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Conversational Maxims Revisited in Holy Trinity College's Online Platform

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Abstract. This study examined how Grice's conversational maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner were manifested in student-generated comments on Holy Trinity College's official Facebook platform during Academic Year 2025–2026. An initial set of 150 comments was screened using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, after which 50 comments were retained as the final analytical dataset. Each retained comment was examined against all four maxims, yielding 200 comment–maxim analytical instances. Twelve comments were selected as representative cases for detailed qualitative presentation. The study employed a descriptive qualitative design informed by pragmatic analysis. In the final dataset, Quantity was observed in 38 instances and violated in 12; Quality was observed in 27, flouted in 21, and violated in 2; Relation was observed in 20 and violated in 30; and Manner was observed in 6 and violated in 44. No flouting was identified for Quantity, Relation, or Manner. The findings indicate comparatively stronger adherence to informativeness and apparent truthfulness, while relevance and clarity presented greater challenges. Quality flouting was associated with irony, sarcasm, figurative language, and wordplay. A communication guide was developed to translate these findings into practical guidance for clearer, relevant, truthful, and contextually appropriate online communication. The study contributes localized evidence on pragmatic meaning-making in a Philippine higher-education Facebook environment.

Keywords: Conversational Maxims; Pragmatic Competence; Online Discourse; Facebook Interactions; Student Communication

Introduction

The expansion of digital communication has transformed how students exchange information, respond to institutional content, and participate in academic and social interaction. Computer-mediated discourse leaves textual traces that can be examined to understand how meaning is produced in digitally mediated environments (Herring, 2004). In Facebook comment threads, participants may combine direct statements with humor, irony, shorthand, and context-dependent expressions. These features make online discourse a useful setting for pragmatic analysis.

Grice's Cooperative Principle provides a foundational framework for examining how conversational contributions are interpreted in context. Grice (1975) proposed four maxims: Quantity, which concerns an appropriate amount of information; Quality, which concerns truthfulness and evidential support; Relation, which concerns relevance; and Manner, which concerns clarity and orderly expression. The maxims are not simply mechanical rules. Their apparent observance or departure may contribute to implicature and other context-dependent meanings (Zentz, 2020).

Digital interaction requires additional attention to contextual conditions because written online exchanges may lack some of the nonverbal resources available in face-to-face communication. Herring et al. (2013) describe computer-mediated communication as a distinct environment in which pragmatic phenomena are shaped by technological, interactional, and contextual conditions. Studies of Facebook discourse have likewise shown that users may observe or depart from Gricean expectations in ways connected to humor, interpersonal relations, and communicative goals (Hanifah, 2013; Ayunon, 2018; Aporbo, 2022).

Humor and nonliteral language are particularly relevant to Quality and the interpretation of flouting. Dynel (2017) explains that humorous discourse can involve apparent departures from truthfulness while still communicating speaker meaning or implicature. Online humor may also support participation and interaction, although its interpretation depends on context (Yus, 2021; Erdoğdu & Çakıroğlu, 2021). Rahardi (2022) further emphasizes the importance of situational context in cyberpragmatic interpretation.

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Although prior research has established the usefulness of Gricean analysis in online discourse, there remains a contextual need for localized evidence from Philippine higher education. In particular, naturally occurring student-generated comments on an institutional Facebook platform combine academic, informational, interpersonal, and expressive functions within the same communication space. The present study addresses this gap by examining the observance, violation, and flouting of the four conversational maxims in Holy Trinity College's official Facebook comment environment.

Research Questions:

This study aimed to explore how conversational maxims were observed, flouted, or negotiated within Holy Trinity College's online platform, specifically Facebook, from 2025 to 2026.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How are the conversational maxims within HTC's online platform in terms of the following:
   1.1. Observed
   1.2. Violated; and
   1.3. Flouted
2. Based on the findings of the study, what communication guide on the proper use of conversational maxims in online interactions can be developed?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study focused on student-generated textual comments appearing on Holy Trinity College's official Facebook platform during Academic Year 2025–2026. The initial pool contained 150 comments. After screening against the stated inclusion and exclusion criteria, 50 comments were retained as the final analytical dataset. For transparency and reproducibility, the retained coded set used in this revision consisted of FBC-01–FBC-38 and FBC-40–FBC-51; FBC-39 was not included because its available coding record was incomplete. The 50 retained comments were each examined against all four maxims, producing 200 analytical instances. Twelve comments were selected for detailed qualitative presentation. The study was limited to publicly viewable textual comments on the identified institutional Facebook platform. Private messages, group chats, face-to-face interactions, and comments from other platforms were excluded. The analysis focused on linguistic and contextual evidence available in the comments and did not claim certainty about commenters' private intentions.

