

## Metaphoric advertising and the challenges of group identity

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### Abstract

*While studies on metaphoric advertising and its socio-cultural implications permeate Western and Asian countries, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the Nigerian perspective. Hence, this study examined metaphor mapping in controversial advertising in the Nigerian context. It adopted a qualitative descriptive design and used conceptual metaphor and multimodal metaphor as theoretical paradigms to analyse metaphoric modes in eight purposively selected advertisements. Findings showed that the data included unconventional meaning negotiations indexed with religious narratives, societal ethos, and gender mainstreaming. The intended audience, however, rejected them because they believed that the figurative association of their identities with the target domains was offensive and insensitive, rather than growing fond of the associated brands. The study concludes, therefore, that though thought-provoking advertisements are a valid strategy to attract attention, they could miss the mark when their inherent ambiguity and subtlety are considered insensitive and cross the line of group identity.*

**Keywords:** Metaphor, advertising, metaphoric advertising, conceptual metaphor, multimodal analysis

### 1. Introduction

A good number of the advertisements (ads) that have the greatest enduring impact use metaphor in some capacity (Bonilla 2018; Rodríguez 2016). These advertisements contain pictures, words, and references that seize the attention of viewers and keep them captivated. In modern advertising, metaphors are used in order to convey the unique selling proposition of a product or attract the attention of viewers. As Ortony (1993) and Gentner and Bowdle (2008) observed, metaphor incorporates a concept and conveys meaning in a way that cannot be effectively articulated using straightforward language. Al-Heety and Rajab (2019), in the same vein, justified this, saying that metaphor is a type of linguistic

device that can be found in everyday speech. In the context of cognitive-linguistics, metaphor is seen as the relationship that exists between two different conceptual domains (Dalamu 2020; Indurkha 1992). Thus, Barcelona (1997, 3) defined it as “a cognitive mechanism by which one domain is partially ‘mapped’ or projected onto another domain, so that the second domain is partially understood in terms of the first domain.” The source domain refers to the mental world or space from which metaphorical terms are produced to comprehend a different conceptual realm - the target domain. These domains are mapped to aid in the comprehension of a concept or idea and make it more visualizable.

For example, a metaphor like *Olasoji Adagunodo was a lion* has to be interpreted within the context of its metaphorical meaning because the meaning is not grammar-based but within an underlying conceptual system. The individual serves as the conceptual frame or target domain, which is the domain we aim to comprehend (Lakoff 1993). Conversely, the word "lion" serves as the conceptual realm or source domain, which we employ to facilitate our understanding of the abstract or target domain (Lakoff 2008). By employing the conceptual metaphor in use, we are able to grasp a particular realm of human endowments, namely power and strength, by relating them to an entirely distinct realm of experience, one that is characterised by the might and authority of the sovereign ruler of the animal kingdom. The rationale behind this blending can be attributed to the inherent conceptual nature of the named human qualities, which have to be mapped onto a familiar domain to be better understood.

Furthermore, studies by Cook (1992), Croft and Cruse (2004), Forceville (1998; 2005b; 2008; 2009; 2013), Lundmark (2005), Maalej (2001), Messaris (1997), Svaziene (2010), Toncar and Munch (2001), Vestergaard and Schroder (1985), Urios-Aparisi (2009) and Xiaqing (2017) have acknowledged the impact of conceptual metaphor and its use in advertising. As a vital aspect of mass communication, advertising is an essential source of information for consumers due to the fact that it “provides the most coherent and persistent models for their needs, values, tastes, and behaviour” (Fairclough 1989, 207; Ling et al. 1999, 129). However, due to the intense rivalry for a small portion of the market, it is apparent that modern businesses and organisations need more than just advertising to stand out; they also have to be daring in order to be heard and seen.

