

Metaphoric Representations in Saudi GIF-based Cartoons

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المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الاستعارات المستخدمة في الرسوم المتحركة السعودية من خلال تبني نظرية الاستعارة متعددة الوسائط ونظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية. تم تجميع مدونة متخصصة من الرسوم المتحركة من حسابات أشهر رسامي الكاريكاتير السعوديين. تجيب هذه الدراسة عن الأسئلة التالية: ماهي الاستعارات المستخدمة في الرسوم المتحركة السعودية؟ وماهي أنواع الاستعارات الشائعة المستخدمة في تصوير المواضيع المختلفة؟ تظهر النتائج أن تصوير المواضيع المختلفة في الرسوم المتحركة السعودية تتأثر بعناصر المبالغة (مثل تصوير شفاه النساء ببالونات منتفخة) والتجسيم (إعطاء الكرة الأرضية خصائص بشرية أو حية). المجالات المستهدفة الأكثر انتشارًا مثل تغير المناخ، القيادة الخطرة، الإجراءات التجميلية للنساء، تدخين النساء، استهلاك وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، والمواضيع الاحتفالية مثل الاحتفال بالعيد والفخر الوطني يتم تمثيلها مجازيا من مجالات مصدرية مثل الصاروخ، الطعام، الجروب الكبيرة، الستائر، والبالونات. تعتمد استخدام الاستعارات المبنية على هذه المجالات المصدرية في مناقشة القضايا الاجتماعية والثقافية في المملكة العربية السعودية على مدى معرفة الجمهور السعودي ومدى ملاءمة كل مجال ثقافيًا.



Abstract

This study examines the metaphors used in Saudi GIF-based cartoons by adopting insights from multimodal metaphor theory and conceptual metaphor theory. We have compiled a specialized corpus of GIF-based cartoons from the social media accounts of the most famous Saudi cartoonist. This study addresses the following questions: What are the metaphors used in Saudi GIF-based cartoons? What are the prevalent metaphorical types used to illustrate different topics in GIF-based cartoons? The findings show that the depiction of various topics in Saudi GIF-based cartoons is influenced by elements of exaggeration (i.e., inflated balloons to depict women's lips) and anthropomorphism (i.e., the globe is given human or living attributes). The most prevalent target domains, such as climate change, dangerous driving, cosmetic procedures for women, women smoking, social media consumption, and celebratory topics such as Eid celebration and national pride, are mapped from source domains such as ROCKET, FOOD, GIANT GROUPERS, CURTAINS, and BALLOON(S). The effect of metaphors using these source domains on discussing sociocultural issues in Saudi Arabia depends on the Saudi audience's familiarity with, and the cultural relevance, of each domain.

Keywords: *GIF-based caricatures, humor, multimodal metaphors, Saudi culture*

Introduction

Cartoons in animated Graphical Interchange Format are known as GIFs. A GIF is “a form of web-based graphics that contains a series of frames. These frames can be used to create graphics in the form of looped moving images” (Gursimesk, 2016, p. 330). However, any analytical study of GIF-based cartoons must go beyond textual interpretation and consider the technical and sociological aspects of its flexibility, which makes it easy to circulate: “A GIF can be embedded directly on a webpage, where it loads immediately without plugins or third-party players, because it is an open format. As simple files, GIFs are promiscuous and frictionless, with low barriers to viewing, possessing, and sharing” (Eppink, 2014, p. 303). Given that GIFs reflect complex aspects of meaning, thorough research and discursive theories are essential to their analysis. This is particularly true when we know that GIFs are “intertextual” and “interdiscursive” because of the numerous semiotic outputs (language, image, and video) they employ (Garric & Longhi, 2013). They are intertextual because they display fresh messages while tacitly referencing other sources. They implicitly integrate several linguistic conventions (discourses, styles, and genres) to express new ideas in a creative manner, making them interdiscursive (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The aim of this study was to determine the primary source domains used to portray different topics, and the most common types of visual metaphors (e.g., integrated, contextual, hybrid, pictorial simile, or verbo-pictorial), found in in GIF-based cartoons. Based on this background, this study attempts to analyze the metaphors used in GIF-based cartoons to represent different topics to a Saudi Arabian audience. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How are metaphors used to conceptualize different topics in GIF-based cartoons drawn by the Saudi cartoonist Abdel-Rahman Hagid?
2. What are the prevalent metaphorical types used to illustrate certain topics in GIF-based cartoons?

First, we provide a brief overview of multimodal metaphors as well as some findings regarding the types of metaphors employed in GIF-based cartoons. We then discuss the methodology used in greater detail, summarize the findings, and propose directions for future research on multimodality and evolving forms of political cartoons.

Literature Review

Metaphor

According to conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), people structure CONCRETE (e.g., WAR) in the ABSTRACT in a systematic manner (e.g., PANDEMIC). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), “[T]he essence of metaphor is understanding one kind of thing [a target domain] in terms of another [a source domain]” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 5). The source domain is more tangible and observable, providing embodied “natural” intuitive knowledge upon which people draw when conceptualizing abstract (but also more complicated) “things.” For example, instead of WAR, one could say BATTLE. Individuals possess embodied knowledge of physical combat, suffering, pain, and sacrifice, which they employ to structure the pandemic. Numerous structural parallels exist between these two conceptual domains, such as between the coronavirus and an adversary,

healthcare practitioners and an army, and between eradicating the virus and winning (Semino, 2021).

Forceville (1994, 1996) grouped visual metaphors into four categories: hybrid or pictorial metaphors, pictorial similes, contextual metaphors, and integrated metaphors. In contextual metaphors, the source of the metaphor is not illustrated, but insinuated by the visual context. For example, an advertisement for men's shoes depicts a man's torso with a shoe in place of a tie, inviting the reader to “perceive the shoe not in its usual 'literal' sense, but in terms of the very distinct phenomenon, tie” (Forceville, 1996, p. 109). The integrated metaphor is defined by Forceville (2007, p. 18) as “[a] phenomenon that is experienced as a unified object or gestalt is represented in its entirety in such a way that it resembles another object or gestalt even without contextual cues” (Forceville 2007, p. 18).

An example of an integrated metaphor is an advertisement for the Philips Senseo coffee machine, which resembles a servant or butler (Forceville, 2007). Pictorial similes are images in which both terms are depicted visually and juxtaposed in their totality. El Refaie (2016) provided an example of a pictorial simile in which a black luxury sports car might be depicted alongside a panther on the same scale and from an angle that emphasizes the similarities between their preexisting colors and shapes. Hybrid metaphors are pictures that are perceived as an entire entity or gestalt, but which consist of two distinct pieces that are typically regarded as coming from different domains and not components of a whole. Gombrich (1971) provided an example of a hybrid metaphor in which the face of a specific politician was visually depicted as the body of an animal.

Dynamics of Metaphors in Static and Animated Cartoons

Metaphors “behave” differently across discourse genres (Forceville, 2016). Creative metaphors are likely to appear in all genres; however, some types of visual metaphor (hybrid, contextual, and simile) may be more prevalent in certain genres. Forceville (2016) states that a genre such as animated film can introduce hybrid metaphors because the film medium permits seamless transitions from one item or person to another. An important distinction is the difference between moving and still images in caricatures and their association with metaphors. Compared with still photography, moving images allow for significantly richer methods of constructing metaphors (Forceville, 2002, 2005). Owing to the dynamic nature of the camera, the resemblance between the source and target does not rely on pre-camera similarity; rather, it can be established by matching camera movements, angles, and frame sizes. Moreover, because moving images develop over time, the source and target cannot be depicted or indicated simultaneously, as in the case of static images. The target and its source can be separated into seconds, minutes, or even hours. Finally, the source and target domains can be evoked musically or with a sound effect, making the metaphor multimodal.

