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NEW METAPHOR MODELS IN SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract
This article proposes a practical research approach to investigate emerging metaphor models within social media discourse. The study primarily focuses on social networking platforms widely used by users in Uzbekistan. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and comprehensive text analysis, as well as recent research on metaphors in media and social networks, a mixed method is proposed that combines a social media text corpus, semi-automatic metaphor detection, and manual coding. Within this framework, several new metaphor models frequently encountered in daily online communication are examined.

Keywords: metaphor; social media discourse; text corpus; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; mixed methods.

Introduction

When people discuss social media, they often do not limit themselves to merely "dry technical" terminology. In daily posts and comments, platforms, content, and other users are depicted through various imagery: social media is seen as a "playground," notifications as "noise," the comments section as a "storm," and so forth. Such expressions are not merely ornamental. They reveal how users perceive and evaluate digital life [1].

Recent studies have demonstrated that metaphors play a crucial role when discussing health, emotions, and online behavior. For instance, an analysis of microblogs regarding the global pandemic indicates that users rely on familiar imagery to explain the new situation [3]. In online health blogs, a rich metaphorical repertoire has been identified for describing mental states and relationships with social media [4]. Other studies investigate metaphors in

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cyberbullying, body-positive campaigns on image-based platforms, as well as metaphors in English-language social media posts in general [5–6, 10].

Within the Uzbek academic sphere, there are valuable studies on metaphors in journalistic and medical texts [7]. There are works that examine the functions of metaphors in media texts in a general sense [8], as well as research analyzing how metaphors are expressed in journalistic texts within social networks [9]. Furthermore, authors in Uzbekistan have conducted cognitive analyses of conceptual metaphors in English-language social media discourse [10].

Nevertheless, the potential for a systematic, text-based study of new metaphor models appearing in posts and comments specifically relevant to users in Uzbekistan has not yet been fully realized. Therefore, this article outlines three primary objectives:

- to explain how to compile a text corpus for social media metaphor analysis using a realistic and simplified approach;
- to propose a step-by-step method for identifying and classifying new metaphor models;

Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Metaphor Theory interprets metaphor as a mapping between a source domain and a target domain [1]. For example, in the metaphor "LIFE IS A JOURNEY," the journey (road, obstacles, destination, turns) serves as the source domain, while life is the target domain. This mapping helps people conceptualize life through direction, steps, goals, and stages.

Such mappings are also prevalent in digital communication. Social media can be simultaneously represented through imagery such as a place, a tool, a game, food, or a water flow. Each model highlights different aspects: place metaphors elucidate images of "entry/exit" and "migration"; food metaphors provide classifications of "tasty/tasteless," "light/heavy," and "beneficial/harmful"; while game metaphors highlight rules, scores, victory, and defeat [3–6].

Research on metaphors in media texts has clearly demonstrated their role in explanation and evaluation. For instance, in medical journalistic texts, complex processes and terminology are often explained using imagery from daily life [7]. In other analyses of media texts, metaphor is recognized as a tool for influencing the audience and managing emotional tone [8].

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The role of metaphor becomes even more pronounced in the online environment. An analysis of microblogs regarding the global pandemic revealed that users expressed issues of danger and protection through images of natural phenomena, roads, and obstacles [3]. Research on online health blogs found that social media was described with metaphors such as "sweet but unhealthy food," "a pristine water flow," and "a delightful yet heavy dessert" [4]. Studies on cyberbullying indicate the frequent use of metaphorical expressions to articulate aggression and psychological impact [5]. Furthermore, research on body-positive campaigns on image-based platforms demonstrates the presence of creative metaphors that positively reinterpret the body [6].

Uzbek authors who have analyzed English-language social media discourse from a conceptual perspective have demonstrated that users employ a combination of traditional (e.g., JOURNEY) and novel digital imagery [10].

All these works testify that social media serves as a highly suitable laboratory for studying new metaphor models. At the same time, each local context may shape a unique set of imagery.

