

## A Contrastive Study of Person Metaphors in the Product Launches by Apple and Huawei

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### Abstract

In the dynamic landscape of global product launches, understanding the interplay of language, visuals, and cognition is essential for commercial communication. To construe the cognitive processes in the interplays, this study adopts conceptual blending theory within the framework of cognitive linguistics to analyze the person metaphors as verbal strategies employed by two leading technology companies, Apple Inc. and Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd., during their global product launches for mobile phones from 2020 to 2023. The authors extract speech texts from their launching presentations, and analyze metaphorical blending processes in the discourses to identify how they collaboratively construct product images and direct consumer's cognition in the commercial promotion activities so as to delve the interrelationship between marketization of the products and launchers' intention, which might influence consumers' cognition of the products and purchasing actions, meanwhile providing practical insights and guidance for product promotion in the tech industry cross cultures.

**Key words:** Conceptual blending theory; Person metaphor; Cognitive process; Product launches

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### 1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The accelerated pace of technological advancement and the inherently competitive dynamics of the tech industry have accentuated the importance of sophisticated communication strategies during product launches. Corporations like Apple and Huawei leverage these events not merely to unveil new offerings but also to reinforce their brand identity and forge connections with consumers. Analyzing the construction and influence of these communication strategies on consumer behavior is crucial for both scholarly inquiry and practical applications within marketing. In recent years, there has been an increasing scholarly interest in exploring the verbal communication strategies employed by leading tech giants during their global product launches. Nonetheless, much of the extant research has predominantly concentrated on multimodal elements, thereby leaving a gap in the understanding of exclusively verbal and textual strategies in relation to cognitive construction. Despite the extensive literature on marketing communication, there remains a paucity of research that examines the verbal strategies employed in tech product launches through the lens of cognitive linguistic frameworks, particularly conceptual blending theory, which provides a framework for analyzing how intricate meanings are constructed via the integration of diverse metaphorical applications in marketing or promotional discourses. Thus, this study aims to analyze the metaphorical lexis employed in marketing speeches on Apple and Huawei product launches, offering nuanced insights into how verbal strategies impact consumer cognition. More specifically, through the application of conceptual blending theory to metaphor analysis within product launch texts, this paper seeks to elucidate the cognitive process and mechanisms underlying consumer perceptions and potential commercial behaviors.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics

Metaphor has emerged as a critical element in cognitive linguistics over the past few decades, drawing substantial academic interest both in China and internationally. Numerous scholars have contributed to this growing field, exploring metaphors from cognitive and linguistic perspectives (Falck, 2018; Ng & Koller, 2013; Wen & Yang, 2016; Yu et al., 2017; Yang, 2020, Yang et al., 2020). Traditionally, metaphor had been treated as a rhetorical device (Richards, 1936) until the 1980s, when Lakoff and Johnson (1980) redefined metaphor as a conceptual tool, establishing the foundation for cognitive metaphor theory, and Lakoff (1987) further developed this idea with “mapping theory,” explaining how metaphors connect conceptual domains. Building on this, Fauconnier (1994, 1997) introduced “mental space theory” and “blending theory,” focusing on the cognitive processes behind metaphorical meaning construction.

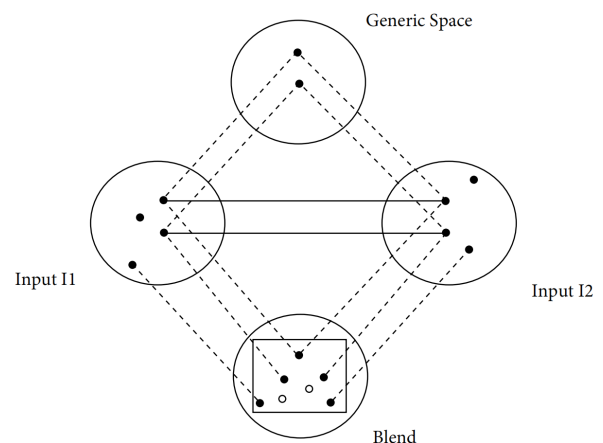
Metaphor research is currently flourishing, with scholars examining conceptual metaphors in various contexts, including education (Knop, 2015; Tao, 2017), politics (Chen & Liu, 2009; Musolff, 2011), and business (Cacciaguidi-Fahy & Cunningham, 2007; Handford & Koester, 2010; Koller, 2004, Yang 2020). While cross-cultural studies of metaphor was gaining attentions (Shen, 2006; Tarvi, 2013; Lai, 2016; Yang 2020), some studies have also focused on multimodal metaphors, examining both verbal and non-verbal elements such as visual and auditory metaphors (Ning, 2011; Zhang & Xu, 2017). Given these studies, in cognitive linguistics, metaphor remains a central concept in cognitive linguistics, with significant academic contributions by both Chinese and international scholars (Falck, 2018; Ng & Koller, 2013; Wen & Yang, 2016; Yu et al., 2017; Yang 2020) from various angles, leading to the development of influential theories such as “conceptual metaphor” and “mapping theory” by Lakoff (1987), “mental space theory” and “blended space theory” by Fauconnier (1994, 1997) as difference approaches to understand the cognitive world. Meanwhile, scholars such as Lakoff (1987), Gibbs (1994), Kövecses (2002, 2005), and Goatly (1997) have also explored the relationship between metaphor and metonymy, significantly broadening the scope of metaphor studies.

Despite these advances, gaps remain, particularly in applying these theories to empirical, complex and multimodal contexts. Recently, Chinese scholars have explored metaphors within various linguistic and cultural frameworks, with an emphasis on cross-cultural comparisons and multimodal applications (Ning, 2011; Zhang & Xu, 2017, Yang, 2020), but have overlooked the dynamic potential interpretations that metaphorical blending theory offers. Developed by Fauconnier and

Turner (1998, 2002), metaphorical blending theory elucidates how multiple conceptual inputs combine to generate novel meanings and interpretations, rendering it particularly useful for examining the diverse metaphors present in contemporary commercial and technological discourses. This approach provides insight into how metaphors utilized in tech companies’ product launches influence consumer behavior, offering a unique perspective on the cognitive mechanisms underpinning metaphorical meaning in marketing contexts, where visual and experiential components are fundamental to meaning construction.

