

BEHIND THE HUMOR: IMPLICATURES IN STAND-UP COMEDY MENS REA

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Abstract

Stand-up comedy serves not only as entertainment but also as an indirect means of conveying sensitive sociopolitical criticism to the public. This study examines how maxim flouting generates conversational implicatures to convey humor and sociopolitical criticism in the stand-up comedy show Mens Rea. It aims to identify the forms of maxim flouting and conversational implicature found in the show. The study is expected to contribute to the development of pragmatic studies, particularly in understanding the use of conversational implicature in humorous discourse as a medium for conveying sociopolitical criticism. A qualitative descriptive approach was adopted, with utterances that flouted the maxims serving as the primary data source. Data collection was conducted through observation and documentation, by recording Mens Rea's stand-up comedy shows on Netflix. The recordings were transcribed into text to facilitate data analysis. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods to identify and interpret flouts of maxims, which reveal the implicit meanings of these utterances, guided by Grice's (1975) theoretical framework. This study concludes that there are flouts of the maxims of relevance, quantity, and quality. Furthermore, there were both generalized and particularized conversational implicatures, indicating that the interpretation of humor is highly dependent on contextual knowledge of Indonesia's social and political conditions. This underscores that Mens Rea's stand-up comedy goes beyond mere entertainment, serving as a medium for indirect sociopolitical criticism delivered through humor by flouting the cooperative principle of communication, thereby generating implicit meaning.

Keywords

Conversational Implicature, Maxim Flouting, Stand-Up Comedy, Pragmatics, Political Humor

INTRODUCTION

In political and social discourse, speakers rarely convey criticism solely through direct statements. When the topic is sensitive or potentially controversial, meaning is often conveyed through implication rather than explicit statements. This tendency is explained by the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975), which holds that speakers and listeners communicate through shared expectations of informativeness, truthfulness, relevance, and clarity. When a speaker intentionally deviates from these expectations, the audience is prompted to infer additional layers of meaning not visible on the surface of the utterance. Yule (1996) describes this inferential process as the core of how indirect meaning operates in everyday communication. Thomas (1995) further identifies these inferred meanings as the most productive mechanism for conveying politically and socially charged content while avoiding direct accusations.

The relationship between flouting of the principle of cooperation and the emergence of implicature is particularly distinctive in the context of stand-up comedy. Unlike in other communicative contexts, where flouting of the maxims may be unintentional or defensive in nature, in stand-up comedy, flouting of the principle of cooperation are carried out consciously, deliberately, and systematically by the speaker or comedian to create humor and convey criticism. Gustyawan (2022) asserts that stand-up comedy manipulates language to convey implicit meaning through strategic discourse management. Wijaya & Afriana (2026) demonstrate that verbal humor relies heavily on the audience's ability to recognize pragmatic deviations and reconstruct the implicatures they generate. Cutting (2022) also observes that humor in this genre is constructed not through explicit statements but through an inferential process that engages the audience. Boukhelef et al. (2023) demonstrate that flouting of many types of maxims produce layered and context-rich implicatures, with flouting of the maxim of relevance proving particularly effective in generating humorous and critical effects. Hang, T.T., & Ha, N. H (2025) further confirm that this pattern holds true in the context of performance, with implicatures emerging through various flouts of maxims. Hartono & Kurniawan (2023) adds that in sensitive contexts, the flouting of a principle serves not only to entertain but also to keep the speaker safe when expressing criticism indirectly. Overall, these findings suggest that maxim flouts are not communication failures, but rather deliberate communicative strategies designed to convey specific criticisms.

This dynamic becomes particularly significant in the Indonesian context, where humor is increasingly mobilized as a vehicle for political commentary amid complex legal and democratic constraints. Fuadi (2024) argues that stand-up comedy in Indonesia occupies a relatively protected space for social criticism precisely because its critical content is embedded in implicature rather than direct statements, reducing the speaker's legal exposure while maintaining communicative impact. It is this intersection of pragmatic strategy and political function that makes Indonesian stand-up comedy a productive lens for understanding how speakers use language as a tool to negotiate meaning amid a highly charged political climate.

Pandji Pragiwaksono's show, *Mens Rea*, performed at Indonesia Arena in Jakarta in August 2025 and later streamed on Netflix starting December 27, 2025, provides an intriguing case for such an analysis. Throughout the show, Pandji addresses issues including popular sovereignty, taxation, judicial accountability, the legitimacy of democracy, and freedom of expression in contemporary Indonesian political life. The title itself is drawn from the Latin legal concept meaning "criminal intent," a term Black (1990) defined as the mental element required to establish criminal liability, and this framework signals from the outset that the performance is oriented toward a critical interrogation of institutional responsibility and public failings.