As a consequence, in order to generate engaging content that could connect with customers across the board, many now rely on metaphor mapping without taking cognizance of the complexity of the different cultures and religious beliefs of the target audience (Aguirre-Rodriguez, 2014; Aaker and Bruzzone 1985; Barnes and Dotson 1990; Frank and Meyer, 2002; Shao, 1993; Paek, Nelson and Vilela 2011; Waller and Fam, 2000). This is essentially problematic in societies like Nigeria, where group identity, including social background, age, ethnicity, religious views,

gender, and livelihood, is somewhat indispensable and highly revered. Owing to this reality, a growing clash of interests and resistance towards controversial commercials stemming from the perceived misalliance of metaphoric realms is fast becoming the norm (De-Run and Ting 2014; Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda 2003; Prendergast and Hwa, 2003; Maglajlic et al., 2015; Waller, 1999). This matter is of considerable concern and calls for scholarly attention, specifically within the Nigerian setting, given its high secularity and assortment of socio-cultural beliefs. This investigation, therefore, holds promise for highlighting compelling observations regarding the lean yet consequential boundary that should not be violated between advertisements and individuals' identities, using the Nigerian context and sociolinguistic perspective. The study was founded on the hypothesis that a well-selected metaphor can do wonders for the marketing of a product's sale, whereas a poorly chosen metaphor can have the opposite effect and backfire.

## **2. Literature review**

The principal aim of advertising is to persuade the envisioned audience to develop familiarity with the products being marketed, ultimately prompting them to engage in purchasing activity. Routinely, it is illustrated through textual elements and the use of figurative language (Ritson and Elliott 1999). According to Scott (1994), the concept has been so extensively advanced that many commercial graphics do not merely serve as straightforward depictions of reality. Instead, they depend on a complex symbolic system of visual rhetoric, which allows the use of images as part of the mode of textual communication. Among others, the use of visual metaphors holds great importance as a rhetorical tool in the field of advertising. This is primarily because visual metaphors have the ability to elicit positive emotions and pleasure, effectively communicate substantial information, and prompt significant inferences about the goods or services being promoted (Chang and Yen 2013). According to Callow and Schiffman (1999), pictorial metaphors play a significant role as a visual medium in global marketing, as they are universally understood and decoded by customers. As further described by Feinstein (1985, 26):

Metaphor has been considered at best an ornamental linguistic device and at worst a deviant use of grammar and semantics. By extension, metaphoric thinking has been regarded as unclear thinking, a shield that impedes the search for truth.

One of the prominent views of metaphor within the linguistic framework suggests that it is a cognitive mechanism — a method of thought that may be utilised in several disciplines (Lakoff and Johnson 2003) — and entails the deliberate placement of two apparently unrelated ideas in order to generate symbolic significance. A landmark study by McQuarrie and Phillips (2004) posited that the

use of metaphor (extended metaphor) enables humans to deduce a parallel between two entities that may exhibit resemblances in their structure or physical attributes. Also, metaphor is often defined as an implied analogy (implied metaphor) between two disparate entities that possess a shared attribute. They are frequently employed as a means to render abstract concepts more tangible and comprehensible (ontological metaphor) (Corbett, 1990; Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

Numerous academics have undertaken scholarly investigations on the use of metaphors or tropes in advertising or brand communication. Studies by Levy (1959), McQuarrie and Phillips (2004), Scott (1994), and Zaltman (2016), to mention but a few, were examples of such scholarly inquiries. They all declared that metaphoric advertising augments the intensity and novelty of advertisements while simultaneously expanding the imaginative capabilities of the audience through their various rhetorical functions and expressive impacts. In a study conducted by Burgers et al. (2015), it was found that the incorporation of metaphoric advertising enhances the understandability and tangibility of intangible product features for consumers. The study further postulated that metaphoric advertising possesses the potential to assist customers in their intuitive understanding of abstract qualities associated with products or services, which may present challenges when conveyed through alternative methods. This suggests that advertising serves as an effective means of imparting symbolic implications to brands, establishing and managing brand personality (Ang and Lim 2006), or situating brands within the realm of commerce (Alden et al. 1999).

Furthermore, a study conducted by Delbaere et al. (2011) particularly confirmed this and also highlighted that the practise of personifying a brand, which involves depicting a product in an advertisement as exhibiting human-like behaviour, not only influences the transmission of explicit brand personality traits but also has the potential to foster a feeling of connectivity and positively impact brand preference. Aggarwal and McGill (2007) supported this claim, adding that the use of metaphoric advertising has the potential to exploit the advantageous results of brand anthropomorphism. In a related study, Hawkins (1973) observed the significance of metaphoric advertising in establishing a vital connection between brands and consumers and effectively achieving the basic goal of marketing communications. The paper remarked that metaphoric advertising is characterised by distinctions and connotative variations between the source and target elements and that the connection between the listed entities, specifically the source and target, is hypothesised to be based on an underlying similarity or conceptual similarity, as also noted by McQuarrie and Mick (1999). Therefore, to comprehend a metaphorical advertisement, consumers must first identify the shared structures between the source and the target domains. Subsequently, they

have to employ their knowledge of both domains to determine if and how they align.

