



METAPHORIZING POWER THROUGH SYMBOLIC VISUALS IN NIGERIAN EDITORIAL CARTOONS MEDIA: A MULTIMODAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study examines how power is metaphorized through symbolic visuals in Nigerian editorial cartoons using a multimodal discourse analytical approach. Editorial cartoons occupy a critical position in Nigerian media as platforms for political commentary, satire, and ideological negotiation, yet their metaphorical and symbolic construction of power remains underexplored. Drawing on an integrated theoretical framework combining Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics, Forceville's multimodal metaphor theory, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study analyses a purposively selected corpus of Nigerian editorial cartoons addressing sociopolitical issues such as governance, corruption, and civic resistance. The analysis reveals that power is systematically constructed through recurring visual metaphors grounded in embodied and culturally resonant schemas, including power is size, power is height, power is force, power is resistance and power is control. These metaphors are realized through exaggerated bodily scale, spatial dominance, animal symbolism, gaze, angle, and salience. The findings demonstrate that symbolic visuals function as central meaning-making resources through which power is legitimized, critiqued, and contested in Nigerian media discourse. The study contributes to multimodal discourse scholarship by foregrounding editorial cartoons as ideologically significant multimodal texts and by demonstrating the analytical value of integrating social semiotic and cognitive approaches to visual metaphor analysis.

Keywords: multimodal discourse analysis; editorial cartoons; power; visual metaphor; Nigerian media

Introduction

Power is rarely communicated in direct or literal terms in media discourse. Instead, it is often metaphorized, condensed into symbolic visuals that invite audiences to see, feel, and interpret authority, dominance, resistance, and control. Among the most potent sites for such meaning-making are editorial cartoons, which rely on exaggeration, symbolism, and metaphor to comment on sociopolitical realities with ideological force. In the Nigerian media landscape, marked by complex power relations involving governance, corruption, civic resistance, ethnicity, and economic inequality, editorial cartoons function as a critical multimodal space where power is visually constructed, contested, and negotiated.

Editorial cartoons do more than entertain; they operate as ideological texts that compress complex political narratives into a single frame. Through symbolic figures, spatial arrangements, bodily postures, and culturally resonant icons, cartoonists transform abstract notions of power into concrete visual metaphors. Political leaders may be depicted as oversized bodies, predatory animals, immovable objects, or elevated figures, while citizens are rendered as compressed, fragmented, or marginalized forms. Such representations are not arbitrary. They draw on shared cultural knowledge and entrenched metaphorical schemas that shape how power is perceived and evaluated within society.

In Nigeria, where visual political commentary has a long tradition in print and digital journalism, editorial cartoons play a particularly significant role in mediating public understanding of power. They provide a semiotic arena for critiquing authority, exposing contradictions in leadership, and amplifying popular discontent, often in ways that circumvent the constraints of formal political discourse. Yet, despite their prominence and influence, Nigerian editorial cartoons appear to be relatively underexplored within multimodal discourse analysis, particularly with regard to how symbolic visuals metaphorically construct power relations.

Existing studies on media representations of power have largely focused on verbal discourse, photographic imagery, or news narratives, often neglecting the metaphorical and symbolic complexity of cartoons as multimodal texts. Where visual analysis is undertaken, metaphors are frequently treated impressionistically rather than systematically. This gap limits our understanding of how power is not only represented but naturalized through recurring symbolic patterns and multimodal metaphors that appear commonsensical to audiences.

To address this gap, the present study examines how power is metaphorized through symbolic visuals in Nigerian editorial cartoons using a multimodal discourse analytical framework. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic theory, the study analyses how symbolism visually encode power relations. Forceville's theory of multimodal metaphor is employed to identify and interpret metaphorical mappings realized through visual symbols, while Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides insight into the underlying cognitive schemas that structure these representations.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study foregrounds editorial cartoons as critical multimodal artefacts that do ideological work through metaphorical symbolism. It argues that power in Nigerian media is not merely shown but metaphorically staged, relying on culturally resonant symbols to legitimize, ridicule, or resist authority. In doing so, the study contributes to multimodal discourse scholarship by demonstrating how symbolic visuals in editorial cartoons function as powerful semiotic resources for political meaning-making in a postcolonial media context.