Previous research on *Mens Rea* has approached the performance from sociological, semiotic, and reception-oriented perspectives. Hidayat & Widuri (2026) examined it as a mechanism of social control. Anggraini & Sulistyowati (2025) analyzed its symbolic dimensions through a semiotic lens. Sari et al. (2026) found that audience interpretations vary significantly depending on individual backgrounds and the reflective positions audiences bring to the text, including domination, negotiation, and opposition. These contributions are valuable in situating *Mens Rea* within a broader social and reception framework, yet none of these studies engages with the performance at the level of its pragmatic linguistic construction. More specifically, no prior study has systematically mapped the types of maxims flouted by Pandji when delivering criticism on sensitive political and legal themes in *Mens Rea*, nor connected each type of flouting to the specific category of implicature it generates, whether conventional or conversational, generalized or particularized.

This gap is the primary motivation for this study. Yulianti et al. (2022) have developed a contextual understanding of implicatures in humorous discourse but have not integrated maxim-flouting analysis into a unified typological framework. Abady et al. (2025) similarly emphasize the role of shared knowledge in implicature interpretation without examining how specific maxim flouts trigger particular types of implicatures. Based on the studies discussed above, research on implicatures in the stand-up comedy show *Mens Rea* has so far been overlooked by previous researchers. As argued by Thomas, (1995), understanding how criticism is produced and interpreted through implicature mechanisms in specific discourse situations is just as important as understanding the content of the criticism itself. Therefore, this study poses two questions: first, what forms of maxim flouts trigger the emergence of conversational implicatures in *Mens Rea*, and second, what types of conversational implicatures are generated throughout the performance. By analyzing these two dimensions together within Grice's (1975) cooperative framework, this study aims to account for the linguistic mechanisms through which *Mens Rea* constructs humor and sociopolitical critique, and to contribute to the broader pragmatic understanding of Indonesian popular comedy as a site of consequential public discourse.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design because the analysis of flouting of principles and implicatures is inherently interpretive and cannot be reduced to numerical measurements. Creswell (2014) asserts that a qualitative approach allows researchers to fully capture the complexity of meaning hidden behind utterances. The data source for this study is the stand-up comedy show *Mens Rea* by Pandji Pragiwaksono, which officially premiered on Netflix on December 27, 2025, with a total runtime of 150 minutes. The unit of analysis is an individual utterance produced by Pandji that contains an identifiable flouting of Grice's Cooperative Principle and generates an implicit meaning.

The research data consist of nine utterances selected from the entire performance. The data were selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) the utterance contains a clear deviation from one or more of Grice's maxims; (2) the deviation is intentionally interpretable as a maxim flouting rather than an accidental failure to communicate; and (3) the utterance generates a conversational implicature that can be interpreted within the context of the performance. Utterances that did not meet these criteria were excluded from the analysis. The selection was therefore not based on the frequency of utterances alone but on their analytical relevance to the research questions concerning maxim flouting and conversational implicature.

Data collection was conducted through observation and documentation. The researcher repeatedly watched the *Mens Rea* performance on Netflix from beginning to end and recorded the performance for detailed observation. The recording was subsequently transcribed into written form, including the relevant utterances and their surrounding contexts. The transcript was then used to identify potential instances of maxim flouting. Source triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing the transcription with the official translated text available on Netflix, while theoretical triangulation was applied by verifying the identification and interpretation of maxim flouting and conversational implicature against Grice's (1975) framework.

The coding procedure was conducted in three stages. First, the researcher identified all of Pandji's utterances that were suspected of containing maxim flouting based on the conversational context. Second, utterances that met the data criteria were coded according to the type of maxim being flouted, namely the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, or manner. If an utterance involved flouting more than one maxim, it was categorized as a combined maxim flouting. Third, each utterance was analyzed to determine the type of conversational implicature, namely generalized or particularized implicature, as well as the implicit meaning generated by the maxim flouting. The determination of maxim categories and implicature types was based on the utterance, its conversational context, and the sociopolitical context underlying it.

