



Original Article

Cognitive Framing and Conceptualization in Media Discourse: Mechanisms of Meaning Construction

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Abstract: In the context of rapidly evolving media environments, the cognitive dimension of media discourse has emerged as a critical area of interdisciplinary inquiry. This paper undertakes a systematic examination of the cognitive mechanisms underlying media discourse, with particular attention to how framing strategies, conceptual metaphors, and processes of meaning construction interact to shape audience cognition. Drawing on cognitive linguistic theory and discourse-analytical frameworks, the study analyzes a corpus of contemporary media texts, including political news articles, televised broadcasts, and social media narratives. A mixed-method approach is employed, combining qualitative metaphor analysis with quantitative frame mapping to examine how media discourse organizes, filters, and directs public interpretations of complex socio-political phenomena. The findings reveal that cognitive mechanisms such as metaphorical framing and conceptual blending not only structure media narratives but also function as powerful tools of ideological influence and identity construction. By integrating cognitive linguistics with discourse analysis, this research contributes to the theoretical development of media cognition and offers a comprehensive account of how linguistic and conceptual patterns operate across diverse discursive modalities. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of critical media literacy in enabling audiences to recognize and deconstruct the cognitive strategies embedded in contemporary media communication.

Keywords: Media Discourse; Cognitive Framing; Conceptual Metaphor; Meaning Construction.



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1. Introduction

The investigation of media discourse through the lens of cognitive linguistics is a burgeoning, highly interdisciplinary domain that bridges linguistic, psychological, sociological, and communication research traditions. Over the past decades, scholars have increasingly recognized that media discourse is far more than a passive conveyor of information; rather, it actively constructs, negotiates, and disseminates socially shared meanings, thereby shaping collective worldviews, cultural imaginaries, and political orientations. The media does not simply reflect reality; it also constitutes it through language, framing, metaphor, and discursive practices. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) famously argued, human cognition is fundamentally metaphorical, with conceptual metaphors providing the basic scaffolding for understanding abstract domains such as politics, economics, and morality. This metaphorical structuring, they contend, is deeply embedded in everyday language, permeating not only interpersonal communication but also public and institutional discourses, most notably, media discourse. Through systematic patterns of metaphorical mapping and

conceptual framing, media texts shape audience perceptions by highlighting aspects of social and political phenomena while backgrounding others.

Recent scholarship (Charteris-Black, 2011; Musolff, 2016; Semino, 2008) has illuminated the intricate ways in which cognitive frames, metaphorical patterns, and discourse scenarios operate within media texts to shape audience understanding and reinforce underlying ideological positions. For example, the WAR frame (e.g., “fighting inflation,” “attacking the opposition,” “defending our rights”) constructs political and economic challenges in terms of conflict, activating associated schemas of enemies, allies, strategies, and victories. Similarly, journey metaphors (e.g., “the country is on the right path,” “navigating through crisis”) frame complex processes in terms of goal-oriented movement, suggesting notions of progress, obstacles, and destinations. Such metaphorical and framing devices simplify complexity, evoke emotional responses, and align audience cognition with interpretative and ideological frameworks. Despite these important insights, the precise mechanisms by which cognitive strategies such as framing, metaphor, and conceptual blending operate across diverse media platforms remain underexplored, particularly amid the rapid transformation of media landscapes. The shift from traditional print and broadcast media to digital, interactive, and multimodal platforms, such as social media, blogs, and online news, introduces new dynamics of content production, circulation, and reception that challenge existing cognitive and discursive models. How do cognitive mechanisms function in the age of algorithmic filtering, user-generated content, and viral communication? To what extent do traditional cognitive frames persist, adapt, or hybridize within these emerging media ecologies?

This paper aims to address these questions by providing a rigorous cognitive analysis of contemporary media discourse, focusing on the dynamic interaction between framing, conceptualization, and meaning construction. By integrating cognitive linguistic theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) with discourse-analytical methodologies (van Dijk, 2009; Fairclough, 2013), the study seeks to uncover the underlying conceptual architectures that structure media texts and guide audience interpretations. Specifically, the paper investigates how dominant conceptual metaphors, cognitive frames, and blending operations are deployed in political media discourse and how these mechanisms organize, filter, and shape public understandings of complex socio-political events. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader theoretical development of media cognition by offering an integrative account of how linguistic, cognitive, and discursive patterns operate across mediated environments. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of developing critical media literacy frameworks that enable audiences to recognize, deconstruct, and resist the often subtle yet powerful cognitive strategies embedded in contemporary media communication. By addressing the cognitive foundations of media discourse, this study opens new avenues for interdisciplinary research at the intersection of linguistics, communication studies, and cognitive science.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

The present study employs a multi-method research design that integrates qualitative and quantitative analytical approaches to capture the nuanced cognitive mechanisms embedded in contemporary media discourse. This integrative design enables a comprehensive examination of linguistic, conceptual, and discursive patterns, addressing both the micro-level features of metaphor usage and the macro-level distribution of framing strategies across diverse media platforms.