Interestingly, McQuarrie and Mick's (1999) investigation added further substantial insights on the use of metaphor in advertising. It admitted that metaphors possess inherent limitations and require readers to actively fill in the gaps in order to fully grasp the intended metaphorical meaning. The study observed that the use of metaphors in advertising generally entails the depiction of a divergence from the expected conventions of the target audience and might be accomplished by integrating unconventional or non-conventional visual or language elements to achieve a diverse range of positive cognitive effects. In part, Toncar and Munch (2001) consented to the limitations of metaphorical use of words in advertising or tropes but further claimed that their integration has the potential to mitigate consumers' inclination to resist the claims being advertised owing to the greater difficulty consumers face in scrutinising and interrogating the underlying connotations of metaphoric advertisements, in contrast to statements that are more straightforward and explicit.

Like McQuarrie and Mick (1999) and Toncar and Munch (2001), Lakoff and Johnson (2003) had clearly admitted that metaphoric advertising is deep-rooted in intrinsic ambiguity and subtlety with a disguised abundance of meaning. All in all, while advertising has the capacity to augment the vibrancy and ingenuity of promotional content, the use of metaphors in the process fulfils a specific rhetorical function and generates distinctive expressive results. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from the reviewed studies. However, the most pressing gap in the examined literature, which this study seeks to fill, is the Nigerian experience or perspective.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

The main theoretical frameworks used in the current study for data analysis are Forceville's (2008) Multimodal Metaphor Theory and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003). One of the fundamental tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory is the idea that people use idealised cognitive models, including image schemas, to order and express their thoughts based on certain social, cultural, and personal experiences (Lakoff 1987b, 68; Stockwell 2002, 32–33). This is made possible by the use of conceptual metaphor and mapping. A conceptual map is a collection of connections made between components in two different domains. In this mapping, there is a contrast between the source domain, which has concrete or tangible concepts, and the target domain, which has abstract or intangible concepts. By creating a conceptual link between the two domains, knowledge is transferred (Lakoff 1993, 207), and the target could be understood in light of the mapped source domain.

On the other hand, multimodal metaphor, according to Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009, 4), is one that expresses the primary or exclusive representation of both the target and source domains using two or more modes, while monomodal metaphor uses one mode, such as the verbal mode, to express both domains. The numerous modes or modalities that could be combined and demand thorough analysis are outlined by Forceville (2009a, 23) and include gestures, sounds, music, scents, tastes, and touch, in addition to visual, written, and spoken signs. According to Forceville (2008, 469), there must be a clear distinction between the two phenomena, which can be classified as the target and source, respectively, in order to be labelled a multimodal metaphor. Since the focus of the current paper is on controversial advertising, which entails both the source and target domains and includes the use of multiple modes such as images, text, speech, gestures, sounds, and music, the multimodal metaphor and conceptual metaphor theoretical frameworks were considered appropriate for the study.

#### **4. Materials and method**

The materials for this study consist of advertisements that were gathered based on the level of attention they garnered subsequent to their dissemination within the Nigerian context. The selection process involved the purposive identification of controversial advertisements and brand communications with extended circulation and recognition across various national communication platforms, particularly online and on television. During the course of the selection process, our main aim was to find samples that exhibited provocative elements, specifically those that encompassed either a traditional metaphorical phrase or the use of a pictorial metaphor, which was further reinforced by imaginative or debatable elaborations. The choice was made to harvest a controlled number of ads that aligned with the scope of the study, leading to the identification of only eight commercials deemed adequate for qualitative analysis. According to Low (1999, 49 cited in Lundmark 2005), the primary approach utilised to discover metaphors is the unilateral decision methodology, wherein the researcher is responsible for establishing the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. As Lundmark (2005) further observed, the apparent advantages of this approach outweigh any potential disadvantages posed by the underlying subjectivity involved in the data collection. The analysis was based on a qualitative descriptive approach and insights from the aforementioned Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) Conceptual Metaphor and Forceville's (2008) Multimodal Metaphor analytical paradigm

#### **5. Data presentation and discussion**

In this section, the eight assembled data sets are presented. For a better reading and understanding of the metaphor system under investigation and why it did not go down well with the envisioned audience, the data are foregrounded, while the religious, social, cultural, and personal identities associated with the conceptual mapping are also descriptively presented and discussed.