Data analysis followed three sequential steps adapted from Miles et al. (2014). The first step was to identify and select utterances that flout cooperative principles. The second step was to describe the forms in which these cooperative principles were flouted by determining which maxim was flouted and explaining how the flouting occurred in the context of the utterance. The third step is to determine the type of implicature and formulate the implicative meaning resulting from the maxim flouting, based on Grice's (1975) theoretical framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the analysis of nine utterances from Pandji Pragiwaksono's stand-up comedy show, *Mens Rea* (Netflix, 2025). The data are organized chronologically based on their appearance in the performance and classified by implicature type. For each datum, the analysis identifies: (1) the maxim being flouted, (2) how the flouting occurs, and (3) the type of conversational implicature generated. The findings show that flouting the maxim of relevance (Datum 1, 3, 5, 8, 9), followed by the maxim of quantity (Datum 2, 4, 6), and including a combination of maxims of quality and quantity (Datum 7). In terms of implicature types, there are generalized conversational implicature (Datum 1) and particularized conversational implicatures (Datum 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). The frequency distribution of maxim flouting and conversational implicature types is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Frequency of Maxim Flouting

Maxim Flouted	Data	Frequency	Percentage
Relevance	1, 3, 5, 8, 9	5	55.6%
Quantity	2, 4, 6	3	33.3%
Quality	7	1	11.1%
Total	1–9	9	100%

Table 2. Frequency of Conversational Implicature Types

Type of Conversational Implicature	Data	Frequency	Percentage
Generalized Conversational Implicature	1	1	11.1%
Particularized Conversational Implicature	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	8	88.9%
Total	1–9	9	100%

Generalized Conversational Implicature

Datum 1. *Nah, lu tuh tau gak sih, praktek cuci uang tuh seperti apa? Ada bayangan gak? Praktek cuci uang tuh seperti Oreo. Oreo itu diputer, dijilat, dicelup. Cuci uang diputer, dicelup, dijilat. (So, do you actually know what money laundering is like? Can you picture it? Money laundering is like an Oreo. You twist it, lick it, and dip it. Money laundering is twisted, dipped, and licked).*
(1:00:55–1:01:15)

This utterance flouts the maxim of relevance (Grice, 1975). The flouting occurs when the speaker responds to his own rhetorical question about money laundering not with a legal or financial explanation but with an Oreo cookie analogy from an entirely different domain. Two preparatory questions precede the analogy, creating rhetorical anticipation that amplifies the unexpectedness of the analogical leap. This deviation is deliberate: the analogy's literal irrelevance is the mechanism by which the humor is generated.

This utterance produces a generalized conversational implicature because the analogy between eating an Oreo and money laundering can be understood without specific knowledge of the broader *Mens Rea* performance or particular political events in Indonesia. The analogy draws on the familiar three-step procedure of eating an Oreo, “diputer, dijilat, dicelup” (twist, lick, dip), which is humorously rearranged as “diputer, dicelup, dijilat” (twist, dip, lick) to represent money laundering. The audience only needs general knowledge of how an Oreo is commonly eaten and a basic understanding of money laundering as a sequential process to recognize the analogy. This classification does not imply that money laundering is entirely context-free. Understanding “cuci uang” requires general conceptual knowledge of money laundering, while its broader social and political significance may depend on knowledge of the Indonesian context. However, such specific contextual knowledge is not necessary to infer the implicature generated by the utterance. The deliberate reversal of “jilat” and “celup” signals that the comparison is not a literal description of money laundering, but a humorous analogy based on the structural similarity between two sequential procedures. The implicative meaning is that money laundering, despite being a complex financial crime, can be represented as a systematic process that is

accessible to ordinary audiences through a familiar everyday analogy. Thus, although knowledge of Indonesia's social and political conditions may enrich its broader interpretation, the implicature itself can be inferred without specific knowledge of *Mens Rea*, particular political actors, or specific money-laundering cases in Indonesia.

Particularized Conversational Implicature

Datum 2. *Kalo menurut keyakinan saya, dia Ahmad Sahroni, lo mau ngomong apa? Kan menurut keyakinan saya. Kalo bukan, ya beda lagi urusannya. Kan menurut keyakinan saya, Abang duduk aja di airport, mau kemana?" Apapun yang gue katakan, orang gak bisa marah. Kan menurut keyakinan saya. Bahkan, gue akan coba buktikan. Kita coba keluarkan sebuah topik kontroversial. Menurut gua, gua ganti. Menurut keyakinan saya. Menurut keyakinan saya, orang yang makan bubur gak diaduk, itu psikopat. Menurut keyakinan saya. Betul? Betul.*
(If it's based on my personal belief, Ahmad Sahroni, what are you going to say? It's just my personal belief. If not, then that's a different matter. It's just my personal belief, "Bro, just sit there at the airport, where are you going?" Whatever I say, people can't get mad. It's just my personal belief. In fact, I'll try to prove it. Let's bring up a controversial topic. In my opinion, I'll change it. According to my belief. According to my belief, anyone who eats porridge without stirring it is a psychopath. According to my belief. Right? Right).
 (00:30:10–00:31:00)

