the results section. Overall, the findings indicated that interactional metadiscourse markers had duality and sometimes contradictory role in mental health journalism.

Majorly, interactional metadiscourse facilitated textual cohesion, enhanced reader engagement, and helped journalists manage sensitivity when reporting on complex and emotionally charged mental health issues. In addition, the findings demonstrated that when these markers were not used carefully, they contributed to negative framing and the reinforcement of stigma surrounding mental illness. Across the five categories, hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers, metadiscourse markers were shown to actively influence how audiences interpret, evaluate, and emotionally respond to people with mental

health challenges, rather than functioning as neutral linguistic devices.

This study observed patterns that consistent with findings from previous research on metadiscourse and media discourse: studies which indicated that metadiscourse in online journalism plays a powerful role in guiding reader interpretation and evoking emotional responses. In the context of mental health communication (Chen & Li, 2023; Ruonan & Al-Shaibani, 2022), it has also been established that media language frequently reproduced subtle forms of stigma, even when overtly sympathetic intentions were present (Lyons *et al*., 2018; Mutiso *et al*., 2019). The present findings extended this body of research by demonstrating how interactional metadiscourse specifically contributed to these discursive effects in online news reporting, particularly within a Kenyan media context that has received limited scholarly attention.

The findings suggested that journalists operated in highly competitive digital environments, where attracting attention, sustaining reader interest, and provoking emotional engagement were essential. As a result, writers frequently relied on interactional metadiscourse to create proximity with readers and frame mental health as a shared social concern. However, in contexts where mental health literacy is limited and stigma remains deeply embedded, such rhetorical strategies might unintentionally reinforce dominant negative assumptions. Without sufficient ethical and linguistic awareness, journalists default to familiar discursive patterns that emphasize urgency, control, or generalization, thereby reproducing stigmatizing narratives rather than challenging them. This suggested that problematic framing was not necessarily intentional but emerges from the intersection of journalistic norms, audience expectations,

and broader socio-cultural beliefs about mental illness.

The strength of this study was in its systematic and theory-driven analysis of interactional metadiscourse in online mental health news. By grounding the analysis in Hyland and Jiang's interpersonal model, the study provided a nuanced understanding of how linguistic choices shape public perceptions of mental health. The combination of corpus-assisted identification and qualitative interpretation allowed for a balanced examination of both patterns and meanings in journalistic discourse.

Nevertheless, the study has some limitations. The relatively limited corpus and focus on Kenyan mainstream media outlets may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other socio-cultural or media contexts. In addition, the analysis partly accounted for external factors such as readers' prior beliefs, cultural ideologies, or individual experiences with mental health, which might also influence interpretation. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the dataset across different countries, media genres, or languages, and by integrating audience reception studies or interdisciplinary approaches to further explore how metadiscourse shapes mental health understanding in public discourse.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study investigated the use of interactional metadiscourse in shaping readers' attitudes in online news articles covering mental health. The results indicatethat while metadiscourse is a crucial component of establish rapport and guiding interpretation in news reporting, its use in mental health journalism often carries problematic implications. All categories of interactional markers were identified, but their distribution and use reveal patterns that

carry the risk of reinforcing negative perceptions. For instance, attitude markers, which appeared with a frequency of 79 items, were predominantly negative, painting a pessimistic outlook on the state of mental health persons. Such language does not explicitly stigmatize individuals but contributes to a discourse of negative attitudes that undermines constructive public engagement of people with mental health disorders. Similarly, the heavy reliance on engagement markers reflects attempts to invite readers into the conversation. Yet rather than fostering genuine dialogue, these markers frequently generalize responsibility and normalize shared negative assumptions about mental wellbeing. This kind of information packaging risks manipulating readers' emotions and perpetuating stigma. The use of boosters further amplifies these effects, closing down alternative perspectives and portraying contested claims as undeniable facts.

In general, the findings demonstrate that metadiscourse markers are not neutral; they actively shape how mental health is framed and understood. This calls for an urgent need for greater linguistic and ethical awareness in journalism. Therefore, metadiscursive choices can foster empathy, accuracy, and inclusion instead of reinforcing stigma.

Based on the findings, it is necessary for journalists to utilize linguistic and ethical awareness when reporting on mental health to avoid reinforcing stigma and misrepresentation. As observed by (Hyland & Jiang, 2016; Hyland & Jiang, 2021) the choices regarding metadiscourse markers shape how readers interpret information and engage with texts; therefore, journalists should receive targeted training on inclusive and relevant use of language in relation to the target audience. Editors should also develop clear policy guidelines to ensure that sensitive language expressions and engagement markers enhance empathy rather than bias, as suggested by Chaisiri *et al*. (2025). Additionally, collaboration between journalists and mental health practitioners is essential to balance accuracy, sensitivity, and audience engagement. From a policy perspective, these findings highlight the need for media and mental health regulators to develop and enforce evidence-based guidelines for responsible mental health reporting, ensuring that journalistic practices align with national mental health policies aimed at reducing stigma, promoting public awareness, and supporting prevention and early intervention efforts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author Benard Mudogo was responsible for determining the topic, drafting the background, literature review and proofreading the final version of the manuscript. Author Stella Wangare contributed to data collection and analysis.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interests.

DECLARATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

The authors affirm that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools, services, or technologies were employed in the creation, editing, or refinement of this manuscript. All content presented is the result of the

independent intellectual efforts of the author(s), ensuring originality and integrity.

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