### 2.2 Conceptual Blending Theory

Conceptual blending theory (CBT), also known as integration theory, was initially introduced by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002), which describes conceptual blending as a dynamic process that occurs during perception, allowing individuals to generate new meanings from existing mental structures. Unlike the traditional unidirectional mapping found in conceptual metaphor theory, blending theory (BT) involves a more intricate and dynamic process of meaning construction. This approach is particularly effective for analyzing complex images and enhancing the understanding of conceptual metaphors through its mechanisms of meaning formation (Hedblom et al., 2016; Schneider & Hartner, 2012). Coulson and Oakley (2005) further elaborate the metaphors on the basics of blending, emphasizing its role in language and thought, arguing that blending facilitated the creation of new meanings by merging elements from different conceptual domains, thereby enhancing communication and understanding.



**Figure 1**  
**Model of CBT space (Fauconnier 1998, p.145)**

However, before delving into the process of blending theory, it is essential to first understanding the concept of “Mental Spaces,” which was extensively explored by Fauconnier in the 1990s (Fauconnier 1994, 1997,

1998, 1999). Mental spaces are temporary and partial representations that individuals construct when thinking or conceptualizing past, present, imagined, or future situations (Fauconnier 1997: 11). These research on the relationships between various mental spaces led to the definition of conceptual blending as networks of four mental spaces. A model of Conceptual blending theory (CBT) illustrates these four spaces (see Figure 1).

The Conceptual Integration Network model typically includes four mental spaces: two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space. These mental spaces are depicted as circles, with solid lines representing connections between the inputs and dotted lines indicating links to generic or blended spaces. Elements and frames populate the input spaces, where elements signify discourse entities, and frames represent relationships between those entities. In cognitive linguistics, frames reflect schematic and conventional structures of knowledge that arise from human experience, cultural practices, and social institutions. Typically, the network includes at least two input spaces, though this number can increase under certain circumstances (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In Figure 1, the generic space contains abstract structures shared by the input spaces, serving as the foundation for cross-space mapping. However, the formation of a network does not always require a generic space, which is only momentarily activated in short-term memory. The blended space, the fourth mental space, receives inputs from the two input spaces and generate a new structure not present in either input space, known as the emergent structure. The blended space is formed through dynamic simulation and instantaneous cross-space mapping.

Conceptual blending is a fundamental mental operation integral to human thought, even in basic cognitive activities. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) describe conceptual blending as an unconscious process embedded in all aspects of life. The mental spaces function through cross-space mapping, selective projection, and three steps within the blended space.

*Cross-Space Mapping:* Conceptual blending involves mappings between input spaces I1 and I2, connecting elements and features across various domains. These mappings aim to establish relationships that enable the generation, communication, and processing of meaning.

*Selective Projection:* Projection plays a key role in the formation of blended spaces, with elements from input I1 and I2 projected into the blended space. This process occurs unconsciously, and while some elements are selected for projection, not all are necessarily included. In certain cases, elements from both input spaces may merge in the blended space, creating new meanings and structures.

*Three Steps in the Blended Space:* The processes of composition, completion, and elaboration characterize the blending process. Composition involves projecting

elements from the input spaces into the blended space, establishing connections between previously unrelated elements. Completion refers to forming a pattern within the blend by aligning the input elements with long-term memory, drawing from familiar structures. Finally, elaboration occurs as mental simulations are run based on the blended content, allowing for dynamic connections and insights to emerge. These three steps collectively result in a new, emergent structure that transcends the original inputs (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998: 48).

In summary, the processes of composition, completion and elaboration converge to yield a novel configuration that transcends the individual components of the initial inputs, denoted as I1 and I2, which serve as the bedrock for the current investigation.

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### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

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#### 3.1 Data Collection

Within the purview of this scholarly endeavor, the author has elected to scrutinize the scripts from product launch videos pertaining to mobile devices, specifically those of Apple and Huawei. The transcriptions of Huawei's launch event videos were procured from Bilibili, with a focus on content from Huawei's official channel and a video compilation of Huawei's launching events. In the case of Apple, the pertinent footage was extracted from the company's official YouTube channel. The criteria for video selection were stringently delineated, with a singular emphasis on the introduction of mobile products during the launch events. This encompassed Huawei's P series, Nova series, 畅享 (Enjoy) series, 麦芒 (Maimang) series, and Mate series, in addition to Apple's iPhone series. The product launch videos under consideration were released between the years 2020 and 2023, as detailed in Table 1.

For Huawei, a total of 19 videos were analyzed, with the transcribed text comprising 351,141 tokens. The longest video was the Huawei P60 launch event, lasting 3 hours and 15 minutes, while the shortest was the 麦芒 (Maimang) 9 launch event, with a duration of 34 minutes and 57 seconds. For Apple, the analysis included 4 videos, with the transcribed text comprising 45,300 tokens. The longest Apple video was from the Apple Event on September 7, 2022, lasting 1 hour and 34 minutes, and the shortest was the Apple Event on October 13, 2020, with a duration of 1 hour and 10 minutes.

The data analysis of this study encompasses an in-depth scrutiny of the speech texts within the transcribed texts to initially discern metaphors and subsequently deconstruct their blending processes. Employing NVivo as a qualitative analysis software, the author systematically identified metaphors present within the transcribed speech texts and extracts. This tool is instrumental in facilitating the coding of data and adeptly managing the substantial corpus of textual data.