**5.1 Plates one and two: Trophy ads in Ilorin, Kwara State**  
Theme: Marketing of Alcoholic Drink – Trophy



Plate one

Plate two

The ads on Plates one and two appeared on two sides of a massive billboard erected along Offa Garage Road, Ilorin, Kwara State. They combined pictorial, gestural, and written signs on a predominantly black background to deliver an off-track metaphorical note. In Plate one, the pictographic part contains two men, one of whom is blurred and in the background. The unembroidered and superimposed one could be seen holding a half-filled glass cup containing an alcoholic drink popular among socialites and beer lovers. He beheld the liquor with admiration, and the look on his face signalled the relief and pleasure he had derived from gulping the visibly cold drink. Similarly, in Plate two, four cheerful men could be seen cooling off on the beer with contagious smiles and gesticulations.

The third multimodal element in the Plates is the textual component. A Yoruba word, *Atunilara* (meaning a reliever in English), was boldly positioned underneath the brand name of the beer; Trophy. The striking expression was formed from a combined process of concatenation and contraction of Yoruba first-person pronoun (plural) "a", "tu" (meaning comfort in English), "ni" (a focus marker in the Yoruba language), and "ara" (meaning body). The third deck of the textual elements also contains two interesting phrases. First, *tó si e gégé bi* and the second, *omo ilorin*. The latter translates to an Ilorin indigene, while the former means 'that is restful like...'

These ads included a combination of personification and extended metaphor. The advertised beer is the target domain. *Omo ilorin* is the source domain, while the restfulness and serenity associated with the ancient city are the purportedly shared features and the basis of the conceptual mapping. The rationale behind such mapping may be unconnected to the attributes and calm depositions of Ilorin and her people. The people pride the city as a town that is far from hell and closer to paradise and themselves as children of 'alfa' meaning Islamic priests. The brand possibly wanted the beer to be so understood and perceived by the core values of the town and the people so as to foster a feeling of connectivity and positively impact brand preference. Hence, the use of personification and extended metaphor; Trophy is *Omo ilorin*; *Omo ilorin* is Trophy.

Obviously, the socio-cultural experience and identity of the people and the fact that Ilorin operates an emirate system and has a strong religious affiliation were either not considered or completely overlooked in the execution of the ad, and this was justified by the protests and condemnations that trailed the metaphoric advertising until it was eventually pulled down. For instance, the Ilorin Emirate Descendants Progressive Union (IEDPU) described the metaphoric ads as liberty taken too far and contended that the message on the billboard attaching alcohol to the people of Ilorin, a predominantly Muslim community, was a deliberate confrontational act. A Facebook post by a media and public analyst who hails

from Ilorin and the dearth of studies in this area within the context of Nigeria when the researcher attempted to probe further into the controversy generated by this *Omo Ilorin* mapping stimulated his interest in this work. The said analyst remarked:

This is an insult to Ilorites. I don't expect anyone to say that there are drunkards in Ilorin to justify this nonsense. I'm an Ilorite, I don't drink beer. People at the authority should sue them, please.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Delbaere et al. (2011) particularly emphasised that the practise of personifying a brand, which involves depicting a product in an advertisement as exhibiting human-like behaviour, does not only influence the transmission of explicit brand personality traits but also extends to fostering a sense of togetherness and potentially yielding beneficial effects. While this may be the case in some instances, the Ilorin scenario presented and discussed above is an exception and is instead considered offensive and insensitive in what could be regarded as lean tolerance for the subtlety of the employed metaphor system (van Mulken, le Pair, and Forceville 2010; van Hooft, van Mulken, and Nedertigt 2013).

## 5.2 Plate three: Dove body wash ad

Theme: four-in-one slide showing skin lighting



This quadrilateral image was from Dove's implied metaphoric ad designed to spark sales for its body wash. The anger-evoking advertisement consisted of a static combination of four photographs rolled into one. It was positioned on a plain background. In the opening frame, a Nigerian model, Lola Ogunyemi, could be seen transforming into a white lady. The dark-skinned lady was depicted in a bathroom setting, where a bottle of Dove body wash could also be seen in the

lower right-hand corner of the frame. In the ensuing frames, she lowers her hand and lifts up her brown blouse and ostensibly the rest of her skin, only to turn out to be a smiling white woman in a lighter-coloured shirt.