Another important aspect of such dynamics is the distinction between metaphor formation in static and animated caricatures (Leon, 2018). The difficulty in conceiving and structuring metaphorical structures in an animated environment lies in the artist's ability to incorporate metaphors into narratives that are sustained over time. How the metaphor develops should be in some way revealing and intriguing in order to sustain the audience's interest and deliver a satisfying resolution or payoff. In comparison, whilst a static cartoon's usage of

metaphor provides the clues for completing "the enthymematic chain" in a single frame, such clues must be provided and disclosed progressively in linear time in an animation. Thus, the cartoonist actively controls and orders the reception of thoughts and information contained in the image. To maximize the satirical power of animated cartoons, the animator must be aware of the form of the metaphor through time, and the amount of time that should be devoted to each frame.

Both static and animated political cartoons have the same intended rhetorical effect: to achieve "an enthymematic engagement with the viewer through the strategic selection and arrangement of imagery that introduces, explores and contextualizes social and political constructs and events through the use of easily recognized and processed metaphors" (Leon, 2018, p. 99). The cartoonist provides some of the puzzle pieces, and the viewer solves the puzzle by understanding the meaning of those pieces both independently and in relation to each other. A static image fulfills this task within the limitations of a single frame, whereas an animated image does so across a series of frames measured in time.

A new type of caricature is animated caricature, first systematically theorized by media theories such as media richness theory, social influence theory, and media synchronicity theory (Bakhsi et al., 2016). A wider shift in how people consume news media from print to the Internet is indicated by the emergence of animation in cartoonists' portfolios. The status of political cartoonists has clearly been affected by the slow but inevitable decline in newspaper readership and circulation in the US, the UK, Australia, and other countries (Tiffen, 2010). Political cartoonists must examine the current media landscape and find new opportunities for the effective dissemination of their output, as viewers look for alternative ways to consume news and opinions. Leon (2017, p. 163) examined the sociotechnical variables that threaten print media as well as new media tactics open to caricaturists. An animated moving image has a clearly visible following; however, reaching and interacting with it can be challenging. In the 21st century, political cartoonists must negotiate their profession in the world of Web 2.0, portable communication systems, and social networks. Syndication and "unique hits" that generate income are also replacing editor–cartoonist hiring dynamics in the field. Cartoonists are now operating for the first time in a news-publishing setting that enables both still and audio-visual dynamic visuals, owing to the digital media revolution.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis in Saudi Arabia

Recent studies have investigated Saudi multimodal discourse considering various social themes, where such studies have emphasized the interactive relationship between visual media and societal matters. For example, a study conducted by Alsadi and Howard (2021) employed theories of multimodality and humor to examine various themes shown in Saudi cartoons, demonstrating a substantial correlation between cultural representation and media platforms. Moreover, multimodal discourse analysis has played a crucial role in the field of gender and language studies. Alkhamash (2022) conducted a study on sexism in cartoons that portray gender and gender dynamics in Saudi Arabia, revealing some ingrained cultural prejudices. In addition, Alasmari and Almohammadi (2023) specifically examined how Saudi women are depicted on worldwide media platforms, thereby broadening the understanding of how global media represents Saudi women. These studies collectively show the significant influence of multimodal analysis in comprehending and evaluating cultural narratives in Saudi media. In

the context of researching Saudi cartoons and their socio-cultural implications, there remains a notable gap in understanding the potential of GIF-based cartoons. While existing studies have delved into the analysis of static cartoons, the exploration of GIF-based cartoons presents a novel avenue for examining visual narratives and their impact on societal perceptions.

The Current Study

The cultural significance of Hagid's cartoons is inherently linked to the research questions posed in this study. By examining how metaphors are used in GIF-based cartoons drawn by Saudi cartoonist Abdel-Rahman Hagid, and indeed how they reflect the cultural significance of his work, we aim to unravel the underlying narratives and societal reflections embedded within his creations. Hagid is a cartoonist of remarkable versatility, but retains a consciousness shaped by the cultural environment in which he operates in response to social and local events. Abdul Rahman Hagid is a Saudi cartoonist and social context commentator. In contrast to many other Saudi editorial cartoonists, Hagid's work focuses primarily on social practices, as opposed to purely political events. Hagid's work has been featured in the Saudi newspaper *al-Jazirah* for over 40 years. Unlike other Saudi cartoonists, and driven by his dedication to editorial cartoons, Hagid ventures into social media on a massive scale by adopting GIF-based cartoons. In an interview with Hagid, he explained his new move, saying, 'I should keep up with people, they moved on social media, so I will move with them,' especially since he noted that people engage well with his GIF-based cartoons, which typically receive more than 2,000 views a day (MBC, 2019).

Hagid's cartoons serve as a reflection of societal norms, values, and cultural dynamics, making them a rich source for understanding the cultural fabric of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, investigating the metaphors used in Hagid's cartoons provides insights into the broader cultural context in which they are situated.

Corpus Data and Methodology

The data for this study consisted of 146 GIF-based cartoons that were posted between October 10, 2019, and November 17, 2021, on Abdel Rahman Hagid's TikTok account, @hagid4444. This account has more than twenty-one thousand followers and more than one hundred and thirty-one thousand likes. According to Leech (2014, p. 256), the online corpus is, by far, the most accessible method for investigating authentic speech. In the GIF-based cartoon corpus, different topics have been touched upon in the cartoons, ranging from environmental topics such as pollution and global warming, social topics such as driving habits, senior citizens, generational differences, gender, and national celebrations, to more personal topics such as supporting the Al-Hilal football club and self-representation of the cartoonist.

Building upon our established research framework, this study extends the analytical methodologies previously described in Alkhamash (2022), where the focus was on multimodal metaphors in various contexts. This solid methodological foundation has been adapted here to specifically examine Saudi GIF-based cartoons. The two-step process for identifying visual metaphors, as detailed in our previous work, involves initially determining the dynamics of cartoons — who caricatures whom, under what conditions, why, and in what form, or whether they should be regarded literally (for relevance assessment, see Sperber and

Wilson, 1986). Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory states that human cognition is geared towards maximizing relevance through the least cognitive effort. In other words, our cognitive resources are better utilized to achieve the highest payoff when decoding meaning. This is essential in understanding how audiences process metaphors that are embedded in complex visual narratives such as the ones in GIF-based cartoons. The second step involves grouping objects and characters, and selecting those that do not belong (Raheem, 2021). Abdul Raheem's (2021) methodology on grouping objects and characters plays a pivotal role in the second step of our visual metaphor analysis process by providing a systematic way to dissect the cartoons' visual rhetoric. By applying this principle to the analysis of visual media, we categorize elements within a scene into coherent groups based on shared attributes such as shape, color, orientation, or thematic connection. The data were translated from Arabic to English.

The third step is to explain the contextual dimensions of the caricatures. The interpretation of a metaphor entails identifying (a) its two elements, namely the source and target domains, and (b) which connotations should be mapped from source to target (Forceville, 1996, 108). The connotations mapped from the source domain to the target domain are context-dependent and constrained by genre conventions (Bounegru & Force, 2011).

Types of multimodal metaphors: The investigation consisted of two steps: a qualitative step to detect metaphors in context, and a quantitative step to determine the most common pictorial metaphor types. Both are manual processes. All images were thoroughly analyzed, but the researcher has only been able to offer a few examples in this article; they were chosen because they were very vivid and descriptive in terms of the metaphor's motivating base.

Sixty-nine of the 144 GIF-based cartoons featured no metaphors, while seventy-seven had metaphors. Excluding non-metaphors yielded 53% of the GIF-based cartoons for the analysis. Independent intercoder reliability tests were used to evaluate the variables. 10% of the sample was coded by two researchers (eight cartoons). According to Cohen's kappa coefficient, the findings indicated strong agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Due to space constraints, the researcher has only been able to share specifics on a subset of the cartoons because they are extremely insightful in terms of the metaphor's motivational underpinning.

Result Analysis and Discussion

This section includes the multifaceted metaphorical representations of various social, environmental, and personal themes in Saudi GIF-based cartoons. The analysis is structured into two main parts: quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative analysis provides an overview of the frequency and types of source domains used in the cartoons, offering insights into the most prevalent metaphoric themes. Following this, the qualitative analysis examines how these metaphors conceptualize complex issues such as environmental topics, social behaviors, and gender roles within Saudi society. At the end, we present a general discussion.