Literature Review

Grice's Cooperative Principle and conversational maxim

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle proposes that conversational participants generally make contributions appropriate to the accepted purpose or direction of an exchange. Quantity concerns the amount of information supplied; Quality concerns truthfulness and evidence; Relation concerns relevance; and Manner concerns clarity, brevity, order, and avoidance of ambiguity. Zentz (2020) notes that conversational implicature concerns meanings that are conveyed beyond what is explicitly stated, making the maxims useful for examining contextual interpretation. Stotts (2024) revisits the status of conversational maxims as social norms rather than purely rational rules. This perspective is useful in online discourse because what counts as sufficiently informative, relevant, clear, or appropriate may be influenced by the practices and expectations of a particular communicative community.

Conversational Maxims in Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication creates conditions in which textual traces can be examined systematically while interaction may occur without the full range of face-to-face cues (Herring, 2004). Herring et al. (2013) likewise emphasize the pragmatic distinctiveness of digitally mediated communication. Atifi et al. (2011) demonstrated that the Maxim of Quantity can be examined in Internet discussions, showing that participants develop expectations about the amount of information appropriate to online interaction. Facebook-specific studies further demonstrate the relevance of Gricean analysis. Hanifah (2013) found non-observance of maxims in Facebook conversations and associated departures with interactional functions such as joking and maintaining closeness. Ayunon (2018) similarly examined Facebook conversation posts and reported both observance and violations of the maxims. Aporbo (2022) extended this line of inquiry to Gen-Z Facebook conversations, highlighting the role of contextual interpretation and implicature.

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Flouting, Humor, and Context

Flouting differs from an ordinary violation because an apparent departure from a maxim may invite readers to infer an additional meaning. This distinction is particularly important for online humor. Dynel (2017) shows how humor may interact with apparent departures from Quality and other maxims while still conveying speaker meaning. Yus (2021) discusses humor as a pragmatic resource in Internet interaction, including its role in participation and shared discursive conventions. Erdoğdu and Çakıroğlu (2021) likewise found that humor can influence engagement in online learning contexts, although its effectiveness depends on how it is integrated into the communicative environment. The interpretation of such cases requires attention to context. Rahardi (2022) demonstrates the importance of situational context in cyberpragmatic analysis. In the present study, therefore, a comment was not classified as flouting merely because it appeared unusual or nonliteral; contextual evidence had to suggest that the departure invited an inferred meaning.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design informed by pragmatic analysis. The design was appropriate because the study sought to interpret the linguistic and contextual characteristics of naturally occurring online comments. Frequency counts were used as descriptive summaries of recurrence within the coded dataset rather than as statistical estimates of a broader population.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the context of Holy Trinity College of General Santos City, Philippines. The data source was the institution's official Facebook platform, specifically publicly viewable comment sections containing school-related interaction.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, the researchers secured institutional permission to access and examine the relevant public content. The initial 150 comments were documented and screened using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The 50 retained comments were anonymized and assigned FBC codes. Usernames, profile names, profile photographs, links, and other direct identifiers were excluded from the research presentation. The coded materials were stored in password-protected/encrypted digital storage accessible only to the research team.

Results and Discussions

The final analytical dataset contained 50 comments. Because every retained comment was examined against four maxims, the correct denominator for the frequency summary was 200 comment–maxim instances, not 600. Each maxim therefore had a maximum of 50 instances. The revised frequencies are presented below**.**

Research Question 1: How are the conversational maxims within HTC's online platform in terms of the following: Observed; Violated; and Flouted?