Though the company contended that this ad was projected to show that Dove body wash is for everyone and be a celebration of diversity, the visual metaphor leaves much to be desired and was met with objections in Nigeria and among other women of colour who perceived the comparatively "before and after" shots to be racially insensitive.

After the backlash, the brand later admitted it missed the mark in representing women of colour thoughtfully and restated its commitment to representing beauty in diversity (Astor 2017). But there is obviously more to this. Though the ad is not explicit, by using pictures and gesticulations, the ad could be said to be a multimodal metaphor and evoke a long-running stereotype and trope in soap advertising: black is dirty, White is clean. This metaphor is implied because the theme of the product, "(body) wash", apparently belongs to the same metaphoric frame as cleanliness and purity, which are shared attributes of the metaphor for "white". The representations therefore implied a metaphor between black (the source domain) and white (the target domain) and let out an identity bias or disorientation in the frame at the lower right-hand corner of the picture in favour of the target domain.

### 5.3 Plate four: Starling bank and *agege* bread mapping

Theme: Easter Celebration



The irk-inducing ad in Plate four was circulated by Sterling Bank to felicitate Nigerian Christians for the Easter celebration. However, it generated furor as a result of its assumed misrepresentation of the group's identity and the

resurrection of Jesus Christ. The multimodal ad combined elements of visual metaphor and written signs to pass its intended metaphoric message, which was received in a bad light and seen as a derogatory remark on the Christian faith and insensitive to Jesus Christ, whom the people hold sacred. The public and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), who insisted that the advertisement misrepresented Christianity, then responded negatively to this.

The advertisement's textual component reads, "Like Agege Bread, He Rose. Happy Easter". This was accompanied by a picture of a locally made bread in Nigeria called "Agege Bread," divided into two halves. This conceptual mapping or association of Easter with the Agege brand of bread may not be unconnected to an attempt to imitate the words of Jesus proclaiming Himself as the 'bread of Life' and the usual nature of bread to transform from its previous shape and evolve once heated with fire or baked. The choice of Agege bread and not any other kind of bread is due largely to the usually fattened nature of the bread compared to others, making it a household food in Nigeria.

So, since resurrection is rooted in reawakening and baked bread is associated with regeneration, Agege Bread was used here as a source domain for a better reading and understanding of the target domain, which is intangible and linked with regeneration or reawakening from death or a previous state of being. In this ontological metaphor, the proclivity of Agege bread to rise is accentuated, and it is the concrete basis for us to understand the abstract concept of resurrection. The metaphor here is that Agege bread is resurrection. Resurrection is Agege bread. Meanwhile, given the context-sensitive nature of pronouns, the binding principle governing their use, and their indexical nature, the capitalised one included in the ad clearly referred to Jesus Christ, the symbol of Easter celebration.

As a result, the Christian community found it insulting, lacking in sensitivity, and derogatory to link the sacred resurrection of Jesus Christ with Agege bread during a period when the global Christian community was observing Easter. Within the realm of ontological metaphors, there exists a conceptualization wherein abstract entities, such as ideas, emotions, and psychological activities, are regarded as tangible entities or concrete objects. This notion is aptly illustrated in Plate four. The hypothesised relationship between the things mentioned, particularly the source and goal, is postulated to be rooted in an underlying likeness or mental similarity (Rise, +tns). Nevertheless, the advertisement was ultimately unsuccessful in fulfilling its intended objective and encountered obstacles due to the inherent limitations imposed by group identification.

#### **5.4 Plates five, six and seven: Peak Milk and Jesus' crucifixion-themed ads**

Theme: Easter-focused ads

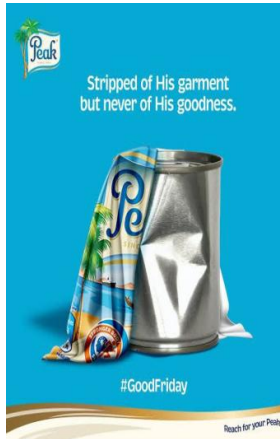


Plate five



Plate six



Plateseven

In what has been widely described as a desecration of the Easter moment and the huge sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Plates five, six and seven above were circulated on social media by Peak Milk to promote their product during the Easter Celebration. However, the metaphoric ads sparked backlash from Nigerians because, like in many other countries of the world, Easter has a serious religious connotation in Nigeria. From the early days of Christianity, good Friday marked the day Jesus Christ was crucified and entombed.

