

**SEXUAL CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN THE INSTAGRAM COMMENT
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Abstract: This study investigated how sexual conceptual metaphors were employed to construct carnal meaning in Instagram discourse, focusing on the comment section of Cupu Cupita's official account. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson and supported by Yus's Cyberpragmatics framework, the study examined how verbal expressions and multimodal elements, particularly emojis, interacted to communicate implicit sexual meanings in online communication. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to analyze 64 Instagram comments collected from posts published between January and April 2025. The data were identified, classified, and interpreted according to the types of conceptual metaphors and their pragmatic functions in digital interaction. The findings indicated that structural metaphors occurred most frequently, followed by ontological, orientational, metonymic, and other metaphorical expressions that represented sexuality through indirect linguistic and symbolic forms. The analysis further revealed that emojis functioned as pragmatic cues that intensified metaphorical meanings while allowing users to express sexual desire, humor, and attraction in socially acceptable ways. These findings demonstrate that sexual conceptual metaphors in social media function not only as cognitive mechanisms for conceptualizing sexuality but also as discursive resources through which users negotiate gender, desire, and cultural values in online interaction.

Keyword: conceptual metaphor, sexuality comments, cyberpragmatics

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media has transformed the way people communicate, allowing language to function not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a resource for constructing identities, expressing emotions, and negotiating social relationships. Among various digital platforms, Instagram has become one of the most influential environments for multimodal communication because it integrates written language, images, videos, emojis, and other visual elements into a single interactive space. Consequently, meaning in Instagram interactions is constructed not solely through verbal expressions but also through the combination of linguistic and visual resources. This communicative environment has encouraged the emergence of increasingly creative figurative expressions, including conceptual metaphors that enable users to communicate implicit meanings while adapting to the social norms of online interaction.

Within Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor is understood as a cognitive mechanism through which abstract concepts are interpreted in terms of more concrete experiences rather than merely as a stylistic feature of language. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that conceptual metaphors reflect the way individuals organize thought, reason about experience, and

communicate complex ideas. Because sexuality is often regarded as a culturally sensitive topic, metaphor becomes an effective strategy for expressing desire, attraction, evaluation, and intimacy indirectly. In digital environments, metaphorical expressions allow users to communicate sensitive meanings without relying on explicit sexual language, thereby maintaining social acceptability while simultaneously conveying rich pragmatic implications.

The interpretation of metaphor in online communication cannot be separated from its digital context. Unlike face-to-face interaction, communication on social media is multimodal, where meaning emerges through the interaction of text, emojis, images, hashtags, and audience participation. Yus (2011), through the framework of Cyberpragmatics, emphasizes that internet-mediated communication requires readers to interpret linguistic and non-linguistic cues simultaneously to infer speakers' communicative intentions. Therefore, the interpretation of sexual metaphors on Instagram depends not only on lexical choices but also on visual symbols and contextual information that accompany online interaction.

Previous studies have investigated conceptual metaphors in literary texts, song lyrics, news discourse, and public communication, demonstrating that metaphor serves as an important cognitive and cultural mechanism for representing abstract experiences. Research on sexual metaphors has also shown that figurative language frequently reflects social attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and the body. Nevertheless, relatively limited attention has been devoted to examining how sexual conceptual metaphors operate within interactive social media environments, particularly in Instagram comment sections where textual expressions are closely integrated with multimodal features such as emojis and visual context. Furthermore, few studies have combined Conceptual Metaphor Theory with Cyberpragmatics to explain how verbal and non-verbal resources jointly construct sexual meaning in online discourse.

This study addressed these gaps by examining sexual conceptual metaphors found in the Instagram comment section of Cupi Cupita's official account. As a public figure whose online content frequently generates metaphorical and sexually suggestive responses from followers, Cupi Cupita provides a relevant context for investigating how metaphor functions in naturally occurring digital interaction. Rather than focusing solely on identifying metaphorical expressions, this study explored how conceptual metaphors and multimodal resources collectively construct carnal meaning, negotiate desire, and reflect broader cultural perceptions of sexuality within Indonesian digital discourse.