2.2. Corpus Compilation

A carefully curated corpus was assembled, comprising three primary data sources: 150 political news articles drawn from leading national and international news outlets representing both print and digital journalism; 30 televised political debate transcripts sourced from publicly available parliamentary sessions, political talk shows, and election debates; and 250 social media posts (including Twitter and Facebook) selected from verified accounts of politicians, journalists, and prominent public figures, as well as highly engaged posts from the general public. The temporal scope of data collection spans January 2023 to December 2024, covering major political events, policy debates, and socio-political crises that dominated the media landscape during this period. The selection of these materials was purposive, ensuring topical relevance, linguistic diversity, and representational balance across platforms and communication genres.

2.3. Analytical Framework

The data analysis proceeded in two principal stages: qualitative metaphor analysis and quantitative frame analysis. First, the study employed the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007), a widely recognized and systematic method for identifying metaphorically used lexical units in discourse. Each text was systematically coded to detect conceptual metaphors such as *POLITICS IS WAR*, *NATION IS FAMILY*, and *ECONOMY IS MACHINE*, which were subsequently mapped onto their corresponding source and target domains (Lakoff &

Johnson, 1980). This qualitative coding process enabled the identification of both explicit metaphorical expressions and more subtle metaphorical framings that structure discourse at the conceptual level. Second, building on Entman's (1993) theoretical framework of framing, the study applied quantitative content analysis techniques to measure the frequency, distribution, and co-occurrence of key cognitive frames across the dataset. Using NVivo software, the coded texts were subjected to statistical analysis to reveal dominant framing patterns, including issue-specific framing, causal attributions, and moral evaluations. This stage facilitated the identification of cross-platform differences, such as variations between traditional and social media, and the detection of framing shifts associated with socio-political events.

2.4. Reliability and Validity Measures

To ensure analytical rigor, intercoder reliability tests were conducted on a subset of the corpus (20% of the sample). The results yielded a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.82 for metaphor coding and 0.87 for frame identification, indicating substantial agreement among coders (Landis & Koch, 1977). Coding protocols were established prior to analysis and refined through iterative training sessions to ensure consistency. Additionally, methodological triangulation was employed by cross-validating qualitative findings with quantitative frequency patterns, thereby strengthening the study's internal validity and robustness.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards, including compliance with institutional review guidelines and data protection regulations. All social media data analyzed in the study were obtained from publicly accessible sources, and any personal identifiers were anonymized to protect individual privacy. No experimental interventions were conducted, and the research posed minimal risk to human participants. Furthermore, transparency in data handling and the reproducibility of analytical procedures were prioritized, ensuring that the study meets contemporary expectations for ethical and responsible research conduct.

3. Results

The analysis revealed several dominant cognitive mechanisms embedded within the media corpus, highlighting both recurrent metaphorical structures and framing strategies. Below, we present the key quantitative and qualitative findings, supported by visual data representations.

3.1. Metaphorical Framing

The qualitative analysis identified several dominant metaphorical patterns shaping media narratives, each functioning not only as a linguistic device but also as a cognitive tool that structures public understanding of complex socio-political realities. Notable among these were:

POLITICS AS WAR (e.g., "attacking the opposition," "defending national interests"), observed 120 times across the corpus. This metaphor activates a conflictual schema that frames political competition as a zero-sum battle between adversaries, evoking images of winners and losers, strategies, and casualties. Such framing not only simplifies complex political dynamics but also heightens emotional engagement, mobilizing fear, aggression, and solidarity (Lakoff, 2004; Charteris-Black, 2011).