Literature Review

Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Visual Meaning-Making

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) has gained prominence as an analytical approach concerned with how meaning is produced through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, including image, language, layout, colour, and spatial design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Jewitt, 2016). Rejecting the primacy of language, MDA conceptualizes communication as a socially situated practice in which different modes contribute distinct yet interrelated meaning potentials. Visual texts, from this perspective, are not neutral reflections of reality but culturally shaped semiotic constructions that encode social values and ideological positions (Machin, 2013).

Central to MDA is Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar, which outlines three meta functions of visual meaning: representational, interactive, and compositional. Representational meanings concern how social actors, actions, and concepts are depicted; interactive meanings examine relations between viewers and represented participants through features such as gaze, distance, and angle; while compositional meanings focus on salience, framing, and information value. These analytical tools have been widely applied to media texts such as news images, advertisements, and educational materials (van Leeuwen, 2008; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). However, although symbolism is often acknowledged in such studies, its role in metaphorically structuring abstract meanings like power is rarely examined in a systematic manner.

Power and Ideology in Visual and Media Discourse

Power has long been a central concept in critical discourse studies, where it is viewed as discursively constructed and sustained through representational practices rather than merely exercised through coercion (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). Visual media play a significant role in this process by shaping how power relations are perceived, legitimized, or challenged. Research has shown that visual strategies such as size, centrality, vertical positioning, and perspective function to naturalize hierarchies and authority in media representations (Machin & Mayr, 2012; van Leeuwen, 2008).

In media discourse, power is often communicated implicitly, relying on visual cues and symbolic representation rather than explicit verbal articulation. Images condense ideological meanings into seemingly commonsensical forms, making power relations appear natural and inevitable (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021) Despite this recognition, much of the existing literature focuses on photographic realism or institutional imagery, with limited attention to stylized visual genres such as editorial cartoons. This gap is significant because cartoons rely less on realism and more on symbolic abstraction, making them particularly suited to metaphorical meaning-making.

Editorial Cartoons as Multimodal and Ideological Texts

Editorial cartoons have been widely recognized as powerful forms of political communication that combine visual imagery, minimal text, satire, and symbolism to comment on sociopolitical issues (El Refaie, 2009; Medhurst & DeSousa, 1981). Through caricature, exaggeration, and visual condensation, cartoons are able to express complex political critiques within a single frame, often provoking reflection and debate. Scholars argue that cartoons function as ideological texts that shape public opinion by framing political actors and events in evaluative ways (Edwards & Ware, 2005).

Studies across different contexts have shown that cartoonists employ symbolic imagery, such as animals, objects, and bodily distortion, to critique authority and expose power abuse (Greenberg, 2002; El Refaie, 2003). However, much of this research remains largely descriptive, focusing on thematic interpretation rather than systematic multimodal analysis. In African and Nigerian contexts, existing studies have examined cartoons primarily as tools of political activism or historical documentation (Omoera & Ake, 2016), often without detailed attention to how visual and compositional resources interact to construct meaning.

Metaphor, Symbolism, and Multimodal Meaning

Metaphor has traditionally been approached as a linguistic device, but Conceptual Metaphor Theory reconceptualizes it as a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). From this perspective, power is commonly conceptualized through embodied metaphors such as **POWER IS UP**, **POWER IS HUGE**, and **POWER IS FORCE**, which structure both thought and representation.

Extending this cognitive approach, Forceville (1996, 2009) demonstrates that metaphors can be realized multimodally, with images, sounds, gestures, and spatial relations functioning as metaphorical vehicles. In multimodal texts, metaphorical meaning often emerges through symbolic visuals that invite viewers to map attributes from a source domain onto an abstract target domain. Editorial cartoons, which frequently rely on visual symbolism rather than extensive verbal explanation, provide fertile ground for such multimodal metaphors (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009).

Despite the growing body of work on multimodal metaphor, relatively few studies integrate this framework with social semiotic analysis to examine how metaphors are embedded within broader visual structures and ideological contexts. As a result, the role of symbolic visual metaphors in constructing power relations remains insufficiently theorized.