Accordingly, this study aimed to identify the types of sexual conceptual metaphors employed in Instagram comments, analyze how these metaphors construct carnal meaning through conceptual mapping and examine how emojis and other multimodal resources reinforce metaphorical interpretation within the framework of Cyberpragmatics. By integrating Cognitive Linguistics with digital pragmatics, this research contributes to the growing discussion on metaphor, online discourse, and the representation of sexuality in contemporary social media communication. Moreover, in digital communication, metaphorical meanings are conveyed not only through text but also via nonverbal elements like emojis, hashtags, and the visual context of the posts being commented on. Yus's (2011) Cyberpragmatics framework emphasizes that interactions in digital media are multimodal and context-dependent, with meaning emerging from the interplay of text, images, and audience responses. For instance, emojis such as 💧, 😏, or 🔥 in comments on Cupi Cupita's posts do more than decorate; they intensify and reinforce the sexual undertones already suggested by the words. This demonstrates that sexual discourse on social media is shaped through the interaction of linguistic and visual symbols.

The results of this research are anticipated to deepen the understanding of metaphor as a cognitive mechanism in digital interaction, especially in the construction of sexual meaning. In addition, it extends the discussion on gender, communication, and cultural representation in online spaces by providing insights into how language mirrors and sustains societal perceptions of sexuality within contemporary Indonesian contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate how sexual conceptual metaphors were used to construct carnal meaning in Instagram discourse. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to interpret meanings embedded in naturally occurring language rather than to measure linguistic phenomena quantitatively. Consistent with qualitative inquiry, the analysis focused on understanding the contextual and conceptual dimensions of metaphorical expressions as they appeared in authentic online interactions.

The data were collected from the comment section of Cupi Cupita's official Instagram account (@cupitagobas19). The unit of analysis consisted of individual Instagram comments containing metaphorical expressions that conveyed implicit sexual meanings. The comments were retrieved from posts published between January and April 2025, a period selected because it generated substantial audience engagement and a rich variety of metaphorical expressions relevant to the objectives of the study. Initially, all comments posted during the selected period were observed. The researcher then applied purposive sampling to identify comments that met the research criteria. After the screening process, 64 comments were selected as the primary data for analysis because they contained conceptual metaphors referring to sexuality.

To ensure analytical consistency, the following inclusion criteria were applied: (1) the comment contained metaphorical expressions related to sexuality; (2) the metaphor conveyed implicit rather than explicit sexual meaning; (3) the comment was written in Indonesian; and (4) the comment was relevant to the visual and textual context of the Instagram post. Comments consisting solely of emojis without accompanying textual context, duplicated comments, advertisements, spam, and comments unrelated to the research topic were excluded from the analysis.

The data were collected through non-participant observation and documentation. The researcher observed the interactions without participating in the online discussion, allowing the data to reflect naturally occurring communication. Relevant comments were documented through screenshots and transcription before being organized into a research corpus. Each comment was subsequently coded according to its conceptual metaphor, source domain, target domain, and pragmatic context to facilitate systematic analysis.

The analytical procedure followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), comprising three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, comments that fulfilled the selection criteria were identified and classified according to the conceptual metaphor categories employed in the study. In the data display stage, the selected comments were organized into analytical tables and interpreted by identifying the relationships between the source domain and the target domain. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting how conceptual metaphors constructed carnal meaning and how emojis and other multimodal resources reinforced metaphorical interpretation within the framework of Cyberpragmatics.

