



An Investigation into Conceptual Metaphors of “Emotion” in Social Media Discourse of Young People

Nguyen Ngoc Bao Tran¹, Ngo Thi Hien Trang^{1*}

¹ The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

*Corresponding author’s email: nthtrang@ufl.udn.vn

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6949-6505>

 <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.26524>

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Received: 21/04/2026

Revision: 27/05/2026

Accepted: 28/05/2026

Online: 06/06/2026

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

conceptual metaphor;
emotion metaphor;
social media discourse;
Vietnamese youth;
cognitive linguistics;
digital communication

The purpose of this study is to investigate conceptual metaphors of EMOTION in the social media discourse of Vietnamese young people from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. The research data consists of 150 linguistic expressions collected from 73 accounts on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram during the period from 2020 to 2025. A qualitative method combined with descriptive statistics was employed to identify, classify, and analyze metaphorical expressions based on the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The findings reveal ten major conceptual metaphor models of emotion. In addition, the study indicates that the use of emotional metaphors is influenced by cognitive and socio-cultural factors, as well as by the distinctive communicative features of each social media platform. The results contribute to clarifying how Vietnamese young people conceptualize emotions in the context of digital communication.

Introduction

In modern society, most young people use technology and social media (SM) daily for studying languages and communicating. Research has shown that using smartphones, laptops, YouTube, and TikTok can improve lexical resources, reading comprehension, speaking skills, and learners’ motivation (Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen & Pham, 2022; Abdullah et al., 2023). Simultaneously, social media creates multimodal and communal affordances that assist learners in using languages more flexibly and authentically (Barrot, 2022; Ngo & Pham, 2024). Therefore, social media should be regarded as a learning tool and an environment where young people express and share their emotions, and where conceptual metaphors of emotion are constructed and re-created in social media discourses. In the view of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is considered a tool for structuring abstract thought and constructing people’s experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). It employs a figure of speech that characterizes an object by referring to another object with similar features in the traditional view. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) defined conceptual metaphor (CM) as a cognitive mechanism for conceptualizing the

external world, especially in everyday social communication.

Among the metaphorical expressions most frequently used in their text, they employ conceptual metaphors (CMs) of EMOTION. Take the following expressions as examples: In Vietnamese, they present the expressions as “Cháy hết mình” (Give it your all) to express the feeling of very passionate and energetic cases or “Bùng nổ cảm xúc” (An emotional explosion / Overwhelming emotions), which express very strong emotions. In conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), emotion is typically conceptualized through several dominant metaphor systems. Meanwhile, in Vietnamese, the emotion utilizes the CM ‘EMOTION IS HEAT/FIRE’. Emotion is viewed as a change in temperature, especially when expressing anger and passion. This CM is understood as the target domain EMOTION and the source domains HEAT/FIRE.

In daily communication, young people use social media to share their feelings by creating CMs that express emotions. Aiming to find out the features of these CMs in Vietnamese, a study entitled “An investigation into conceptual metaphors of ‘emotion’ in social media discourse (SMD) of young people” has been conducted with the hope of providing some insight into the understanding of CM of EMOTION in Vietnamese SMD of young people.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the conceptual metaphors of EMOTION in the Vietnamese social media discourse of young people?
2. What are the influences of cognitive and socio-cultural interpretation factors on conceptual metaphors of emotion in Vietnamese social media discourse of young people?

Literature Review

Conceptual Metaphor

Traditionally, the concept of metaphor has been widely discussed for a long time. However, many researchers consider it a figure of speech used in literature to achieve an aesthetic effect. In 1980, Lakoff and Johnson first developed a new approach to metaphor. These two authors stated that it is not solely a linguistic phenomenon, but “a property of concepts” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). They initiated the development of CM with the theories proposed to understand the foundation and interpretation of the figure of speech. Kövecses (2002), a linguist in Cognitive Linguistics, especially for his research on CMT, stated the conceptual correspondences between the source domain (SD) and the target domain (TD) in a metaphor which are regarded as conceptual mappings. In 2017, Gibbs (2017) evaluated the arguments for and against conceptual metaphors and examined the role of metaphor from the perspectives of linguistics and psychology.