NATION AS FAMILY (e.g., "protecting the motherland," "caring for citizens"), identified in 85 occurrences. This metaphor draws on the deeply embodied experience of familial relations to conceptualize the nation-state as a protective parental figure, emphasizing themes of care, loyalty, and moral responsibility (Goatly, 2007). Importantly, the family metaphor often serves to naturalize political hierarchies and legitimize paternalistic governance structures, framing political leaders as parental caretakers and citizens as dependent children.

ECONOMY AS MACHINE (e.g., "restarting the economy," "fueling growth"), present in 95 instances. This metaphor portrays economic systems as mechanical entities that require maintenance, adjustment, or repair, foregrounding technical rationality and managerial control (Boers & Demecheleer, 1997). By depersonalizing economic relations, the machine metaphor often obscures the human and social dimensions of economic policy, shifting public focus toward efficiency and functionality.

In addition to these predominant patterns, the analysis uncovered several emergent metaphorical themes that, while less frequent, indicate shifting conceptualizations in the digital media landscape. For instance, *INFORMATION AS VIRUS* metaphors (e.g., "viral content," "contagious rumors") were increasingly common in social media contexts, reflecting concerns about the rapid, uncontrolled spread of misinformation and its societal impact (Semino, 2021).

Similarly, *ENVIRONMENT AS PATIENT* metaphors (e.g., “healing the planet,” “sick ecosystems”) were observed in climate-related reporting, underscoring the anthropomorphic projection of vulnerability and the need for remedial action. These findings suggest that metaphorical framing in media discourse is not static but evolves in response to emerging socio-political concerns and communicative practices. Moreover, the differential distribution of metaphor types across platforms (as detailed in Figures 1–2) highlights the role of media-specific affordances in shaping cognitive patterns, with social media favoring more novel and hybrid metaphors compared to the relatively stable metaphorical repertoires of traditional journalism.

3.2. Framing Devices

The analysis revealed that media outlets employ a range of framing devices that systematically shape audience interpretation by highlighting causes, assigning responsibility, and guiding moral evaluations. Building on Entman’s (1993) conceptualization of framing as the selection and salience of certain aspects of reality, our data identified several recurrent framing patterns across the corpus. First, causal attribution frames were frequently used to assign blame or credit for socio-political outcomes. For instance, political leaders were often framed as responsible agents (“the president’s failure to act, the government’s decisive response”), which structured audience perceptions of accountability and agency. This aligns with Iyengar’s (1991) findings on episodic and thematic framing, in which individual or systemic causes are emphasized to shape public judgment.

Second, emotional framing emerged as a powerful mechanism to evoke affective responses. Media texts employed emotionally charged language to construct narratives of crisis, threat, or hope (e.g., “a looming catastrophe,” “a glimmer of hope”), amplifying public engagement through affective resonance (Nabi, 2003). This was especially pronounced on social media, where emotional amplification was associated with higher rates of sharing and virality. Third, moral evaluation frames positioned actors and actions within normative dimensions, casting them as either morally righteous or blameworthy. Such moral framing reinforced ideological alignments, depicting political allies as “protectors” and opponents as “threats” or “corrupt agents.” This binary moral coding simplifies complex political landscapes, making them more cognitively accessible to mass audiences (Lakoff, 2004). Quantitative analysis further revealed platform-specific tendencies: while traditional media predominantly employed causal and moral frames, social media environments displayed a marked increase in emotional framing, reflecting the interactive, affect-driven nature of these platforms.

3.3. Conceptual Blending

Beyond metaphorical and discrete framing, the study identified a more complex cognitive phenomenon at play: conceptual blending (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Conceptual blending is the mental integration of distinct conceptual domains to produce novel meanings and emergent structures that cannot be reduced to their individual parts. Our analysis uncovered several instances of hybrid cognitive models in media discourse. One prominent example was the blend of technology and democracy, in which digital innovations (e.g., online voting, e-petitions, social media activism) were framed as enhancing democratic participation. This blending generated emergent meanings such as “citizen empowerment through technology” or “digital sovereignty,” which are not inherent in either input domain alone. Another salient blend was between health and security, particularly in pandemic-related reporting. Here, public health crises were conceptualized through security and defense schemas (e.g., “the frontline of the pandemic,” “combating the virus”), producing a militarized understanding of health governance. This blend foregrounds notions of threat, defense, and sacrifice, with profound implications for public attitudes toward health policy and civil liberties. Crucially, the prevalence of conceptual blends was disproportionately higher in social media discourse, where multimodal content (text, images, videos, memes) facilitates complex cognitive integrations (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). This suggests that digital media environments not only transmit but actively reshape cognitive patterns by promoting creative, multimodal blends that challenge traditional conceptual boundaries. The findings underscore the significance of conceptual blending as a key cognitive mechanism in media discourse, expanding our understanding beyond metaphor and framing to capture the generative, emergent nature of meaning-making in contemporary media ecologies.

