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Metaphorical And Visual Persuasion in Digital Fish Marketing in Nigeria: A Credibility–Cue Framework for Analysing Advertising, Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention

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Abstract

Digital fish marketing increasingly depends on photographs, short videos, captions, and messaging-based interactions, yet consumers often cannot inspect a fish product before deciding whether to enquire or buy. This paper develops an original conceptual contribution for analysing how metaphorical and visual persuasion may operate in Nigerian digital fish marketing without conflating attractive presentation with verified product quality or demonstrated consumer response. It critically synthesizes a source-bounded documentary corpus described in the underlying manuscript, including Nigerian fisheries communication and marketing studies, as well as established scholarship on conceptual metaphor, multimodality, visual rhetoric, online trust, and the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) perspective. The paper introduces the Credibility–Cue Framework for Digital Fish Marketing (CCF-DFM), which distinguishes four linked but non-equivalent layers: persuasive cues; consumer inferences; credibility and trust judgments; and behavioral responses. The framework's distinctive contribution is a "claim–evidence alignment" principle: metaphorical and visual cues can make fish meaningful and desirable, but factual implications about freshness, safety, provenance, nutrition, or handling should be supported by inspectable evidence and credible fulfillment practices. The synthesis also proposes an operational coding matrix that separates verbal metaphor, pictorial metaphor, verbo-pictorial metaphor, literal product cues, verifiability signals, and transaction assurances. Because the study did not collect advertisements or consumer data, it reports no prevalence estimates or causal effects. The framework is intended to guide future empirical research, responsible marketing practice, and consumer-protection discussions in Nigeria and comparable settings where fish is marketed through digital channels.

Keywords: *digital fish marketing; multimodal metaphor; visual persuasion; claim–evidence alignment; online trust; perceived quality; purchase intention; Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

Fish supports food consumption, livelihoods, and commercial activity across production, processing, distribution, and retailing. For small-scale fish businesses, digital channels provide ways to display products, communicate availability and price, answer customer questions, and maintain relationships beyond a physical market. Yet digital fish marketing involves a distinctive information problem: potential buyers often cannot touch, smell, or inspect the product at the moment of exposure. They must form an initial judgment from selected images, captions, seller identity, reviews, product details, and transaction arrangements.

Visuals can make a product salient, while metaphorical language can connect it to familiar meanings such as family, vitality, nature, celebration, or convenience. A staged meal may frame fish as part of domestic belonging; a close-up image may invite an inference of freshness; a

caption may present fish as "fuel" or "a taste of home." These are illustrative examples for conceptual explanation, not examples drawn from a sampled Nigerian advertisement corpus. Importantly, visual appeal, metaphorical meaning, perceived quality, trust in a seller, and intention to purchase are different constructs. A persuasive image may attract attention without demonstrating safe handling, and a consumer may like a product yet distrust the seller or reject the offer because of price, delivery, or availability.

Nigerian fisheries research has examined constraints in digital communication, information access, value addition, processing, and marketing. Such work helps establish the commercial context but does not, by itself, establish how consumers respond to metaphorical digital advertisements. Advertising scholarship, in turn, offers analytical tools for examining verbal and visual meaning, while online-trust research emphasizes credibility, integrity, and assurances in remote transactions. The problem is not simply that these literatures have not been combined; it is that their combination can inadvertently encourage a leap from interpretation to claims about consumer effects.

This paper addresses that problem by developing an original Credibility–Cue Framework for Digital Fish Marketing (CCF-DFM). The framework links advertising cues to consumer interpretation, credibility appraisal, and possible responses while explicitly specifying the evidence required at each stage. The paper asks: (1) How can verbal, pictorial, and multimodal persuasive cues in digital fish marketing be distinguished analytically? (2) How should these cues be related to product-quality inferences and seller trust without treating them as equivalent? (3) What observable indicators can support empirical testing of the proposed relationships? and (4) What principles can help fish marketers use persuasion responsibly?