Methodology

In this article, the term "text collection" refers to a large aggregate of posts and comments gathered from social networks. Simply put, it is a file (or group of files) containing authentic online texts preserved for research purposes. While linguists typically refer to this as a "corpus," we will employ the term "text collection" for the sake of clarity.

For empirical research, a text collection consisting of approximately 15,000 to 20,000 posts and comments can be compiled. Data is gathered from the following sources:

- public channels (news, daily tips, psychology, education, entertainment content);
- pages of popular bloggers and influencers on photo/video-based platforms;
- open groups and pages exchanging views on study, work, migration, family life, technology, and daily problems.

It is advisable to cover a timeframe of the last few years to observe stable trends. Messages may be in Uzbek, Russian, and English. Prior to analysis, the texts are:

- cleaned of spam and duplicates;

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- partially normalized regarding spelling (e.g., standardizing different spellings of the same word);
- separated into words (tokenization) and, if necessary, word forms are reduced to a single form (lemmatization).

Research Process

The overall research process is illustrated in Figure 1. This figure depicts the eight stages of the proposed research process for studying new metaphors in social media. In the first stage, posts and comments are collected from social networks to form a text collection for the study. In the second stage, these texts are cleaned of spam and duplicates, spelling forms are normalized, and the data is prepared for analysis. In the third stage, specialized software is used to automatically extract unusual phrases that serve as potential metaphor candidates. In the fourth stage, these candidates are manually verified within their context, and only confirmed metaphors are retained for further analysis. In the five stage, the confirmed metaphors are coded according to their source domain, target domain, and function within the text. In the sixth stage, the frequency of each metaphor model is calculated, and a comparative analysis is conducted. The seventh stage involves the visual presentation of results in the form of tables, bar charts, and network diagrams. Finally, in the eighth stage, the content of key metaphor models and their role within social media discourse are interpreted.

In the automatic phase, the computer model assists in identifying segments that appear "unusual" or unconventional. For instance:

- the collocation of a technical element with emotional verbs (e.g., "this app **eats** my time");
- the comparison of a platform to a physical space (e.g., "this page is a **noisy room**");

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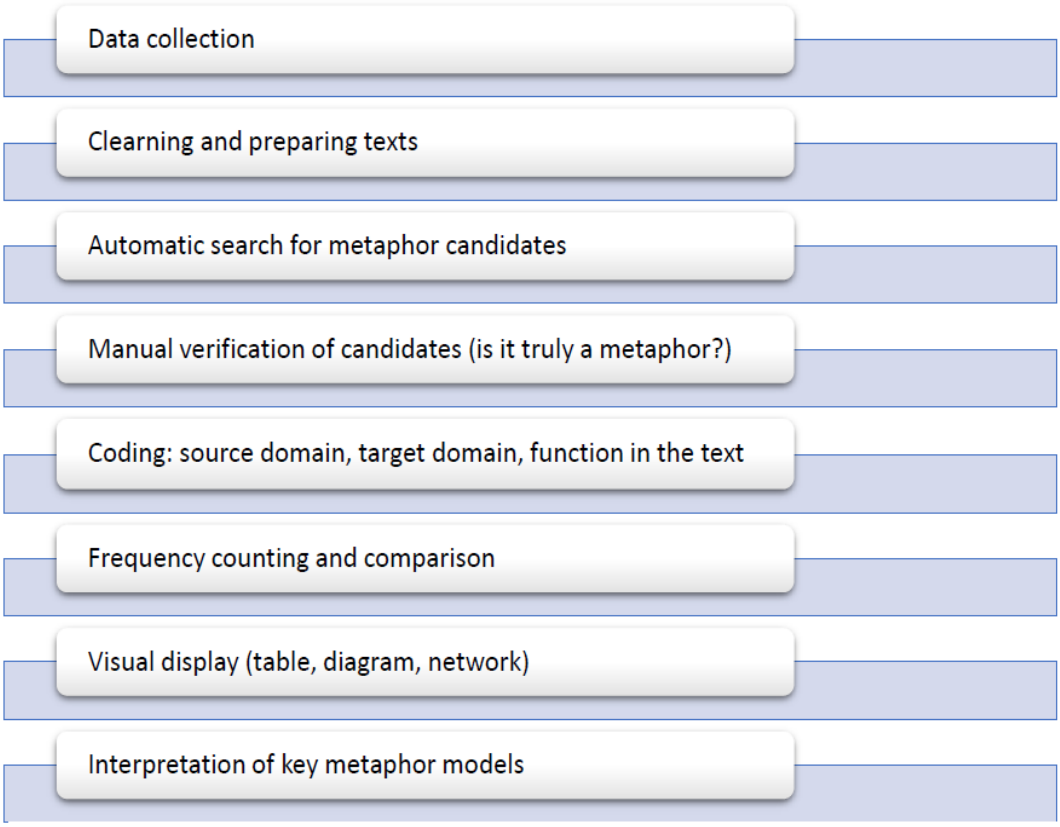

