

**CHRIS ROCK, FROM COMEDY TO TRAGEDY:
PHENOMENON ON OSCAR 2022 STAGE****¹Lambok Hermanto Sihombing, ²Maria Paskalia Aninda**^{1,2}Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi, President University
lambok@president.ac.id.**Diterima** : 10 Desember 2021; **Review** : 03 Januari 2022; **Direvisi Author** : 20 Januari 2022; **Terbit** : 14 Februari 2022**Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the phenomenon at the 2022 Oscars. The origin of this issue is the tragic joke-turned-tragic slapping by Chris Rock. This research utilized a descriptive qualitative methodology. The primary source for this study was content analysis data from Oscar 2022, when Chris Rock hosted. This research's objective was determined in three steps: data gathering from YouTube and Instagram channels, data analysis, and discussion and results. After all the data was collected, the researchers tried to find the theory of superiority and underestimation in Gaurer (1988) as the situation showed how Chris Rock used Jada Pinkett as a joke. Based on data analysis, the researchers determined that the OSCAR 2022 case study was separated into the following sections: The context of comedy, Moral power, and code of ethics on stage. Based on the analysis results, the researchers found out that the most important takeaway from this topic is that not everything is appropriate and worthy of being converted into a joke, much alone entertaining the public.

Keywords: *Comedy and code ethics, Media, Oscar 2022, Roasting.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Chris Rock and Will Smith fought on March 28, 2022, the night before the Academy Awards. The event caused tension at the award ceremony and prompted Will to apologize (Angelina & Lestari, 2022). Will Smith walked on stage and punched Chris Rock in the face after the comedian made a joke about the actor's wife while presenting the best

documentary prize at the Oscars, in an unscripted moment that surprised viewers and audience members (Stevens, 2022).

Rock joked that Smith's wife, the actress Jada Pinkett Smith, was in "G.I. Jane 2," ostensibly about her short hairstyle. Pinkett Smith has disclosed that she suffers from alopecia, a disorder that causes hair loss. After returning to his seat, Smith raged and cursed at Rock,

asking that he refrain from speaking about his wife. During the heated debate, the transmission went silent on some screens; leaving viewers confused about what had occurred and what was said. Presenter Rock had been cracking jokes during a brief address when he reached the actors and their spouses. "Both Javier Bardem and his wife are nominated," stated Rock. If she loses, he can no longer win. Rock said, "He is praying that Will Smith wins, like, please, Lord." "Jada, I love you. "Can't wait to see 'G.I. Jane 2,' right?" (Stevens, 2022).

Smith appeared to be initially smiling as the camera panned to him. However, the joke received a lukewarm response, causing Rock to comment, "That was a good one!" Jada Pinkett Smith rolled her eyes at the humor immediately. Pinkett Smith has been upfront about her alopecia, uploading a video on Instagram explaining the progression of her hair loss last year. She disclosed the diagnosis for the first time in 2018 during an episode of her talk show, during which she explained that she had opted to cut her hair short since she was losing handfuls of hair in the shower. Sunday, just after Rock's speech, her husband left his seat. Smith made his

way to the stage through the runway (Stevens, 2022).

From its chronology, the researchers view that the incident at the Oscars stage which occurred during live made the news quickly spread to various social media. It went viral and became a trending topic. The world's netizen were excited to the point that it became a topic that caused polemics for the pros and cons because of differences in responding to the incident. In the comedy world, things like roasting other people are commonplace, usually the person who will be roasted will be briefed first so that they maintain ethics and are not out of line, but Chris Rock's roasting is different and ends with an unexpected incident. On the other hand, netizen support Will Smith and justify the act of slapping Chris Rock, because Will Smith is considered to be defending his wife who is sick, but on the other hand many netizen are also defending Chris Rock, because what Chris said was just a joke by roasting the bald Jada, netizen judged that as a husband and as a famous actor Will Smith shouldn't go on stage and slap Chris just for his jokes. Slapping is a form of physical violence that should not be done especially at a big event like the

Oscars that is watched by the public all over the world.