The paper makes three contributions. First, it introduces claim–evidence alignment as a central analytical principle for fish advertising, a product category where important attributes are difficult to verify remotely. Second, it integrates metaphor analysis, visual diagnosticity, seller trust, and fulfillment conditions into a staged framework. Third, it provides an operational coding matrix and testable propositions for subsequent content analysis, consumer research, and experimental work. These are conceptual and methodological contributions, not claims of measured advertising effects.

2. Background and conceptual foundations

2.1 Digital communication and the Nigerian fish-marketing context

The documentary material discussed in the source manuscript points to the relevance of mobile communication and digital information channels in Nigerian fisheries, while also noting barriers involving literacy, accessibility and the capacity to act on information. Studies cited in that manuscript include work on ICT use among fish farmers in Lagos, digital and mobile aquaculture communication in Kogi, climate-information communication, and constraints in fish processing and value addition. These studies are relevant to the operating environment, but they should not be misrepresented as direct tests of consumer-facing digital fish advertising.

Digital promotion is embedded in a business system. Product availability, processing, packaging, storage, pricing, delivery, responsiveness, and the seller's ability to fulfill orders affect whether a promotional promise can be kept. A campaign may generate inquiries yet fail commercially if the advertised product is unavailable or if delivery conditions are unclear. Conversely, a modest post with accurate product information and dependable fulfillment may support customer confidence even without elaborate creative production. This context makes the relationship between persuasion and credibility central to the analysis.

A broader reading of Awolumate's fisheries scholarship strengthens the sector-specific foundation of this paper. Research on extension services and ICT adaptability in Lagos (Awolumate & Omosola, 2017; Awolumate, 2018a), information access and preference among fish farmers in Akwa Ibom (Awolumate, 2018b), and threats to information-use efficiency in multi-channel communication systems (Awolumate & Inyang, 2019a) helps frame the practical conditions under which digital messages can be accessed and acted upon. Work on value-addition constraints and investment risks (Awolumate & Inyang, 2020a; Awolumate & Iniobong, 2021), smoked and dried fish marketing (Awolumate et al., 2022a), catfish consumption patterns (Awolumate, 2022), and financial constraints among small-scale roadside processors (Awolumate & Muyiwa, 2025) place promotional communication within the wider realities of product form, consumer demand, processing capacity, and commercial viability. These studies do not directly test metaphorical online advertisements; their contribution is contextual and should be interpreted accordingly.

2.2 Conceptual metaphor and multimodal meaning

Conceptual metaphor theory treats metaphor as a way of understanding one domain through another, rather than merely as decorative language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In advertising, food can be framed in terms of domains such as energy, nature, family, celebration, or premium experience. A rigorous analysis should identify the source and target domains and the mapping, rather than label every vivid phrase as a metaphor. Expressions may instead be literal descriptions, metonymies, idioms, slogans or unsupported factual claims.

Forceville's work on pictorial and multimodal metaphor extends analysis beyond verbal language to images and combinations of modes (Forceville, 1996, 2008). In digital advertising, meaning may arise through a caption-image relationship, product placement, color, sequencing, spoken narration, sound, or movement. However, an attractive photograph is not automatically a pictorial metaphor. The analyst should show what conceptual mapping is being proposed and how the image or interaction of modes supports it. Interpretations may vary by language, food culture, fish species, familiarity, and prior experience.

2.3 Visual rhetoric, diagnosticity, and perceived quality

Visual rhetoric concerns how visual arrangement communicates an argument or directs attention. Close-up photography, lighting, color, background, packaging, and serving context may influence what viewers notice and infer. For remote food purchases, images may function as cues, but their evidential value differs. A clear photograph can show product form or packaging; it cannot, by itself, establish microbial safety, cold-chain history or the accuracy of a freshness claim. Thus, perceived diagnosticity—the extent to which a cue is seen as useful for judging an attribute—should be distinguished from aesthetic appeal.

Perceived quality is a judgment made by a viewer based on available cues and prior experience. It is not an objective laboratory measure of quality. A consumer may infer that a fish looks fresh while still lacking evidence about handling conditions. The proposed framework, therefore, treats visual appeal and perceived quality as separate analytical constructs and encourages researchers to identify which attribute a particular cue could plausibly inform.

