

ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY ★ GRADUATE SCHOOL

**DIGITAL HUMOR AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT:
THE USE OF MUSIC MEMES IN TURKEY’S MUSIC MARKETING -
PAST, PRESENT, AND EMERGING POSSIBILITIES**



M.A. THESIS

Alp Timuçin BULUT

Department of Music

Music Programme

MAY 2025

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İSTANBUL TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ ★ LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ

**DİJİTAL MİZAH VE KÜLTÜREL KATILIM:
TÜRKİYE'NİN MÜZİK PAZARLAMASINDA ESPRİLİ GÖRSEL (MEM)
KULLANIMI - GEÇMİŞ, BUGÜN VE ORTAYA ÇIKAN OLANAKLAR**

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Alp Timuçin BULUT
Center for Advanced Studies in
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DIGITAL HUMOR AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT: THE USE OF MUSIC MEMES IN TURKEY’S MUSIC MARKETING — PAST, PRESENT, AND EMERGING POSSIBILITIES

SUMMARY

One of the most powerful dynamics of the digital age that transforms social life is the infiltration of visual forms of communication and humor into everyday life. One of the most striking and controversial examples of this transformation is “meme culture”. Initially considered only as a means of online entertainment, memes have now become one of the basic building blocks of political discourse, social criticism and marketing strategies. In this context, the music industry is intertwined with new types of humor shaped through social media, redefining the dynamics of both production and consumption.

This thesis aims to examine the relationship between meme culture and music marketing by focusing on the functions of humor in digitized communication environments. Internet memes have gone beyond individual entertainment and have taken on the functions of expressing social mood, generating political messages and establishing collective identity. Similarly, music has been used throughout history as a form of social communication and a means of resistance. The research examines how humorous content produced and circulated on digital platforms is integrated into musical meaning production and marketing processes.

The thesis analyzes the historical ties between humor and music, with a particular focus on the case of Turkey. From the tradition of satire to today's social media campaigns, the connection between humor and music is discussed within a cultural continuum. Within the scope of the research, methods such as qualitative content analysis, participant observation, experimental music content and online survey were used. Digital interaction data were collected and user behaviors were observed through experimental posts on the Instagram page named “musicbizinis” and humorous music released on Spotify.

In addition, an online survey of 162 respondents in March 2025 was tested on the basis of the hypothesis that memes are an effective attention-grabbing strategy in music marketing, as well as the supporting layers that memes and music strengthen emotional bonds between individuals and function as similar communication tools in expressing common feelings and thoughts.

This study provides a unique framework for the effective use of digital humor by music professionals and independent artists in Turkey. It aims to contribute to the understanding of user-driven forms of dissemination different from traditional marketing models.



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ÖZET

Dijital çağ, teknolojik dönüşümlerle birlikte aynı zamanda gündelik yaşam pratiklerini, toplumsal ilişkileri, kültürel üretim biçimlerini ve ifade yollarını da derinlemesine dönüştüren bir dönüm noktası olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu dönüşüm sürecinde en dikkat çeken unsurlardan biri ise görsel iletişim biçimlerinin olağanüstü bir hızla yaygınlaşması ve mizahın bu görselliğin ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmesidir. Görsellik ve mizah, sosyal medya platformlarının işleyiş biçimleriyle doğrudan bağlantılı bir şekilde gündelik iletişim pratiklerine yerleşmiş; bireylerin, grupların ve kurumların ifade biçimlerinden biri haline gelmiştir. Bu çerçevede ortaya çıkan mem kültürü, bir internet fenomeni olmasına ek olarak, aynı zamanda çağdaş kültürün, eleştirinin, sosyal tepkilerin ve pazarlama stratejilerinin merkezinde yer alan bir anlatı biçimi olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Başlangıçta basit görsel-şakalar veya karikatür benzeri içerikler şeklinde görülen memler, bugün toplumsal hafızanın bir aynası haline gelmiştir. Güncel olaylara verilen tepkiler, kolektif hafıza, kimlik tartışmaları, mizah yoluyla ifade edilen öfke ya da umut gibi pek çok duygusal ve pek çok farklı unsur memler aracılığıyla görünür kılınmaktadır. Bu durum, özellikle yoğun internet kullanan genç kuşaklar arasında hem gündemi takip etmenin hem de ona dair bir tutum geliştirmenin temel yollarından biri haline gelmiştir. Memlerin bu kadar hızlı ve yaygın bir şekilde dolaşıma girmesi bir iletişim biçimi olarak değerlendirilmesini gerekli kılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda memler, dijital çağın hem dilini hem de düşünme biçimini temsil eden yeni bir estetik formdur.

