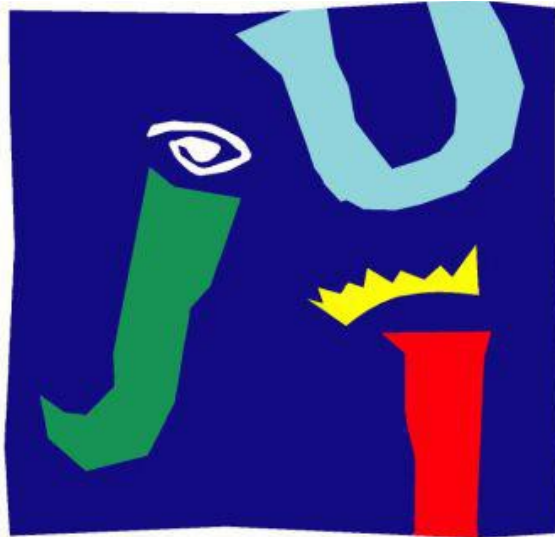


ENGLISH STUDIES DEGREE  
FINAL UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION



**UNIVERSITAT**  
**JAUME • I**

**Analysis of visual metaphors in social media**

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## ABSTRACT

From a Cognitive Linguistics point of view, a metaphor was understood as a tool that allows us to understand one conceptual domain in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Originally, metaphors were only considered from a verbal perspective. Later on, a whole new wave of research appeared to show that metaphors could also be explored from a different view. This research gave birth to a new concept called metaphor and modality. This concept's main focus was that in monomodal metaphors, the source and the target domain was exposed in the same mode whereas in multimodal metaphors, the source and the target domain were presented in different modes.

Thus, the present paper aims to present a qualitative analysis of pictorial metaphors in social media.

The goal of this analysis is to show that social media influences our perception of the world and often manipulates us and makes us captive of their use.

In order to do so, I make use of a corpus of 6 pictorial metaphors and offer a comprehensive cognitive analysis of them. These images emphasize the manipulation of social media and technology in today's society. Nevertheless, because the length of this paper is very limited, a more extended research would be useful to enrich the findings of this study.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of Cognitive Linguistics, a metaphor is defined as a tool which allows us to understand one conceptual domain in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). We make use of metaphors in order to make abstract things more concrete and easy to understand. Originally, the focus of the conceptual metaphor study was verbal related. However, recently, a new perspective of the same topic has gravitated towards a wider conception of metaphor; hence giving birth to a whole new panorama in which monomodality and multimodality are taken into account (Forceville and Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Pascual and Silvestre 2015). Being Charles Forceville's research (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009) the main foundation for this assignment, its aim is to present an analysis of visual metaphors in social media.

### 1.1 CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY

#### 1.1.1 WHAT IS A METAPHOR?

Originally, metaphor was studied within the discipline known as rhetoric. Metaphor was understood as an implicit comparison of two categories (Forceville, 2006). Usually, when we talk about matters like love and life, we usually refer to them as journeys. We often do so because it is easier for us to interpret complex concepts as life and love in terms of the more concrete concept journey.

The term conceptual metaphor was born in the work 'Metaphors we live by' by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson:

*Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. (...) In most of the little things we do every day, we simply think and act more or less automatically along certain lines. Just what these lines are is by no means obvious. One way to find out is by looking at language. Since communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like.*

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 124).

Therefore, a metaphor could be defined as a tool that allows us to understand a conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. They help us structure our thought and world experience (Pascual and Silvestre-López, 2015).

The mappings between the source and the target domain embrace two different kinds of entailments, ontological and epistemic ones (Croft & Alan, 2004:196). The main difference between them relies on where the entailment or realization appears. While ontological entailments focus on the relationship between the elements in the two domains, the epistemic focus is located in between the relations between the elements of the two domains.

### 1.1.2 FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY

“The basic premise of Conceptual Metaphor Theory is that metaphor itself is not simply a stylistic feature of language, but that thought itself is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 124). This being so, the majority of our mental concepts are organized in terms of metaphors. There is an internal systematization in every metaphor and, in each of them, we find similarities between the source domain and the target domain.

In order to best understand what the concepts 'source domain' and 'target domain' mean, we will take Kövecses definition: "The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain." (2002: 25) The target domain is that one that we try to understand through the use of the source domain. Thus, from a cognitive perspective, it is very easy for a person to associate, say, the concepts 'up' with 'happiness', and so, 'down ' with 'sadness'. In our minds, the mental association "HAPPY IS UP" would follow a coherent metaphorical system. Therefore, saying "CHEER UP" to express unhappiness or lack of motivation would show an incoherent metaphorical system.