2.4 Online trust and purchase intention

Online trust research highlights the importance of perceived competence, integrity, reputation and assurances in transactions where buyers cannot fully observe the seller or product (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002). In fish marketing, trust can be supported by identifiable seller information, consistent descriptions, transparent pricing, clear quantities, responsive communication, stated delivery terms, genuine customer feedback and a practical route for complaints. These features do not guarantee trust, but they are observable indicators that can be tested.

Purchase intention refers to a stated willingness or likelihood to buy. It should not be treated as equivalent to an enquiry, a completed transaction, repeat purchase or sales growth. Price, location, delivery cost, product availability and payment options can intervene between intention and behaviour. A credible study should measure these outcomes separately and avoid inferring consumer effects from advertising interpretation alone.

2.5 Theoretical integration

The framework draws on four complementary perspectives: conceptual metaphor theory to interpret cross-domain meaning; multimodal metaphor and visual rhetoric to examine the interaction of language and visual form; the stimulus–organism–response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) to organise the possible sequence from advertisement exposure to internal appraisal and response; and online-trust theory to explain why credibility and transaction assurances matter in remote purchasing. The integration is not a claim that the theories independently prove the proposed pathway. Instead, it provides a coherent set of concepts for constructing and testing hypotheses.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

This paper uses a critical documentary synthesis and a conceptual framework development approach. It draws on the source-bounded literature described in the underlying manuscript, including eight fisheries-related publications by Awolumate and collaborators cited there, alongside foundational works on metaphor, multimodality, online trust and S–O–R theory. The purpose is to integrate concepts and derive an operational framework, rather than estimate an effect or claim systematic coverage of all available research.

3.2 Documentary scope and analytical procedure

The reviewed material was organized under five themes: (i) digital-channel access and usability; (ii) fisheries marketing and value-addition constraints; (iii) verbal, pictorial, and multimodal metaphor; (iv) visual diagnosticity, credibility, and online trust; and (v) purchase intention and enterprise implications. Each point was interpreted as a reported finding from a cited sectoral study, a theoretical proposition from the literature, or an implication derived by connecting the two. This distinction prevents a theoretical expectation from being presented as an observed Nigerian consumer response.

Framework development proceeded in three steps. First, the analysis separated message-level features from viewer-level judgements and behavioural outcomes. Second, it identified credibility and fulfilment as conditions that can support or weaken the movement from favourable impression to trust and intention. Third, it translated the constructs into observable categories suitable for a future advertising-content dataset and consumer study.

3.3 Scope and limits of inference

No new advertisements were sampled, no consumers or fish marketers were recruited, and no questionnaire, interview, experiment or transaction audit was conducted for this paper. The illustrative slogans and scenes are hypothetical examples

only. No frequencies, inter-coder reliability coefficients, consumer scores, effect sizes, sales estimates or causal effects are reported. The synthesis is source-bounded and is not a systematic review or meta-analysis. Consequently, the proposed framework and propositions require empirical testing.

4. Findings and framework development

4.1 Documentary synthesis: the central distinctions

The documentary synthesis supports four distinctions that underpin the proposed contribution. First, access to digital communication does not automatically confer effective marketing capability. The cited fisheries communication literature addresses channels and information use, but does not directly test the effectiveness of consumer-facing metaphorical advertisements. Second, promotion operates within the realities of processing, storage, packaging, finance, price, and fulfillment. Third, verbal, pictorial, and multimodal metaphors provide useful categories for analysing meaning, but actual classification requires a defined advertisement corpus. Fourth, perceived product quality, trust in the seller, purchase intention, and actual purchase are related but non-equivalent outcomes.

These distinctions reveal a methodological risk in research on digital fish marketing: analysts may infer too much from a message's persuasive potential. A visual can invite an inference; it cannot establish that the inference is accurate. A metaphor can position a product; it cannot prove that consumers interpret it as intended. A favorable attitude can be associated with intention; it does not prove that a transaction occurred. The framework is designed to keep these inferential steps visible.