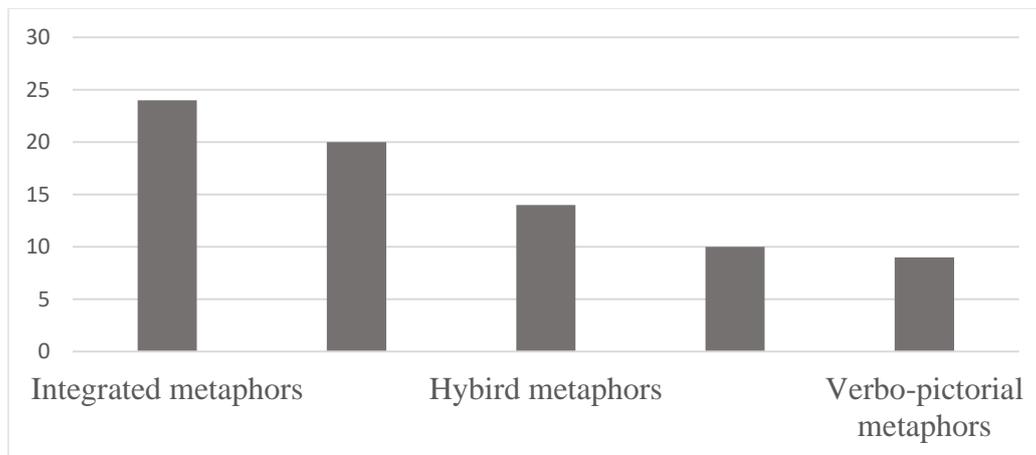
Quantitative Analysis

To address the first research question related to how different topics are conceptualized through metaphors in Saudi GIF-based cartoons, see Figure 1, which shows the frequency of

multimodal metaphors in the corpus. ANIMALS was the most frequently recurrent source domain for depicting different topics in Saudi GIF-based cartoons and was used in 16.9% of the corpus, with 13 occurrences. CLOTHES was the second most frequent source domain, comprising 13% of the corpus, with 10 occurrences. BALLOONS was the third most used source domain with eight occurrences, comprising 10% of the corpus. PERSON was the fourth most frequent source domain in the corpus with seven occurrences, constituting 9% of the corpus. Seven source domains occur twice in the corpus, constituting 18.1% each, such as ROCKETS, SKULL, and ZOMBIE. Of the source domains, 33% occurred only once in the corpus.

Figure 1

Frequency of Multimodal Metaphors in the Corpus



Qualitative Analysis

Representation of Environmental Topics

Air Pollution

In Figure 2, the globe is depicted with factory chimneys that emit smog that circulates around the earth, forming a knife holding the hand that stabs the earth, causing its death. We see here that both the earth and the smog are personified; the hybrid metaphor may be construed as POLLUTION AS A KILLER with the GLOBE AS A DYING PERSON and THE SMOG AS A STABBER. The connotations mapped from the source to the target domains include 'destructive power' and 'immense damage.' Furthermore, the negative implications associated with this metaphor highlight the need for urgent and decisive action to protect the environment. Interestingly, this metaphor received more than 174 likes and shares.

Increase in Temperature

In Figure 3, the man runs with his hair on fire due to the high temperature, which reaches 50°C. This metaphor can be construed as an INTENSE HEAT INFLAMING THE FIRE. Connotations mapped from the source to the target domains include 'intense heat', 'intense discomfort and distress,' and 'dangerous' and 'harmful'. In general, this metaphor highlights the dangers and consequences of high temperatures, and provides a means of understanding global warming.

Figure 2
Pollution as a Killer

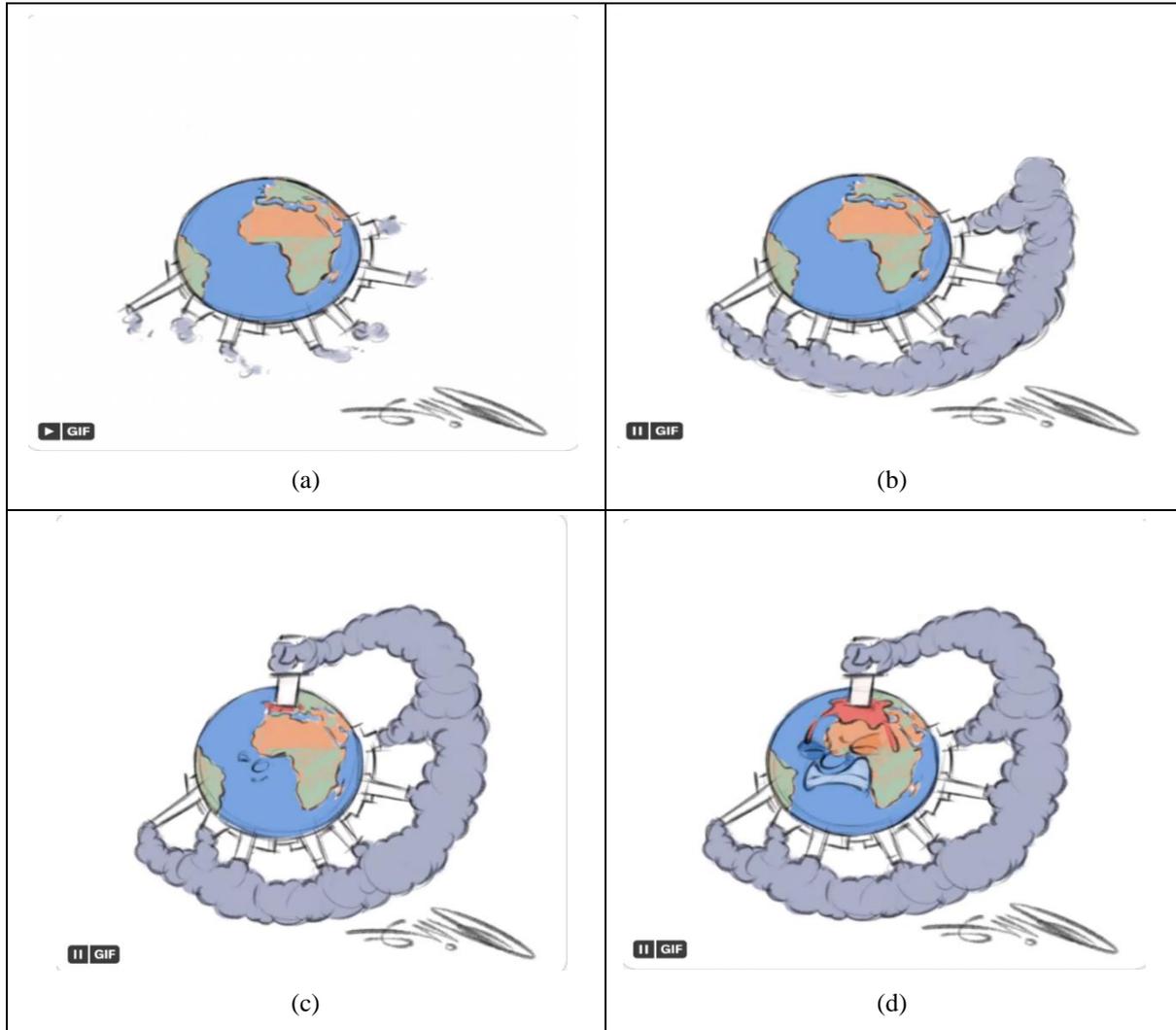
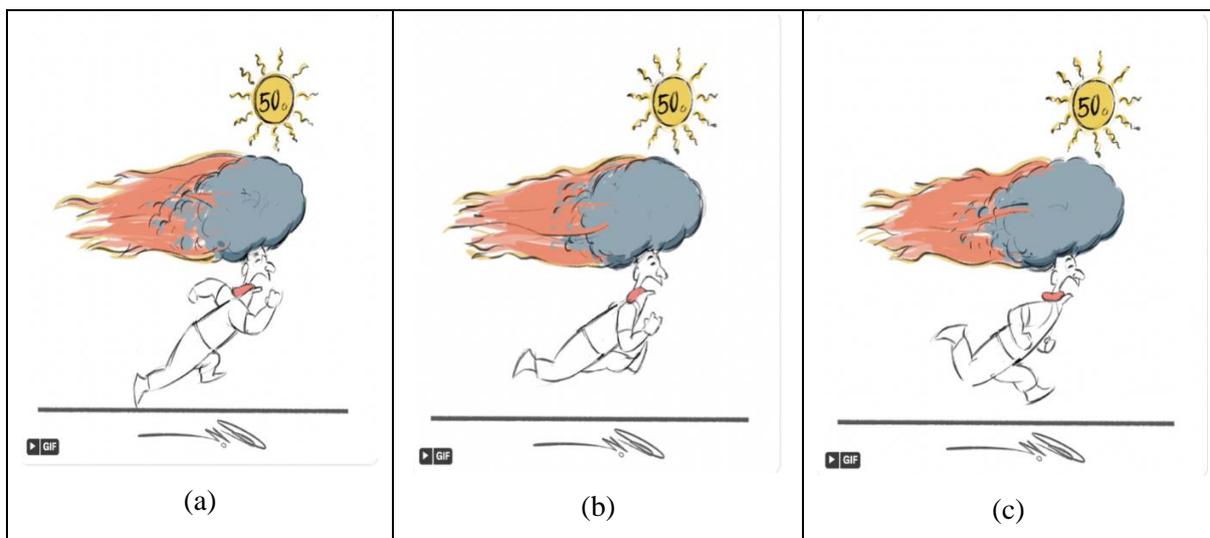