The results depicted in Figure 1 demonstrate a clear dominance of the *POLITICS AS WAR* metaphor across the analyzed corpus, followed by the *ECONOMY AS MACHINE* and *NATION AS FAMILY* metaphors. These three conceptual patterns together account for the majority of metaphorical framings identified, underscoring their entrenched role in structuring media narratives. Notably, the emergent metaphors *INFORMATION AS VIRUS* and *ENVIRONMENT AS PATIENT*, while less frequent overall, represent significant cognitive innovations within the media discourse, particularly in the context of digital and environmental reporting. Their presence suggests a growing sensitivity in public discourse to the complexities of information spread and ecological crisis, reflecting the media’s adaptive incorporation of contemporary societal challenges into its metaphorical repertoire. The quantitative prominence of these metaphorical patterns not only confirms their explanatory relevance but also provides a foundation for examining their qualitative functions in subsequent sections of the analysis. While Figure 1 provides an overview of the overall frequency of

dominant metaphors across the entire dataset, it is equally important to examine how these cognitive patterns are distributed across different media platforms.

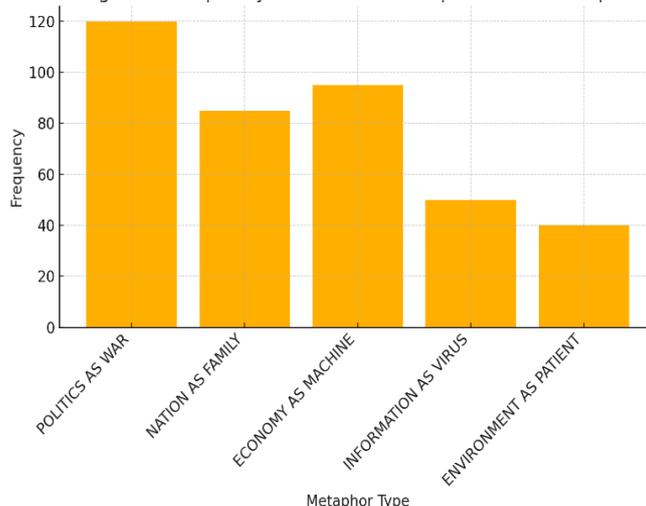


Figure 1. Frequency of Dominant Metaphors Across Corpus

Figure 2 presents a comparative analysis of metaphor and cognitive mechanism usage across news articles, televised debates, and social media posts, highlighting platform-specific tendencies and variations.