Tran (2009) reviewed the traditional metaphor and discussed this stylistic device from a cognitive view. Since then, there have been studies on CM conducted by a lot of linguistics scholars. Nguyen (2012) carried out extensive investigations in this field, Huynh (2013) explored Vietnamese thought features from the perspective of CM in English and Vietnamese WATER idioms, Nguyen (2014) examined the conceptualization of SADNESS in English and Vietnamese idioms and stated that most differences are caused due to cultural influences, Luu and Bui (2015) investigated CMs of fire, while Bach and Luu (2015) analyzed CMs of spring, Phan and Ho (2017) focused on CMs of love and relationships, Tran (2017, 2018) explored CMs of five human senses. Overall, these studies have approached conceptual metaphors from

various cognitive perspectives. However, no previous study has investigated CMs of EMOTION in Vietnamese social media discourse among young people.

Metaphor in the Traditional View

Traditionally, metaphor is the “*transference of some quality from one object to another*” (Galperin, 1971, p.140). Metaphor is the use of language to establish comparisons between two things that are not directly related to one another (Knowles and Moon, 2004, p.3). Metaphor is viewed as “*a matter of words rather than thought or action*” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.3). According to Deignan (2005), the frequent, though not always intentional, use of traditional metaphor is viewed by cognitive linguists as crucial, as it forms the framework for conceptual systems.

Metaphor in the Cognitive View

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) laid the groundwork for cognitive theories of metaphor, which we use as the foundation for the study. According to the authors, the presence of metaphor is not only in the language humans use but also in their understanding of an argument, as they behave with our conceptions of the world; most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. They also found that “*the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*” (p.104). This view has been approved by many scholars. Kövecses (2002) is one of the scholars who has expanded the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) by focusing on how we understand abstract concepts through metaphor. According to Kövecses (2002, p.4), metaphor is defined as “*understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain*”. Besides, Kövecses (2002) indicated that the SD and the TD are closely connected.

In short, from a cognitive perspective, a conceptual metaphor is a mechanism by which abstract concepts are systematically structured and understood through more concrete, embodied experiences (Kövecses, 2002).

Methods

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach, employing descriptive quantitative analysis, to examine conceptual metaphors of EMOTION in Vietnamese SMD of young people (18-25 years old) posted from 2020 to 2025. The approaches were applied to collect data, analyze, and categorize metaphorical expressions into different types of CMs. In addition, the descriptive method was employed to identify the linguistic features of EMOTION CMs in the Vietnamese SMD of young people.

To achieve the research objectives, this study is based on the CL methodology, particularly CMT, proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which holds that metaphor is not only a rhetorical phenomenon in language but also reflects how humans perceive and conceptualize the world through bodily and lived experiences.

The study applies qualitative analysis combined with descriptive statistics to identify and classify linguistic expressions containing metaphorical expressions of emotion in Vietnamese SMD used by young people. Data were collected from various social media platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok and Instagram. After collection, these expressions were analyzed to identify the CM they represent, and then classified into corresponding metaphor groups. The combination of these methods allows the study not only to describe and analyze emotion-related

CMs but also to provide a comprehensive view of how bodily experiences are reflected in the language and thinking of young Vietnamese people.

Sampling

The data collected and analyzed in this study were taken from 73 social media accounts officially posted on Vietnamese SMD by young people (18 - 25 years old) during 2020 - 2025.

This study examines CMs of EMOTION in Vietnamese SMDs of young people, drawn from a corpus of Vietnamese comments, captions on Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram with emojis, stickers, GIFs, short videos, and music mood. They were collected from widely posted accounts to ensure the representativeness of social media usage. The themes of EMOTION in Vietnamese social media discourse of young people are mainly love, work, relationships, studying, and behaviors.

However, for security reasons, we cannot disclose all social media accounts. The discourses were posted between 2020 and 2025, including a range of occurring metaphorical usages. Firstly, data sets were selected from emotion-related expressions in 150 Vietnamese samples. A metaphorical expression allows for in-depth qualitative analysis to ensure sufficient variation for linguistic features. The CMs have characteristics and functions as described in the studies by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kövecses (2002), interpreted in context and through metaphorical mappings.

After compiling all the expressions as presented above, I proceeded to check their meanings to ensure the accuracy of the meanings of the words and phrases found in the following dictionaries: (1) Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) via the website <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com> and (2) Vietnamese Dictionary (VD) via the website <https://vtudien.com/>.

Data Collection

The steps comprised in the research process include:

Step 1: Select the data on 150 expressions from 73 accounts' captions, comments, captions with emojis, stickers, GIFs, short videos, music mood on Facebook, TikTok and Instagram created by young holders.