Pandji's utterance flouts the maxim of quantity. The maxim of quantity in the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) requires the speaker to provide the addressee with just enough information, neither too little nor too much. This flouting is evident when the speaker states he will attempt to address a controversial topic but fails to specify which topic he is referring to. The information provided stops at the very point the audience needs it most, namely, the main substance of the topic promised to be discussed. Consequently, Pandji's utterance fails to meet the expected level of informativeness in accordance with the relevant principle. This deviation appears intentional, given that Pandji is capable of revealing the topic but consciously withholds the information. This strategy is used to create tension and audience anticipation, a common tactic in stand-up comedy for delivering a *punchline* or the climax of humor.

Speech that flouts this maxim generates particularized conversational implicature, meaning its interpretation is highly dependent on the context of the *Mens Rea* performance. In this context, Pandji consistently positions himself as a speaker who consistently raises sensitive issues. The implied meaning is not merely a promise of a topic, but also an implicit signal that the subsequent material has the potential to cross conventional boundaries in public discourse. This delay in disclosure reinforces the implicature by building the audience's anticipation of content rich in social and political dimensions.

Datum 3. *Tukang, jangan sok-sok ngerjain kerjaan arsitek. Ikutin gambarnya, jangan ngide. Tukang ngerjain kerjaan arsitek, jadinya kayak gitu. Sama, arsitek juga jangan ngerjain kerjaan tukang. Karena arsitek ngerjain kerjaan tukang, itu ibaratnya lapor Mas Wapres.*
(Contractors, shouldn't try to do an architect's job. Follow the plans, don't improvise. When contractors try to do an architect's job, this is what happens. Likewise, architects shouldn't try to do a contractor's job. Because when architects try to do a contractor's job, it's like reporting to the Vice President).
 (00:55:25–00:55:45)

This utterance flouts the maxim of relevance (Grice, 1975). The flouting occurs when the speaker shifts from a discussion about professional roles in construction to the statement "it's like reporting to the Vice President." The comparison introduces a different contextual domain that initially appears unrelated to the previous discussion. However, the analogy is intentionally constructed to guide the audience toward a broader social and political interpretation. The seemingly unrelated statement serves as a humorous strategy that creates incongruity and directs attention to an implied meaning beyond the utterance's literal content.

By flouting this maxim, the utterance generates a particularized conversational implicature because its interpretation depends on contextual knowledge shared by the audience regarding the figure referred to as the Vice President and the broader sociopolitical circumstances associated with that

reference during the *Mens Rea* performance. The implied meaning suggests criticism of a tendency to involve higher authorities in matters that could reasonably be addressed at lower or more appropriate levels. Through the analogy between professional roles in construction and governance practices, the speaker indirectly comments on decision-making patterns without explicitly identifying any particular individuals or events. The humorous effect emerges from the contrast between two different domains that appear unrelated on the surface but become meaningful when interpreted within a broader context. In this way, humor serves not only as entertainment but also as an indirect medium for expressing social criticism.

Datum 4. *Ada lagi, yang milih berdasarkan yang populer. Gue gak tau nih, orang ini bisa kerja atau enggak? Gue gak tau ahlaknya nih orang. Pokoknya, populer aja. Artis.*
(There's another, type who chooses based on popularity. I don't know. Can this person actually do the job or not? I don't know what kind of character this person has. They're just popular. A celebrity).
 (00:57:35–00:57:45)

Pandji's utterance flouts the quantity maxim. In the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975), the quantity maxim requires the speaker to provide adequate information, neither more nor less than what is currently needed. In this case, Pandji constructs a narrative suggesting that voters tend to choose based on a person's popularity, but he deliberately stops speaking before revealing the identity of the figure in question. The speaker states that he does not know the figure's performance and character. These two dimensions are fundamental to the selection of leaders, but the speaker provides no further information. The utterance ends with a single word, "celebrity" without elaboration, making the utterance less informative. This lack of information is a deliberate strategic choice intended to encourage the audience to interpret the reference in question using their own knowledge.