Metaphors are also determined by socio-cultural factors, that is, depending on what culture one person belongs to, he or she will create different metaphors (Gibbs & Cameron, 2008; Silvestre-López & Navarro, 2017). This is because in different cultures people talk and

communicate in different ways, and so, with different metaphors. In addition, there is another factor that takes relevance, the cognitive. Many of the expressions that we use in our everyday life are based on conceptual metaphors (Steen, 1999).

In the beginning, the first studies of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory were focused on linguistic metaphors. However, a number of different studies have demonstrated that metaphors can also occur non-verbally, and so multimodally (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). However, it has also been claimed that a theory of metaphor cannot be based entirely on the analysis of verbal language, because that would only show a small chunk of what the entire concept of conceptual metaphor actually signifies.

Later, different approaches related to the research of conceptual metaphor raised and so the concept of multimodality was born to allow an entire new wave of research in the realm of metaphor.

Traditionally, it was thought that metaphor was a field of study that only required focusing on verbal language (a single mode). Nevertheless, more lately, Forceville, among other scholars, became interested in the analysis of realizations of conceptual metaphors (the mental associations between cognitive domains in our minds) throughout other potential modes, like pictures, comic strips, videos, etc.

This new conception of realizations of conceptual metaphor across different modes or modalities set a debate about what a mode should be. In this connection, Forceville claims that it is only fair to provide a clear definition of what 'mode' actually designates before diving into monomodality and multimodality (2009: 23).

According to Forceville, this concept is often labelled as intricate. The reason for this lays on the fact that yet the concept sets out to the different channels by which people receive information from the outside world, (see, hear, touch, smell or taste) the meaning of 'mode' goes much beyond. As Forceville pointed out, "modes cannot simply be equated with the five senses but distinctions need to be made between them" (2006: 4). For instance, language can be decoded both visually and aurally. For this reason 'mode' calls for another perspective if a precise definition of the concept is to be attained. According to Forceville and Urios-Aparisi, in an attempt to analyze a multimodal metaphor, the modes to be taken into account are two or more of the following: written language, spoken language, static and moving images, music, non-verbal sound, smell, taste and touch (2009).

### 1.1.3 METAPHOR AND MODALITY

Monomodal metaphors are those which are only represented in a single mode.

Monomodality is a feature typical of verbal texts, through which knowledge and information has been conveyed to later generations. Nevertheless, monodal messages can also be transmitted visually, as pictures or images for instance. In the case of a visual metaphor, the source and the target domain are both located in the same image.

In agreement with Forceville (1996; 138-163), there are four types of visual or pictorial metaphors that can be distinguished:

–Hybrid pictorial metaphor: a single object in a picture formed by two different parts. The interpretation deals with the understanding of one part in terms of the other.

–Contextual pictorial metaphor: when the target domain does not appear in the image but it is understood because of the context, which plays the role of source domain.

–Pictorial simile: when the source and the target domain appear in the image juxtaposed and it is the mapping which makes the audience understand the metaphor.

–Integrated metaphor: it is an object that resembles another object. For example, a coffee machine which is a waiter.

Whereas in monomodal metaphors the source and the target domain are performed in the same mode, “Multimodal metaphors are those whose target and source are each represented exclusively or predominantly in different modes” (Forceville 2006: 384).

Accordingly, the complexity of the matter relies on the fact that multimodal metaphors can only be called such if the perceived source domain (be it a word or phrase, an image or image sequence; a sound, a musical theme, a smell, a taste, a touched surface) is recognized and gives rise to certain connotations, which will have to allot to the elements in the target domain (Moreno 2015).