Step 2: Use the dictionaries to find the exact meanings and metaphorical relationships and then analyze the metaphorical features semantically.

Step 3: Analyze and categorize them into different CMs.

Step 4: Set up the mappings.

Step 5: Discuss the findings.

Data Analysis

Based on the Metaphor Identification Technique (MIP), or Group (2007) procedure, the definition and characteristics of conceptual metaphor in Kövecse (2002)'s theoretical framework, 150 collected Vietnamese expressions from 73 public and private accounts on social media were considered to contain metaphorical components by (1) interpreting its meaning in given contexts; (2) comparing it to other relevant uses; (3) determining if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts, and if the contextual meaning differs from the basic meaning yet can be comprehended in comparison to it; (4) if yes, deciding that it can be viewed as metaphorical. The meanings of the metaphors were then interpreted in context. Finally, the metaphorical expressions were set up into different mappings.

Firstly, the study identified and categorized metaphorical expressions in the collected samples. It then analyzed their semantic features. Second, we examined the frequency of metaphor use in Vietnamese text captions, comments, captions with emojis, stickers, GIFs, short videos, music mood on Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram by young accounters. Finally, we identify the linguistic features of conceptual metaphor that young people use in their emotional expressions.

The examples used for illustrations in the discussion were coded as follows: F for Facebook, e.g., F01 is the first sample selected from Facebook; I for Instagram, e.g., I01 is the first sample selected from Instagram; T for TikTok/TikTok/tiktok, e.g., T01 is the first sample selected from TikTok.

Results and Discussion

The Conceptual Metaphors of EMOTION in Vietnamese Social Media Discourse of Young People

In this section, ten mappings are set up from metaphorical expressions of emotion posted on captions, comments, and captions with emojis, stickers, GIFs, short videos, music mood on Facebook, TikTok and Instagram by young people (18 - 25 years old) found with systematic correspondences between the SD and the TD.

Table 1

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS LIQUID

SD: LIQUID		TD: EMOTION
Liquid can be contained	→	Emotions can accumulate
Liquid rises	→	Emotions increase
Liquid overflows / floods	→	Emotions intensify / erupt
Liquid flows / pours	→	Emotions are expressed
Liquid is depleted	→	Emotions decrease / disappear

With 150 conceptual expressions, we found out 16 expressions (10.7%), we can consider the following examples:

- (1) *Vội chìm vào ánh mắt em từ sau đã từ lâu* (T02)
- (2) *Deadline ngập đầu nên chỉ còn thì yêu chính mình thiiiiii q* ❤️ (T08)
- (3) *Số nhỏ như Đạt G: Đúng sinh nhật thì bị bóc phốt, fanpage ngập trong "gạch đá"* 😞 (I01)

From the examples, we can see that when people suppress, they feel like water being compressed in a sealed container. With “*Ngập deadline*” (pressure to finish the task). When emotions are too much, they cannot be contained; they will overflow. With “*Nước mắt chảy ròng rỏi*” (Tears flowed out), these CMs appear to make it easy for viewers to understand because they can connect to the real body (embodiment). When people are emotional, tears will flow.

The expressions for EMOTION IS LIQUID bring the characteristics of being short, very figurative, and easily relatable. Emotions are understood as liquid in the body, which can rise, be held back, overflow, or explode. We understand feelings as substances that fill, move, and overflow inside the body. Liquids overflows are strongly associated with heightened emotions. Therefore, emotion can adapt to any flow that is shaped to it. We understand the feelings as

substances that fill, move, and overflow inside the body. This feature is similar to how liquid can rise. In our daily life, many characteristics of liquid are partially structured by the concept of expressing human beings' feelings. In the above examples, the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS LIQUID is presented from a variety of perspectives: Emotions can accumulate, Emotions increase, Emotions intensify/erupt, Emotions are expressed, Emotions decrease/disappear.