Figure 3
Intense Heat Inflaming the Fire



Representation of Social Topics

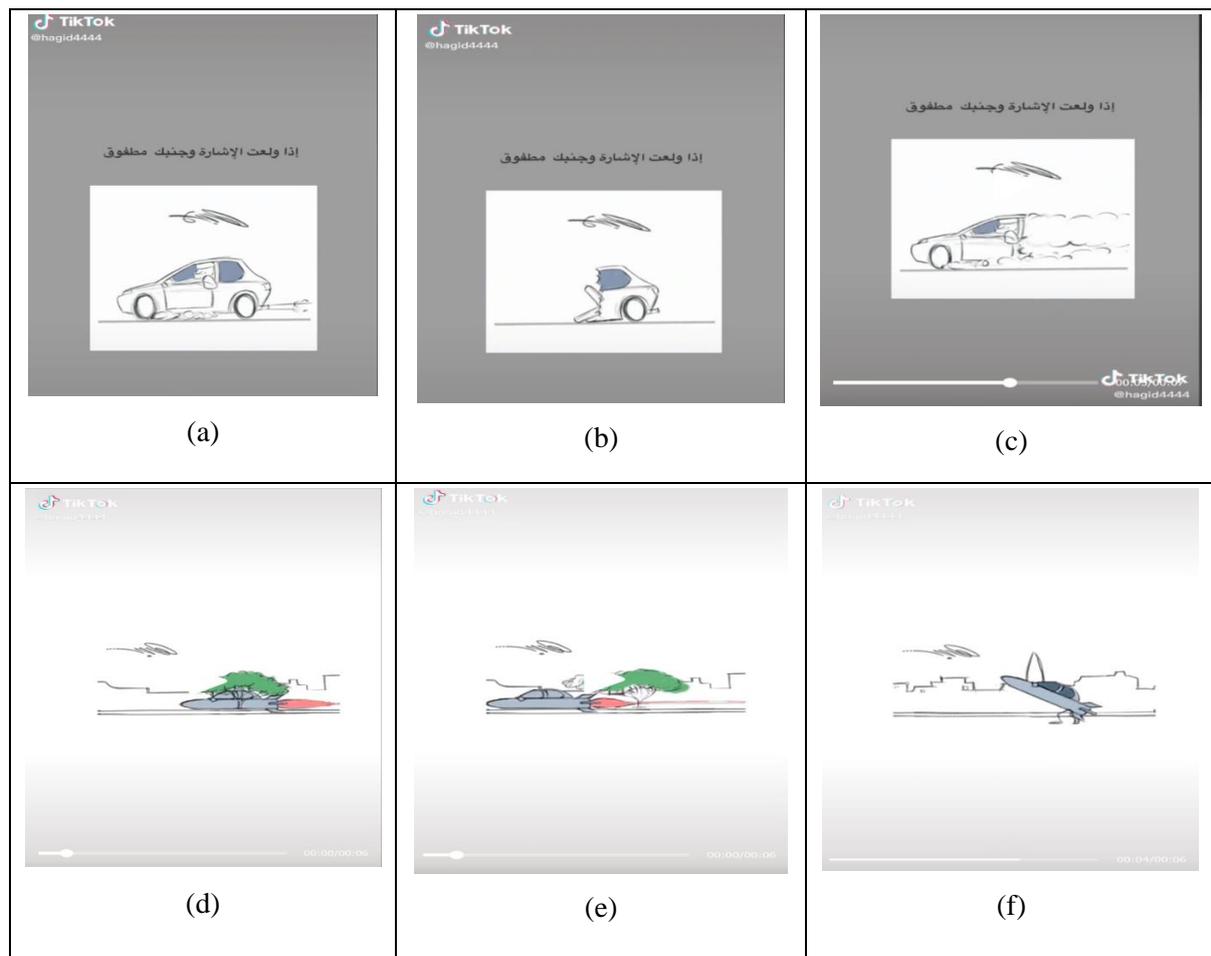
Driving Habits

In response to the issue of risky driving habits in Saudi Arabia, Saudi cartoonists depicted cars on Saudi roads in two GIF-based cartoons, drawing on ROCKET as the source domain. In Figure 4 (a-c), the caption reads: “*When the traffic light turns green, and you drive next to a risky driver,*” while Figure 4 (d-f) does not have captions. Understanding the two GIF-based cartoons requires the activation of a significant amount of knowledge about driving in Saudi Arabia and the issue of speeding. This metaphor must be construed as CAR AS A ROCKET. Connotations mapped from the source domain to the target domains include ‘excess speed,’ ‘dangerousness,’ and ‘recklessness.’

Although we drew on the same source domain, ROCKET, both cartoons represent two different types of pictorial metaphor. Before stating the types of metaphor identified in each of the cartoons, some observations were made regarding the depiction. First, the CAR, the target domain in both cartoons, is visually cued in Figure 4 (a-c) but does not have a visual representation in Figure 4 (d-f); second, the cartoon based on GIFs is supplemented with some textual cues for illustration in Figure 4 (a-c), while the other cartoon in Figure 4 (d-f) is not supplemented verbally (see Lan & Zuo, 2016).