Nigerian Editorial Cartoons and Research Gaps

Nigerian editorial cartoons are deeply embedded in local sociopolitical realities and draw extensively on culturally resonant symbols such as animals, traditional attire, spatial hierarchies, and bodily exaggeration to communicate meaning (Oloyede, 2016). These symbols function as shared semiotic resources that enable cartoonists to comment on leadership, governance, corruption, and social inequality in accessible yet critical ways. While some Nigerian studies have examined cartoons as instruments of political criticism and media activism (Eko, 2007; Omoera, 2014), they have largely relied on content analysis or interpretive commentary.

Consequently, there remains limited empirical research that systematically examines how power is metaphorically constructed through symbolic visuals in Nigerian editorial cartoons using an integrated multimodal discourse analytical framework. Little attention has been paid to how conceptual metaphors interact with compositional features such as salience, framing, and information value to produce ideological meanings. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how visual media contribute to the normalization, contestation, or subversion of power in Nigerian society.

In sum, while extensive scholarship exists on multimodal discourse, visual power, and metaphor, limited work has brought these strands together to examine editorial cartoons, particularly within the Nigerian media context. Existing studies tend to privilege either visual structure without metaphor or metaphor without systematic multimodal analysis. The present study addresses this gap by integrating Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotics with Forceville's (2009) multimodal metaphor theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to examine how power is metaphorized through symbolic visuals in Nigerian editorial cartoons. In doing so, the study contributes to multimodal discourse scholarship and advances understanding of the visual politics of power in postcolonial media discourse.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in an integrated theoretical framework that combines social semiotic theory, multimodal metaphor theory, and conceptual metaphor theory to examine how power is metaphorically constructed through symbolic visuals in Nigerian editorial cartoons. This integration is necessary because the representation of power in cartoons operates simultaneously at the levels of visual structure, cognitive mapping, and ideological meaning-making.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's social semiotic theory (2006) provides the primary analytical lens for examining how visual meaning is organized in editorial cartoons. Rooted in Halliday's functional linguistics, the theory conceptualizes images as socially and culturally shaped semiotic resources. It proposes three metafunctions—representational, interactive, and compositional—through which meaning is constructed. The representational metafunction is particularly central to this study, as it enables a systematic analysis of how social actors, actions, and abstract entities such as authority and domination are visually depicted. Narrative processes (actional and reactional structures) and conceptual processes (classification, analytical, and symbolic structures) offer tools for identifying how power relations are encoded through symbolic figures, exaggeration, and visual categorization. However, while this framework effectively explains how meaning is structured and organized, it pays limited attention to the cognitive mechanisms through which viewers interpret abstract concepts such as power.

To address this limitation, the study incorporates Charles Forceville's multimodal metaphor theory (1996, 2009), which extends metaphor analysis beyond verbal language to include visual, auditory, and multimodal representations. Forceville distinguishes between monomodal and multimodal metaphors and emphasizes that meaning arises from cross-domain mappings in which a source domain is used to structure a target domain. In the context of editorial cartoons, this theory enables the identification of how symbolic visuals—such as animals, objects, spatial positioning, and bodily exaggeration—function as source domains for conceptualizing power. For instance, the use of large physical size, vertical elevation, or predatory animals can metaphorically construct dominance and authority. Unlike social semiotics, which focuses on representational structure, multimodal metaphor theory provides analytical tools for uncovering how meaning is transferred across domains. However, it does not sufficiently explain the experiential or embodied basis of these mappings.

This gap is addressed through Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) and further developed by Zoltán Kövecses (2010). This theory posits that abstract concepts are understood through systematic metaphorical mappings grounded in embodied human experience. It introduces the notion of image schemas—recurring cognitive patterns such as verticality, force, and containment—that structure conceptual understanding. Within this study, conceptual metaphors such as POWER IS SIZE, POWER IS HEIGHT, POWER IS FORCE, and POWER IS CONTROL provide a cognitive basis for interpreting how audiences make sense of symbolic visuals in editorial cartoons. While Conceptual Metaphor Theory offers a robust explanation of how metaphor operates at the cognitive level, it does not account for the socio-cultural and ideological contexts that shape visual representation.