Table 1. Conversational Maxims Observed in HTC's Online Platform

Maxim	Observed	Flouted	Violated	Total Instances
1. Quantity	38 (76.00%)	0 (0.00%)	12 (24.00%)	50
2. Quality	27 (54.00%)	21 (42.00%)	2 (4.00%)	50
3. Relation	20 (40.00%)	0 (0.00%)	30 (60.00%)	50
4. Manner	6 (12.00%)	0 (0.00%)	44 (88.00%)	50
Total	**91 (45.50%)**	**21 (10.50%)**	**88 (44.00%)**	**200**

Table 1 shows that Quantity had the highest observed frequency, with 38 of 50 instances (76.00%). Quality followed with 27 observed instances (54.00%). Relation was observed in 20 instances (40.00%), while Manner had the lowest observance, with 6 instances (12.00%). Across all four maxims, 91 of the 200 analytical instances were observed, 88 were violated, and 21 were flouted.

The relatively high observance of Quantity suggests that many contributions provided enough information for their immediate communicative purpose. This pattern is compatible with research showing that online participants develop expectations concerning appropriate informativeness (Atifi et al., 2011). The result should nevertheless be interpreted contextually because a short message may be sufficient when participants share background knowledge.

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Quality was observed in 27 instances and flouted in 21. The combination suggests that apparent departures from literal truthfulness were not necessarily treated as deception. Some comments used irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, or wordplay that required contextual interpretation. This is consistent with work describing the relationship between humor, truthfulness, and implicature (Dynel, 2017; Yus, 2021).

Relation was observed in 20 instances but violated in 30. This indicates that relevance was less consistently maintained than Quantity and Quality. Because institutional Facebook spaces may contain academic, informational, interpersonal, and expressive exchanges, a comment can shift away from the immediate topic even while remaining meaningful to the participant. The finding reinforces the importance of situational context in cyberpragmatic interpretation (Rahardi, 2022).

Manner showed the largest concentration of violations: 44 of 50 instances (88.00%) were classified as violations, while only 6 were observed. The pattern indicates frequent difficulties involving clarity, organization, ambiguity, and contextual completeness. These results should not be interpreted as evidence that students were generally incapable of communicating; rather, they indicate that the informal and compressed nature of Facebook interaction may make some contributions more difficult for readers to interpret.

Research Question 2: Based on the findings of the study, what communication guide on the proper use of conversational maxims in online interactions can be developed?

Table 2. Representative Qualitative Evidence

	Code	Classification	Interpretive Summary
1.	FBC-03	Observed Quantity	The scholarship inquiry and institutional response provide sufficient detail for the communicative purpose.
2.	FBC-16	Observed Quantity	The extended explanation supplies several supporting points about the athletes' effort and the speaker's position.
3.	FBC-02	Quantity violation / Quality flouting / Manner violation	The short, evaluative comments provide limited support; the tone also permits an ironic reading.
4.	FBC-14	Quality flouting	The reference to "crocodiles" carrying "sacks of money" is figurative and appears to communicate criticism beyond the literal wording.
5.	FBC-22	Quality violation	The expression is an unsupported and inappropriate characterization rather than a verifiable contribution.
6.	FBC-38	Quality violation	The comment contains an unsupported implication about transgender individuals and lacks factual grounding.
7.	FBC-40	Quality flouting / Relation and Manner violation	The literary reference is used humorously, but the extended comparison shifts across ideas and may reduce clarity.
8.	FBC-46	Relation violation	The comment expresses a personal sentiment that is not sufficiently connected to the immediate topic.
9.	FBC-50	Manner violation	The evaluative statement is understandable but provides limited contextual precision for the discussion.
10.	FBC-01	Quality flouting	The juxtaposition of a factual-sounding statement and exaggerated laughter creates a nonliteral, context-dependent reading.
11.	FBC-21	Quality flouting	Irony and rhetorical questions appear to communicate dissatisfaction with the holiday announcement rather than literal approval.
12.	FBC-61	Quality flouting	"Power Point" is a pun on "point," producing a humorous meaning rather than a literal answer.

The representative cases illustrate why contextual analysis is necessary. FBC-03 and FBC-16 demonstrate that detailed contributions can satisfy Quantity, whereas FBC-02 shows that one comment may contain different pragmatic actions across different maxims. FBC-14, FBC-21, and FBC-61 illustrate Quality flouting through figurative language, irony, and wordplay. FBC-22 and FBC-38 show how unsupported assertions may be treated as Quality violations. FBC-46 and FBC-40 illustrate how relevance and clarity may weaken when comments shift toward personal or loosely connected material. These examples support the frequency pattern without claiming direct access to commenters' private intentions.