Figure 4

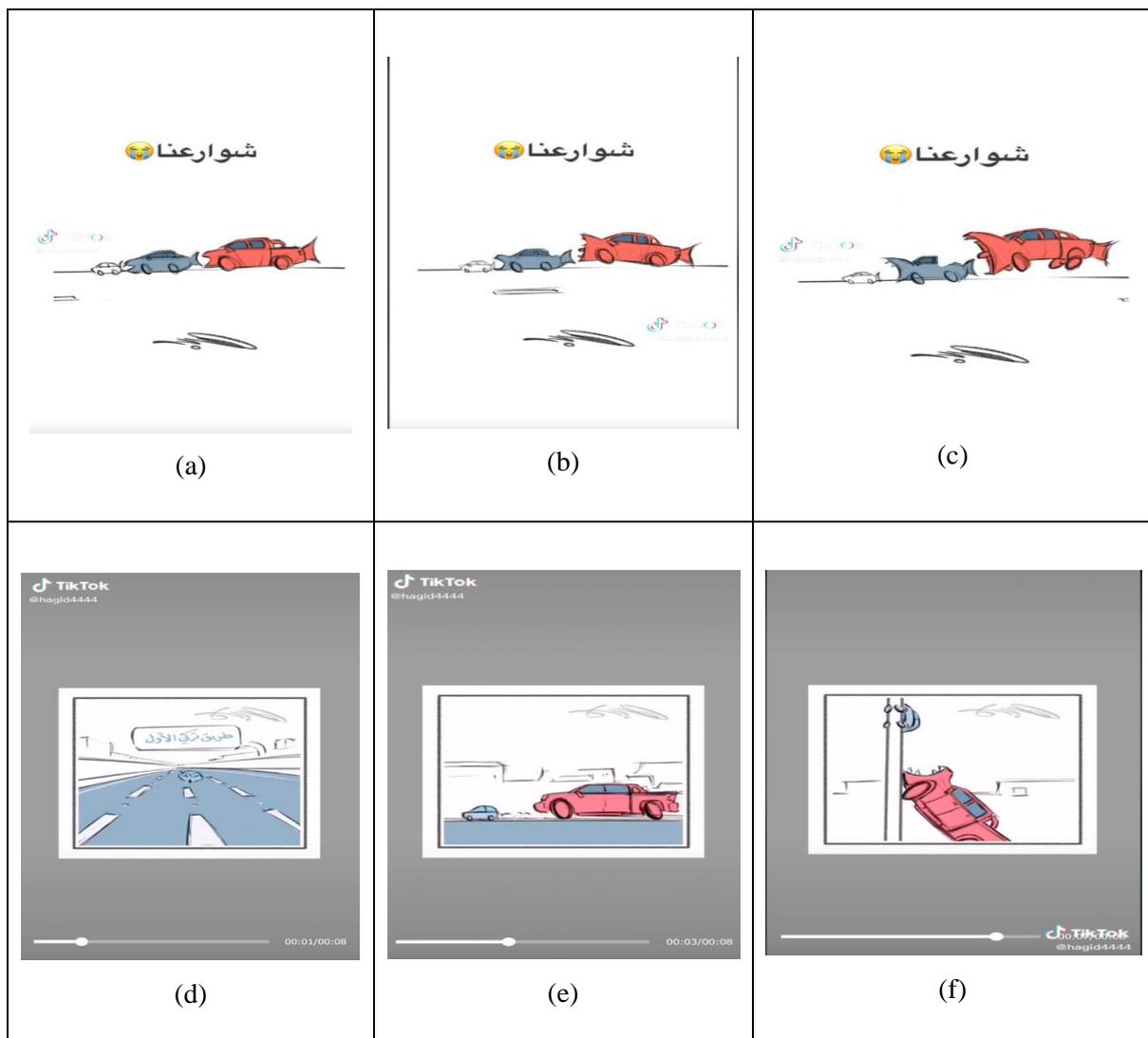
Cars as a Rocket



Regarding the issue of unsafe driving practices in Saudi Arabia, Saudi cartoonists represented cars on Saudi roads in two GIF-based cartoons using the source domain GIANT GROUPERS. In Figure 5 (a-c), three cars chase each other and are depicted in such a way as to suggest that larger cars are creatures that attempt to devour smaller creatures. The caption reads, ‘Our streets’ with crying emojis. In Figure 5 (d-f), the cartoonist represents traffic on one of Riyadh’s main roads by depicting one larger car chasing a smaller one. This metaphor must be construed as CARS AS GIANT GROUPERS. The giant grouper, *hāmūr*, is metaphorically used in Saudi culture to describe a sea beast that deceives smaller stock owners by devouring their money. A parallel is drawn here if we know that *hāmūr* hide in sea caves and open their mouths to wait for small fish to swim inside, believing that they are still inside a sea cave. Here, we can see that the negative connotations mapped from the source domain, GIANT GROUPERS, into the target domain, CARS, include ‘causing harm,’ ‘destructiveness,’ and ‘invasiveness.’

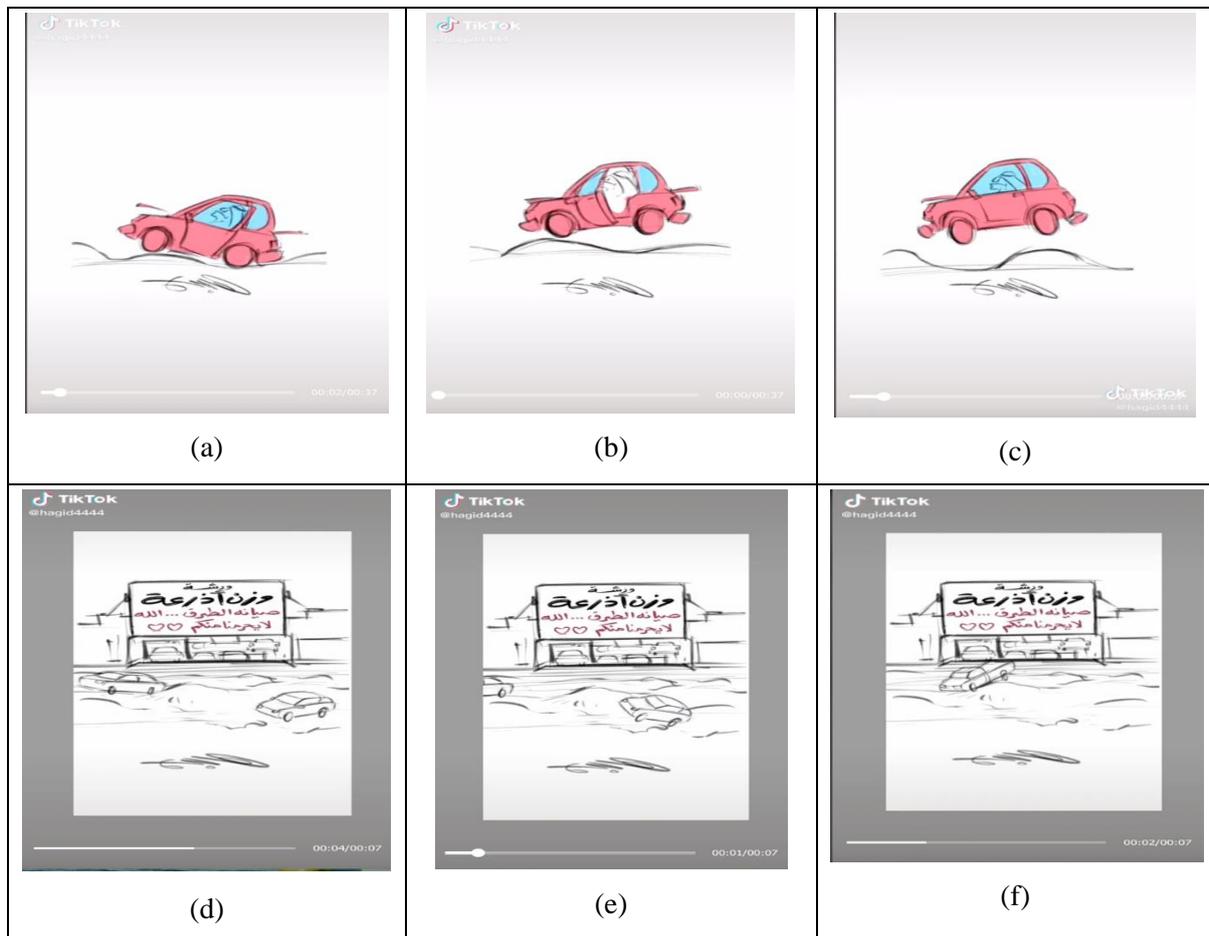
Figure 5

Cars as Giant Groupers



In Figure 6 (a-c), the Saudi cartoonist Abdel-Rahman Hagid depicts cars going up and down the road in a similar way to climbing a hill, with the movement of the car being caused by improperly paved roads. The metaphor must be verbalized as DRIVING AS HILL CLIMBING. The negative connotations mapped from the source to the target include ‘difficult journey,’ ‘journey with obstacles,’ ‘tiring,’ and ‘arduous.’