**Table 1**  
**Data for analysis**

Year	Huawei Product Series	No. of Launching Events	Apple Product Series	No. of Launching Events
2020	P40	8	iPhone 12 Series	1
	Nova 7			
	畅享20 pro (Enjoy 20 pro)			
	麦芒9 (Maimang 9)			
	畅享20 (Enjoy 20)			
2021	Mate 40	3	iPhone 13 Series	1
	Nova 8SE			
	Nova 8			
2022	Mate X2	3	iPhone 14 Series	1
	P50			
	Nova 9			
2023	Mate Xs2	5	iPhone 15 Series	1
	Nova 10			
	Mate 50			
	P60			
	Nova 11			
2023	Nova 11SE	5	iPhone 15 Series	1
	Mate 60			
	Nova 12			
Total		19		4

Once metaphors are identified, the authors will differentiate the typologies of metaphors and ascertain those that are most pertinent to commercial marketing grounded in blending theory offering a framework for comprehending how disparate elements from the source and target domains combine to engender new connotations and commercial insights.

### 3.2 Metaphor Categorization

The extraction of metaphors in the product launch texts

employs a two-pronged approach, combining automated Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques with manual verification to ensure comprehensive and accurate identification. Automated tools, such as Python-based metaphor detection algorithms, systematically scan the texts for potential metaphors by analyzing lexical patterns and context. For manual verification, researchers review the detected metaphors, identify any missed or misclassified instances, and categorize them into predefined types. This approach balances efficiency with the nuanced understanding needed to capture both obvious and subtle metaphors, ensuring a thorough and reliable analysis for the research. NVivo is used to identify metaphors in the transcribed texts. First, the transcribed texts procured from the product launch events are imported into NVivo for systematic analysis. A manual coding is then initiated, commencing with the establishment of primary codes that correspond to the classifications of metaphors: structural, ontological, and orientational. This comprehensive analysis facilitates the identification and categorization of diverse metaphors embedded in the textual corpus. Subsequently, personification instances are singled out from the coded segments. These instances are then categorized to further categorization based on the gender attributes articulated within the statements, yielding three distinct codes: “man,” “woman,” and “neuter.” This systematic approach enables a thorough examination of the metaphoric language employed in the promotional discourse of Huawei and Apple, thereby augmenting the comprehension of the manner in which these metaphors influence consumer cognition and product image construction.

Having extracted the metaphors by using both NVivo and manual examining, the authors have identified 62 tokens in Huawei Chinese texts and 56 tokens in Apple English texts from structural, ontological and orientational perspectives (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Metaphor categorization**

Metaphors type		Metaphor tokens in Huawei speeches	Percentage among all metaphors in Huawei speeches	Metaphor tokens in Apple speeches	Percentage among all metaphors in Apple speeches
Structural	Personification	13	21%	6	11%
	Other metaphors	26	42%	17	30%
Ontological	Personification	5	8%	7	12%
	Other metaphors	17	27%	21	38%
Orientational	Personification	0	0%	0	0%
	Other metaphors	1	2%	5	9%
Total metaphors		62	100%	56	100%
Total personification		18	29%	13	23%

For each metaphor identified within the scope of this study, a meticulous classification process was undertaken, categorizing them into three distinct typologies: structural, ontological, and orientational. This systematic approach ensured that the total count of metaphors, as well as the distribution across each category, was meticulously documented. Concurrently, the frequency of personification instances was also quantified, providing a granular view of the metaphoric expressions employed in the promotional narratives of Huawei and Apple. This quantitative documentation serves as a foundational aspect of the analysis, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the rhetorical features and their implications on consumer cognition and branding.

In the two corpora, conceptualization is prevalent followed by personification. The former one is widely analyzed while the latter one is overlooked. As a significant feature, personification is particularly interesting and deserved more attention. In Huawei's speech, personification accounts for 29% among the metaphors, while in Apple, it accounts for 23% of the total metaphorical tokens. Specifically, Huawei utilizes more structural personification (13 in total), compared to Apple's 6, and slightly fewer ontological personifications (5 for Huawei, 7 for Apple). Noticeably, neither company uses orientational personification. The data indicates that, although both brands employ personification to imbue their products with human-like attributes, Huawei places greater emphasis on this rhetorical device, ostensibly to cultivate a stronger emotional resonance with consumers by rendering its technology more lifelike and relatable. In contrast, Apple's strategy, while comparable, maintains a more measured equilibrium between personification and alternative conceptualizations, suggesting a sophisticated and neutral approach to product narrative. In the following, the authors will focus on personification metaphors and their blending process to provoke their embedded meanings within the contexts.

## 4. PERSON METAPHOR ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Huawei Mobile Phone as a Gendered Person

In the corpus of Huawei's product launch narratives, gendered personifications are prominently featured. The company's rhetoric frequently incorporates descriptors such as "graceful appearance," "elegant," and "slim figure" to imbue certain products with feminine attributes, while words such as "gentleman" and "youth" are applied to evoke masculine traits. These gendered personifications are instrumental in crafting distinct product identities, which appeal to consumers by leveraging qualities associated with specific genders. Simultaneously, Huawei also incorporates personifications that underscore more gender-neutral characteristics, reflecting a broader inclusivity that resonates with a heterogeneous audience.

The intentional employment of both gender-specific and gender-neutral traits in Huawei's product launch rhetoric mirrors the company's strategic alignment with its diverse product offerings and its acute awareness of the variegated identities of its consumer base. The coexistence of gendered and genderless personifications within their promotional discourse suggests an intentional effort to reconcile traditional aesthetic connotations with contemporary demands for inclusivity.

This approach is likely aimed at broadening the appeal of Huawei's products to a more expansive array of target demographics. By adopting this strategy, Huawei positions itself as a brand that is both attuned to the evolving social landscape and dedicated to satisfying the needs and preferences of a multicultural and multifaceted consumer market. The balance between traditional and modern sensibilities is crucial in today's global marketplace, where consumer expectations are increasingly shaped by a desire for brands to be representative and inclusive of all genders and identities.