Müzik endüstrisi ise bu dönüşümden bağımsız düşünülemez. Müzik, tarih boyunca yalnızca estetik bir deneyim olmanın ötesinde, bireylerin duygusal dünyalarıyla, toplumsal kimlikleriyle ve pek çok konuda görüşleriyle kurdukları ilişkinin bir aracı olmuştur. Dijitalleşmenin etkisiyle birlikte müziğin üretim, dağıtım ve tüketim biçimleri büyük ölçüde değişmiş; sosyal medya, müziğin anlamında ve pazarlama süreçlerinde merkezi bir rol üstlenmeye başlamıştır. Bu yeni dijital ortamda mem kültürü ve dijital mizah, müzikle etkileşim içerisine girerek geleneksel tanıtım ve iletişim stratejilerinin sınırlarını aşan yaratıcı ve katılımcı modeller ortaya çıkarmıştır.

Bu tez çalışması, mem kültürü ile müzik pazarlaması arasındaki çok katmanlı ve dinamik ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ana hedef, dijitalleşen iletişim

ortamlarında mizahın nasıl işlediğini, hangi işlevleri yerine getirdiğini ve müzik ile kesiştiğinde ne tür yeni anlatı biçimlerine dönüştüğünü analiz etmektir. Tezde memler yalnızca birer eğlence olarak değil, duygusal ifade ve sosyal aidiyet gibi çok yönlü işlevlerle değerlendirilmiştir. Benzer şekilde müzik de, dijital çağda yalnızca eğlence amaçlı bir içerik olmaktan çıkmış; görsel estetik, mizahi anlatı ve dijital kültürün birleşim noktasında yer alan bir deneyime dönüşmüştür.

Araştırmada kullanılan yöntemler hem nitel hem de deneysel veri toplamaya yönelik bir çerçevede kurgulanmıştır. İlk olarak, tarafımda deney olarak oluşturulan, Türkiye’de faaliyet gösteren “musicbizinis” adlı mizah ve müzik odaklı Instagram sayfası üzerinden yapılan sosyal medya paylaşımları analiz edilmiştir. Bu sayfa, mem kültürünü ve müzik endüstrisindeki güncel tartışmaları mizahi bir dille bir araya getirerek, hem bireysel hem de toplumsal düzeyde nasıl etkileşim kurulduğunu gözlemlemeye olanak tanımayı amaçlamıştır. Ayrıca Spotify’da yayınlanan mizah temalı deneysel müzik içerikleriyle dijital dinleyici davranışları incelenmiştir. Yorumlar, beğeniler, paylaşım oranları ve erişim istatistikleri gibi veriler aracılığıyla memlerin ve mizahi müziğin dijital platformlardaki etkisi ölçülmüştür.