Table 2

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS HEAT

SD: HEAT		TD: EMOTION
Temperature (high/low)	→	Emotional intensity (strong/weak)
Heat, burning, boiling	→	Strong / eruptive emotions
Cooling, coldness	→	Reduced / absent emotions

Take the following expressions:

(4) *Bùng nổ cảm xúc* 🤔 🤔 (T25)

(5) *Bùng nổ cảm xúc và hoài niệm với hit quốc dân "Sau Tắt Cả"* 🇻🇳 (I15)

All of the above metaphors are based on the body, the senses, and everyday experiences. Therefore, they are easy to use, easy to spread, and quite suitable for quick communication on social media. On TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, we often see 'low energy', 'heavy mood', 'sweet vibe'; they are short, vivid, and highly effective. They are multimodal, combining words, emojis, images, and filters to create a complete emotional discourse. Young people use metaphorical expressions to express their personality, lifestyle, and emotional identity. They conceptualize emotions (especially anger) as a rising internal temperature that can build up and explode: the body is a heated container, and the intensity of emotion is the degree of temperature.

Table 3

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS ENERGY

SD: ENERGY		TD: EMOTION
high energy	→	positive emotion
low energy	→	low emotion
energy loss	→	exhaustion

Take the following expressions:

(6) *Khởi đầu một ngày tràn đầy năng lượng* (T03)

(7) *Cảm giác bất lực khi đội bóng thất bại* (T24)

(8) *Ngày mới đầy năng lượng* (T27)

(9) *Điều gì cho bạn năng lượng, hãy giữ lấy. Điều gì lấy đi nụ cười, hãy buông bỏ* (I06)

The mapping EMOTION IS ENERGY is set up when emotions are understood as a form of energy within the body. It can be high/low, increase/decrease, transferred to others, or depleted. Emotions are something that "runs" through the body like energy. When people are happy, they feel energetic and want to be active. When people are sad, they are tired and do not want to do anything.

Emotions are like the flow of electricity/energy. When the flow is good, it expresses natural emotions. When it's blocked, it expresses stress. Emotions can “build up” inside, like a battery charging or pressure increasing. Laughing/crying /shouting is like “releasing energy”. People feel lighter after crying, or they feel more relaxed after laughing. Some people/situations drain your energy. Emotions can be contagious like energy. This can explain the cases: being near happy people makes a person happy too; being near negative people affects him / her.

This explanation clarifies why this metaphor is so powerful. In fact, it can connect to real experiences (embodiment). The body truly functions as an energy system suitable for modern thinking (self-care culture). Young people often say: ‘protect your energy’, ‘low energy today,’ and ‘good vibes only’. Emotions are seen as something that can be managed, protected, and optimized. This situation is well-suited to social media. On TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, extremely popular phrases are ‘positive energy’, ‘low vibe’, ‘drained,’ and ‘healing energy’. They are short, trendy, and easily viral. This metaphor has four main points: (1) Emotions - energy in the body; (2) can increase, decrease, deplete, recharge; (3) can be transmitted between people; (4) can be “managed” (protected, recharged).

In short, emotions are understood as an intrinsic source of energy that can be generated, accumulated, transformed, consumed, and regulated within the human body.

Table 4

Mapping the structure of the Conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS COLOR

SD: COLOR		TD: EMOTION
bright color	→	positive emotion
dark color	→	negative
color change	→	reaction

Take some examples:

(10) *Cuộc đời này không màu hồng như bạn tưởng và nó cũng không diễn ra theo cách bạn muốn đâu* (I05)

(11) *Cuộc sống đen tối* 🌑 (T10)

(12) *Ta thấp sáng mỗi ngày của mình. Bằng một bình hoa cắm trong nhà. Một bản nhạc tập lâu thành thuộc* 🎵 (I08)

In daily communication, young people use it: Language + slang: They usually use Emoji & symbols: 🤍 = love; 😌 = sad / calm; 🤔 = jealousy / support; 🌑 = dark mood. Besides, they also use visual storytelling such as: Instagram stories using a blue filter (sad); TikTok videos with a red tone (intense / hot / dramatic). In fact, in the expressions as ‘*tâm trạng xanh tươi*’ (feel blue), “*tâm trạng u ám*” (gloomy mood), “*đen tối*” (dark), “*đỏ mặt vì tức giận*” (red with anger). Young people today are strongly influenced by English and social media, so they use colors in a more global way. According to Zoltán Kövecses (2002), this metaphor shows that emotions are experienced through perception. Color helps to concretize the abstract and, in culture (especially digital culture), transforms and expands metaphors.

In summary, young people use color as a “fast language of emotion”, both visual and personal, reflecting digital culture.