#### 4.1.1 Mobile Phone as a Man

In Huawei's launching events, the utilization of personification, particularly the anthropomorphization of their brands as a "man", serves to embody attributes of strength, power, and reliability. This gender implication is congruent with traditional masculine traits, highlighting features such as endurance, cutting-edge technology, and superior performance. The strategic alignment of these masculine traits with their products is aimed at resonating with consumers who place a premium on assertiveness and robustness in technological devices. Such a marketing approach not only seeks to establish a strong brand identity but also to forge a connection with the target demographic that appreciates and seeks out these qualities in their technology choices.

##### Example 1

“日晕而雨，月晕而风，象征着君子高雅不凡的生活格调。”  
("A halo around the sun predicts rain; a halo around the moon predicts wind—symbolizing the noble and elegant lifestyle of a gentleman.") (Huawei, 2020.09.03)

君子 ("Gentleman") portrays the product with qualities of tastefulness, elegance, and sophistication, attributes traditionally associated with masculinity. The metaphorical deployment by Huawei, equating their product to a "gentleman," encapsulates notions of refinement and quality. This linguistic strategy accentuates the product's appeal to consumers who esteem class and sophistication. The product is thereby positioned as an emblem of taste and elegance, transcending its functional utility to signify a cultivated style.

The linguistic choices associated with the "Gentleman" metaphor include terms such as "gentle," "elegant," and "good taste." "Gentle" conveys a sense of smoothness and ease, suggesting that the product is user-friendly and pleasant to interact with. "Elegant" highlights the

product’s refined design and aesthetic appeal, while “good taste” emphasizes its association with quality and sophistication. These lexical choices resonate with the metaphor of a gentleman, reinforcing the idea that the product is crafted for users who appreciate style, quality, and elegance in their technology.

Example 2

“刚刚开始少年出尘般的蜕变，充满了生机和无限的可能。” (“Just beginning a transformation as pure and extraordinary as a young man stepping into the world, brimming with vitality and limitless potential.”) (Huawei, 2020.04.23)

This sentence uses personification, analogizing the smartphone to a young man embarking on a transformative journey. This comparison accentuates the device’s latent potential and dynamism, situating it as an artifact brimming with novel vigor and untapped potential, akin to a youth on the precipice of maturation, teeming with invigorating vitality and limitless prospects. The term “少年” (youth or young man) conjures an image of innocence combined with the excitement of new experiences, implying that the product embodies both refined design and a readiness to explore new technological frontiers. By choosing phrases like “出尘般的蜕变” (a transcendental transformation) and “生机和无限的可能” (vitality and limitless potential), Huawei underscores the inherent innovation, adaptability, and quintessence of youthful vigor. This metaphor frames the phone as more than a tool but as a “companion” in a user’s existential voyage, consonant with thematic elements of maturation, potential, and the inception of novel endeavors.

Example 3

“绿色演绎着生命的律动，宛如润玉，颜如君子，即便是暗光也难掩典雅的气质。” (“The color green expresses the rhythm of life, like polished jade, with a refined elegance akin to that of a noble gentleman. Even in dim light, its graceful aura remains undiminished.”) (Huawei, 2020.04.23)

In this description, the color green is personified with qualities traditionally associated with a refined “gentleman,” suggesting a quiet dignity and resilience. The selection of “gentleman” as a metaphor introduces a subtle gender implication, framing green as a color of restrained, timeless elegance—attributes frequently culturally ascribed to the masculine domain. This delineation of green within this context is not merely aligned with the fortitude and grace of jade, a gem revered for its purity and virtue in Chinese culture, but also with qualities of maturity and stability. By imbuing green with these “gentlemanly” traits, the sentence appeals to a perception of green as noble and versatile, bridging nature’s raw energy with cultural refinement. It’s an artistic device that not only enhances green’s aesthetic appeal but also taps into gendered associations that could influence how the audience views the product’s qualities, potentially appealing to a demographic seeking sophistication and understated strength.

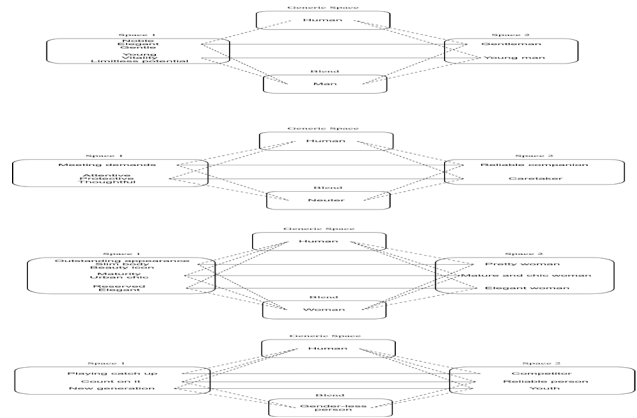


Figure 2  
**CBT space of Huawei: “Mobile phone as a man”**

In this blending model for Huawei, the characteristics of nobility, elegance, and gentleness are combined with youth, vitality, and limitless potential to form an idealized set of attributes. These traits, reminiscent of noble human qualities, convey both refinement and modernity simultaneously. In blending these qualities with the specific identities of a gentleman and a young man, Huawei crafts a nuanced product persona that symbolizes maturity and aspirational youthfulness. This persona is recognizable and relatable as a form of Man — a blend that integrates the abstract virtues with the human figure to create a sophisticated yet energetic product image. The use of “gentleman” and “young man” suggests an intentional alignment with masculine qualities of elegance and vigor, which may evoke reliability and strength while remaining relatable and timeless. This metaphor suggests not just a product but a reliable companion, incorporating Huawei’s brand essence of tradition with innovation. This gendered choice, while distinctly masculine, remains aspirational and appealing across a broad audience due to the youthful, noble qualities attributed to this “Man” figure, making it flexible in reaching both gender-specific and neutral audiences through the symbolic ideals embedded in the product’s characterization. Through this blend, Huawei positions the product as embodying a balance of grace and modern vitality, appealing to customers seeking reliability paired with forward-looking sophistication.