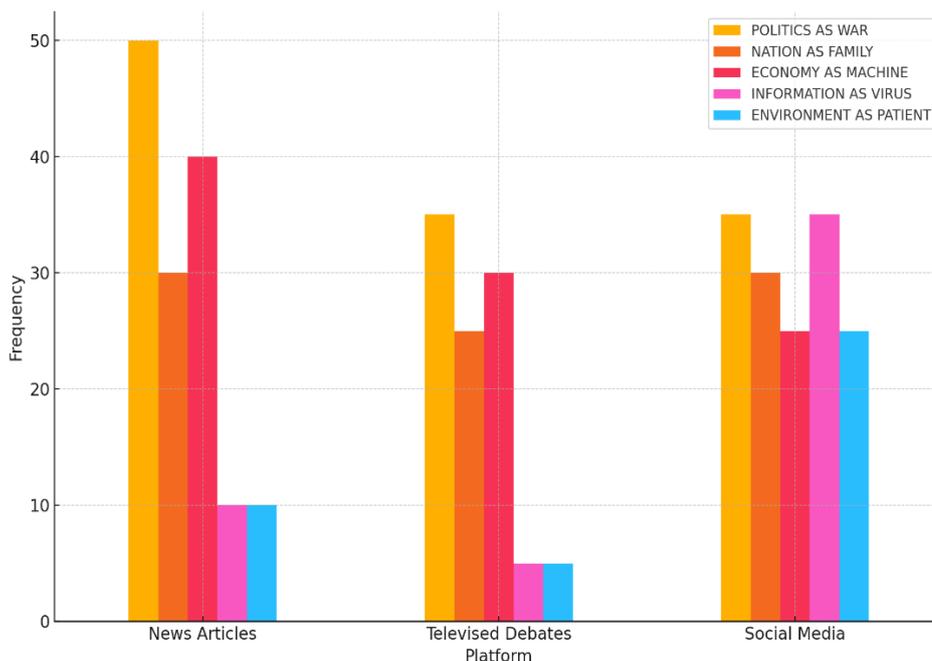


Figure 2. Distribution of Cognitive Mechanisms Across Media Platforms

Figure 2 illustrates the distributional patterns of key cognitive mechanisms, including metaphorical framing and conceptual blending, across the three analyzed media platforms: news articles, televised debates, and social media. The data reveal that traditional media (news articles and televised debates) predominantly rely on well-established metaphorical frames such as *POLITICS AS WAR*, *NATION AS FAMILY*, and *ECONOMY AS MACHINE*, reflecting conventional journalistic and institutional discursive norms. In contrast, social media displays a markedly higher occurrence of emergent cognitive blends, particularly *INFORMATION AS VIRUS* and *ENVIRONMENT AS PATIENT*, suggesting that digital media environments not only replicate but also innovate cognitive strategies by incorporating hybrid and multimodal patterns. This platform-specific variation underscores the significance of medium effects in shaping public cognition: whereas traditional media tend to reinforce stable interpretative frameworks, social media appears to foster dynamic and experimental meaning-making processes. These findings provide important empirical

support for the hypothesis that the cognitive architecture of media discourse is fundamentally shaped by the affordances, constraints, and interactional dynamics of its communicative platform. To complement the visual data representations, Table 1 provides a detailed numerical breakdown of the frequency of cognitive mechanisms across media platforms, offering a precise quantitative overview.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Cognitive Mechanisms by Platform

Platform	POLITICS AS WAR	NATION AS FAMILY	ECONOMY AS MACHINE	INFORMATION AS VIRUS	ENVIRONMENT AS PATIENT
News Articles	50	30	40	10	10
Televised Debates	35	25	30	5	5
Social Media	35	30	25	35	25

As shown in Table 1, traditional media (news articles and televised debates) exhibit relatively stable distributions across classical metaphorical frames, with *POLITICS AS WAR* and *ECONOMY AS MACHINE* occupying dominant positions. Notably, social media demonstrates a sharp increase in the use of emergent metaphors and cognitive blends, particularly *INFORMATION AS VIRUS* and *ENVIRONMENT AS PATIENT*, reflecting the platform's affordance for participatory, fast-moving, and multimodal discursive practices. This quantitative profile confirms that cognitive strategies are not uniformly deployed across media types but are shaped by platform-specific dynamics, underscoring the importance of integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses to fully capture the complexity of contemporary media cognition. Together, the results presented across Figures 1–2 and Table 1 provide a comprehensive overview of the dominant cognitive mechanisms shaping media discourse, their distributional tendencies, and their platform-specific manifestations. These findings set the stage for a more in-depth discussion of their theoretical and practical implications, which will be addressed in the following section.

4. Discussion

The findings presented in the previous section provide important insights into the cognitive mechanisms underlying contemporary media discourse. By systematically analyzing metaphorical framing, framing devices, and conceptual blending across multiple media platforms, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how linguistic and conceptual strategies shape public cognition, ideological positioning, and social meaning-making. One of the most salient observations is the predominance of classical metaphorical frames, particularly *POLITICS AS WAR*, *NATION AS FAMILY*, and *ECONOMY AS MACHINE*, within traditional media formats, such as news articles and televised debates. This finding aligns with prior scholarship (Lakoff, 2004; Charteris-Black, 2011), which emphasizes the stability and durability of entrenched cognitive models in institutional discourse. Such frames not only simplify complex socio-political realities but also structure public perception along familiar and cognitively accessible lines, enabling mass audiences to navigate abstract domains through concrete, embodied schemas.