The integration of these three frameworks reveals both their convergence and divergence. All three approaches share a common concern with meaning-making and representation, particularly in how abstract concepts are communicated through signs and symbols. However, they operate at different but complementary levels: social semiotics focuses on the socio-cultural organization of visual meaning, multimodal metaphor theory examines cross-domain mappings in multimodal texts, and conceptual metaphor theory explains the cognitive structures underlying these mappings. Their divergence lies in emphasis—social semiotics prioritizes discourse and ideology, multimodal metaphor theory emphasizes representational modality, while conceptual metaphor theory foregrounds cognition and embodiment.

By synthesizing these perspectives, the study establishes a multi-layered analytical framework in which power is understood as a semiotically structured, cognitively grounded, and metaphorically constructed phenomenon. This integrated approach enhances analytical depth by enabling the examination of how symbolic visuals in Nigerian editorial cartoons simultaneously encode ideological meanings, activate metaphorical mappings, and shape audience interpretation of power relations.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative multimodal discourse analytical design, suitable for examining the complex interaction of visual, symbolic, and metaphorical resources in editorial cartoons. The qualitative approach allows for in-depth interpretation of meaning-making processes rather than quantification of surface features, aligning with the study's focus on ideological representation and metaphorical construction of power.

The data for the study consist of a purposively selected corpus of Nigerian editorial cartoons drawn from major national newspapers (vanguard, newswire, tribute etc) online platforms. Selection was guided by relevance to sociopolitical themes such as governance, leadership, corruption, civic resistance, and power relations. Only cartoons that rely predominantly on visual symbolism rather than extended verbal explanation were included, ensuring a strong focus on multimodal and metaphorical meaning-making. The

sampling period was defined to capture cartoons published during politically significant moments, thereby enhancing the analytical richness and contextual relevance of the data.

Data analysis followed a systematic, theory-driven procedure. First, each cartoon was subjected to a social semiotic analysis based on Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar. This stage involved examining representational structures to identify depicted actors and symbolic elements, interactive features such as gaze, angle, and social distance to determine viewer positioning, and compositional features including salience, framing, and information value to establish how power relations are visually foregrounded. Second, Forceville's multimodal metaphor framework was applied to identify metaphorical mappings, focusing on how symbolic visuals function as source domains for conceptualizing power. Particular attention was paid to recurring symbolic patterns and visual exaggerations that invite metaphorical interpretation. Third, identified metaphors were interpreted using Conceptual Metaphor Theory to reveal underlying cognitive schemas and their ideological implications within the Nigerian sociopolitical context.

To enhance analytical rigor and credibility, interpretations were grounded in contextual knowledge of Nigerian sociopolitical discourse and supported by recurring patterns across the data set rather than isolated examples. Visual analyses were conducted iteratively, allowing themes and metaphors to be refined as analysis progressed. This layered analytical procedure ensures that findings are theoretically grounded, methodologically transparent, and empirically robust.

Analysis and Findings

The analysis of Nigerian editorial cartoons reveal that power is consistently metaphorized through symbolic visuals that draw on culturally familiar imagery and embodied experience. These metaphors are not isolated stylistic choices but recur across cartoons, forming patterned semiotic strategies through which authority, dominance, and resistance are visually constructed.

Figure 1. Sample schematic editorial cartoons from vanguard online news illustrating metaphorical constructions of power in Nigerian media. Analyses are framed by Kress & van Leeuwen, Forceville, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory.



The cartoon relies on a symbolic representational process to communicate the nature of political power. The suited figure positioned above the enclosure symbolizes authority and governance rather than a specific individual. His elevated placement, stern expression, and controlling posture function as symbolic attributes of dominance. The citizens are depicted collectively behind bars, symbolizing the public as a restrained and regulated group rather than as distinct actors. At the level of metaphor, power is visually represented as control and confinement. The cage operates as a central metaphorical device: it transforms political authority into an act of restriction, surveillance, and limitation of freedom. The leader's hands positioned over the enclosure reinforce the idea of supervision and command, suggesting that power is exercised through regulation rather than consent.

Within Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the image instantiates the conceptual metaphor **POLITICAL POWER IS CONTROL/CONFINEMENT**. The source domain of physical restraint (bars, enclosure, and containment) is mapped onto the target domain of governance and leadership. Through this mapping, political power is conceptualized as the ability to contain, regulate, and restrict citizens' actions, framing leadership as an exercise of control rather than empowerment or representation.