Araştırmanın bir diğer bileşeni ise Mart 2025 tarihinde gerçekleştirilen çevrimiçi anket çalışmasıdır. Bu anket, 162 katılımcının görüşlerine dayanarak memlerin ve mizahın müzik pazarlamasında nasıl algılandığını, mizahın müzikle kurduğu ilişkiyi nasıl değerlendirdiklerini ve dijital kültürle olan bağlarını ortaya koymuştur. Katılımcıların büyük bölümü, mizahın müzikle birlikte kullanıldığında dikkat çekiciliği artırdığını, içeriği daha paylaşılabılır hale getirdiğini ve duygusal etkileşimi derinleştirdiğini ifade etmiştir. Bu sonuçlar, mem ve mizahın müzik pazarlamasında etkili olduğu hipotezini desteklemiş; her iki ifade biçiminin de bireyler arasında sosyal bağ kurma, ortak duyguları ifade etme ve kolektif bilinç yaratma gibi işlevler üstlendiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Tezin diğer katkılarından biri, mizah-müzik ilişkisini Türkiye özelinde tarihsel bir arka plana oturtmasıdır. Yetmişli yıllardan erken internet dönemine uzanan süreçte taşlama, hiciv ve alay gibi mizah biçimleri, hem edebiyat hem de müzik yoluyla ifade edilmiştir. Bu kültürel gelenek, günümüzde sosyal medya ve dijital müzik platformlarında yeniden üretilmektedir. Türkiye’deki müzik profesyonelleri ve bağımsız sanatçılar, bu geleneksel anlatı biçimlerini dijital mizahla birleştirerek yeni ifade yolları geliştirmekte ve mizahı hem eleştirel hem de pazarlama aracı olarak kullanmaktadır. Bu noktada, mem kültürü yalnızca Batı kökenli bir dijital olgu olmayı aşarak yerel kültürel unsurlarla harmanlanarak Türkiye’ye özgü bir form kazanmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak araştırma, müzik ve mizahın dijital çağda kazandığı yeni anlam katmanlarını ele alarak, bu iki alanın kesişiminde ortaya çıkan yaratıcı anlatı formlarına odaklanmaktadır. Dijitalleşme yalnızca içeriklerin paylaşım hızını artırmasına ek olarak, aynı zamanda bu içeriklerin biçimlenme tarzını, etkileşim yollarını ve toplumsal etkilerini de temelden dönüştürmüştür. Bu dönüşüm sürecinde müzik, artık çok katmanlı bir dijital temsil biçimine evrilmiştir; görsel unsurlar, mizah ve kullanıcı etkileşimiyle birlikte okunması gereken bütünlüklü bir ifade aracına dönüşmüştür.

Bu bağlamda mem ve müzik birlikteliği, geleneksel içerik tüketimi anlayışını değiştiren, çok yönlü bir dijital deneyim sunmaktadır. Müzik artık aynı zamanda görülen, yorumlanan ve yeniden anlamlandırılan bir içerik türüne dönüşmüştür. Bu dönüşümde memler, kullanıcıların duygusal tepkilerini, gündelik gözlemlerini veya kültürel göndermelerini anında, esprili biçimlerde ifade etmelerine olanak tanıyan araçlar olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Dolayısıyla mem, mizah ve müzik etkileşimi, dijital çağda bireylerin dünyayı algılama, deneyimleme ve ona tepki verme biçimlerini anlamak açısından da önemli kültürel unsurlar sunmaktadır.

Gelecek araştırmalar, mem mizah ve müzik etkileşiminin farklı müzik türlerinde ve yaş, cinsiyet, kültürel geçmiş gibi demografik değişkenlerde nasıl işlediğini inceleyebilir. Türkiye merkezli deneylere dayanan bu çalışma, yerel mizah anlayışı ve sosyal medya pratikleriyle iç içe ilerletilmiştir; bu da ortaya çıkan sonuçları bölgeye özgün kılmaktadır. Özellikle Batı ülkelerinde gerçekleştirilecek karşılaştırmalı çalışmalar, mizahın anlam dünyalarının, dijital içerik üretim biçimlerinin ve müzik tüketim alışkanlıklarının kültürel farklarını gözler önüne serebilir. Ayrıca yapay zekâ ile üretilen mizahi müzik içeriklerinin kullanıcı etkileşimi üzerindeki etkileri, dijital yaratımın geleceğini anlamak açısından önemli bir araştırma alanı olarak öne çıkmaktadır.



1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most powerful dynamics of the digital age that transforms social life is the infiltration of new forms of visual communication and humor into everyday life. One of the most striking and controversial examples of this transformation is meme culture. Initially seen as a mere form of entertainment online, memes have now become one of the basic building blocks of political discourse, social criticism and even marketing strategies. The music industry, in particular, redefines the dynamics of both production and consumption by intertwining with new forms of humor shaped through social media.

This study aims to examine the relationship between meme culture and music marketing by focusing on the functions of humor in digitalized communication environments. Internet memes have gone beyond being merely a means of individual entertainment and have taken on the function of expressing social moods, generating political messages and constructing collective identities. Similarly, music has been used throughout history as a form of social communication and a tool of activism, playing a consistent role in expressing shared values and responding to societal change.. The main aim of the research is to reveal how humorous content produced and circulated on digital platforms is integrated into musical meaning production and marketing processes. Furthermore, in the case of Turkey, how humor has historically been associated with music will be examined, from the political satire tradition of the past to contemporary social media campaigns. This will provide a two-way analysis focusing on both global digital dynamics and humorous practices specific to Turkey.