Figure 1. Research process for studying new metaphors in social media

- the analogy of the comments section to weather or waves (e.g., "the comments section became a **storm**").

All these instances are considered merely candidates. During the manual verification stage, the researcher examines each candidate within its context to determine the actual presence of a metaphor. For each verified metaphor, three parameters are recorded:

1. Target Domain – what the user is actually discussing (e.g., algorithm, content, social media, profile, internet).
2. Source Domain – the imagery through which it is described (e.g., weather, fuel, food, game, clothing, road/city).
3. Function – the role the metaphor performs in the text (evaluation, humor, warning, self-expression, etc.).

Table 1 presents a sample coding scheme for several new metaphor models.

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Table 1

Code	Source domain	Target domain	Example sentence (English gloss)	Main function
ALG-WE	Weather / season	Algorithm / system	"Today the algorithm feels like bad weather"	Uncertainty, frustration
CNT-FU	Fuel / energy	Content	"Good content is the fuel of your page"	Motivation, value
SM-FOO	Food / drink	Social media use	"This app is sweet but not healthy for my mind"	Warning, self-reflection
SM-GAM	Game / playground	Social media use	"I am tired of this platform; the game is not fun"	Evaluation, distance
PRF-COS	Costume / mirror	Profile / online self	"Her profile is a costume, not the real person"	Identity, authenticity
NET-RO	Road / city	Internet / platform	"Be careful, this part of the internet is a dark road"	Safety, advice

New Metaphor Models: Qualitative Analysis

Based on existing literature and daily observations, it appears that at least six metaphor models are gaining particular significance in social media discourse.

Algorithm as Weather (ALGORITHM IS WEATHER)

Users often refer to the platform's algorithm as something "temperamental" or "incomprehensible." Rather than technical terms, they employ expressions akin to descriptions of weather or seasons:

- "The algorithm is cold today."
- "The algorithm is in a bad mood again."

In this model, the algorithm is the target domain, while weather/season is the source domain. The metaphor portrays the system as an uncontrollable phenomenon that exerts influence from the outside. Without providing a technical explanation, the user expresses a sense of lack of control and frustration.

Content as Fuel (CONTENT IS FUEL)

For bloggers and small business owners, content is described not merely as "information," but as a force that sets the page or channel in motion. For example:

- "Content is the fuel for growth."
- "If there is no new content, your page will come to a halt."

Here, content is the target domain, and fuel/energy is the source domain. The metaphor emphasizes that content must be updated regularly and that it provides the specific "power" for all other activities. Studies on social media and mental states have also observed posts being described with adjectives such as "heavy/light" and "rich/empty" [4].

Social Media as Food or Drink (SOCIAL MEDIA IS FOOD/DRINK)

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Many users articulate their relationship with applications through eating and drinking metaphors:

- "This app is fast food for the brain."
- "I need a social media diet."
- "My feed is overflowing with empty-calorie information."