The interpretation of the data was primarily guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which explains that abstract concepts are understood through more concrete experiential domains. This framework was employed to identify the conceptual mappings underlying sexual metaphorical expressions found in Instagram comments. To complement the cognitive analysis, the study also adopted Yus's (2011) Cyberpragmatics framework to explain how contextual information, emojis, and other multimodal resources contributed to the interpretation of metaphorical meaning in digital communication. The integration of these two theoretical perspectives enabled the study to explain not only the conceptual structure of sexual metaphors but also their communicative functions within contemporary online discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 64 Instagram comments containing sexual conceptual metaphors were identified and analyzed from Cupi Cupita's official Instagram account. The findings indicate that Instagram users frequently employed metaphorical language to express attraction, desire, evaluation, and sexual imagination through indirect linguistic expressions. Rather than communicating sexuality explicitly, commenters relied on conceptual mappings, figurative language, and symbolic references to construct meanings that remained socially recognizable while avoiding direct sexual expressions. The identified metaphors were classified into five analytical categories used in this study, namely structural metaphors, ontological metaphors, orientational metaphors, non-ontological metaphors, and metonymic expressions. Table 1 presents the distribution of each category.

Table 1. Types of Metaphors

No	Types of Metaphor	Total
1.	Structural	29
2.	Ontology	13
3.	Orientasi	16
4.	Nononcologic	4
5.	Metonymy	2

As shown in Table 1, structural metaphors constituted the largest category, accounting for 45.3% of all identified metaphors. This finding suggests that Instagram users predominantly conceptualized sexuality through familiar activities, bodily experiences, and everyday actions that could be readily understood by other users. Orientational metaphors represented the second largest category (25.0%), followed by ontological metaphors (20.3%). Meanwhile, non-ontological metaphors and metonymic expressions occurred less frequently, accounting for 6.3% and 3.1% of the data, respectively.

The predominance of structural metaphors demonstrates that users tended to construct sexual meanings by mapping abstract sexual experiences onto concrete activities and physical actions. This strategy enabled commenters to communicate desire indirectly while maintaining the playful and implicit style that characterizes interaction in social media environments. The relatively lower frequency of metonymic expressions indicates that commenters generally preferred broader metaphorical representations over references based on specific body parts or symbolic substitutes. The following sections present representative examples from each metaphor category together with their conceptual mappings and contextual interpretations.

Structural Metaphor

Structural metaphor is one of the main types of conceptual metaphor described by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their theory of conceptual metaphor (2008). In this type of metaphor, an abstract concept (the target domain) is understood and organized through the structure of a more concrete and familiar concept (the source domain). This process allows complex ideas such as time, love, or sexuality to be framed using more tangible experiences like war, objects, food, or journeys.

Excerpt 1: "*buka pintu kak aa mau ambil bantalnya*"

Structural metaphor in which a concrete object such as *bantal* in English is a pillow is used as the source domain to represent the female sexual organs as the target domain. In this context, *bantal* in English is a pillow is not just an object used to lean on or sleep on, but functions as a metaphor that implies a part of the female body, most likely the genitals or other intimate areas. The choice of the word *bantal* in English is a pillow, as a metaphor accentuates physical properties, in this case, the pillow implies breasts due to the similarity in shape and softness, making it easier for audiences to understand abstract concepts of sexuality through associations with concrete and familiar objects. In accordance with (Lakoff and Johnson 2008) theory of conceptual metaphor, abstract concepts such as female organs and sexuality are explained through mapping to a more tangible and concrete realm, so the sexual meaning in this comment is conveyed implicitly but effectively in digital communication.

Ontology Metaphor

Ontological metaphor is a type of metaphor that gives abstract concepts or experiences an ontological structure by treating them as if they were physical objects, entities, or containers. In these metaphors, non-concrete things such as emotions, ideas, or events are understood and talked about as if they had the boundaries, shape, and substance of real objects.

Excerpt 2: "*bibit unggul ya kak, eh bukan bibit lagi ini mah,*"

The female body is compared to a "seed," implying fertility, reproductive potential, and high biological quality. The source domain is drawn from agriculture or breeding, while the target domain is the human body, particularly the female body. This metaphor not only makes abstract concepts of sexual and reproductive capacity concrete but also frames these attributes in terms of measurable, observable traits, making the discussion of sexuality more accessible while subtly objectifying the body. In addition to illustrating biological qualities, ontological metaphors reflect broader cultural and social attitudes toward women's bodies. By representing the female body as a biological object, such metaphors reinforce perceptions that women can be evaluated, categorized, and symbolically exploited. This language reveals a societal tendency to reduce female sexuality to quantifiable traits, prioritizing reproductive potential and physical characteristics over personal agency or subjective experience. Consequently, ontological metaphors serve as both a linguistic tool and a mirror of social values, highlighting the ways in which gender, sexuality, and power intersect in everyday discourse.