Figure 6
Driving as Hill Climbing



Gender

Figure 7 shows a Saudi woman holding a cigarette (7a), inhaling smoke while closing her eyes (7b), and blowing smoke out (7c). Immediately, we realize that there is something unusual about the woman’s lips: they are depicted as a couple of eggplants in a way that generally suggests another object, notably the lips. The reader is prompted not to consider the lips not in their conventional, literal sense but in relation to another phenomenon, eggplants. This metaphor can also be expressed as LIPS ARE EGGPLANTS. In this GIF-based cartoon, the contextual metaphor raises the question of which elements have been mapped from the SOURCE domain (EGGPLANTS) to the TARGET domain (LIPS). One possible explanation is that eggplants are symbolized as an unattractive facial feature by equating the lips of the woman who is smoking to the color of the skin of the eggplant. In all three frames (holding the cigarette, and inhaling and blowing out its smoke), the shape and color of the lips were permanent, making it seem that the change in lip color is irreversible. The connotations mapped

include ‘unattractive,’ ‘undesirable,’ and ‘ugly.’ The conceptualization of unattractive, undesirable women is well established in metaphor literature; for example, Maalej (2020) found that (UN)DESIRABLE WOMAN AS FOOD is a cross-cultural metaphor that has been attested to in eight languages. However, the choice of food items as the source domain seems to be motivated from within the culture in question; that is, the specific cultural meanings of food items affect the conceptualization of women. Therefore, the conceptualization of (un)desirable women depends on already established social norms on how certain foods are viewed. For plants, specific metaphors such as (UN)DESIRABLE WOMAN IS A PLANT are found in Armenia. Maalej (2020) provided an example, depicting Armenian women to donate their unattractiveness in the use of *Datarki meke* (a real cork tree: empty mind, slow in articulating) and *Tormshats vard e* (she is a faded rose: once attractive, now dangerous). He provides another example of how a Danish woman is depicted as *en sild* (a herring). This conceptualization of women denotes a woman as unattractive in the same manner as the fish is viewed in Danish culture. Despite the fact that the fish are supposed to have an attractive appearance by being slim and long, the Danish consider the fish to be of rather low status, which means that only poor people consume them.

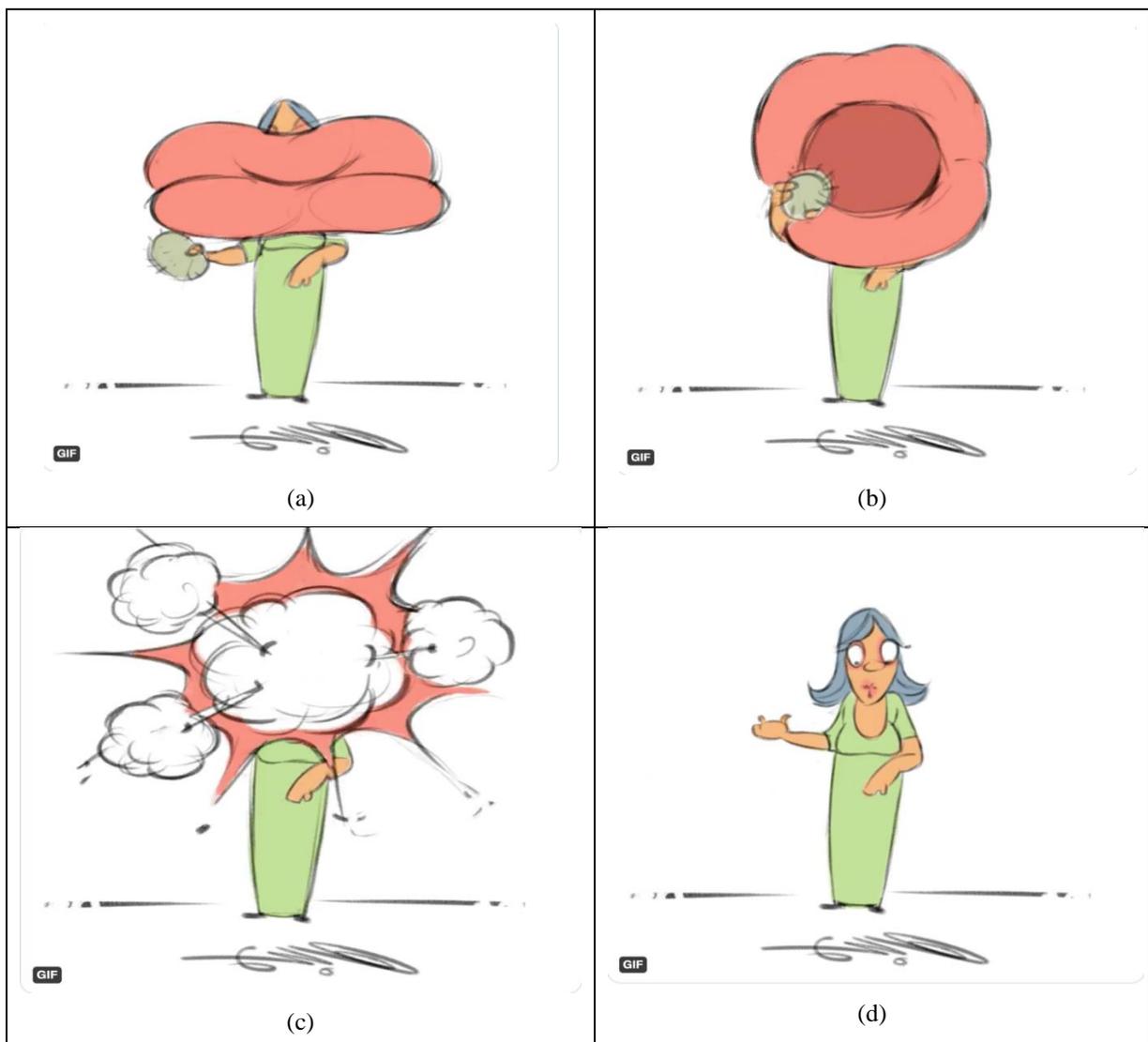
Figure 7
Lips are Eggplants



In Figure 8, a woman with exaggeratedly large lips holds a prickly pear in one hand (8a). She holds the fruit close to her lips to consume it (8b). The woman's lips explode as soon as the fruit touches her lips (8c), and are reduced in size due to this explosion (8d). The balloon-shaped lips read: 'Those who have filled their lips should be aware when eating a prickly pear.' It was apparent that the woman's lips were unusual. The injected lips eventually burst and harm the woman's aesthetic appearance in the same way that the balloon, when inflated, will explode and disappear due to eating the spiky fruit. In this GIF-based cartoon, the integrated metaphor proposes a connection between the lips and balloons by presenting the lips in such a manner that they resemble an inflated balloon. These metaphors can be verbalized as INJECTED LIPS AS AN INFLATED BALLOON (8a and b), INJECTED LIPS AS A BLOWN-UP BALLOON (3c), and INJECTED LIPS AS A DEFLATED BALLOON (8d). The mappings projected from the source domain to the target domain include 'artificial,' 'impermanence,' and 'fleeting.' This suggests that beauty achieved by artificial means is temporary and transitory.

Figure 8

Injected Lips as Inflated Balloon



National Pride and Celebrations

Figure 9 shows a hand holding an incense holder and writing a phrase to celebrate Eid, a Muslim festival, with the incense. The phrase reads as follows: *Wishing you many happy returns.* In this case, the incense holder serves as a tool for a man to write his message in smoke, which is a form of communicative expression. This metaphor can be construed as **WRITING WITH INCENSE SMOKE**. The connotations of this metaphor are related to the cultural association between incense and smoke. The connotations mapped from the source domain to the target domain include 'celebration,' 'positivity,' and 'joy.' In this context, smoke represents the man's words being carried and conveyed to the recipient.