## 2. GOALS

The aim of this work is to provide an analysis of visual metaphors in social media. Among the list of different kinds of visual metaphors provided in the previous section, my study will focus on visual metaphors appearing in static images mainly. These images involve social media and the way technology affects our perception and evaluation of the world nowadays. The description of this analysis will be achieved through images which are regarded as monomodal and multimodal. In order for this analysis to become clear, it will be based on Forceville's view on pictorial metaphor.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

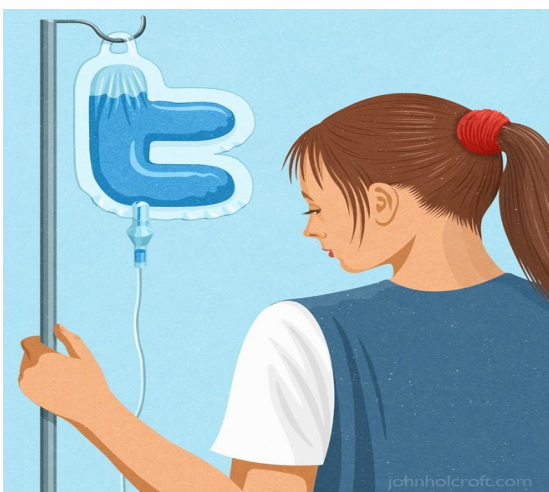
In order to perform the analysis of pictorial metaphors in social media and show how they condition our understanding of the world, a corpus of 6 images was compiled:

- 1- Twitter is our I.V
- 2- Facebook is our confessional
- 3- Likes feed our ego
- 4- Technology is a torture
- 5- Technology is the only mean to access the outer reality
- 6-Our head is a smartphone

These metaphors were examined in order to identify the source and the target domains. Later, the whole message of the metaphor was analysed in detail to ascertain to which extent social networks influence our everyday lives. The outcome of this analysis is presented in the following section.

### 4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

#### Metaphor 1



Cognitive analysis:

Metaphor: TWITTER IS AN I.V

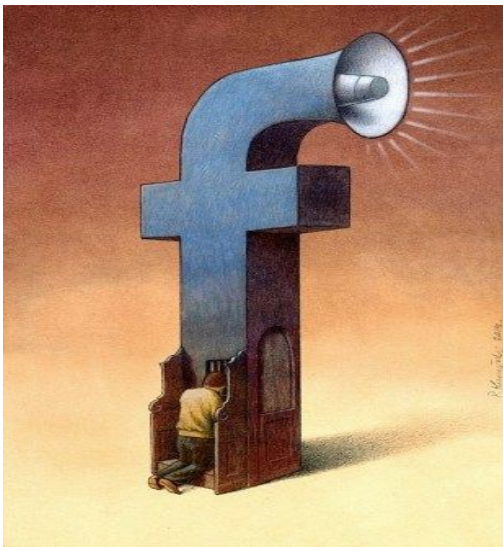
Source domain: I.V



Target domain: Twitter

In the picture we can see a patient that is holding an I.V (a pole is actually holding it and the patient receives it). The picture shows a monomodal visual metaphor because the source and the target domain are represented visually. The mapping of the two domains is established in a cognitive way since the audience knows that an I.V is needed in order for a patient to keep living or maintain his/ her health. This being so, the audience can understand the intended message, which is that we need twitter to keep living.

Metaphor 2



Cognitive analysis:

Metaphor: FACEBOOK IS A CONFESSIONAL

Source domain: Confessional

Target domain: Facebook

The second metaphor is monomodal because the source and the target domain are expressed in a visual way, without the need for language or extra input.

In the image itself, we can see a confessional that ends with the logo of Facebook at the top and a speaker right where the 'F' ends. The link between the source domain being the confessional and the target domain being Facebook is reached through the visual help of a man standing on his knees in front on the confessional window. The background knowledge of the audience would be that people who go to this place do it with a certain purpose, which is to disclose sins that they have made or things they have done in their lives.

On the other hand, the loudspeaker at the end of the 'F' reinforces that facebook is a dissemination channel.

By universal knowledge, people know that a loudspeaker is an item that is used to get volume amplified (as when people meet for a manifestation, for instance, they often use a loudspeaker so that the message reaches the highest number of people). Thus, by seeing the loudspeaker at the end of the "F", the audience immediately understands that the sins that the man is confessing on Facebook are spreading and reaching a great number of people.

### Metaphor 3



Cognitive analysis:

Metaphor: FACEBOOK LIKES ARE FOOD

Source domain: Food

Target domain: Facebook likes

This pictorial metaphor falls into the category of multimodality because the source and the target domain are achieved in different modes (static image and written language). In the image, we can see someone pouring likes into a trough. The link between the source and the target domain is attained thanks to the presence of a box that is dropping "food" into a trough, and the trough itself, which by universal knowledge, is an item that is meant for holding food inside. The audience knows that food is something that the human being needs in order to be alive and feel satisfied. Food is something that contributes to our growth.