Table 5

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS LIGHT

SD: LIGHT		TD: EMOTION
Brightness	→	Emotional positivity
Dimness	→	Low emotional intensity
Darkness	→	Negative emotion
Glow	→	Sustained positive feeling

We consider some examples:

(13) *Vắt vắ hôm nay, ngày mai tươi sáng* (T29)

(14) *Tưởng tắt rồi mà vẫn còn le lói hy vọng* ••' e- (T11)

Light is a direct visual experience, so it is easy to use to understand emotions. Emotions are understood as light: positive emotions are bright, negative emotions are dark, and they can flare up, spread, or fade away. In the context of digital communication, Gen Z not only speak but also express emotions through light and visuals used in everyday language (slang + caption). Words belonging to the semantic field "light" are used to express mood. Due to characteristics such as short, vivid imagery. They are easy to understand, highly emotional, and also often appear in captions and stories. Emojis and symbols are often used:

✨ (sparkles) → Happy, excited, "positive energy"

💡 → Idea / "aha moment" (feeling of realizing something)

🌟 / ★ → Confident, radiant

🌙 / 🌑 → Down mood, lonely

Considering some examples: 'Làm mới mình thôi' (new me) ✨, 'Không chút sáng sủa 🌑' (no brightening), they often use images and filters commonly. On Instagram, TikTok, Facebook: they use strong light to express a positive mood, natural light to express a glow and sparkle effect. In addition, it can evoke feelings of happiness, confidence, healing, and positivity. Weak/dark light expresses negative mood, underexposed image, dark tone, shadows and dim light. In fact, young people use the metaphor EMOTION IS LIGHT in a multimodal way: Language (light, dark, glow...), Symbols (✨, 🌙), Images (light, filter, aesthetic). This shows that metaphors exist not only in language but also extend to digital discourse.

In short, young people use EMOTION IS LIGHT as a tool to both express and "showcase" emotions through words, emojis, and light images on social media.

Table 6

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS WEIGHT

SD: WEIGHT		TD: EMOTION
Heavy object	→	Emotional burden
Light object	→	Relief, happiness
Carrying weight	→	Enduring emotional pressure
Weight removal	→	Emotional release

We consider some examples:

(15) *Có những ngày tâm hồn nặng trĩu* 😞😞😞 (I13)

(16) *Lòng người càng ít tạp niệm càng nhẹ nhàng an vui* (I11)

(17) *Hôm nay lại thấy lòng nhẹ tênh...!* (T21)

(18) *Thôi kệ đi để gió cuốn hết muộn phiền* (T20)

(19) *Gánh nặng cuộc sống đè lên đôi vai* (T22)

To analyze this, the word ‘heavy / light’ doesn't just mean sad, but also implies the meanings ‘prolonged, difficulty escaping, systemic impact’. For example, “Đường chưa biết xa bao nhiêu, chỉ biết lòng nay nhẹ tênh” (“I don't know how far the road is, but I know my heart feels light now”), “Thôi kệ đi, để gió cuốn hết muộn phiền” (“Never mind, let the wind carry away all your worries”). This is experiential realism (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980): emotions understood through actual physical experience.

Table 7

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS TASTE

SD: TASTE		TD: EMOTION
Sweet	→	Love, happiness
Bitter	→	Regret, sadness
Taste lingering	→	Lasting emotion
Weight removal	→	Emotional release
Sour	→	Emotional release

This is a form of evaluative metaphor (evaluating emotions through taste). For example,

(20) *Ngọt ngọt ngào chỉ có thể là em Q* (I10)

(21) *Đắng lòng thanh niên cover guitar* (T19)

(22) *Đắng lòng chàng thanh niên bị vk phạt 😞 Ta nói nhìn mặt ông năn nỉ cười muốn rưng hàm 😊* (T28)

(23) *Đắng lòng 😞* (T27)

(24) *Mã cười tíu mắt, nụ cười ngọt ngào 😊* (T24)

The conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS TASTE is a very interesting model because it transforms the abstract experience of emotion into a concrete bodily experience (tasting). On platforms Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, young people use this metaphor extremely flexibly and expressively. The word ‘sweet’ refers to positive emotion (positive emotions are sweet). On social media, we also got the conceptual expressions such as “Mã cười tíu mắt, nụ cười ngọt ngào 😊”. Negative emotions are bitter, we found out ‘đắng lòng’ (bitter emotion), ‘An unpleasant emotion is sour “Sour mood” “Seeing them happy makes me feel a little sour ●^v-”’. This metaphor is so popular on social media, with 14 expressions (9.3%). The sense of taste expresses direct bodily experience. Everyone has eaten sweet, eaten bitter, eaten spicy. Therefore, it is easy to immediately relate it to emotion, create emotional imagery extremely quickly.