This statement carries a particularized conversational implicature that the audience can understand the sociopolitical context surrounding celebrity-related political phenomena during general elections in Indonesia. Public figures often leverage their popularity to secure votes rather than relying on their actual competence. This reflects a prioritization of image and popularity over capability, thereby shifting the focus of politics from competence to personal branding in the public sphere. Beta & Neyazi (2022) demonstrate that the political legitimacy of celebrities in Indonesia is frequently built through strategies rooted in emotional appeal and performativity rather than genuine political integrity. This situation results in the quality of political representation tending to be weak when popularity is prioritized over capability from the outset. In his discourse, Pandji creates the impression of feigning ignorance, even though a critical evaluation is conveyed implicitly. This approach serves as an indirect means of gauging political preferences based on popularity, without mentioning specific individuals.

Datum 5. *Yang gak bisa punya rumah, kelas menengah. Kenapa, kita gak bisa punya rumah? Kata Erik Thohir sih, "gaya hidup". Lu sih, beli tiket gue.*
(The middle class, the ones who can't afford a home. Why, can't we afford a home? According to Erik Thohir, it's "lifestyle." You're the one who bought my ticket).
 (1:37:42–1:37:57)

This utterance flouts the maxim of relevance (Grice, 1975). The flouting occurs when the speaker abruptly shifts from a serious sociopolitical discussion about the middle class's inability to afford housing, including a direct reference to a public official's statement attributing this condition to lifestyle choices, to the sudden remark, "you're the one who bought my ticket." This final statement appears entirely disconnected from the preceding discussion about housing affordability and economic inequality. When speakers flout the cooperative principle, incongruity and duality emerge, and these elements are deliberately exploited for communicative purposes, including humor that resists or challenges dominant narratives and authority. The shift to the ticket-buying remark, however, is intentionally constructed to create a comedic *punchline* that simultaneously implicates a counterargument. In stand-up comedy, the *set-up* builds an expectation in the audience's mind while the *punchline* flouts that expectation, and in the framework of incongruity theory, it is precisely this deviation from what is anticipated that generates laughter. Here, the speaker sets up the expectation of a serious political critique and then subverts it with a self-referential remark that shifts responsibility

back to the audience, thereby producing humor through the contrast between the gravity of the topic and the lightness of the closing statement.

This flouting of the maxim generates a particularized conversational implicature whose full meaning depends on contextual and sociopolitical knowledge shared between the speaker and the audience. To interpret this datum, the audience must be aware of the actual statement made by the public figure referred to, in which the inability of the middle class to own homes was publicly attributed to poor lifestyle choices rather than to structural economic conditions such as stagnant wages, rising property prices, or insufficient housing policies. The speaker quotes this statement and then turns to the audience with the remark "you're the one who bought my ticket," which carries an implicit meaning that the very middle-class audience who cannot afford homes has nonetheless spent money on a comedy show ticket, thereby becoming living evidence that contradicts the official explanation. Political discourse frequently relies on implicature to criticize opponents without making direct accusations, and humor, through irony and sarcasm, operates by flouting maxims to convey meanings that diverge from the literal surface of the utterance. In this way, the self-referential remark serves as an indirect yet pointed rebuttal to the public official's claim, suggesting that the economic hardship faced by the middle class stems not from irresponsible personal spending but from systemic conditions that even modest leisure expenditures cannot account for. Humor thus serves as a vehicle for social criticism, allowing the speaker to challenge an official narrative through implication rather than direct confrontation.

Datum 6. *DPR tuh profesi yang aneh, menurut gue. Banyak banget, yang pengen jadi anggota DPR. Mereka gak ngerti kerjanya apa. Karena kalau gak dapet, stress.*
(Being a member of the House of Representatives is a strange profession, in my opinion. There are so many people who want to be members of the House of Representatives. They don't understand what the job entails. Because if they don't get elected, they get stressed out).
 (1:48:20–1:48:31)

This utterance flouts the principle of quantity (Grice, 1975). The flouting occurs when the speaker makes a series of statements that go beyond what is actually necessary to convey the main point of the conversation. Instead of simply stating that being a member of the House of Representatives is an odd profession, the speaker adds that many people want to become legislators, that these people do not understand the responsibilities of the job, and that failing to get elected will cause stress. The principle of quantity and its implicature occur when the speaker conveys a message that is less informative or contains excessive and unnecessary information for the purpose of the ongoing communication. Every additional statement in this utterance does not merely elaborate on the previous one but rather piles on layers of seemingly contradictory observations: namely, that people desperately pursue a role they do not fully understand, and that the emotional consequence of failing to obtain it is sadness. Comedians disregard the principles of quantity and quality as the most common strategy in creating humor, with the primary aim of directing the audience to seek the implied meaning behind the literal content of the statement. This accumulation of deliberate observations serves as a humorous device that exposes the apparent absurdity of legislative candidates' motivations, prompting the audience to question whether the desire to hold public office is driven by a sincere sense of public responsibility or by other, unspoken personal interests.