The Roman leader, Pontius Pilate, reluctantly sentenced Him to execution following His proclamation of being the Son of God, which caused dissatisfaction among the Jewish decision makers. During the day of His crucifixion, Jesus' attire was tattered and shared into four and catered away. Thereafter, He was adorned with a woven crown of thorns and affixed to a cross, with nails driven into His palms and feet at Calvary. With blood gushing out from His head, palms, and feet, He passed on on the cross, after which His remains were subsequently detached from the cross and entombed.

The easter-focused ads employed multimodal metaphors combining visual and textual modes. Tagged #Goodfriday, Plates five and six featured the picture of a dented tin of Peak Milk, a metaphor for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and illustration of the phases of the tribulations leading to His eventual passing at Calvary. Particularly, Plate five featured a textual mode that reads, "stripped of His garment but never of His goodness," a metaphor for the shredding of Jesus' cloth and His widely acclaimed goodness. The dented tin of the milk on Plate six was pierced on two sides with a nail and also included a textual mode that read, "Bruised and pierced for us," a metaphor for the persecution and piercing of Jesus' palms and feet while nailing Him to the cross and the belief held by

Christians that He died so that their sins could be forgiven. Hence, the use of the personal pronoun “us”. The spilt milk from the two sides where the tin was pierced, and the one on the body and left side of the milk, was an extended metaphor for the blood that gushed out from Jesus’ head, palms, and feet as a result of the injuries from the crown of thorns planted on His head and the nails with which He was pinned to the cross. Plate seven featured an undented but bent tin of the milk pierced on two sides and a textual mode that reads, “...and they met it empty”, a metaphor for Jesus’ transformation and rise from death and his miraculous departure from where he was entombed. The second of the textual modes reads, ‘Happy Easter’, as a mark of the celebration of the religious event with Christian adherents.

Clearly, the ads captured the not-so-pleasant phases of the crucifixion of Jesus and intended to leverage the same to reach the consumers of the brand across the board during the important moment of reflection and celebration, but Christians and the leadership of the religious body in Nigeria found the ads offensive and disrespectful to their faith. They subsequently called for a boycott of Peak Milk products and demanded a public apology from the brand. The conceptual metaphor used in the ads was criticised and rejected for religious insensitivity and divisive messaging.

### **5.5 Plate eight: MTN and "Mama, na boy" video ad**

Theme: Male child-focused ad



Plate eight

MTN, whose logo appeared on the left side of Plate eight, is a leading telecommunications company and network service provider in Nigeria with aggressive promotion and thought-provoking commercials. One of its outstanding yet controversial ads was the 49-second "mama, na boy" trope, which combined elements of visual, gesticulation, sound, and root metaphors.

The phone-holding discussant on the right side of the Plate was the man at the centre of the ad. The commercial started off with the man moving nervously in front of the door of a delivery room. Shortly after, a female doctor came out and told him that his wife had just given birth. The man was overjoyed and reached for his cellphone. Immediately, he called his mother in the village and delivered the news, saying, "Mama, na boy!" The excitement about the baby's sex was obvious from his body language and put a question to the worth of a female child (Beauvoir 1953; Courtney and Lockeretz 1971; Eisend, 2010; Klonoff and Landrine 1995) within the depicted traditional Nigerian society.

As if that was not enough, on hearing the news, his mother, who was seated, swiftly rose to her feet, jubilated profoundly, and shared the perceptibly good news with the villagers. She started singing a folk song, and the villagers joined her in the celebration immediately. Disturbed from his sleep by the noise coming from the rejoicing women and following a prompt by his friends, the father of the latest dad asked what was happening, and on hearing the news too, he collected the phone, spoke to the new dad, and was later joined by his friends in the celebration.