Orientational Metaphor

Orientational metaphor is a type of conceptual metaphor that organizes concepts based on spatial orientations and embodied human experiences, such as *up-down*, *in-out*, *front-back*, *on-off*, and *near-far*. These metaphors arise because people understand abstract concepts

through concrete physical and spatial experiences. For example, the conceptual metaphor “HAPPY IS UP” is reflected in the expression “*I’m feeling up today,*” while “SAD IS DOWN” can be seen in the expression “*I’m feeling down.*” Thus, orientational metaphors do not merely describe literal directions; rather, they provide conceptual structure for understanding abstract experiences, emotions, states, and values through physical orientations that are grounded in human bodily experience.

Excerpt 3: “*lampunya terang banget, bikin naik darah*” (“the light is so bright, it makes my blood rise”) or “*panas banget, bikin meleleh*” (“so hot, it makes me melt”).

In these cases, concepts like “rise” and “hot” originate from physical experiences such as temperature and vertical movement as the source domain, while the target domain refers to emotional or sexual states. These expressions indicate an increase in arousal or desire, showing that physical experiences provide a framework for understanding emotional and sexual responses. By employing orientation-based language, these metaphors also reveal how abstract emotional and sexual states are conceptualized through tangible physical experiences. The use of spatial or thermal imagery allows for the communication of heightened desire in a way that is immediate and relatable, linking the body’s sensations directly to emotional or sexual intensity. This demonstrates how orientational metaphors not only facilitate the expression of sexual excitement but also reflect the interplay between physical experience and emotional interpretation in everyday discourse.

Nonontology Metaphor

Nonontological metaphors are concepts that are formed metaphorically by using other concepts. This metaphor is based on two domains, namely the source domain and the target domain. Nonontological metaphors are not related to ontology, but rather to human cognition and the way humans understand and experience the world through metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 2008).

Excerpt 4: “*malam ini pasti badai*” (“tonight will surely be a storm”) or “*cuacanya mendukung banget*” (“the weather is so supportive”)

This has implied sexual connotations without explicitly mentioning sexual acts or body parts. Source domain comes from natural phenomena such as storms or weather, while the target domain refers to sexual activity or mood. This type of metaphor allows speakers to communicate sexual meaning in an indirect way, making it more socially acceptable in public contexts. In addition to concealing explicit sexual content, non-ontological metaphors also serve as a form of linguistic play, highlighting the speaker’s creativity and carefulness in expressing sexual desire within digital spaces. By using environmental or situational imagery, these metaphors create a subtle, suggestive tone that allows readers to infer sexual intent while maintaining a level of ambiguity. This demonstrates how figurative language functions as both a communicative tool and a social strategy, reflecting the interplay between cultural norms, digital communication, and the expression of sexuality.

Metonymy

Metaphors are conceptual tools that, frequently through analogous imagery, aid in the understanding and experience of one thing through another. Metonymy, on the other hand, is a method of comprehending something that is closely connected to another real-world object; it frequently substitutes an attribute or element for an entity. (Lakoff and Johnson 2008).

Comment : *“belahannya menggoda”* (“her cleavage is tempting”) or *“buahnya ranum banget”* (“her fruit is so ripe”).

In these cases, words like “cleavage” or “fruit” do not simply denote a specific body part; they serve as symbols of overall sensuality and sexual allure. The source domain is concrete the body or an object while the target domain is abstract, relating to sexuality. By focusing on a part to imply the whole, metonymy metaphors condense complex sexual meanings into concise, evocative expressions that are easily understood by the audience.