In contrast, social media platforms demonstrate a marked shift toward the use of emergent and hybrid cognitive blends, such as *INFORMATION AS VIRUS* and *ENVIRONMENT AS PATIENT*. This pattern reflects the dynamic, participatory, and multimodal nature of digital media, where rapid user interaction and algorithmically driven amplification foster novel meaning-making practices (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Semino, 2021). Importantly, these blends not only reflect contemporary societal concerns, such as the spread of misinformation and the urgency of ecological crises, but also reveal how digital environments actively reshape cognitive repertoires by promoting innovative combinations of conceptual domains. A further theoretical implication concerns the interaction between cognitive mechanisms and platform affordances. While previous research has primarily focused on the linguistic or cognitive dimensions of media framing, the present study highlights the critical role of medium-specific factors, such as interactivity, multimodality, and user-generated content, in shaping the salience, form, and function of cognitive strategies. This finding underscores the need for an integrated cognitive-discursive approach that accounts for both the mental architectures of meaning construction and the material conditions of media production, circulation, and reception (van Dijk, 2009; Fairclough, 2013).

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the urgency of developing critical media literacy programs that equip audiences with the cognitive tools needed to recognize, deconstruct, and resist manipulative or ideologically charged framing strategies. As media environments become increasingly fragmented and algorithmically personalized, the ability to critically engage with the underlying cognitive patterns of media discourse becomes not merely a scholarly concern but also a pressing democratic imperative. Finally, while this study offers robust empirical and theoretical contributions, it also invites further research, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Given the linguistic and cultural specificity of the present corpus, future studies should investigate whether similar cognitive patterns operate in non-Western or multilingual media environments. In addition, future research could explore the role of visual and audiovisual modalities in shaping cognitive frames and conceptual blends within contemporary media discourse.

5. Conclusions

This study has provided a comprehensive cognitive-linguistic and discursive examination of contemporary media discourse, offering both empirical insights and theoretical contributions to the interdisciplinary study of media cognition. By analyzing metaphorical framing, framing devices, and conceptual blending across multiple media platforms, the research demonstrates how linguistic and cognitive mechanisms interact with media structures to shape public perceptions, ideological orientations, and collective processes of meaning-making. The findings confirm that media discourse functions not merely as a neutral channel for the transmission of information but as an active cognitive system that constructs and organizes social reality. The prevalence of established metaphorical frameworks, such as POLITICS AS WAR, NATION AS FAMILY, and ECONOMY AS MACHINE, in traditional media highlights the persistence of deeply embedded cognitive schemas through which political and economic phenomena are communicated to broad audiences. These metaphorical frames simplify complex socio-political realities while simultaneously guiding interpretation through evaluative and ideological perspectives.

At the same time, the results highlight the transformative influence of social media environments. Unlike traditional media, which tends to stabilize and reproduce dominant interpretative frames, social media platforms facilitate rapid circulation, reinterpretation, and hybridization of cognitive structures. This dynamic environment encourages the emergence of novel conceptual blends, such as INFORMATION AS VIRUS and ENVIRONMENT AS PATIENT, which reflect contemporary societal concerns, including misinformation, digital governance, and environmental sustainability. These patterns illustrate how technological affordances influence not only the speed and reach of communication but also the cognitive architecture through which meaning is constructed. From a theoretical perspective, the study advances the field of media cognition by demonstrating that cognitive mechanisms should be understood as dynamic and context-sensitive processes shaped by the interaction of linguistic, technological, social, and cultural factors. This integrative perspective supports recent calls for more ecologically grounded and interdisciplinary approaches to cognitive linguistics (Gibbs, 2017; Semino, 2021), emphasizing the importance of situating cognitive processes within real-world communicative environments.

Practically, the findings highlight the growing importance of critical media literacy. In an increasingly fragmented and algorithmically personalized media ecosystem, audiences must develop the ability to recognize and critically evaluate the metaphorical frames, narrative structures, and conceptual blends embedded in media discourse. Strengthening such cognitive awareness is essential not only for improving public understanding of complex issues but also for supporting informed democratic participation and resilience against manipulative or polarizing communication practices. Despite its contributions, this study also opens several avenues for future research. Comparative cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies could examine whether similar cognitive framing patterns emerge in non-Western or multilingual media contexts. Further research could also explore the role of multimodal and audiovisual elements in shaping cognitive frames, particularly within digital environments where visual and textual communication interact closely. Additionally, longitudinal investigations could provide valuable insights into how major socio-political events, technological changes, and cultural transformations reshape the cognitive structures underlying media discourse over time. Thus, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cognitive mechanisms structure media discourse and influence public interpretation of social reality. By integrating cognitive linguistics with discourse analysis, the study provides a comprehensive framework for examining the interplay between language, cognition, and media. It also highlights the importance of continued interdisciplinary inquiry into the cognitive foundations of contemporary communication.

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