In this model, social media usage constitutes the target domain, while food/drink serves as the source domain. The metaphor allows for the classification of digital habits as "tasty–tasteless," "beneficial–useless," or "light–heavy." Such metaphors have been frequently noted in studies of online health blogs [4].

Social Media as a Game or Playground (SOCIAL MEDIA IS GAME)

Another widespread model involves viewing social media as a game. Users employ terms such as "level," "points/score," "victory," "defeat," "rules," and "breaking the rules":

- "The platform has changed the rules of the game again."
- "I am tired of this game; I want to post without numbers."

Here, social media usage is the target domain, and game/playground is the source domain. The metaphor depicts strategy, competition, and enjoyment, yet simultaneously illustrates states of "fatigue" and "burnout" when the game becomes excessively demanding.

Profile as Costume or Mirror (PROFILE IS COSTUME/MIRROR)

In discussions regarding identity, users refer to personal profiles as clothing, a mask, or a mirror:

- "His profile is a costume; his real life is different."
- "My page is a mirror that shows only my best moments."

In this model, the profile or online "self" is the target domain, while clothing/mirror is the source domain. The metaphor reveals the discrepancy between the "online image" and "daily reality." Similar metaphors have been observed in body-positive and self-presentation discourses on image-based platforms [6].

Internet as Road or City (INTERNET IS ROAD/CITY)

Teachers, parents, and other adults often compare the internet to a road, a city, or a neighborhood:

- "This part of the internet is a safe street, whereas that side is not."
- "Do not get lost in unfamiliar corners of the network."

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Here, the internet or a specific platform is the target domain, and the road/city is the source domain. This metaphor is highly convenient for advice and warnings: just as in a real city, there are safe and dangerous zones, clear directions, and confusing narrow streets.

Illustrative Quantitative Representation

Once the metaphors have been coded according to the scheme in Table 1, the frequency of occurrence for each source domain is calculated. Table 2 and Figure 2 are presented as examples to demonstrate this.

Table 1

Source domain	Code	Share of all metaphor tokens (%)
Weather / season	ALG-WE	15
Fuel / energy	CNT-FU	12
Food / drink	SM-FOO	14
Game / playground	SM-GAM	11
Costume / mirror	PRF-COS	10
Road / city	NET-RO	13
Other sources	OTHER	25

The codes for the metaphor source domains identified within social media discourse, along with their proportions relative to the total number of metaphor units, are presented. As the table illustrates, in addition to the domains of weather/season (ALG-WE), fuel/energy (CNT-FU), food/drink (SM-FOO), game/playground (SM-GAM), clothing/mirror (PRF-COS), and road/city (NET-RO), there are various traditional and less frequent source domains combined into the “other sources” (OTHER) group.