In short, the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS TASTE structures emotional experiences in a way that reflects taste perception. Positive emotions are often associated with sweetness, while negative emotions are conceptualized as bitterness, sourness, or spiciness. In youth online discourse, expressions like ‘ngọt’(sweet), ‘đắng’ (bitter) and ‘cay’ (spicy) demonstrate how taste-based metaphors help express emotions vividly, physically, and culturally. Young people don't create completely new ones but they inherit, modify, “memeize”. This is very suitable for social media style (short + expressive) but extremely “emotional”.

When used by young people, the CM (1) Intensification, increases drama, creative – mixing: slang + English, (3) Expressions + emojis: “too sweet 🍬 🍷”, “bitter ☹️”, “spicy 🌶️”. In fact, emoji can enhance the metaphor of taste. This CM has a role in social media discourse. It can help to transfer “Boduma-ize” emotions, becoming “feelable”, increase interaction so that readers can easily empathize, and create a youthful, relatable, and creative style.

Table 8

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS FOOD

SD: FOOD		TD: EMOTION
Eating	→	Experiencing
Hunger	→	Emotional need/desire
Nourishment	→	Emotional fulfillment
Starvation	→	Emotional lack

Young people use this metaphor quite a lot with ... expressions. Eating and drinking are the most basic experiences; everyone understands hungry (not bad), full, delicious (good), hard to swallow, so it is easy to relate to emotions, very suitable for social media language (meme + everyday life), for example: “*Mình nếm đủ drama hum ni á 🍷*” (I’ve had enough drama today). When these expressions are used, it sounds both humorous and rich in imagery. Besides, it strongly combines with Internet culture. With some characteristics, when appearing on social media, it can extend metaphor, not only “food” but also eat, swallow, digest, and crave. In addition, it can form a complete system; it is humor-satire, for example: “*Ăn gì chưa? - Ăn đủ drama rồi*” (Have you eaten yet? - No, I’m eating drama). This CM is used to abate negative emotions and create entertainment. Moreover, it is an English-Vietnamese hybrid: “*Feed cảm xúc*”, “*Detox tâm trạng*”. This can be explained by the strong influence of English. In social media discourse, the CM EMOTION IS FOOD helps to specify emotions, transform emotions into something “manageable”, create a sense of closeness because eating and drinking are daily experiences, and increase creativity, making it easy to adapt and play with words.

Table 9

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS PRECIOUS

SD: PRECIOUS		TD: EMOTION
Valuable object	→	Important emotion
Treasure	→	Cherished feeling
Loss	→	Emotional loss

(25) *Cuối cùng, chúng ta chỉ giữ lại những điều thật sự xứng đáng* (I17)

(26) *Kỉ niệm là thứ quý giá nhất* 5 (T17)

In online discourse among young people, this metaphor appears frequently in expressions such as “cherish emotions”, “value feelings”, “don’t waste emotions”, or “invest in a relationship”. These expressions show that emotions are not only internal states but also limited resources that need to be used wisely. “Wasting” or “losing” emotions evokes the idea of a devaluation, while “cherishing” or “preserving” emphasizes the importance of protecting what is meaningful.

This metaphor also clearly reflects the influence of modern thinking and consumer culture, where concepts like “investment”, “value”, or “worthiness” are applied not only in economics but also in emotional life. Young people today often say, for example: (27) “*Mối quan hệ này không đáng để đầu tư cảm xúc*” (This relationship isn’t worth investing emotionally in); (28) “*Hãy dành cảm xúc cho người xứng đáng*” (Save your emotions for someone who deserves

them), showing that emotions are valued, considered, and allocated like a form of personal asset. This contributes to a style of expression that is both rational and reflects a high level of self-awareness regarding one's own value in relationships.

In summary, the CM 'EMOTION IS PRECIOUS' helps to concretize emotions by associating them with the notions of value and possession, thereby making expression clearer, more profound, and relevant to the modern communication context on social media.