Beyond representing sexual appeal, the use of metonymy also reflects broader patterns of social and cultural communication on digital platforms. Social media users often prefer indirect expression of desire, employing body parts as symbolic proxies for eroticism, which allows them to navigate public spaces while maintaining a degree of subtlety. This approach not only emphasizes the aesthetic and sensual significance of the female body but also showcases the creativity of language users in conveying sexual interest implicitly. Ultimately, metonymy metaphors reveal how parts of the body can be linguistically transformed into powerful symbols of sexuality, highlighting the interplay between language, desire, and social norms in online interactions.

From the five identified types of conceptual metaphors, structural metaphors appeared as the most dominant form. This dominance indicates that social media users tend to construct sexual meanings through explicit comparisons between bodily experiences and sexual activities. Such patterns serve as communicative strategies that allow users to channel erotic desires symbolically without expressing them in an overtly vulgar manner, thereby maintaining social acceptability within the public sphere.

In addition to verbal metaphors, the study also revealed that emojis and nonverbal symbols play a crucial role in reinforcing metaphorical meanings. Emojis such as 🍆 (eggplant), 💧 (water), 😏 (smirking face), and 🔥 (fire) function as visual cues that emphasize the sexual context of comments. Within the framework of Cyberpragmatics proposed by Francisco Yus (2011), these symbols act as contextual indicators that guide readers in interpreting the speaker’s communicative intentions. Consequently, emojis serve a dual purpose: on one hand, they conceal sexual meanings to prevent explicit interpretation, while on the other, they strengthen the erotic undertones implied by the text.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that sexual metaphors in digital discourse function as implicit communication tools that enable users to express desire and erotic imagination without breaching social norms. Metaphorical language and digital symbols such as emojis represent a form of negotiation between personal expression and public ethical boundaries. Furthermore, this phenomenon reflects the dynamics of gender and power in online public spaces, where the female body often becomes an object of representation and symbolic consumption. Thus, sexual metaphors in Instagram comment sections serve not only as linguistic expressions but also as cultural mirrors that reveal how society constructs and interprets sexuality, humor, and social relations in the era of digital communication.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how sexual conceptual metaphors were employed in the Instagram comment section of Cupi Cupita's official account to construct carnal meaning within digital discourse. The analysis demonstrated that Instagram users predominantly expressed sexual desire, attraction, and evaluation through indirect metaphorical language rather than explicit expressions. Among the identified categories, structural metaphors were the most frequently used, indicating that abstract sexual experiences were commonly conceptualized through familiar bodily actions and everyday experiences. Ontological, orientational, non-ontological, and metonymic expressions further illustrated the diversity of metaphorical strategies employed by users in negotiating sensitive meanings within public online interactions.

The findings also revealed that metaphorical expressions did not function independently. Instead, they were reinforced by emojis and other multimodal resources that provided contextual cues for interpreting implicit sexual meanings. Viewed from the perspective of Cyberpragmatics, these linguistic and visual elements jointly contributed to the construction of meaning, allowing users to communicate intimacy, humor, and desire while maintaining a degree of indirectness that aligns with the communicative norms of social media.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Cognitive Linguistics by demonstrating that conceptual metaphors continue to serve as cognitive mechanisms for understanding abstract domains such as sexuality in contemporary digital communication. Furthermore, the integration of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cyberpragmatics offers a broader analytical perspective for explaining how verbal and non-verbal resources interact in the interpretation of metaphorical meaning within online discourse.

Practically, the findings provide insights for researchers, linguists, and digital communication scholars interested in the relationship between language, metaphor, and online interaction. The study also highlights the importance of considering multimodal communication when examining meaning construction in social media, particularly in discussions involving culturally sensitive topics such as sexuality.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited to comments collected from a single Instagram account within a specific period. Future research is encouraged to investigate sexual conceptual metaphors across different social media platforms, cultural contexts, or multilingual online communities. Comparative studies involving larger datasets and computational approaches may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of metaphorical patterns and digital discourse in contemporary communication.

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