In this article, the researchers wanted to explore the role of Chris Rock as a nominee reader with a background as a comedian. On that occasion, Chris Rock showed himself to highlight his comedian side by making jokes such as roasting Jada Pinkett while reading the Oscar winner. Roasting is a term used in comedy, when a comedian makes a joke of a guest or a certain person. This is usually done in front of an audience. According to Mosthof (2016) that there is a sense in which one can transgress a boundary many believe ought to be respected. There are limits or boundaries to what is fair game; not just anything is up for grabs in a roast. For example, much of what Mariella Mosthof, a writer for Romper, saw as problematic of the roasting of Ann Coulter during a Comedy Central roast for Rob Lowe was that many of the jokes focused on her looks and womanhood. Mosthof argues this was lazy and that many of the jokes took aim at Coulter while needlessly dragging along others in the process. These are matters I briefly engage later. For the anti-moralist, jokes in general are not subject to the constraints normally

applied to serious discourse. Insofar as the directive “know the limits, nimrod” connotes ethical considerations, there are some for whom this is misguided.

According to the moralist, “humor is, by its very nature, said to be beyond good and evil” (Carroll 2014). Berys Gaut identifies two forms of anti-moralism can take. First, there is a moralism, which is the view “that the ethical and the humorous do not interact at all” (1998). This is either because the one who expressed cannot manifest ethically bad attitudes in the production of a joke-token by employing its content, and hence these attitudes cannot determine the joke token's funniness; or because the utterer can manifest such attitudes, but even if one does, that is irrelevant to the funniness of the joke-token.

The second form, immoral-ism is the thesis that if an utterer manifests ethically bad attitudes in the production of a joke-token by deploying (aspects of) its content, then that counts towards the funniness of the joke. For the immoral, the ethically bad attitudes actually contribute, or at least can contribute, positively to amusement. Thus, this

version of the anti-moralist view encourages roasters to transgress ethical lines in order to enhance the humor of the roast.

As Carroll points above, most would appear to find the anti-moralist position too strong, that there are some instances of humor which are immoral. "A racist joke-token told with the intention to vilify in the presence of and at the expense of a member of a minority can be hurtful. That is, morally wrong". The anti-moralist is contrasted with the moralist, ethics, and moderate moralist. Moralism, in its strongest form, would recognize that humor can be immoral and that all such humor is unfunny. Not everyone who acknowledges immoral humor has such strong views. This extreme view can be contrasted with a more moderate consideration found in Carroll's "Ethics and Comic Amusement." "Moderate comic moralism contends," he writes, "that some humor some humor tokens will resist uptake, due to their immorality. This is consistent with some immoral humor amusing people in a lighthearted way, even those with strong moral convictions (2014).

There are several studies related to this topic. One of them was taken from

Alfi Rianis Tsani entitled LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS USED IN THE CHRIS ROCK'S UTTERANCES DURING "OSCAR AWARDS 2022". His research aimed to identify the language function and context in the incident of Smith's slapping Rock in the Oscars Awards 2022. Chris Rock's speech used 23 linguistic functions, according to the data. Chris Rock used five personal functions, four interactional functions, three imaginative functions, and two representational functions prior to the slapping incident. Personal function is used to communicate emotions. The interactional function is utilized to engage the audience. The imaginative function is used to create jokes, whereas the representational function is utilized to convey facts. After the slapping event, Chris Rock used five representational functions, three instrumental functions, and one interactional function. Furthermore, Chris Rock maintained by employing representational, instrumental, and interactional functions because he attempts to convey facts, control the environment, and maintains audience communication. Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that Chris Rock uses language functions to facilitate interaction between the speaker and the

audience (Tsani, 2022). However, our focus is different from the previous research conducted by Tsani (2022).

The purpose of our research is to find out the code of ethics and the limitations that comedians need to pay attention to, especially when Chris Rock roasts other people, not everything should be used as a joke, especially on a big stage like the Oscars, which is followed by many people. know the situation of the person we roast in this case, namely Jada who is bald due to a history of illness. For that, according to the background of the problem that has been explained, the researcher wants to answer the research question "What is the comedian's code of ethics when roasting directly in front of the person".

2. METHODS

This study focuses on a descriptive qualitative approach that alludes to findings through social media content analysis. This research began in April 2022, and the researchers took the following steps:

First, the researchers analyzed the content of the national television news, CNN Indonesia. At this step, the

researchers adjusted the data with other media and selected media sources that discussed the subject directly.

Second, to strengthen the analysis, the researcher also analyzed the problems through YouTube channel broadcasts, including Guardian News, with the title "Watch the uncensored moment Will Smith smacked Chris Rock on stage at the Oscars, dropped the F-bomb," duration 1:23 and the Telegraph channel with the headline "Will Smith breaks down during Oscars 2022 speech after hitting Chris Rock" accessed on April 4, 2022 (<https://youtube.com/watch?v=6tbyBlelzA>).