Table 10

Mapping the structure of the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS JOURNEY

SD: JOURNEY		TD: EMOTION
the traveler	→	the experiencer of emotion
movement along a path	→	emotional change
destinations	→	emotional goals or states

In the online discourse of young people, this metaphor appears through expressions such as:

(29) *Phía sau hành trình là thềm đầy hoa hồng, chúng ta chỉ giữ lại những điều thật sự xứng đáng* (T04)

(30) *Đi qua miền thương nhớ...* (T05)

These expressions suggest that emotions are envisioned as a path that people must travel, with different stages such as beginning, challenges, transformation, and ending. Elements of the journey, such as “the path”, “obstacles”, and “destination,” are mapped to emotional states such as “falling in love”, “experiencing relationship difficulties”, or “achieving peace”.

This metaphor is particularly relevant to how young people today talk about long-term psychological processes such as “healing”, “self-growth”, or “moving on”. For example, the phrase “I am on a healing journey” not only describes the current emotion but also implies that it is a process that takes time, progresses, and can lead to a better state. This reflects a developmental perspective on emotions, rather than just an immediate reaction.

Furthermore, the metaphor EMOTION IS JOURNEY helps create a sense of hope and direction. When negative emotions are viewed as a “difficult stretch of road”, the speaker implicitly understands that it is still possible to “keep going” and “overcome”. Therefore, expressions like “it will all be alright”, “keep going”, or “it's just a journey” not only describe the emotion but also offer encouragement and motivation.

In summary, the metaphor EMOTION IS JOURNEY helps to structure emotions as a directed and meaningful process of movement, thereby making expression deeper, richer in experience, and highly relevant to the SMD of today's youth, where emotions are often shared as ongoing stories rather than just isolated states.

Table 11*Frequency of the conceptual metaphors of EMOTION in Vietnamese SMDs*

	Conceptual metaphors	Occurrence (%)	
1	EMOTION IS LIQUID	16	10.7
2	EMOTION IS HEAT	15	10.0
3	EMOTION IS ENERGY	14	9.3
4	EMOTION IS COLOR	17	11.3
5	EMOTION IS LIGHT	13	8.7
6	EMOTION IS WEIGHT	12	8
7	EMOTION IS TASTE	14	9.3
8	EMOTION IS FOOD	17	11.3
9	EMOTION IS PRECIOUS	13	8.7
10	EMOTION IS JOURNEY	19	12.7
TOTAL		150	100

As shown in Table 11, the study investigates a total of 150 conceptual metaphorical expressions denoting EMOTION in Vietnamese SMD.

Influences of Cognitive Interpretation Factors

This section offers a deeper interpretation of the CMs of emotions identified in the previous section, grounded in the theoretical framework of CMT. Specifically, it aims to clarify the cognitive motivation and sociocultural influences that govern the use of metaphors in social media discourse among youth in Vietnam.

From a cognitive perspective, the use of CMs reflects the universal human mechanism of understanding abstract concepts through concrete and bodily experiences (embodiment) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Emotions, being abstract and elusive phenomena, are often conceptualized in terms of concrete source domains such as matter, motion, temperature, or energy.

Overall, the emotional metaphors used by Vietnamese youth show a strong reliance on embodied cognition. The repetition of these metaphorical patterns suggests that they are not individual but reflect shared cognitive patterns.

Influences of Socio-Cultural Factors

Besides a universal cognitive basis, the use of metaphors is also deeply influenced by specific cultural factors and social contexts.

First, Vietnamese culture is characterized by collectivism and emphasizes harmony in communication; therefore, the expression of emotions is often indirect and subtle. In this context, metaphor becomes an effective linguistic tool that helps speakers express emotions

discreetly yet vividly. For example, instead of directly stating sadness, users can use expressions like ‘lòng nặng trĩu’ (heavy heart), thereby conveying emotion while remaining consistent with cultural communication norms.

Secondly, youth culture and the social media environment contribute to increased creativity in the use of metaphors. Young people often use highly figurative, exaggerated, and performative expressions such as “tổn thương sâu như đại dương” (wounds as deep as the ocean) or “cảm xúc lên xuống như tàu lượn siêu tốc” (emotions that go up and down like a roller coaster). These expressions not only convey emotions but also contribute to the formation of personal identity in the digital space.

Furthermore, globalization and exposure to English have led to the borrowing and hybridization of metaphors. Expressions like “toxic”, “crush,” and “burn out” are increasingly common in the discourse of Vietnamese youth. This demonstrates the interaction between different metaphorical systems and the flexibility in language adaptation.