4.1.2 Mobile Phone as a Woman

The “woman” category in Huawei’s personification embodies elegance, beauty, and sensitivity. This gender implication emphasizes aesthetics, user-friendliness, and emotional resonance, appealing to consumers who appreciate stylistic flair and personal expressiveness. By ascribing feminine qualities to certain features or design elements, Huawei delineates its products as not only utilitarian but also as an embodiment of grace and sophistication.

#### Example 4

“颜值出众，身材纤薄，相信Nova7系列会成为我们2020年的手机界的颜值担当。” (“With outstanding appearance and a slim body, we believe the Nova7 series will be the beauty icon of the smartphone world in 2020.”) (Huawei, 2020.04.23)

In Example 4, Huawei’s Nova7 series smartphone is personified with the qualities of a visually striking, slender figure, carrying a subtle gendered implication of feminine beauty. Phrases like “颜值出众” (“outstanding appearance”) and “身材纤薄” (“slim body”) draw on traditional feminine characteristics associated with grace and physical allure, echoing cultural norms that emphasize these traits in a highly positive light. This feminine imagery subtly aligns the product with qualities of attractiveness, elegance, and refinement, presenting the phone as an embodiment of visual appeal in the tech world. Positioning the Nova7 series as the “beauty standard” in the smartphone industry for 2020, the description likens the product to a leading figure in aesthetics, an approach that resonates with cultural perceptions of idealized femininity. This approach can resonate with audience who value beauty and elegance, potentially attracting consumers seeking a stylish, visually captivating device. However, it also reflects a gendered perspective that frames technology as embodying culturally specific ideals of femininity, a trend that may appeal differently across various demographic segments.

#### Example 5

这次我们在蜜语红中间加入了一点点桃红色的色相，让它多了一点点成熟感和都市时尚感 (“This time, we’ve added a hint of peach pink to the honey-red color, giving it a touch of maturity and urban chic.”) (Huawei, 2020.04.23)

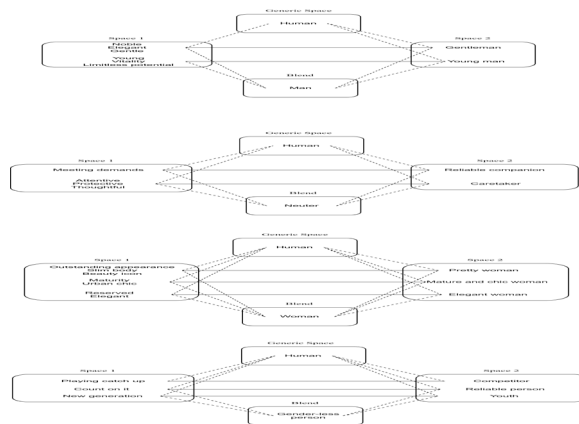
This description infuses the product with a distinctly feminine identity, emphasizing a blend of sophistication and metropolitan style. The use of “蜜语红” (honey red) and the added “桃红色” (peach pink) in Example 5 imbues the color with connotations of warmth, softness, and femininity. Peach pink, in particular, is culturally associated with tenderness and subtle sophistication, aligning with qualities often attributed to mature femininity and chic, urban sensibilities. By choosing this nuanced color blend, the description invokes a “mature” yet trendy appeal, targeting a demographic that may see these qualities as aspirational. The nuanced inference herein suggests that the device, like an elegant, urban woman, embodies a refined balance of allure and style. Such gendered vernacular possesses the potential to evoke a potent, although it may also confine the artifact within a circumscribed array of attributes that corresponds to conventional feminine archetypes.

#### Example 6

银色的水晶星耀环，搭配上浅紫色的星耀纱，让它在柔和之外多了一份高冷的优雅，对于女性用户而言是非常夏天非常气质的选择。 (“The silver crystal star halo, paired with a light purple shimmering veil, gives it a reserved, elegant charm

beyond its softness. For female users, this is a very summery and stylish choice.”) (Huawei, 2022.07.04)

This description employs distinctively feminine language and imagery to personify the product with attributes traditionally associated with femininity — grace, elegance, and subtle sophistication in Example 6. The “silver crystal star halo” and “light purple shimmering veil” evoke a sense of gentle beauty, hinting at softness and allure, yet the product is also portrayed as having a “reserved elegance,” which could appeal to women seeking a blend of refinement and understated strength. The gender implications are evident in the selection of words like “elegance” and the emphasis on a “summery and “stylish” feel, suggesting that the product aligns with culturally constructed feminine ideals. By framing these qualities as desirable to female consumers, the language subtly reinforces traditional associations of grace, delicacy, and aesthetic appeal with femininity. This approach targets a specific consumer profile, appealing to women who may resonate with the notion of balancing subtle beauty with cool sophistication, though it also risks limiting the device’s appeal by perpetuating gendered product imagery.