In this metaphor we can differentiate between two types of entailments, the ontological and the epistemic ones:

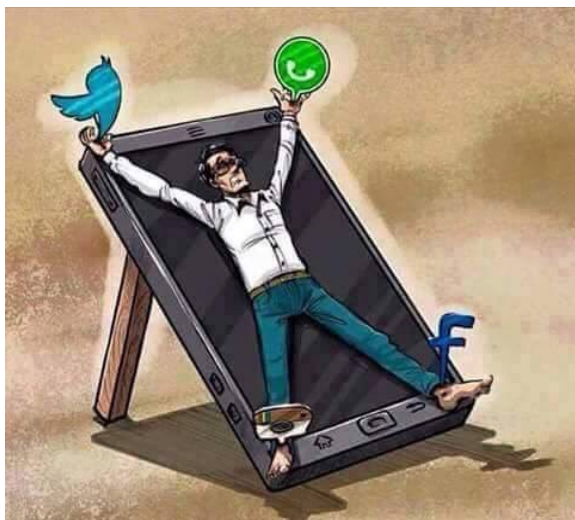
-Ontological entailment: Facebook likes are food.

-Epistemic entailment: Facebook likes feed our ego.

The epistemic entailment is performed through written mode. It reads 'ego' on the trough.

This metaphor gives rise to a second metaphor or submetaphor "LIKERS ARE MASTERS" (and thus, people who makes posts are dogs). This submetaphor would not exist if the main one did not show a trough. Again, us human beings share the knowledge that dogs eat from troughs and people do it from plates. So, as dogs, we expect likers to feed us.

#### Metaphor 4



Cognitive analysis:

Metaphor: TECHNOLOGY IS A TORTURE RACK

Source domain: torture rack

Target domain: technology

This metaphor is monomodal because the source and the target domain can be reached visually. In this metaphor we see a man that is immobilized, lying on a torture rack. Social media are what keep him from moving. They are what tie him to the torture rack. The link between the source and the target domain is reinforced by the presence of the instagram, facebook, twitter and whatsapp icons. The audience, by universal knowledge, acknowledges that the torture rack is not a nice place. People who lay on a torture rack is because they are going to suffer or feel pain. The social media icons that are in the picture, act as nails that attach the man to the "torture rack".

In this pictorial metaphor we see ontological and epistemic entailments:

- Ontological: Social media are nails.
- Empirical:
  - Social media torture us.
  - Social media attach us to smartphones.

As stated before, there is another metaphor inside the main pictorial metaphor: "Social media are nails". They are nails that attach us to the smartphone. Here, the audience shares the knowledge that nails are use to attach something to another thing, like a surface, for instance. Beyond the use of technologic devices per se, it is specifically social networks that keep us addicted to using our smartphone.

### Metaphor 5



Cognitive analysis:

Metaphor: TECHNOLOGY IS A GATE

Source domain: Gate

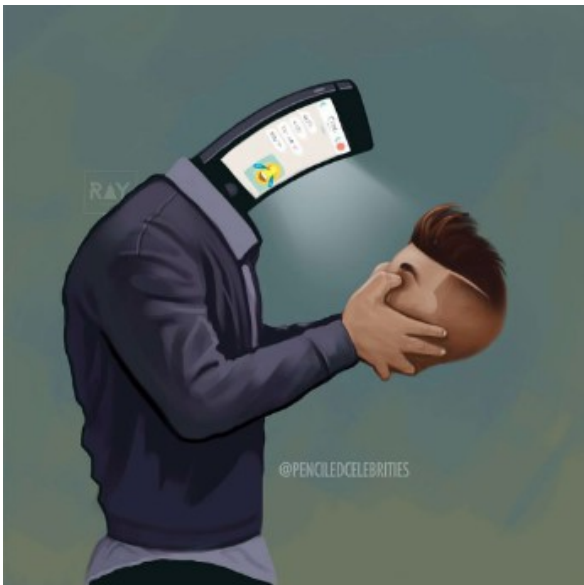
Target domain: Technology

This metaphor pertains to the field of monomodality because the source and the target domain are pointed in a visual way. In this image, we can see a boy whose sight is blocked by a wall. Then, we can also see an open gate. The mapping of the two domains is established in a cognitive way. By universal knowledge, the audience knows that technology is the way through which we can access the outer reality. This is reinforced by the visual aid of a smartphone acting as the ground of the castle gate. Moreover, the audience infers that technology is not only a way to acess reality but that it is the only mean to access it, since the the wall is blocking his eyes, not allowing him to see. Thus, this visual metaphor provides us with some ontological and epistemic entailments:

-Ontological: A smartphone is a gate

-Epistemic: we believe what social media tells us. We know what goes on in the world through our smartphone.