This flouting produces a particularized conversational implicature whose interpretation depends on the shared socio-political knowledge held by the speaker and the listener. In this case, the listener must understand the Indonesian political landscape, particularly the phenomenon in which legislative candidates invest significant personal resources, including financial and social capital, in election campaigns, so that failure to win a seat is not merely a professional setback but also a serious personal and financial crisis. This implied meaning suggests that the ambition to become a member of the House of Representatives is not primarily driven by a commitment to public service but rather by a desire to gain the privileges, power, and material benefits associated with the position. Political discourse is characterized by indirect language, and flouting of maxims allows speakers to express critical judgments about political behavior without making direct accusations. The humorous effect arises from the tension between the motivations openly declared by legislative candidates and the implied reality subtly revealed by the speaker through these layered speech constructions. In this way,

humor functions not only as comedic entertainment but also as a pragmatic strategy for speakers to convey sharp social criticism of political culture and the motivations underlying legislative ambitions.

Datum 7. *Menurut keyakinan saya, satu keluarga tuh, ikutan melindungi koruptor tersebut. Karena pasti tau, ngumpetin 1 triliun dimana, guys? Satu triliun, cash dan emas. Lu ngumpetin dimana? Pasti ketahuan. Di bawah kasur? Keangkat kasurnya.*
(In my opinion, his family is in on it and helping to protect him. Because let's face it, where would you hide a trillion rupiah, guys? A trillion, in cash and gold. Where would you hide it? They'd find out for sure. Under the mattress? They'd just lift the mattress).
 (2:14:26–2:14:51).

Pandji's utterance flouts the maxim of quality (Grice, 1975), particularly through the statement "menurut keyakinan saya" ("in my belief"), which presents the alleged involvement of the family as a personal assumption rather than a fact supported by verifiable evidence. By stating that the family "must have known" where the one trillion rupiahs was hidden, the speaker implies their involvement without providing direct evidence to substantiate the claim. The phrase "Menurut keyakinan saya" therefore signals that the statement is based on the speaker's belief rather than established fact. This deliberate lack of evidential support generates a humorous effect because the serious accusation is presented as a speculative assumption. The implicative meaning is that the family's alleged involvement is treated as highly plausible by the speaker, while the absence of evidence invites the audience to recognize the statement as satire rather than a factual accusation.

By flouting this maxim, the utterance generates a particularized conversational implicature because its interpretation relies on contextual knowledge related to a corruption case involving large amounts of cash and gold assets that attracted considerable public attention during the period in which *Mens Rea* was performed. Without such contextual understanding, the utterance may simply be interpreted as a hypothetical discussion about concealing large amounts of money. The implied meaning suggests that individuals closely associated with corrupt actors are likely to be aware of such assets, making complete ignorance appear less convincing. Rather than making a direct accusation, the speaker conveys criticism indirectly through hypothetical scenarios and exaggerated examples. The humorous effect emerges from the contrast between the unrealistic image of hiding enormous amounts of money under a mattress and the audience's understanding of the broader social context. Through this strategy, humor functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for expressing social criticism indirectly.

Datum 8. *Emang gak boleh, orang gak pernah cuci muka jadi Menteri? Boleh kan? Masa gak boleh? Cuci muka doang permasalahannya.*
(Is it really not allowed, for someone who never washes their face to become a minister? It's allowed, right? Why wouldn't it be? Washing your face is the only issue here.)
 (2:15:30–2:15:41)

Pandji's utterance flouts the maxim of relevance. The maxim of relevance in Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle requires the speaker to make contributions that are logically relevant to the topic under discussion. The flouting occurs when the speaker chooses "washing one's face" as the sole criterion under scrutiny in the context of a person's suitability for a ministerial position, a public office that, in common discourse, is typically associated with intellectual capacity, professional track record, integrity, and competence in a specific field. At a literal level, washing one's face is a matter of hygiene and personal care with absolutely no connection to the substantive qualifications required to hold a ministerial-level position. By making "washing one's face" the sole point of contention in their speech, the speaker deliberately shifts the discussion of public officials' suitability from competence and integrity to something entirely trivial and irrelevant. This deviation constitutes a deliberate and calculated flouting of the issue, as it is precisely through the selection of a parameter entirely irrelevant to the context of public office that the humorous effect is constructed. The repeated use of the question "it's allowed, right" reinforces this flouting, as the speaker appears to be defending an argument that seems reasonable on the surface but is actually built on a premise deliberately chosen for its irrelevance.