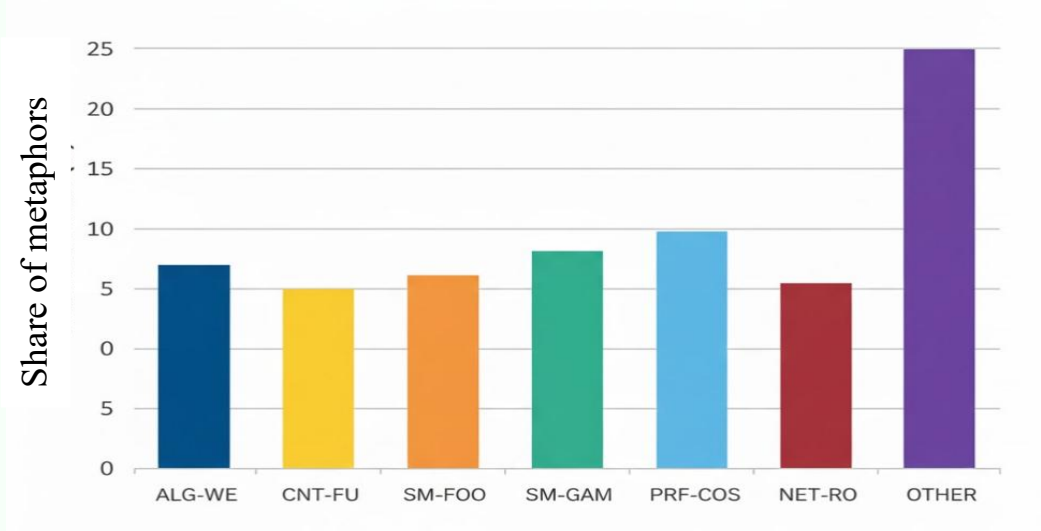

Figure 2. Source domains

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Merely knowing the frequencies is insufficient. It is also beneficial to observe the connections between source and target domains. Figure 3 offers a simple "network" diagram to demonstrate this.

Figure 2 visually represents the data from Table 2 in the form of a bar chart. As the diagram indicates, the "other sources" (OTHER) category occupies the largest share at 25 percent, suggesting that traditional or variously classified source domains are also significantly utilized in the texts. Metaphors related to weather/season (ALG-WE) constitute 15 percent, food/drink metaphors (SM-FOO) 14 percent, and road/city metaphors (NET-RO) 13 percent, demonstrating a strong tendency to describe the social media experience through these specific images. The share of source domains such as fuel/energy (CNT-FU), game/playground (SM-GAM), and clothing/mirror (PRF-COS) ranges between 10 and 12 percent, indicating that they also play a crucial role in shaping users' conceptualizations of content, profiles, and platforms.