Third, the researchers investigated Helmy Yahya Official's TikTok content that discussed the behind-the-scenes facts about Chris Rock's slapping by Will Smith.

The last, the researchers interpreted the observation supported by the theory and other literary works to conclude the analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comedy

Comedy or humor is a form of drama that makes us laugh and have a happy ending. Comedy comes in the form of literature, pictures, and other art forms that contain funny elements in it. Humor is synonymous with anything funny, which makes people laugh. In the Indonesian Encyclopedia (1982), as stated by Setiawan (1990), Humor is the quality to evoke a sense of amusement or humor, because of its ridiculousness or inappropriateness; a blend of a subtle sense of humor in humans and a compassionate awareness of life with a sympathetic attitude. Furthermore, the theory of humor is divided into three groups (Manser, 1989), including:

(1) The theory of superiority and underestimation, that is, if the laugh-er is in a super position; while the object being ridiculed is in a position of degradation (belittled or humiliated). Plato, Cicero, Aristotle, and Francis Bacon (in Gauter, 1988) say that people laugh when something is ridiculous and out of the ordinary. Ridiculous is defined as something that violates the rules or something that is very ugly. A joke that

causes laughter, also contains a lot of hatred. Jokes always arise from teasing mistakes/mistakes and anger.

(2) Theories of imbalance, hopelessness, and bissociation. Arthur Koestler (Setiawan, 1990) in his bissociation theory says that the thing that underlies all forms of humor is bissociation, suggesting two situations or events that are impossible to happen at once. The context gives rise to various kinds of associations.

(3) Theories regarding the release of tension or liberation from pressure. Humor can emerge from lies and deceit; can appear in the form of sympathy and understanding; can be a symbol of the release of tension and pressure; can be in the form of lay or elite expressions; it can also be serious like satire and cheesy like street humor, besides that humor does not interfere with truth.

Another opinion regarding the theory of humor according to Fuad Hasan in the writing of *Humor and Personality* (Kompas, 1981) quoted from Agus Mulia (2014) divides humor into two major groups, namely:

(1) humor is basically an aggressive act intended to degrade someone;

(2) humor is an act to vent depressed feelings in a light and understandable way, with the result that mental tension is relaxed.

Based on the exposure of experts, the researcher concludes that in the world of comedians it does not only focus on aspects but has a fairly broad scope, in the case experienced by Chris Rock, the appropriate theory is the theory of superiority and underestimation in Gauter (1988) because in Chris Rock, Jada's situation is Pinkett as a joke.

Roasting

Roasting has been part of the US comedy tradition since 1950. At that time, the most famous example of roasting comedy was the comedy central roast, which was often shown on television. Roasting is a stand up method that is often used by comedians to attack someone but in a unique way. The attack referred to here is not physical, but rather verbal by using sentences or words. A comedian will tend to make jokes on purpose. But with the intent and purpose to attack his personality directly. As

written in Cambridge Dictionary defines roasting as an act of criticizing someone. Roasting is used as a forum for comedians but at the same time to convey criticism of their policies to the public.

Although it is said to be a comedy, of course you also have to have certain ethics when roasting someone. One of them is; ensure that the target character has agreed to be roasted at the event. So that everyone cannot arbitrarily and freely roast the person, especially by spit out all the ugliness. Usually the producers of the show have made a backstage agreement about what things to make jokes about. The character or object to be roasted has the right to set a limit to the comedian regarding the extent to which his personal life may be exposed or discussed in public. For example, such as the name of a family member, physical characteristics such as short, fat, and many more.

However, because many people don't know this, the community also becomes involved in roasting the character. They will also tend to imitate jokes that may be similar and then uploaded to social media. Even though the comedy roast contains ridicule

towards someone.

However, this does not eliminate respect for the person and of course this is done in a different and unique way according to ethics. Negotiation is a technique used to find agreement between the two parties, namely the producer and the character. Of course, it's not just about ridicule. There are times when at certain events, roasting also involves a sincere compliment and respect given to certain characters. This will also make people who accept the joke as good humor not as an insult or criticism that is so serious.

Jokes and Theory of Oddity

A French philosopher, named Henry Bergson, described that laughter can occur because humans construct something odd about reality. In 'Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic' (1913), Bergson calls something funny, basically, something that is said but goes against social norms or even facts. The reason people laugh at Rock's jokes on the Oscar 2022 stage, for example, is because of this oddity. Everyone there knew the plot of the GI Jane film, everyone knew that Jada had a short hair like Lieutenant Jordan O'Neil.