Figure 2. Sample schematic editorial cartoons from newswire platform illustrating metaphorical constructions of power in Nigerian media. Analyses are framed by Kress & van Leeuwen, Forceville, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory.



The cartoon is structured around a symbolic representational process in which the political leader stands as a symbolic embodiment of authority, while the smaller figure below represents ordinary citizens. The leader's elevated position atop a pedestal symbolizes institutionalized power and status, whereas the citizen's action of pushing the base symbolizes collective agency and challenge. Neither figure represents a specific individual; rather, both function as abstract symbols of power and resistance. At the metaphoric, the image represents political power as something unstable and contestable. The pedestal, traditionally associated with honor and permanence, becomes a metaphorical structure that can be shaken or overturned. The leader's loss of balance visually encodes the weakening of authority, while the citizen's physical push metaphorically signifies resistance, dissent, and subversion. Within Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the cartoon instantiates the conceptual metaphor **POWER IS A PHYSICAL STRUCTURE** (and its corollary **RESISTANCE IS PHYSICAL FORCE**). The source domain of balance, weight, and structural stability is mapped onto the target domain of political power relations. Through this mapping, authority is conceptualized as something that stands only as long as it is supported, while resistance is understood as the force capable of destabilizing and subverting dominant power structures.

Figure 3. Sample schematic editorial cartoons from the news online platform illustrating metaphorical constructions of power in Nigerian media. Analyses are framed by Kress & van Leeuwen, Forceville, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory.



The cartoon operates primarily through a symbolic representational process, where the oversized figure labeled "LEADER" functions as a symbolic carrier of political authority. His exaggerated body size, clenched fist, and dominant posture do not depict a specific action toward an individual but symbolize the abstract quality of power itself. The smaller figures beneath him symbolize the general populace, collectively representing citizens subjected to that power. Metaphorically, the image constructs power visually as physical force. The leader's massive fist, thrust forward and occupying the foreground, serves

as the key metaphorical vehicle, suggesting domination, pressure, and control. The caption “Power is Force” anchors this metaphor verbally, ensuring a clear correspondence between visual form and intended meaning. The cartoon instantiates the conceptual metaphor as **POLITICAL POWER IS PHYSICAL FORCE**. The source domain of bodily strength and violence (large body, clenched fist, downward pressure) is mapped onto the target domain of political leadership and governance. Through this mapping, power is understood not as legitimacy or service but as the capacity to overpower and suppress others.

Figure 4. Sample schematic editorial cartoons from vanguard online news illustrating metaphorical constructions of power in Nigerian media. Analyses are framed by Kress & van Leeuwen, Forceville, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory.



The cartoon is structured around a symbolic representational process in which the political leader stands as a symbolic embodiment of authority, while the smaller figure below represents ordinary citizens. The leader’s elevated position atop a pedestal symbolizes institutionalized power and status, whereas the citizen’s action of pushing the base symbolizes collective agency and challenge. Neither figure represents a specific individual; rather, both function as abstract symbols of power and resistance. At the level of metaphor, the image represents political power as something unstable and contestable. The pedestal, traditionally associated with honor and permanence, becomes a metaphorical structure that can be shaken or overturned. The leader’s loss of balance visually encodes the weakening of authority, while the citizen’s physical push metaphorically signifies resistance, dissent, and subversion. Within Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the cartoon instantiates the conceptual metaphor **POWER IS A PHYSICAL STRUCTURE** (and its corollary **RESISTANCE IS PHYSICAL FORCE**). The source domain of balance, weight, and structural stability is mapped onto the target domain of political power relations. Through this mapping, authority is conceptualized as something that stands only as long as it is supported, while resistance is understood as the force capable of destabilizing and subverting dominant power structures.

Figure 5 Sample schematic editorial cartoons illustrating metaphorical constructions of power in Nigerian media. Analyses are framed by Kress & van Leeuwen, Forceville, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory.