Figure 9

Writing with Incense Smoke

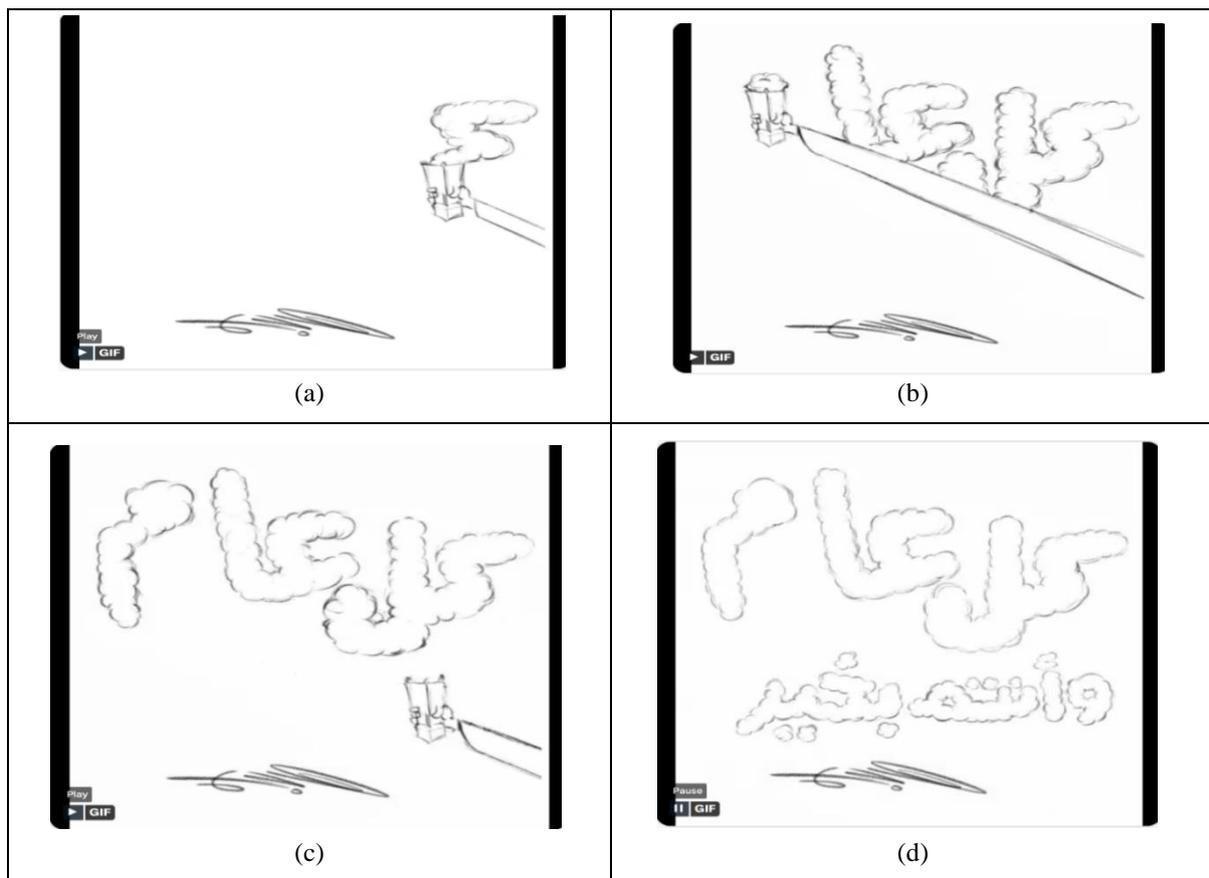
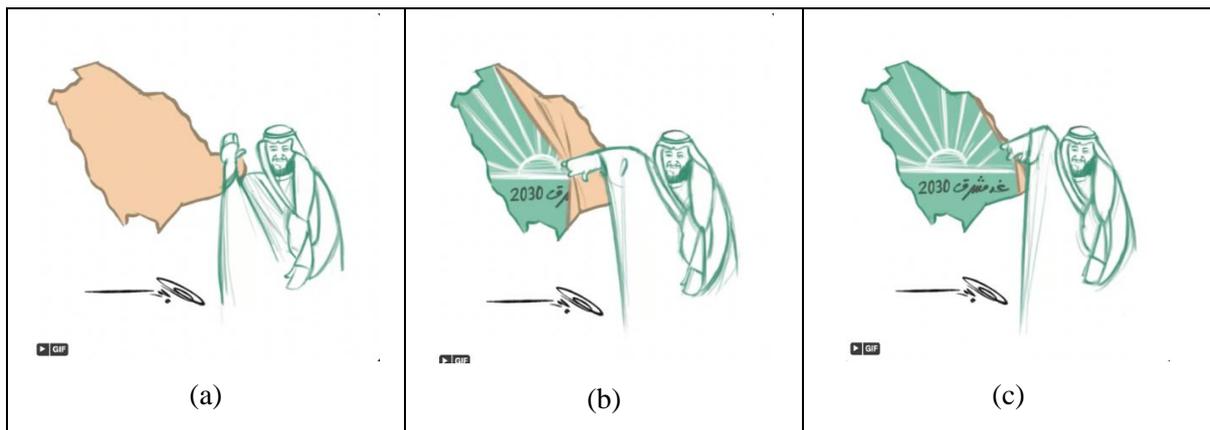


Figure 10 shows Prince Mohammed bin Salman expressing a greeting in front of the Saudi map in Figure 10(a), then unraveling the yellow curtain in Figure 10(b), revealing a green Saudi that had sunny light and a caption that reads: 'a bright tomorrow 2030' in Figure 10(c). This metaphor must be construed as **THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY AS UNVEILING A CURTAIN**. The mapped connotations include 'growth' and 'prosperity.' In this metaphor, unravelling the yellow map, like pulling aside a curtain, implies that the future of the country is being revealed, suggesting that although the future is hidden or obscured it can be made visible through the act of unveiling. The yellow and green maps represent degradation and growth, respectively. The metaphor thus suggests that the country's future is bright, implying positive change.

Figure 10

The Future of the Country as Unveiling a Curtain

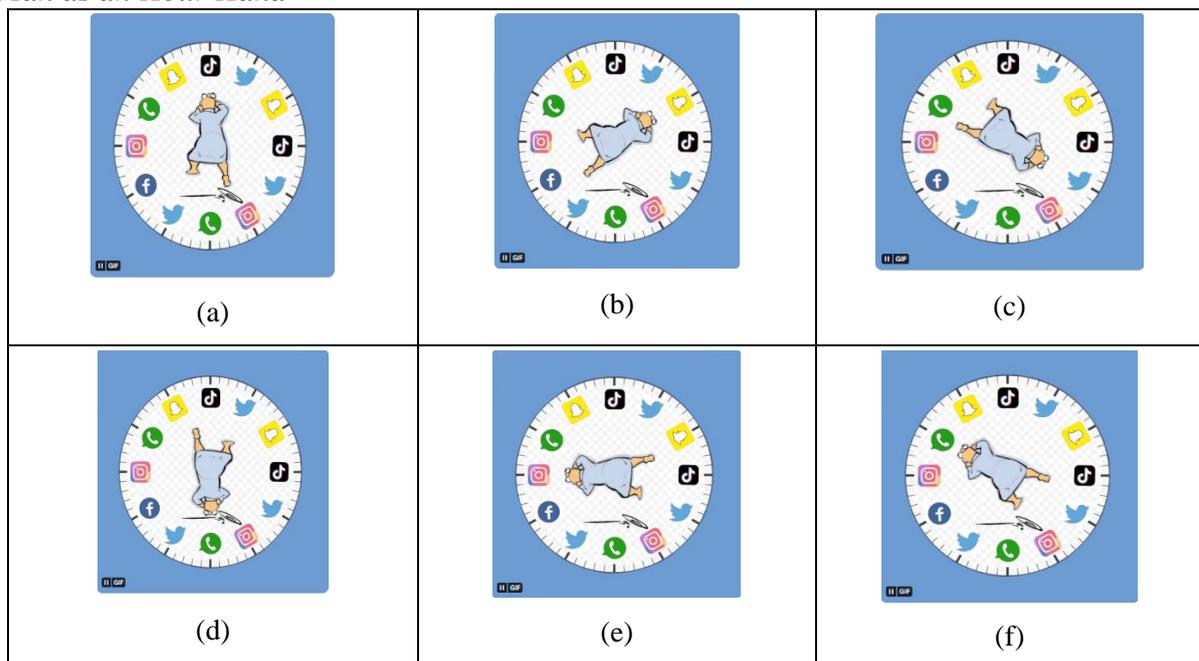


Social Media Use

Figure 11 shows a man as the hour hand of a clock that moves clockwise; the numbers of the clock have been replaced by social media logos such as TikTok, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook. It is immediately clear that the man's movement is similar to the movement of the hour hand, yet the hour hand is not visually signaled. In this GIF-based animation, the contextual metaphor makes it unclear which components have been transferred from the target domain, man, to the source domain, hour hand. The metaphor can also be formulated as MAN AS AN HOUR HAND, which maps the concept of time and motion onto the concept of social media consumption. This metaphor suggests that people are continuously moving towards different social media platforms and that this is an ongoing and never-ending process. It also implies that people are increasingly engaged with different social media platforms, and that this trend is likely to continue. The connotations of this metaphor can be formulated as 'controlled by an external force,' 'moving toward different things,' 'consumption,' and 'engaged.'