4.2 The Credibility–Cue Framework for Digital Fish Marketing (CCF-DFM)

The CCF-DFM proposes four linked layers, with contextual conditions operating across the pathway. Layer 1 is the persuasive cue layer: verbal metaphor, pictorial metaphor, verbo-pictorial metaphor, literal product imagery, sensory presentation, and layout. Layer 2 is consumer inference: the meaning a viewer assigns to freshness, quality, safety, nutrition, value, cultural familiarity, or convenience. Layer 3 is credibility appraisal: the viewer's judgment of the evidence supporting the claim, confidence in the seller, and expectations about fulfillment. Layer 4 is response: attention, inquiry, sharing, purchase intention, and actual purchase, measured separately. Prior experience, digital literacy, price sensitivity, product type, platform, seller reputation, and delivery conditions may shape any link.

Layer	Core question	Possible indicators	Evidence boundary
1. Persuasive cues	What does the advertisement show or say?	Metaphor type; image composition; caption; product information; seller signals	Content features can be coded from advertisements.
2. Consumer inference	What meaning or product attribute is inferred?	Perceived freshness, quality, safety, nutrition, value, belonging or convenience	Requires audience data to establish actual interpretation.
3. Credibility appraisal	Does the message appear supportable and is the seller trusted?	Claim–evidence alignment; seller identity; price/quantity clarity; handling and delivery information; reputation	Content can show presence of signals; consumer trust requires audience measurement.
4. Response	What does the viewer do or intend to do?	Enquiry, sharing, purchase intention, completed purchase, repeat purchase	Intentions and observed behaviours must be measured separately.

The framework's core principle is claim–evidence alignment. Expressive or symbolic language can be used to create brand meaning, but a message that makes or strongly implies a factual claim should provide proportionate evidence. For example, a "fresh" claim may be supported by current product information and transparent handling or delivery details; an image alone is not sufficient proof. A nutrition claim should be accurate and appropriately substantiated. A cultural or family metaphor may be expressive rather than factual, but its interpretation still needs empirical examination.

4.3 The Claim–Evidence Alignment Principle

Claim–evidence alignment is the original organising principle proposed here. It asks whether the implication invited by the advertisement is matched by information that can reasonably support it. It does not require every creative message to become a technical label. Rather, it distinguishes expressive positioning from material assertions that could affect food-quality or transaction decisions. The principle is assessed by comparing (a) the claim or inference invited by words and visuals, (b) the evidence supplied in the advertisement or linked information, and (c) the degree to which the evidence is relevant to that claim.

Claim class	Illustrative message type (not sampled data)	Potential inference	Evidence or safeguard to examine

Expressive / symbolic	A family meal or "taste of home" framing	Belonging, tradition, comfort	Cultural interpretation should not be assumed; test with viewers.
Sensory / appearance	Close-up of a fish product	Visual appeal; possible freshness inference	Use representative images; do not treat appearance as proof of safety.
Product specification	Named species, product form, weight or quantity	Product identity and value	Specific, consistent product description and quantity.
Quality / safety assertion	Claims about freshness, hygiene or safe handling	Reduced perceived risk	Relevant, accurate and checkable handling or product information.
Transaction promise	Delivery today; guaranteed availability; stated price	Reliability and convenience	Clear conditions and actual fulfilment capability.

The principle is useful because metaphorical persuasion can blur the line between symbolic association and factual implication. It also gives content analysts a way to avoid making a subjective judgement that an advertisement is simply "trustworthy." Instead, analysts can record the particular claims, information and transaction assurances present, then separately test how consumers evaluate them.

4.4 Proposed coding framework for future advertisement analysis

To make the conceptual contribution operational, Table 3 provides a starter codebook. The unit of analysis should be one unique advertisement asset or campaign post, defined consistently. Reposts of the same creative may be retained as separate exposures only if the research question concerns platform circulation; otherwise, duplicate assets should be identified. A study should state platforms, dates, inclusion rules, product types, and whether paid and organic content are included.