Everyone also knows that the film GI Jane is impossible to remake let alone be played by Jada. Among comedians, Bergson's theory of incongruity has become a kind of pocket book for making jokes. However, the joke sometimes causes a comedian to slip into serious trouble. In Canada, for example, a famous comedian named Mike Ward had to be tried at the Quebec Court of Human Rights in 2016. Ward was reported to have targeted Jeremy Gabriel, a child singer with a disability.

In action, Ward jokes that he thinks Gabriel's illness is a terminal death. Therefore, he said, people were only kind to the child because he would die soon. The court also ordered Ward to pay compensation of USD 35 thousand or around Rp 502 million. The court also considered Ward to have violated Gabriel's human rights. In Indonesia, the comedians Tretan Muslim and Coki Pardede have also stumbled because of their jokes. In 2018, they were accused of blaspheming religion for cooking dates and pork.

Jokes and Discriminatory Prejudice

Salford University's performing arts teacher, Ian Wilkie, disagrees when a

comedian is punished for his jokes. In a column in *The Conversation* entitled 'Stand-up comics should concentrate on being funny: so don't take offense if they are' (2018), Wilkie wrote that comedians' job is only to entertain. Therefore, closing it, it is hard to imagine that a comedian has the intention to insult someone. According to him, comedians are only tasked with making the audience laugh, regardless of how offensive the jokes are. Wilkie then explained that the audience is important in a comedy show. He said that the audience who came to the comedy show was basically ready to accept it. And most importantly, he said, the audience would not be worse off just because they heard offensive jokes. However, what Wilkie said has actually been dismissed by an analysis conducted in 2015. In the journal entitled 'Disparagement humor and prejudice: Contemporary theory and research' (2015), Thomas Ford, Whitney Petit, and Kyle Richardson prove that jokes offensive has consequences for the audience.

According to the journal, offensive jokes do not have the potential to foster discriminatory prejudice. However, the joke can actually provide

justification for the audience who has had this prejudice from the start. Meanwhile, according to Luvell Anderson, assistant professor of philosophy at Syracuse University in New York, comedians have been targeting vulnerable groups for hundreds of years. This practice is known as 'punching down'. The jokes in this terminus will target those who are socially, culturally, financially or racially disadvantaged. According to Anderson, long before stand-up existed, white men in the US would wear black faces and present caricatures of black people to get laughs. A number of '80s comedies also poked fun at gays for laughs. So according to him, a number of jokes that are racist, demeaning to women, homophobia, ethnicity, and other marginalized people are causing serious problems. Sexist jokes, for example, will only normalize the status quo and perpetuate stigma.

Content Analysis

In this study, researchers develop research discussions based on content published in national and international media, besides that researchers also analyze content from YouTube. The

following is a presentation of the findings in question;

A. Chris Rock's jokes to Jada Pinkett



Figure 1: Chris Rock went on stage

The incident that shocked the public began when Chris Rock went on stage to read out the Best Documentary Features nominations. The comedian also made jokes about Javier Bardem and his wife, Penelope Cruz, who were nominated for an Oscar. Then he began to discuss Jada Pinkett Smith's appearance with bald hair which is similar to the film *GI Jane*. He said: "Jada, I love you. *GI Jane 2*, can't wait to see you," as Jada can be seen rolling her eyes at the joke. The *GI Jane* joke makes reference to a 1997 action movie which stars Demi Moore as Jordan O'Neil, who shaves her head to become *GI Jane* to solidify her position as a Navy Seal.



Figure 2: Will Smith slapped Chris Rock

Responding to the joke, at first Will Smith laughed at the joke even though Jada Pinkett was seen on the camera with an annoyed face. Until not long after, Will Smith came on stage. Will Smith's arrival on stage was unexpected by Chris Rock. At first he thought Will Smith was going to join in on the joke, but without a word he slapped Chris Rock hard in the face and came down again. "Gosh, Will Smith just beat me up," said Chris Rock after the unexpected incident.

B. Chris' Joking Relationship With the Film *GI*

GI Jane is a 1997 action film starring Demi Moore. In the film, Demi Moore plays the character of a strong woman who undergoes a profession as a soldier. Because he had to undergo strenuous military training, he cut off his hair. Demi Moore's bald appearance in

the film was taken as an 'inspiration' by Chris to make a joke about Jada Smith's bald head. Jada herself, since last year, has spoken openly about her alopecia. "I can't hide the condition I'm in. So I said "I'm going to share it with all of you, so you don't wonder, I'm going to be friends with this Alopecia2q. Period," he said.