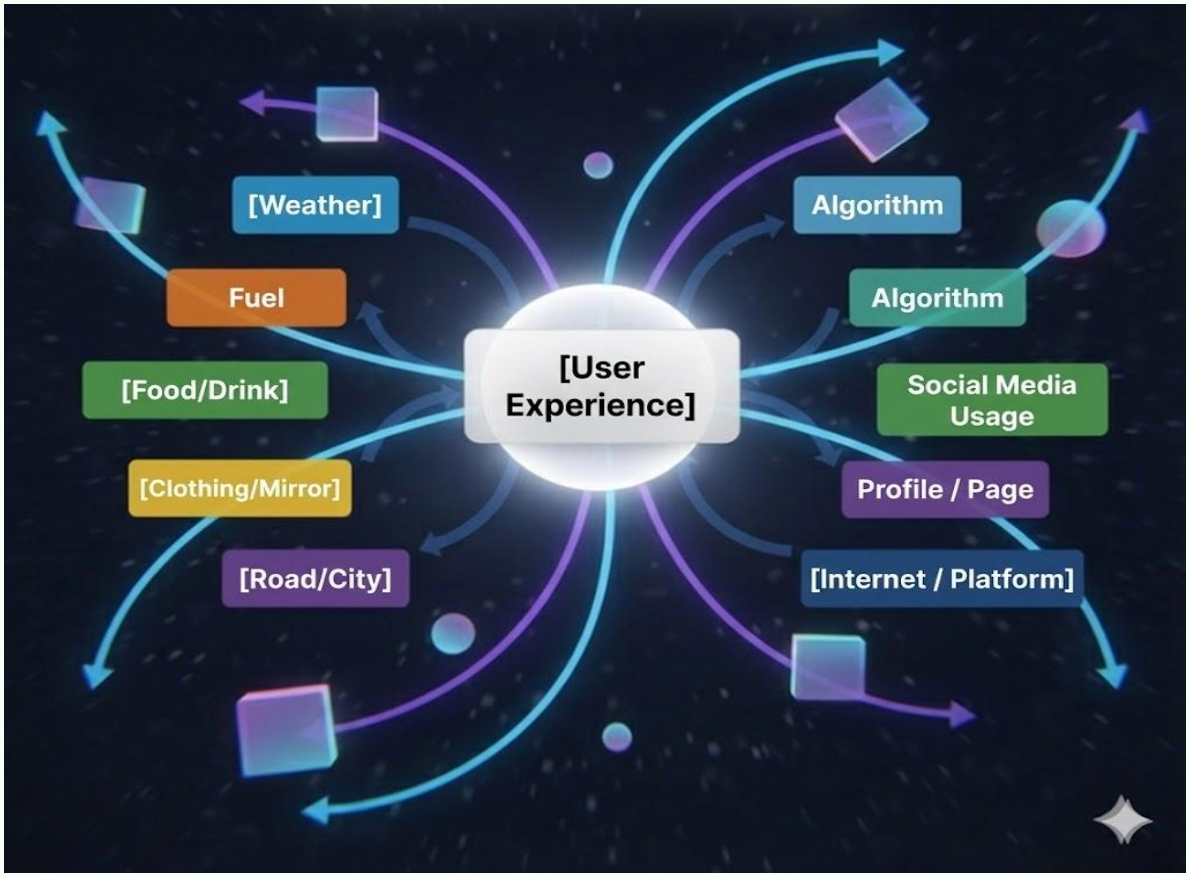

Figure 3. Simple network between source and target domains

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A simplified network scheme of the metaphorical mappings employed in social media discourse is presented. Source domains derived from daily life—weather, fuel, food/drink, game, clothing/mirror, and road/city—are positioned on the left side. On the right side, digital objects such as the algorithm, social media usage, profile/page, and internet/platform are presented as target domains. The arrows indicate which target domain is metaphorically "illuminated" by each source domain: for example, weather and fuel shape conceptualizations of the algorithm, while food/drink and games frame the daily relationship with social media. Clothing/mirror metaphors serve to express how users present themselves through profiles and pages, whereas road/city metaphors represent the safe or dangerous facets of the internet space. Thus, the network scheme demonstrates that the user experience is constructed through various real-life images that describe the digital environment.

Discussion

The models examined above indicate that when discussing digital platforms, users utilize highly concrete imagery rooted in daily experiences: weather, fuel, food, games, clothing, roads, and cities. Each metaphor model reveals a distinct facet of digital life.

- The ALGORITHM – WEATHER model depicts the system as an unpredictable, "temperamental" phenomenon.
- CONTENT – FUEL highlights that the development, movement, and growth of a page depend on content.
- SOCIAL MEDIA – FOOD/DRINK connects digital habits with notions of health, balance, and moderation.
- SOCIAL MEDIA – GAME illustrates rules, scores, numbers, victory, and competition, while simultaneously showing instances of "game fatigue."
- PROFILE – CLOTHING/MIRROR raises questions regarding identity, self-presentation, and authenticity.
- INTERNET – ROAD/CITY closely intertwines themes of safety, guidance, exploration, and avoiding getting lost.

For researchers, these models enable the connection of local vernacular with theoretical inquiries. For educators and media professionals, they serve as tools for constructing effective and memorable dialogues regarding digital habits.

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Conclusion

This article has proposed a concrete, text-based research approach aimed at studying novel metaphor models within social media discourse, applicable to the context of Uzbekistan. Its primary steps include gathering a large-scale text collection from social networks, integrating automatic and manual metaphor detection, coding according to source and target domains, and subsequently summarizing the results through tables and clear visual schemes.

The six described metaphor models—ALGORITHM – WEATHER, CONTENT – FUEL, SOCIAL MEDIA – FOOD/DRINK, SOCIAL MEDIA – GAME, PROFILE – CLOTHING/MIRROR, and INTERNET – ROAD/CITY—highlight the central tensions of contemporary digital life: control and uncertainty, growth and resources, pleasure and dependence, play and fatigue, image and reality, and safety and free exploration.

A comprehensive empirical study could substantiate these models with actual frequency data, identify disparities across different age groups and platforms, and extend to multimodal metaphors within images and videos. For the present, the schemes (Figures 1–3) and tables presented in the article may serve as a ready-made "skeleton" for future scientific research on social media metaphors.

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