**Figure 3**  
CBT space of Huawei: “Mobile phone as a woman”

In this blending model for Huawei, elements of an “outstanding appearance,” “slim body,” and “beauty icon” from Space 1 combine with qualities of “maturity,” “urban chic,” and a “cool, elegant charm.” These abstract qualities are connected to Space 2, represented by specific feminine archetypes: the “pretty woman,” the “mature and chic woman,” and the “elegant woman.” The Generic Space is defined as “human,” drawing on universally recognized qualities associated with attractiveness, sophistication, and elegance in women, which are idealized to form a product persona that embodies these traits as its core identity. In the blend, Huawei’s product is conceptualized as a “woman” who embodies both visual allure and functional sophistication. This “woman” blends elegance with a contemporary edge, targeting an audience that values beauty integrated with maturity and

urban relevance. The adoption of an overtly feminine persona, with qualities often socially attributed to women, introduces an aspirational element for consumers seeking products that epitomize chic and sophisticated lifestyles. The feminine metaphor, centered on beauty and elegance, subtly reinforces Huawei's brand image as an aesthetic and stylish choice. By invoking this "woman" archetype, the product transcends mere luxury and sophistication, instead crafting a personified identity that reflects the refined, desirable qualities of maturity and elegance that Huawei aims to project. This strategic approach effectively engages an audience attuned to elegance and modernity, while also evoking the aspirational traits of confidence and chic style that resonate beyond specific customer demographics.

#### 4.1.3 Mobile Phone as a Neuter

The neuter category in Huawei's launching events signifies a more neutral, non-gendered approach to personification. This framework foregrounds universal qualities of the products, such as innovation, adaptability, and functionality, without ascribing specific gender traits. This strategy is designed to reach a broader audience, promoting inclusivity and underscoring the notion that technology can transcend conventional gender roles.

##### Example 7

“我们希望畅享能够满足和承载更多的需求，成为更多年轻人旅途中坚实的伴侣。” (“We hope Enjoy can meet and carry more demands, becoming a solid companion for more young people on their journey.”) (Huawei, 2020.06.19)

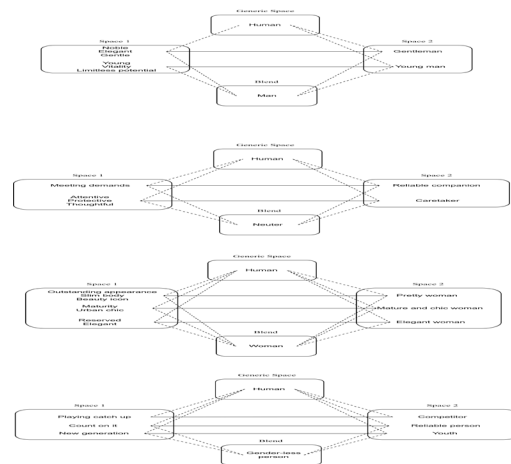
In Example 7, the product (Enjoy) is depicted as a “reliable companion,” evoking its supportive, enduring attributes akin to a steadfast friend who can be counted on. This personification bestows the product with a relational, almost human role, accentuating its functionality and reliability in a manner that resonates with users who perceive their devices as more than mere tools. The phrasing here is notably gender-neutral, as it avoids descriptors that would traditionally link the product to either masculinity or femininity. Instead, the emphasis on companionship and reliability can appeal broadly to any user seeking durability and adaptability. This neutrality can enhance the device's appeal to a younger, diverse demographic by prioritizing universally esteemed traits such as dependability and versatility, rather than qualities aligned with specific gender ideals. Consequently, this approach aligns with contemporary trends in product marketing that prioritize inclusivity and universality, striving to cultivate a wide-ranging user connection devoid of restrictive gender associations.

##### Example 8

把贴心的皮肤管家带在身边 (“Carry a thoughtful skin caretaker by your side.”) (Huawei, 2020.04.08)

As for Example 8, the product is personified as a dedicated, caring “skin caretaker” or “guardian,”

underscoring its attentive and protective qualities. The term “贴心” (thoughtful or close to the heart) conveys warmth, attentiveness, and reliability, portraying the device as a loyal, personalized companion. The adoption of gender-neutral language here enhances the product's accessibility, circumventing specific gendered associations or stereotypes. Instead, it foregrounds the caretaker aspect as a dependable, considerate feature, appealing broadly to anyone seeking a product that intuitively supports their needs. This neutrality can be particularly efficacious in marketing, as it resonates with diverse consumer base who values personal care and reliability without constraint by gendered expectations.



**Figure 4**  
**CBT space of Huawei: “Mobile phone as a Neuter”**

In this blending model for Huawei, attributes from Space 1, such as “meeting demands,” “attentive,” “protective,” and “thoughtful,” integrate with representations from Space 2, which encompass figures commonly regarded as “reliable companions” and “caretakers.” These two input spaces draw upon attributes typically associated with human behavior, yet the qualities are deliberately conveyed without explicit gender implications, centering instead on neutral, universally recognized traits of reliability and consideration. The Generic Space, “human,” operates as an intermediary, connecting human-centric attributes of attentiveness and responsibility without directly invoking gender-specific characteristics. The blended space, therefore, constitutes a “neuter” persona, wherein Huawei's product is anthropomorphized as an attentive and protective presence devoid of gendered connotations. This blending model shapes the product's identity as a neutral yet supportive entity—a dependable “companion” that prioritizes user needs in a responsive and considerate manner. The approach allows Huawei to appeal broadly to customers by offering a product perceived as considerate and reliable, while remaining unencumbered by the constraints or stereotypes of gendered personification.



Such a gender-neutral persona aligns with a burgeoning trend in marketing toward cultivating inclusive product identities that emphasize functionality and user-centered qualities, rather than resorting to conventional gender associations. In this way, Huawei positions its product as universally accessible, attuned to diverse consumer needs, and committed to enhancing the user experience in a non-biased, inclusive manner.

#### 4.2 Apple Mobile Phone as a Gender-less Person

Apple's personification is predominantly gender-less, centering on universal attributes such as simplicity, innovation, and seamless integration. By eschewing gender implications, Apple positions its products as universally accessible and appealing, thereby reinforcing a brand identity that champions inclusivity and cutting-edge design uninfluenced by gender stereotypes.