The cartoon employs a **symbolic representational process** in which the oversized male figure labeled “GOVT” symbolizes governmental authority rather than a specific individual. His exaggerated body size, upright posture, and confident stance function as symbolic attributes of power. The briefcase labeled “BUDGET” serves as a symbolic object representing control over national resources, while the much smaller group of citizens symbolizes the general public positioned as dependent and subordinate. At

the level of **metaphor**, power is visually constructed as **size and height**. The government figure's towering body and elevated visual presence metaphorically signal dominance, authority, and superiority, whereas the reduced scale of the citizens conveys weakness and marginality. The physical gap between the large figure and the small group reinforces unequal power relations. Within **Conceptual Metaphor Theory**, the image instantiates the conceptual metaphor **POWER IS SIZE/HEIGHT (AUTHORITY IS UP/BIG)**. The source domain of physical magnitude and verticality (tall, big, towering body) is mapped onto the target domain of political power and governance. Through this mapping, governmental authority is conceptualized as something that is naturally larger and higher than the people, legitimizing asymmetry in access to resources and decision-making.

Discussion of Findings

The findings confirm that Nigerian editorial cartoons rely heavily on multimodal metaphors to construct and contest power relations. By integrating social semiotic analysis with multimodal and conceptual metaphor theory, the study demonstrates that symbolic visuals do ideological work by transforming abstract political power into concrete, embodied, and culturally resonant forms.

Consistent with Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework, power is shown to be visually organized through compositional hierarchy, spatial dominance, and viewer positioning. However, this study extends social semiotic analysis by demonstrating that these visual structures are not ideologically neutral; rather, they are metaphorically motivated. Exaggerated size, elevation, and centrality do not merely signal importance but activate deeply entrenched conceptual metaphors that naturalize inequality and authority.

Forceville's multimodal metaphor theory provides further insight into how Nigerian editorial cartoons operate as metaphorical texts. The frequent use of animals, objects, and spatial arrangements as source domains confirms that metaphor in cartoons is predominantly visual and symbolic rather than verbal. These findings align with Forceville's assertion that multimodal metaphors rely on viewers' ability to recognize cross-domain mappings, drawing on shared cultural knowledge. In the Nigerian context, such mappings are particularly effective because they draw on familiar socio-cultural symbols and political experiences.

From a conceptual metaphor perspective, the recurrence of metaphors such as **POWER IS SIZE**, **POWER IS HEIGHT**, **POWER IS FORCE**, **POWER IS RESISTANCE** and **POWER IS CONTROL** suggests that public understanding of political authority is structured through embodied experience. These metaphors frame power as something physically possessed by elites and imposed upon citizens, reinforcing asymmetrical power relations. At the same time, the satirical distortion of these metaphors allows cartoons to subvert and critique power by exposing its excesses and contradictions.

Importantly, the study highlights the ideological ambivalence of editorial cartoons. While some metaphors reinforce dominant power structures by portraying authority as inevitable or overwhelming, others function as tools of resistance by ridiculing and delegitimizing those in power. This dual function underscores the role of editorial cartoons as contested semiotic spaces where power is simultaneously normalized and challenged.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how power is metaphorized through symbolic visuals in Nigerian editorial cartoons using an integrated multimodal discourse analytical framework. The findings demonstrate that power is not merely represented but systematically constructed through recurring visual metaphors grounded in cultural symbolism and embodied experience. By combining social semiotics, multimodal metaphor theory, and conceptual metaphor theory, the study reveals how editorial cartoons transform abstract political power into visible, interpretable, and ideologically charged visual forms.

The study makes several contributions to scholarship. Theoretically, it advances multimodal discourse analysis by showing how metaphor operates as a central organizing principle in visual meaning-making rather than a peripheral stylistic feature. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of integrating social semiotic and cognitive approaches for analysing complex multimodal texts such as editorial cartoons. Empirically, it enriches understanding of Nigerian media discourse by foregrounding editorial cartoons as critical sites for negotiating power, ideology, and resistance in a postcolonial context.

The findings also have practical implications. For media scholars and educators, the study underscores the importance of visual literacy in interpreting political media texts. For journalists and cartoonists, it highlights the semiotic power of symbolic visuals in shaping public perception and political critique. Finally, the study suggests avenues for future research, including comparative analyses of editorial cartoons across African contexts, audience reception studies of visual metaphors, and investigations into multimodal representations of power in digital and social media platforms.

In conclusion, Nigerian editorial cartoons emerge as powerful multimodal artefacts through which power is metaphorized, contested, and reimagined. Understanding these metaphorical constructions is essential for appreciating the role of visual media in shaping political consciousness and ideological discourse in contemporary society.

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