Even though the ad mirrors the overriding preference and socio-cultural bias for male children in the Nigerian setting, it still comes off as sexist and controversial on account of the assumed discrimination against a girl child. The root metaphor in use is boy is MTN, MTN is a boy, while their shared and mapped features include social acceptance and celebration-worthy. In the multimodal ad, boy represents the source and concrete domain. The mapped entity, MTN, is the target or abstract domain and was strategically positioned as the conveyor of the good news and treasured to behold in the same manner as a highly cherished boy child.

The root metaphors in use here are directly related to a person's culture, identity, or perception of life. They are able to make sweeping or philosophical statements that tell us more about an idea, a character, or an entity. If the main character could say to his mother, 'na boy', and the whole village square erupted in joy, then one could tell that they all have a deep-rooted belief in a male child and regard the birth of one as a prized gift. Even though the ad was very entertaining and communicated the communal ethos, it was also controversial and did not promote gender equality (Artz, Munger and Purdy, 1999), which is the in-thing and the best practise now. Hence the public outcry that greeted the commercial, particularly from women's rights groups and some religious organisations.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

This study examined selected metaphoric ads and the boundary of group identity in the Nigerian context. It was couched in Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) Conceptual Metaphor and Forceville's (2008) Multimodal Metaphor frameworks.

The examined data contained visual, textual, implied, extended, and ontological metaphors that were stylistically deployed to garner maximum publicity and spiced with religious narratives, societal ethos, and gender mainstreaming. However, they were considered controversial and insensitive representations of groups' identities and social realities and therefore rejected.

In light of these deductions, it is noteworthy to allude to Aristotle's postulation on the correlation between metaphor and language, along with his stance on the importance of metaphor in communication. Aristotle perceived metaphors as implicit comparisons, rooted in the principles of analogy, and clearly cautioned against the potential for ambiguity and obscurity in their usage (Evans and Green, 2006, 293). This postulation holds true for this study given that the controversial ads were enmeshed or rooted in ambiguity and obscurity. Hence, their deafening rejections. According to Singh and Chahal (2020), controversial advertising refers to the promotion of products or the execution of advertising campaigns that have the potential to provoke feelings of shame, aversion, disgust, offence, or anger among a specific group of individuals when they are presented. Kovecses (2010, 65) understood the consequences of such unaccustomed and insensitive mapping and had forewarned that:

A major manifestation of conceptual metaphors is advertising. Part of the selling power of an advertisement depends on how well chosen the conceptual metaphor is that the picture and the word used in the advertisement attempt to evoke in people. An appropriately selected metaphor may work wonders in promoting the sale of an item.

Going by Kovecses' assertion and conclusions from other landmark studies on the use of metaphor in advertising (especially, DeRosia, 2008; García-Madariaga et al., 2020; Morgan and Reichert, 1999; Norris et al., 2012; Rehman and Brooks, 1987; Stamenković, Ichien, and Holyoak, 2019; Pilelienė and Grigaliūnaitė, 2016; Vezina and Paul, 1997; Wang, 2022), it is clear that an inappropriately selected metaphor may look good but cannot work and could result in backlash instead of promoting the sale of an item, as seen in the examined cases, characterised by distinctions and connotative variations between the source and target elements due to the perceived misrepresentation in the mapping and idiosyncratic perception of the bearers of the identities associated with the source domains. In all, this study further highlights the importance of sensitivity in advertising and concludes that brands have a responsibility to ensure that their ads and brand communication are not only engaging and/or touch on matters that people can relate to in order to make sense of their conceptual products and services but are also respectful to all consumers and group identities.

From the foregoing, the study inferred that the use of controversial advertising tactics that incorporate offensive conceptual metaphors and surpass the limits of collective identity can lead to a variety of adverse consequences. This study acknowledges that this form of advertising possesses the capacity to elicit robust adverse responses and engender outrage within the intended recipient group. This situation has the potential to elicit a retaliatory reaction from the offended group, leading to the implementation of boycotts, adverse media attention, and detrimental consequences for the brand's standing and perception.

Moreover, the use of controversial advertising, including insensitive conceptual metaphors, possesses the capacity to evoke emotional distress and unease among customers who come across such advertisements. This phenomenon possesses the capacity to link the brand with undesirable connotations and develop an enduring bad perception. Finally, rigorous vetting of ads by companies and regulatory bodies is recommended and no pun should be used in strategic events that touch on a group's identity and representation. After all, effective communication is not achieved only by being concrete but also by being concise, correct, coherent, clear, and, most importantly, courteous.

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