## Metaphor 6



Cognitive analysis:

Metaphor: OUR HEAD IS A SMARTPHONE

Source domain: Head

Target domain: Smartphone

This pictorial metaphor is monomodal because there is no need for other modes than the visual (static image). In this metaphor we see a boy that has a smartphone as a head. Parallely, he has his head in his hands, as if it were a smartphone. The audience can identify a set of correspondences between the source and the target domain through background knowledge of the world. The audience knows that our head is the main part of our body, and it represents our core identify and our personality and values. So, by looking at this visual metaphor, the audience understands that us, human beings, have lost our minds with the massive use of technology. We no longer have control over the use of techonology but rather it has taken over us. It has reached a point where it has control over us.

Thus, there are a number of ontological and epistemic entailments:

The ontological ones imply that a head is a smartphone and a smartphone is a head.

Regarding the epistemic ones, they entail that we have lost our mind. This empirical

realization is reinforced by frequently used expressions in our everyday lives, such as “I have lost my mind” meaning someone has lost his or her sanity and no longer knows what he or she is doing.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) claims that we do not only speak in terms of metaphors but we also think in a metaphorical manner. According to Forceville (2006), if this is true, there must be different modes to communicate these metaphors; images being part of this new way of communication.

In order to develop this study, a qualitative analysis was carried out by examining the mappings, the modes and the modality of a corpus of 6 pictorial metaphors. On a deeper level, in every metaphor I provided a cognitive analysis in which the source, the target domain and the empirical and ontological entailments are explained in detail.

Every pictorial metaphor in this paper approaches social media pessimistically. The corpus rather emphasizes the manipulation of social media and the way they affect society. The corpus intends to draw attention to the insanity of today's society and how our lives are governed by the use of smartphones. These images help bring awareness of the use of technology and social media, and the way we have become captive of them.

## 6. FURTHER RESEARCH

In this wave of research, it would be of great significance to carry out investigation about where the boundaries of monomodal and multimodal metaphors are. These boundaries are often fuzzy. The reason for this relies on the fact that every individual has a different perception of the world. Different cultures envisage the world in different ways. Thus, some metaphors can be interpreted in a different manner from one individual to another. Therefore, greater investigation on a higher number of pictorial metaphors than the one achieved in this paper would help give consistence to the findings.

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-Images:

Figure 1: Holcroft, J. [Online image]. Retrieved May 25, 2017 from

[https://40.media.tumblr.com/8b413f42ce143db83a0a621381359157/tumblr\\_o0fpow3iDI1qdt6e2o4\\_1280.jpg](https://40.media.tumblr.com/8b413f42ce143db83a0a621381359157/tumblr_o0fpow3iDI1qdt6e2o4_1280.jpg)

Figure 2: Marangoni, M. (2014). Facebook confessions [Online image]. Retrieved May 25, 2017 from

<http://www.manuelmarangoni.it/onemind/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pawel-Kuczynski-Confession-309x450.jpg>



Figure 3: Holcroft, J. Facebook likes feed our ego [Online image]. Retrieved May 25, 2017 from

[https://38.media.tumblr.com/617c7f30f3535da02cf975e0143fdc2f/tumblr\\_nfrfs4POP1r51oypo7\\_1280.jpg](https://38.media.tumblr.com/617c7f30f3535da02cf975e0143fdc2f/tumblr_nfrfs4POP1r51oypo7_1280.jpg)

Figure 4: [Untitled illustration of a man crucified on a smartphone]. Retrieved May 25, 2017 from

<https://imgur.com/JfdmpIE>

Figure 5: [Untitled illustration of a person whose head is surrounded by a castle]. Retrieved May 25, 2017 from

[https://68.media.tumblr.com/19f2847c8962ad4728f26bb90708b8a8/tumblr\\_oc4j1u9lQ61qbe766o7\\_500.jpg](https://68.media.tumblr.com/19f2847c8962ad4728f26bb90708b8a8/tumblr_oc4j1u9lQ61qbe766o7_500.jpg)

Figure 6: Ray Styles Studios. Conceptual-art-45 [Online image]. Retrieved May 25, 2017 from

<http://raystylesstudios.com/illustration-conceptual-art/#mpf-popup@http://raystylesstudios.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CONCEPTUAL-ART-45.jpg|1872|583597d9062f9>