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Table 3. Interpretive Summary of Findings

	Maxim	Frequency	Primary Pattern	Recommended Practice
1.	Quantity	38 observed; 12 violated; 0 flouted	Generally informative, with some underdeveloped contributions.	Provide sufficient information for the immediate purpose without unnecessary elaboration.
2.	Quality	27 observed; 2 violated; 21 flouted	Generally maintained, but humor and nonliteral language were frequent.	Verify factual claims; signal humor or irony clearly when context may not make the intended meaning obvious.
3.	Relation	20 observed; 30 violated; 0 flouted	Relevance was inconsistent.	Check whether a response directly contributes to the topic before posting.
4.	Manner	6 observed; 44 violated; 0 flouted	Clarity and organization were the main concern.	Use clear wording, logical organization, and context-appropriate expressions.

Table 4. Proposed Communication Guide

	Maxim	Guideline	Self-check Question
1.	Quantity – Be informative	Give enough information to answer or clarify the issue.	What information does the reader need to understand my point?
2.	Quality – Be truthful	Avoid unsupported claims; distinguish factual statements from jokes, sarcasm, or exaggeration.	Is my statement supported, and could my humor be mistaken as literal?
3.	Relation – Be relevant	Connect the response directly to the topic or explain the connection when a shift is necessary.	Does this comment contribute to the current discussion?
4.	Manner – Be clear	Use understandable wording, logical order, and sufficient context; avoid unnecessary ambiguity.	Could a reader outside my immediate peer group understand this message?

The communication guide was developed from the revised findings. Its purpose is not to prohibit informal online interaction but to help student-netizens distinguish expressive communication from communication that may unintentionally reduce clarity, relevance, or reliability.

Ethical Consideration

Institutional permission was secured before the collection and analysis of the relevant public Facebook content. The study did not involve direct interviews, surveys, or interventions with commenters. The research presentation excluded usernames, profile names, profile photographs, links, and other direct identifiers, and each comment was represented by an FBC code. The collected materials were used solely for the stated research purpose, stored securely, and restricted to authorized members of the research team. This study also considered the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) and its implementing rules. The National Privacy Commission states that research use of publicly available personal data may be permitted when adequate safeguards are in place, while processing remains subject to transparency, legitimate purpose, proportionality, confidentiality, and other applicable requirements. The researchers therefore minimized identifying information and did not reproduce unnecessary personal details. Where consent or waiver is applicable under the institution's ethics policy, the final manuscript should state the actual basis for the decision. Public availability of a comment was not treated as an unrestricted license to reproduce identifying information. The researchers maintained confidentiality and secure storage throughout the research process

Conclusion

The Study analysis demonstrates that the four conversational maxims were manifested unevenly in the 50-comment analytical dataset. Quantity showed the strongest observance, while Manner showed the highest frequency of violation. Quality displayed a mixed pattern in which apparent truthfulness coexisted with substantial flouting through irony, sarcasm, figurative language, and wordplay. Relation was also frequently violated, indicating that maintaining topical relevance was a recurrent challenge.

The corrected analytical denominator is 200 comment–maxim instances, derived from 50 comments assessed against four maxims. The revised results therefore avoid the earlier mismatch between a 50-

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comment final dataset and a 600-instance frequency summary. The findings suggest that students may benefit from practical guidance emphasizing informativeness, truthfulness, relevance, and clarity while recognizing that nonliteral language can serve legitimate social and pragmatic functions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed: Holy Trinity College administrators may use the communication guide as a supplementary resource for responsible digital communication on institutional platforms. Teachers may integrate short pragmatic-awareness activities into English and communication courses, particularly activities involving relevance, clarity, irony, and context. Students may use the four-maxim self-check questions before posting comments in academic or institutional online discussions. Future researchers may replicate the study using a larger and independently coded dataset and may report inter-coder procedures to strengthen analytic reliability. Future studies may compare institutional Facebook discourse with other digital platforms to determine whether pragmatic patterns vary by platform, audience, and communicative purpose.

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