##### Example 9

"Frankly, the competition is still playing catch up to our chips."  
(Apple, 2021.09.14)

The personification in Example 9 implies that rival companies are struggling to match the technological advancements of this brand. By describing that "the competition is...playing catch up," the company personifies its competitors as active but lagging entities, striving in vain to reach a standard established by this its superior "chips" (likely referring to processing technology). This phrasing positions the brand as a front-runner, indirectly asserting a sense of dominance and innovative superiority.

The phrase is also markedly gender-neutral, abstaining from ascribing any particular gendered identity to the product or the competitors, instead framing the context purely within the domains of performance and innovation. By adopting this approach, the language reinforces a broad, inclusive appeal that privileges technical excellence rather than characteristics that could skew toward gender stereotypes. This strategy enables the brand to resonate across a diverse demographic spectrum, emphasizing universal values like technological leadership and quality without relying on gendered implications. Such neutrality aligns with a modern branding paradigms, engaging a wide audience by foregrounding product's inherent strengths without evoking specific gender associations.

##### Example 10

"iPhone 14 is designed to last so you can count on it to be there for you." (Apple, 2022.09.07)

The speaker personifies the iPhone as a reliable companion in Example 10, imbuing it a sense of dependability and durability that resonates with human relationships. By implying that users can "count on it," the sentence elicits trust, portraying the iPhone as not only fulfilling functional demands but also serving as a constant and supportive presence. This personification is also

distinctly gender-neutral, refraining from attributing any specific gendered characteristics to the iPhone. Instead, it accentuates universal qualities—resilience, longevity, and support—that resonate broadly across demographics. This approach enhances the product's relatability and inclusivity by eschewing traditional associations often embedded in gendered marketing language. In doing so, it underscores the device's appeal as a dependable and universally accessible choice, affirming that these attributes of dependability are valuable for everyone irrespective of gender.

##### Example 11

"Every decade there's a new generation of technology that provides a step change in what we can do with our iPhones."  
(Apple, 2020.10.13)

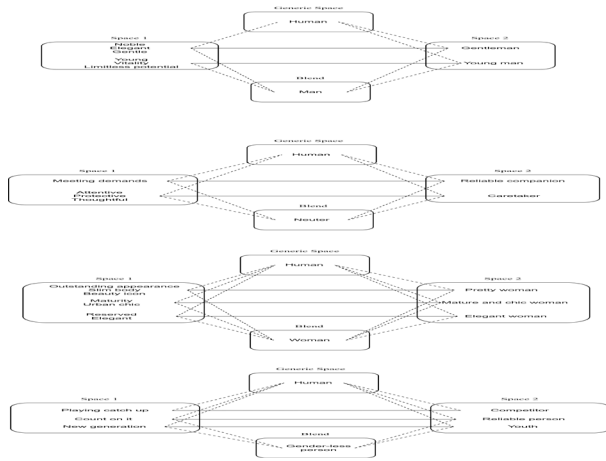
The speaker in Example 11 personifies technological progress as a living, evolving entity. Referring to each new technology as a "generation," it invokes a continuous lineage of progress, wherein each phase builds upon its predecessors to introduce enhanced capabilities and innovations. This choice of words renders technology less static and more like an evolving companion that adapts and progresses alongside its users. The language deliberately remains gender-neutral, abstaining from ascribing any specific traits, and instead foregrounding the universal and transformative nature of technological growth, positioning the iPhone as something that aligns with users' evolving needs and aspirations over time. This approach subtly encourages a broader appeal by avoiding any implication that this product or its innovations are intended for a particular demographic. Instead, it suggests that anyone can be part of this journey with each generational "step change," making the iPhone relatable to all, in irrespective of their identity. This strategy helps maintain an inclusive message, aligning Apple's image with cutting-edge technology for a wide and diverse audience.

##### Example 12

"The dynamic island is always live and active, heightening the sense of vitality by adapting in real-time to show you important information." (Apple, 2022.09.07)

In Example 12, the "dynamic island" feature on the iPhone is personified as an attentive and responsive entity. Phrases like "live and active" conveys a sense of constant presence and awareness, similar to a reliable assistant that continually adapts to provide pertinent information at opportune moments. This portrayal remains gender-neutral, appealing to any user who values a device capable of responding dynamically to their needs. By avoiding gendered descriptions, Apple accentuates the device's role as an inclusive and versatile tool. The "sense of vitality" further reinforces this neutrality, portraying the feature as something that "lives" in a tech ecosystem, always ready to integrate seamlessly with users across

varied demographics. This approach fosters a personal connection between users and products, without any particular identity being imposed upon it, thereby subtly endorsing a universally accessible, adaptable digital assistant.



**Figure 5**  
**CBT space of Apple: “Mobile phone as a gender-less person”**

In this blending model for Apple, the attributes from Space 1, such as “playing catch up,” “count on it,” and “new generation,” intersect with elements from Space 2, including a “competitor,” a “reliable person,” and a “youth.” This fusion produces a conceptual structure where the characteristics of reliability and advancement are fused with the aspirational qualities commonly associated with innovation and foresight. The Generic Space, “human,” serves as a grounding element, uniting these qualities with universally comprehensible and neutral human traits, specifically reliability, competitiveness, and a progressive or youthful mindset.

The resulting blend is a gender-less figure that embodies a neutral sense of progressiveness and dependability. By personifying the Apple product as something that competitors are “playing catch up” to, the product is presented as a leader in innovation and a pioneer in the tech industry. Attributes like “new generation” further reinforce this forward-looking image, ascribing to the product a sense of youthfulness that speaks to technological advancement and evolution. Simultaneously, the product is portrayed as something users can “count on,” highlighting reliability without invoking specific gender characteristics, thereby broadening its appeal and relevance. This neutral, yet personified blend fosters an identity that is youthful, competitive, and trustworthy — a compelling combination that aligns with Apple’s branding as a consistently innovative and dependable technology leader. Through this blending approach, Apple positions its products as accessible and desirable to a wide range of consumers, independent of gender, by focusing on universal qualities

of reliability and continual growth.