Code family	Code / definition	Suggested coding rule
Asset metadata	Platform, date, seller type, product form, language, asset ID	Record only what can be observed or documented.
Verbal mode	Caption, slogan, voice-over, on-screen text	Transcribe relevant wording verbatim; note language and translation procedure.
Verbal metaphor	A phrase maps a source domain onto fish/product meaning	Record source domain, target, mapping and contextual justification; do not code every slogan as metaphor.
Pictorial metaphor	Visual composition supports a cross-domain mapping without relying only on words	Explain the visual elements and proposed mapping; distinguish literal product photography.
Verbo-pictorial metaphor	Meaning emerges from the interaction of text and image	Show why neither mode alone adequately accounts for the interpretation.
Literal visual cue	Product close-up, packaging, cooking, serving or storage depiction	Code separately from metaphor; describe visible cue without inferring unobserved quality.
Claim category	Freshness, safety, origin, nutrition, quality, value, availability or delivery	Record whether the claim is explicit or implied and whether it is factual or expressive.
Evidence signal	Species, weight, price, date, storage/handling details, certification or traceability where applicable	Record presence and specificity; do not assume that a signal is genuine merely because it appears.
Seller / transaction assurance	Seller identity, contact, payment, delivery, return/complaint terms, testimonials	Record visible information and distinguish seller-provided claims from independently verified evidence.
Audience response	Interpretation, perceived quality, trust, intention, enquiry or purchase	Do not infer from content alone; collect audience or transaction data.

At least two trained coders should pilot the codebook on a subset of advertisements, discuss ambiguous categories, revise definitions and independently code a prespecified portion of the final corpus. Agreement should be reported using an appropriate statistic for the data and design, such as Cohen's kappa for two coders on categorical codes or Krippendorff's alpha where suitable. The study should report the denominator and treatment of missing or ambiguous cases. A reliability statistic should not substitute for transparent examples and a record of coding decisions.

4.5 Propositions for empirical testing

The documentary synthesis does not establish the following relationships as findings. They are propositions derived from the framework and offered for future testing:

P1: Digital fish advertisements contain distinguishable verbal, pictorial and verbo-pictorial persuasive forms, alongside literal product cues that should not be misclassified as metaphor.
P2: Metaphorical and visual cues are associated with consumer inferences about product meaning, but the direction and strength of these inferences depend on cultural familiarity, product type and prior experience.
P3: Perceived diagnosticity of product information is more closely related to perceived quality judgements than aesthetic appeal alone.
P4: Claim–evidence alignment and transaction assurances are positively associated with trust in the seller, after accounting for prior experience and perceived risk.
P5: Trust and perceived quality are related but distinct mediating appraisals between advertisement exposure and purchase intention.
P6: The relationship between purchase intention and actual purchase is conditioned by price, availability, delivery cost, payment options, and fulfillment performance.
P7: Expressive metaphor that is not accompanied by factual quality claims may operate differently from metaphor used to imply freshness, safety or nutritional benefits; these effects require audience testing.

5. Discussion

5.1 What the framework adds

The CCF-DFM moves beyond a broad assertion that visuals and metaphors may persuade. Its principal contribution is to specify the inferential boundaries between the message, the meaning assigned to it, the credibility of the claim, and the response that follows. This matters for an online product whose important attributes are not fully observable at the point of exposure. The framework also allows researchers to examine an advertisement's creative form without treating creativity as proof of effectiveness.

The claim–evidence alignment principle adds an accountability dimension to multimodal analysis. Conventional metaphor coding can explain how a product is framed, but it may not ask whether the impression is supported by relevant information. Trust models can explain why seller credibility matters, but may not distinguish symbolic product positioning from claims about freshness or safe handling. The proposed integration asks both questions: what meaning is invited, and what evidence is offered to support the material implications of that meaning?

5.2 Implications for digital fish marketers

For fish processors and vendors, the framework suggests that creative messaging should complement, not replace, product information. Practical posts can identify species or product type, quantity, price, availability, collection or delivery terms and a reliable contact route. Photographs should represent the product being offered and should not imply attributes that cannot be substantiated. Claims about freshness, hygiene, origin or nutrition should be accurate and supportable. Metaphor can contribute to brand identity, but it should not obscure the information customers need to decide.