This flouting produces a particularized conversational implicature. Its implied meaning is accessible only to audiences with contextual knowledge of a specific public official who, during the

period of the *Mens Rea*, was the subject of public discussion regarding an issue widely associated with the phrase "washing one's face" in Indonesian political discourse. Without this knowledge, the utterance reads as an absurd question about ministerial eligibility criteria. The implicature conveys that the appointment process for certain ministerial positions has not adequately considered competence, and the speaker ironically reduces the entire question of eligibility to a matter of hygiene. The closing phrase "washing your face is the only issue here" serves as an ironic marker, framing a commentary on disproportionate standards in public office appointments without explicitly naming any individual.

Datum 9. *Apa masalahnya kalau reshuffle mulu? Tau, gak? Yang kasihan tau gak, siapa? Anak SD. Capek ngapalannya.*

(What's the big deal about all these cabinet reshuffles? Do you know? Do you know who really suffers? Elementary school kids. They're tired of memorizing all that.)

(2:17:55–2:18:07)

This utterance flouts the maxim of relevance (Grice, 1975). The flouting occurs when the speaker abruptly shifts the discussion from the political issue of cabinet reshuffles to the statement that the ones who really suffer are elementary school kids because they are exhausted from memorizing all the changes. On the surface, this shift appears disconnected from the ongoing political discourse, as elementary school children and their learning burdens do not conventionally fall within cabinet reshuffling debates. When a speaker deliberately flouts a maxim, the listener is prompted to infer an underlying implicature that extends beyond the literal meaning of the utterance. The strategic redirection toward a seemingly irrelevant group serves as a humorous device that creates cognitive incongruity for the audience.

This flouting of the maxim generates a particularized conversational implicature, as its interpretation depends entirely on contextual knowledge shared between the speaker and the audience. Particularized implicatures are more context-bound than generalized ones, requiring the listener to possess specific situational background knowledge in order to derive the intended meaning. In this case, the audience must be familiar with the Indonesian political context, specifically the practice of repeated cabinet reshuffles within a single administration, which renders ministerial names subject to constant change, an exhausting reality even for schoolchildren. The implied meaning constitutes a criticism of cabinet instability, suggesting that the government lacks the consistency and decisiveness expected of a stable administration. Conversational implicatures in political communication often serve to soften face-threatening acts, allowing speakers to deliver critical messages while maintaining plausible deniability regarding direct accusations. In the context of comedy, satirical humor excels at pointing out inconsistencies in political rhetoric and behavior in ways that conventional news reporting sometimes fails to achieve, with stand-up comedy serving as one medium through which such criticism is delivered indirectly. The humorous effect emerges from the contrast between two seemingly unrelated domains, the world of politics and the world of children's education, which become meaningfully connected when interpreted within a broader framework of social critique. In this way, humor functions not merely as entertainment but as an indirect medium for expressing dissatisfaction with governmental practices.

Discussion

The findings of this study answer the two research questions raised in the introduction by demonstrating that maxim flouting in Pandji Pragiwaksono's *Mens Rea* operates not as a breakdown in communication but as a deliberate pragmatic strategy through which humor and sociopolitical criticism are constructed simultaneously. In stand-up comedy discourse, utterances rarely serve solely to convey information in a straightforward manner. Instead, they are designed to guide audiences toward meanings that Pandji has deliberately left unstated. This pattern is consistent with Grice's (1975) position that departing from the cooperative principle does not obstruct communication but rather prompts listeners to search for meaning beyond the literal surface of an utterance. Theoretically, this finding reinforces the view that maxim flouting is not merely a deviation from cooperative communication but can function as a systematic mechanism for producing layered meanings in humorous discourse.