Figure 1

Man as an Hour Hand

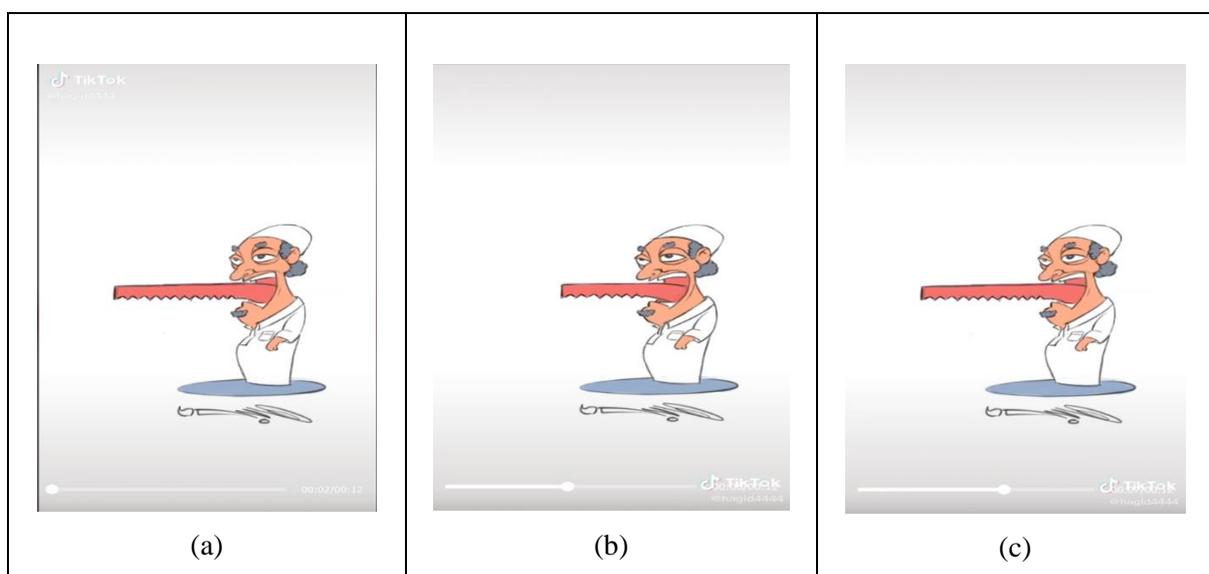


Representation of Personal Topics

The cartoonist depicted himself in Figure 12 by sticking his tongue, which looks like a saw, out in a movement that suggests cutting an object. It is evident that the cartoonist's tongue is abnormal: he has a tongue that looks like a saw which moves in such a way as to mirror the functions of a saw. In this GIF-based animation, the integrated metaphor suggests a relationship between the tongue and saw by depicting the former in a manner that resembles the latter. The metaphor that can be construed here is TONGUE AS A SAW'. The following connotations are projected from the source domain to the target domain: 'powerful,' 'aggressive,' 'strength,' and 'sharp.' The cartoonist implies that his cartoons can have an influential effect, and can be used to critique what he perceives as wrong.

Figure 12

The Tongue as a Saw



Discussion

With regard to the first research question, the quantitative analysis showed that different metaphors were used in GIF-based cartoons to represent various global issues and social topics in Saudi Arabia. The contextual analysis revealed that metaphors have been used to critique global as well as local issues, as viewed by the cartoonist. In the first example, the hybrid metaphor of pollution as a killer, the globe as a dying person, and smog as the assailant was used to convey the destructive power of, and immense damage due to pollution. The second example uses the metaphor of intense heat that inflames a fire to highlight the dangers and consequences of the high temperatures caused by global warming. The next three figures focus on the representation of social topics, particularly driving habits in Saudi Arabia. The first two figures use the metaphor of a car as a rocket, emphasizing excessive speed, dangerousness, and recklessness. In the last figure, driving is metaphorically verbalized as climbing a hill, suggesting a difficult, tiring, and arduous journey. Finally, the last figure depicts a Saudi woman smoking a cigarette, and the metaphor of the cigarette as a lip enhancer is used to criticize gender expectations and stereotypes.

Regarding the second research question, which deals with the most common types of metaphor used to describe various topics in Saudi GIF-based cartoons, the analysis revealed that integrated metaphors were the most common. The second most frequent type was contextual metaphor, followed by hybrid and pictorial simile metaphors. Verbo-pictorial metaphors were the least used type of metaphor. The representation of various multimodal metaphors in GIF-based cartoons is justified and affected by genre and/or viewer (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009).

For example, the integrated metaphors in the corpus had pictorial cues intended to convey a sense of sarcasm, humor, and irony. That is, balloons were integrated with the lips of the woman, or the saw was integrated with the cartoonist's tongue, conveying the idea of rejecting trendy beauty standards in the former and facing criticism in the latter. Such depictions are effective given the choice of these source domains. In verbo-pictorial metaphors, El Refaie (2009) asserted that the use of verbal components in cartoons has three functions: reinforcing pictorial aspects, offering new information, and creating a sense of contradiction and irony. Additionally, the low political or sociocultural awareness of some viewers can affect their visual and linguistic representations of subject matter. It can be claimed that pictorial/verbal aspects are not equally significant to all viewers. If you have extensive political or sociocultural knowledge, verbal signals may not be needed to interpret the metaphors. However, viewers with insufficient political or sociocultural expertise would require extensive verbal clues to interpret metaphors (El Refaie, 2009).

Exaggeration and anthropomorphism in Saudi GIF-based cartoons greatly influence the transmission of complex sociocultural messages. The use of exaggeration, such as portraying women's lips as overly inflated balloons, is employed to emphasize or criticize society's views on beauty and cosmetic enhancements. This style of visual exaggeration not only captures attention but also enhances viewer engagement. Anthropomorphism, which involves attributing human qualities to the planet, serves to personalize abstract concepts such as climate change, so enhancing their relatability and comprehensibility to a wider audience. Forceville (2008) argued that multimodal metaphors, such as those seen in GIFs, are highly successful in captivating the viewer's sensory and cognitive abilities due to metaphorical effects. Moreover, personification by cartoonists to portray abstract notions "facilitates our understanding of the world and our reaction to it" (Alkhamash, 2023, p.3).

The varying interpretations of metaphors by different audience groups should be considered, as these can be influenced by factors such as age, educational attainment, and cultural background (Gibbs, 1994). For example, the metaphor of "curtains" to depict rapid growth and prosperity might be inspiring in a context valuing change and development, but confusing in a culture where such imagery is not commonly associated with positive change.

Considering the recent growth in research into multimodality in the Arab world (see Abdel-Raheem, (2022a), Abdel-Raheem, (2022b), Abdel-Raheem, (2022c), Alkhamash, (2022), AlShurafa et al. (2021)), this study has implications for the educational potential of multimodal cartoons; specifically, educators could use them to showcase multiple meanings and interpretations, as well as cultural and national references.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This study highlights the diversity and complexity of the metaphorical representations of sociocultural themes in Saudi GIF-based cartoons. Integrated, contextual, and hybrid metaphors are the most prevalent, and show how visual and verbal elements work together to communicate metaphorical effects. Exaggeration and anthropomorphism make cartoons more accessible and efficient in terms of communicating abstract ideas; for instance, humanizing the world makes climate change more immediate and significant. Exaggerating women's lips challenges standards of beauty through humor and sarcasm. These analogies may work differently, depending on the viewer's age, education, and culture. Given this diversity, GIF-based cartoons should be designed with audience-interpretative frameworks in mind. Such questions are significant in a region with rapid social and technical development, where digital media shape public debate. Finally, Saudi GIF-based cartoons may convey, analyze, and celebrate complicated sociocultural topics. This medium's ability to reflect and affect culture will grow, emphasizing the need for continual research into its forms and purposes.

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Bio

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