The framework is designed to be feasible for small enterprises. It does not assume that expensive video production is necessary. Clear smartphone photography, consistent captions, timely responses and transparent transaction terms may be more implementable than elaborate campaigns. However, these are practice implications derived from the synthesis, not evaluated interventions. Their effects on conversion, trust or repeat purchase should be tested.

5.3 Implications for training, extension and consumer protection

Enterprise-development and extension programmes can teach sellers to distinguish creative claims from factual claims, capture representative images, provide clear product specifications, respond consistently and maintain simple order records. Training should account for differences in digital literacy, language, connectivity and available resources. Consumer-protection initiatives can promote transparent seller identity, price and delivery terms, substantiated product claims and accessible complaint mechanisms. Such safeguards are particularly relevant where customers rely on remote representations before paying.

5.4 Research agenda

A next-stage empirical study could build a purposive or systematically sampled corpus of public advertisements from specified platforms and a defined time window. The sampling frame should include clear rules for public posts, paid promotions, duplicate assets, seller categories and fish

product forms. A content-analysis phase could apply the codebook and assess coding reliability. A second phase could use cognitive interviews or focus groups to learn how consumers interpret metaphors in their own words. A survey or controlled experiment could then test the relationship between message features, perceived diagnosticity, perceived quality, trust and purchase intention. Where feasible, transaction records or follow-up measures could examine actual purchase separately.

An experiment could compare versions of the same advertisement while varying one feature at a time—for example, metaphor present versus absent, or complete versus incomplete product information. It should avoid manipulating potentially misleading safety claims without suitable safeguards. Sample size should be justified by the planned analysis and expected effect, not selected solely for convenience. If the study focuses on Lagos State, that scope should be stated as a bounded case rather than as representative of all Nigerian consumers.

6. Limitations

This paper is a conceptual contribution developed from a source-bounded documentary synthesis. It is not a systematic review and does not claim to exhaust the international or Nigerian literature. The fisheries studies discussed in the underlying manuscript primarily concern communication, information use, marketing constraints and value addition; they do not directly measure consumer responses to sampled metaphorical fish advertisements. The paper did not collect an advertising corpus or consumer data, and its framework and propositions remain to be tested. The proposed coding scheme may require adaptation to particular platforms, languages, product categories and research objectives. Finally, claim–evidence alignment is an analytical principle, not a substitute for food-safety inspection, regulatory standards or independent verification of seller claims.

7. Conclusion

This paper proposes the Credibility–Cue Framework for Digital Fish Marketing (CCF-DFM) as an original way to connect metaphorical and visual persuasion with consumer trust and purchase intention while preserving the distinction between symbolic meaning and verifiable product information. Its key contribution is the claim–evidence alignment principle, supported by an operational coding framework and propositions for empirical testing. The documentary synthesis indicates that digital communication, fish-marketing constraints, metaphor analysis and online trust are relevant bodies of work, but it does not establish the prevalence or effectiveness of particular advertising strategies among Nigerian consumers. The framework offers researchers a transparent pathway from advertisement analysis to audience testing and gives marketers a practical principle: persuasive presentation should be consistent with accurate product information and dependable fulfilment.

Declarations

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest or competing interests relevant to this study.

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Ethics approval: This conceptual documentary study did not recruit human participants or collect personal data; formal ethics approval was therefore not applicable to the work as conducted.

Data availability: No primary dataset was generated for this conceptual synthesis. The coding framework is provided in the manuscript for adaptation and empirical use.

Author contributions: Onugha Magnus Ekeson contributed to the conceptualization of the original study, data collection, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript draft. Afolabi Innocent Ariremako contributed to conceptualization, methodology, supervision, validation, interpretation of findings, manuscript review and editing, and overall research guidance.

All authors are responsible for reviewing and approving the final manuscript and accepting accountability for the integrity and accuracy of the research.

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