In answer to the first research question, Pandji routinely flouts the principle of relevance by introducing references that initially seem unrelated to the previous topic, but become meaningful when

placed within the broader sociopolitical context he shares with his audience. This finding aligns with Boukhelef et al., (2023) identification of relevance flouts as the most generative source of humorous effect, precisely because such flouts compel the audience to establish inferential connections that the speaker deliberately leaves unexplained. The frequency of this pattern in *Mens Rea* suggests that relevance flouting is not incidental but structurally central to Pandji's construction of his political critique. From a theoretical perspective, this indicates that relevance flouting can serve as a pragmatic bridge between comedic incongruity and sociopolitical interpretation, allowing apparently unrelated ideas to generate criticism through audience inference.

Flouting the maxim of quantity through speech that typically takes the form of deliberate withholding of information, in which Pandji leaves portions of his argument unresolved and invites the audience to supply the implied meaning independently. Hang & Ha (2025) observe that open-ended discursive structures in comedy generate inferential spaces that require active audience participation, and this study confirms this pattern in the context of Indonesian political humor. Rather than stating his criticism directly, Pandji constructs utterances that build comedic tension precisely through what remains unsaid, softening politically sensitive content while ensuring it reaches the audience through inference. This finding extends the application of the quantity maxim by showing that informational incompleteness in political comedy can function not simply as an omission but as a deliberate space for audience participation and indirect criticism.

The flouting of the quality maxim further shows that Pandji does not always utter propositions he literally believes to be true in order to construct comedic or critical effects. He deliberately makes statements that are literally untrue, prompting the audience to seek an ironic or sarcastic meaning behind the statement rather than accepting it as fact. This supports Fuadi's (2024) argument that humor and indirect language serve as protective mechanisms for addressing politically sensitive issues in the Indonesian legal and social context, where direct criticism of public figures and institutions carries a greater risk than criticism embedded in comedic implicature. Theoretically, this finding demonstrates that quality flouting enables stand-up comedy to maintain a distinction between literal falsity and intended criticism, thereby allowing political meaning to be communicated indirectly without requiring the speaker to formulate criticism as a literal factual claim.

In answer to the second research question, there are generalized and particularized conversational implicatures that confirm that interpreting the humor and criticism in *Mens Rea* depends heavily on the contextual and sociopolitical knowledge that audience members bring to the performance. Yulianti et al. (2022) establish that the interpretation of implicatures is inseparable from situational context. Abady et al. (2025) further demonstrate that shared knowledge between speaker and audience is the primary determinant of successful implicature recovery. Both positions are confirmed by the present findings, which show that audiences without specific knowledge of the Indonesian political landscape at the time of the performance would be able to grasp the surface humor of many utterances while remaining unable to access the critical layer embedded beneath them. The coexistence of generalized and particularized implicatures therefore suggests that political stand-up comedy operates on different levels of contextual accessibility, in which some humorous meanings can be recovered from relatively general knowledge, whereas deeper sociopolitical meanings require shared contextual knowledge.

Taken together, these findings suggest that humor in *Mens Rea* emerges from the interaction between Pandji's pragmatic strategies and his audience's interpretive capacity, rather than from linguistic deviation alone. The performance can therefore be understood not only as entertainment but as a pragmatically constructed space for indirect social reflection, where political criticism is carried through inferential meaning rather than explicit statement, and where the audience's contextual knowledge is as constitutive of meaning as the utterances themselves. This dependence on contextual knowledge carries a practical implication for media and political discourse literacy, since audiences who lack sufficient background on Indonesia's legal and political landscape risk grasping only the surface humor of such performances while missing the critical layer of meaning embedded beneath it. Strengthening public familiarity with ongoing legal and political issues may therefore be as important as linguistic competence in enabling audiences to fully access the sociopolitical critique carried through Indonesian political stand-up comedy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, there were flouts of the maxims of relevance, quantity, and quality. Additionally, there were both generalized conversational implicatures and particularized conversational implicatures, indicating that the construction of meaning in this performance was highly dependent on shared sociopolitical knowledge between Pandji Pragiwaksono and his audience. This finding confirms that stand-up comedy's *Mens Rea* is not merely a comedy performance but a structured sociopolitical discourse conveyed through utterances that flout the cooperative principle of communication, thereby generating implicit meanings wrapped in humor, ensuring that critical messages are conveyed without direct confrontation.

This study is limited by its analysis of only nine utterances from a single stand-up comedy performance by one comedian, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other comedians, performances, and humorous discourse contexts. Future research could therefore examine a larger corpus involving at least several performances from multiple Indonesian comedians across different platforms and compare the distribution and functions of maxim flouting and conversational implicatures. Audience reception studies could also be incorporated to examine how audiences with different levels of sociopolitical knowledge interpret the implied meanings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how implicature functions in Indonesian humorous public discourse.

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