C. Will Smith Has Apologized to Chris Rock

After he slapped him at the Oscars, saying his behavior was "unacceptable and inexcusable". "I would like to publicly apologize to you, Chris," he said in a statement. "I was out of line and I was wrong." It comes after the Oscars film academy condemned Smith over the incident and announced a formal review.



Figure 3: Will Smith has apologized

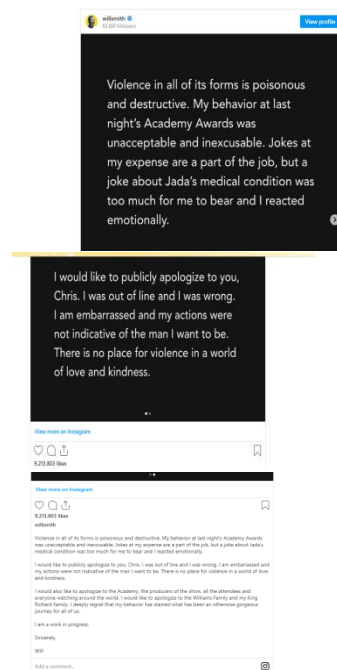


Figure 4: Source from official Instagram @willsmith

The star slapped Rock in the face on stage after the comic made a joke about the actor's wife, Jada Pinkett Smith. Rock had taken aim at Pinkett Smith's shaved head, a result of the hair-loss condition Alopecia. Shortly after, Smith picked up the first Oscar of his career for playing the father of tennis legends Venus and Serena Williams in King Richard. Smith apologized directly to Rock, stating he was "out of line". He also apologized to the Academy and the Williams family.

Based on the data obtained, the researchers concluded broadly in the following points;

1. The context of jokes does not always elicit laughter and amusement from others. Everyone has a unique personality, and their responses to situations vary. The incident that transpired on the Oscars stage taught not only Chris Rock but all of us that we should not make jokes to strangers when feeling down, especially if we do not know them well. Every individual responds to situations and conditions with a different attitude.
2. The genuine meaning of a husband's response to a circumstance is that he is willing to forfeit all his dignity as a public figure and be labeled violent, even though he demonstrates self-respect that he cherishes.
3. The moral is a truth that positively influences mental and character growth. This lesson reveals who is to blame and who is to be justified.
4. Lessons on whether or not a joke with a deliberate or unplanned motive is ethical. It was these statements that led to the comedian receiving a slap for his own words.
5. It is not encouraged to blame others when we are the source of the error. Also, we do not need to aggravate someone's emotions if unaware of the underlying cause.
6. Appreciate shame in public, before being embarrassed by one's own behavior in public. Because he humiliates others, he will be humiliated in the future by the product of his own mind.
6. Cause and effect, humans must feel the consequences caused by it without having to throw the responsibility on anyone.

Chris Rock probably didn't mean to insult Jada Pinkett Smith. The 57 year-old comedian just touched on Jada's appearance, which looks like Demi Moore in the film GI Jane. The action film was released in 1997. In the film GI Jane, Demi Moore plays the bald-looking Lieutenant Jordan O'Neil. She is described as a female soldier who undergoes a test to become a special forces officer in the US Navy SEALs. The problem is, Jada's bald hairstyle is not because she wants to be eccentric or just wants to. The 50-year-old woman is actually suffering from Alopecia or an autoimmune disease. Jada's immune

system was compromised and caused her hair to continue to fall out.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the incident that occurred on the Oscar stage cannot be blamed on both parties, both to Chris Rock as the party who started the joke to Jada Pinkett as well as to Will Smith as the husband who immediately acted to slap Chris. However, the important point that needs to be seen in this matter is that not all things are appropriate and worthy of being made a joke, let alone trying to entertain the public. As a comedian, it is essential to understand the condition of others, particularly the person who will be roasted, which is why a code of ethics exists. On the other hand, although it may be argued that Will Smith is attempting to defend his wife and express the truth in this instance, it should be noted that not all defenses include physical violence, especially at international events like the Oscars. Chris Rock was remorseful and ashamed of his statements, but he remained professional by performing his duties well and not returning the smack. Will Smith, who was already emotional, chose shortcuts by slapping other people, which tarnished his reputation as a

famous actor and won him the Oscar in 2022, despite the fact that it seemed too late to realize this because regret always comes last. However, Will is still responsible for his actions and faces further consequences. Jada Pinkett did the same by publicly apologizing on the Oscars stage and her social media platforms.

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