Finally, characteristics of social media such as brevity, multimodality, and interactivity also influence the use of metaphors. Users often combine metaphors with emojis, images, or memes to enhance the expressive impact of short messages.

Differences in the Use of Emotional Metaphors across Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram

The use of conceptual emotional metaphors in youth discourse is influenced not only by cognitive and cultural factors but also significantly by the characteristics of each social media platform, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Each platform shapes the way emotions are expressed through its own communication norms and technical features.

First, on Facebook, emotional metaphors are often used in medium-to-long-form posts, allowing users to express emotions in detail and in narrative form. The metaphorical expressions here are often clear, direct, and highly explanatory, such as “bùng nổ cảm xúc” (overwhelming emotions). This reflects Facebook's role as a personal sharing space where users tend to present their thoughts and feelings fully.

Conversely, on TikTok, emotional metaphors are concise, exaggerated, and highly expressive to suit the short video format and rapid spread. Expressions like “bùng nổ cảm xúc” (emotional explosion), “sôi máu” (boiling), “hết pin cảm xúc” (emotional battery drain) are often used to create a strong impression in a short time. Furthermore, TikTok metaphors often incorporate non-verbal elements such as sound, images, and emojis, further enhancing their effectiveness.

Meanwhile, on Instagram, emotional metaphors tend to be more figurative, aesthetic, and globalized. Users often employ short, visually rich expressions like “grey mood”, “bright day”, or a combination of English and Vietnamese. This reflects the platform's visual orientation, where visual content plays a central role and language serves only as a supporting element.

In summary, although based on common conceptual metaphor models, the way young people express their emotions differs significantly across platforms. Facebook leans towards detailed expression, TikTok emphasizes speed and intensity, while Instagram prioritizes visuals and aesthetics. These differences highlight the role of the digital communication environment in shaping the use of language and metaphor in modern life.

Conclusion

The study is carried out to investigate conceptual metaphors of EMOTION in Vietnamese SMD. The following conclusions can be drawn from the result analysis to answer the research

questions: Ten conceptual metaphors of EMOTION set up from 150 metaphorical expressions in Vietnamese are within the scope of the study, including EMOTION IS LIQUID, EMOTION IS HEAT, EMOTION IS ENERGY, EMOTION IS COLOR, EMOTION IS LIGHT, EMOTION IS WEIGHT, EMOTION IS TASTE, EMOTION IS FOOD, EMOTION IS PRECIOUS and EMOTION IS JOURNEY accounts for the largest proportion of the metaphors found in Vietnamese SDM of young people.

Although the occurrences differ among the three platforms, they all served as means of conceptualizing the conventional metaphors. Regarding the conceptual metaphors of EMOTION in Vietnamese, the meaning of a metaphor is influenced by culture and personal experiences. The concepts in the metaphors might differ significantly across Vietnamese and other cultures. Furthermore, the use of classifiers and measure words is another reason for the differences that occurred in the use of conceptual metaphors in SMD writing.

Besides, the study examined the influence of cognitive and socio-cultural interpretive factors of conceptual metaphors of emotion in Vietnamese social media discourse among young people. About the influence of cognitive interpretation factors, the emotional metaphors used by Vietnamese youth show a strong reliance on embodied cognition. Regarding the influence of socio-cultural factors, the use of metaphors is also shaped by specific cultural and social contexts.

The study also found the differences in the use of emotional metaphors across Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Each platform shapes the way emotions are expressed through its own communication norms and technical features. Facebook leans towards detailed expression, TikTok emphasizes speed and intensity, while Instagram prioritizes visuals and aesthetics to highlight how the digital communication environment shapes the use of language and metaphor in today's life.

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Biodata

Dr. Ngo Thi Hien Trang has 16 years of teaching experience at the Faculty of English, UFLS-UD, Vietnam. She got her Ph.D. in English Language in 2024. Her expertise and interests include language teaching methodology and English. She has published papers in conference proceedings, WOS and SCOPUS journals, and has successfully defended scientific research.

Nguyen Ngoc Bao Tran is a student of English from the University of Foreign Language Studies, the University of Da Nang. She's currently an excellent student at the Faculty of English. She has participated in national and international conferences and seminars in Vietnam and the UK as a participant, presenter, and volunteer. Her research interests span several areas, including teaching pedagogy, AI tools, and technology in English learning, the English language, and translation.