## 5. CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ON PERSON METAPHORS AND MARKET COGNITION

In cross-cultural contexts of product launches, Chen and Zhang (2019) illuminate how cultural differences affect the communication strategies of Apple and Huawei, with Apple prioritizing themes of innovation and user experience, while Huawei emphasizes technological superiority and reliability. These insights collectively underscore the imperative of aligning marketing strategies with cultural values to optimize global resonance. Thus, in the competitive landscape of global product launches, Apple and Huawei, two leading technology giants, employ distinct verbal communication strategies to captivate their audiences and fortify their brand narratives.

The application of conceptual blending theory in this context underscores the dynamic intricate interaction between language, culture, and cognition in shaping consumer perceptions. Apple’s consistent use of metaphors centered on reliability, longevity, and innovation fosters an identity of continuity and cross-generational relevance, thereby strategically broadening its appeal across a diverse demographic spectrum without overly specific segmentation. Conversely, Huawei’s discourse frequently leverages detailed, gendered imagery to construct relatable, segmented product narratives, appealing to consumer values of sophistication, elegance, or vitality across distinct product lines and gender differences. In analyzing product launch texts, person metaphors and their applications serve as both strategic devices and insightful approaches due to the profound impact that metaphors exert within speeches and discourses. Person metaphors function not only rhetorical and decorative strategies in promotion discourses, but also actively shape consumers understanding and engagement by framing abstract product features and gender segmentations in their minds. Meanwhile, by emphasizing person metaphor analysis, one can uncover the underlying meanings and emotional resonances that brands endeavor to cultivate with their customers, thereby enhancing insights into gender and brand-consumer relational dynamics.

The above person metaphor analyses display that while traditional Chinese cultural perspectives maintain distinct gender roles, there is a growing recognition of the need for inclusivity and diversity. To be more specific, although Chinese speakers applied more gendered metaphors in discourse, the contemporary landscape of global development has increasingly embraced a “gender-neutral” tendency and ideology. While discussions of gender equality often invoke examples from Europe, particularly the Nordic countries known for their progressive stance on gender issues, the strides made in these regions are

more substantial than widely acknowledged. The global expansion of equal rights movements has prompted various nations to confront traditional binary gender norms, seeking to reshape societal perceptions across legal, commercial, educational, and religious sectors. Thus, it is noticeable in China that the movement toward “from the gendered to the gender-neutral” consumption is gaining momentum, albeit at a different pace. There is a growing trend toward the convergence of traditionally gendered consumer behaviors, with a significant increase in male consumers purchasing beauty products. This shift in consumer behavior signals a broader societal acceptance of previously marginalized groups and ideologies, including the LGBTQ+ community.

From a market cognition, Huawei has strategically positioned itself through a diverse product portfolio that caters to varying consumer demographics. The company’s segmentation is particularly noteworthy, as it tailors its marketing strategies based on factors such as age, income, and gender. This targeted precision allows Huawei to develop tailored product designs and marketing campaigns that resonate with distinct preferences of specific consumer groups. For instance, by attributing gender characteristics to certain devices, Huawei effectively engages its target audience, establishing a sense of personal connection and resonance with consumers.

In contrast, Apple’s marketing strategy embodies a more unified approach, with the iPhone as a single product line crafted to appeal to a wide consumer base to frame their various mobile phone’s market cognition. However, within this line, Apple introduces annual variations—such as the iPhone Pro, Pro Max, and Plus models—addressing diverse consumer needs without fragmenting its cohesive brand identity. This differentiation strategy serves to meet specific demands, such as advanced photography capabilities, large display options, or increased processing power, while maintaining a singular, universally appealing product family. By focusing on functional differences rather than distinct consumer segments, Apple maintains its brand unity while offering configurations that appeal to both high-end users and those with more streamlined needs.

Given economic, technological and cultural changes that corporations have to face while doing international business, corporate discourse writers should adjust to the new cultural environment by involving cognitive factors, such as cognition on globalization, advances in scientific technology, the increasing social responsibility of companies and their great impact on people’s lives (Yang, 2024:189). The present analysis further upholds that the people’s cognition on gender issues in marketing and promoting discourses should be attended as well. As the Chinese market undergoes rapid transformation, a noticeable trend towards de-gendering products has emerged. Huawei’s recent marketing initiatives reflect this shift, signaling a strategic pivot away from overt gender

implications. This evolution not only bolsters domestic sales potential but also enhances the brand’s receptivity in international markets, where consumers increasingly prioritize inclusivity and gender-neutral offerings. By broadening its appeal to encompass a diverse spectrum of customer identities, Huawei aligns with global market trends, demonstrating its adaptability within a swiftly evolving commercial landscape. In navigating these cultural and marketing landscapes, both Huawei and Apple exemplify the complexities and opportunities inherent in cross-cultural dynamics within the technology sector.

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## 6. CONCLUSION

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In conclusion, this research investigates the strategic employment of person metaphors within the mobile phone launch events of Apple and Huawei from 2020 to 2023 by analyzing how conceptual blending theory serves as a lens to interpret cultural nuances and cognitive processes in commercial communication. Findings indicate that both Apple and Huawei construct product identities through distinct metaphorical frameworks, mirroring their respective cultural preferences and marketing strategies: Apple’s discourse leans toward universally gendered and gender-less personifications. This study advances the understanding of how metaphorical strategies in global product promotion align with cultural expectations, shaping cognitive framing, consumer perception, and ultimately influencing purchasing behaviors from a lexical perspective, which underscores the strategic importance for global companies to harmonize culturally nuanced and gendered/gender-less appeals with universal marketing intentions, offering practical guidance for effective brand communication in cross-cultural contexts in the new era.

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