The main research question of this thesis is formulated as “What impact do meme culture and digital humor have on music marketing and musical expression in Turkey today?”. The research shaped around this question deals with the dynamics of humor, digital activism, social media marketing and cultural production with an interdisciplinary approach. Furthermore, in the case of Turkey, how humor has historically been associated with music will be examined, from the political satire tradition of the past to contemporary social media campaigns. This will provide a two-

way analysis focusing on both global digital dynamics and humorous practices specific to Turkey.

The significance of this study is that it analyzes the impact of humorous digital content, which increasingly has a marketing function today, on artistic production processes and music consumers. The fact that independent musicians, in particular, are going viral through meme strategies alone, without large production budgets, is radically transforming the nature of music marketing. The limited use of humor by musicians and music professionals in Turkey is very low compared to their global counterparts, and the humor content that goes viral by chance is underutilized in music marketing in Turkey, leading to missed opportunities for both musicians and music professionals. In this sense, the thesis aims to make an important contribution to understanding user-based digital dissemination models that differ from traditional music marketing models.

The research is limited to examples in Turkey and focuses intensively on Turkey. Although some examples from the global literature will be examined, the field research and case studies will mainly focus on digital content, musicians and social media influencers in Turkey.

This study uses a combination of quantitative data analysis. In the first phase of the study, qualitative content analysis was conducted on humorous music posts, user-generated content and viral meme examples on Instagram. In addition, through the Instagram meme page “musicbizinis” managed by the researcher, data on digital interactions and humor-oriented sharing dynamics were collected through participant observation. These observations covered not only content types, but also user reactions, interaction patterns and the speed at which humor circulates. Quantitative data obtained from experimental music content published on music streaming platforms with the same name were evaluated. These data aim to measure the impact of the humorous nature of song titles on listening rates, regional reach statistics and listener behavior. In this way, it is shown how content success on digital platforms is not only related to musical quality but also to social media strategies such as humor and irony. Finally, some chapters provide historical and contemporary examples and examine the humorous forms of production in Turkey in the past that have developed in tandem with music.

Furthermore, an online and anonymous survey was conducted in March 2025, collecting data from 162 participants. This survey aims to test the relationship between music and humor within the framework of one main hypothesis and its supporting subheadings: Humor not only plays a strategic role in music marketing, such as attracting audience attention, increasing engagement, and strengthening artist or brand recognition; it also strengthens social bonds by creating emotional intimacy and a sense of collective belonging among individuals, and as a powerful, analogous communication tool for conveying emotions and thoughts, it supports rapid interaction and joint discourse development processes in both daily life and social issues. The findings and analysis provide a multi-layered research framework.onsists of six main chapters. The first four chapters address the relationship between humor and music in a theoretical and global context. In this context, topics such as the intersection of the “meme” phenomenon in digital culture with political humor (Chapter 2), the social effects of music (Chapter 3), and the common functions of humor and music in social bonding (Chapter 4) are discussed theoretically. In the fifth chapter, examples of musical humor in the context of Turkey are discussed and examples from the historical process and the present day are evaluated comparatively. In addition, direct quotations from interviews conducted by the researcher with people operating in different fields within the music industry are included in this section, supporting the current view of humor and music in Turkey with original data obtained from the field. In the sixth and final section, the strategic use of humor in music marketing is discussed through three experimental studies conducted by the researcher: Instagram humor account named “musicbizinis”, Spotify music published under the same name, and visuals created with humorous content; finally, an online survey with more than 160 participants examined listeners' perceptions of such content. The chapter concludes with predictions about the role of humor in the future of music marketing in Turkey.

1.1 Purpose of Thesis

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between humor, meme culture and music marketing in Turkey's digital media environment. Although humor has historically been intertwined with music in Turkey through satire, parody and performing arts, how this element is integrated with marketing strategies in the digital age has not been sufficiently researched. This study aims to reveal how humor, which

circulates especially through internet memes and viral content, functions as a means of emotional expression, audience interaction and cultural criticism in the field of music.

Taking into account both global and local dynamics, this thesis aims to analyze how humor-based content is disseminated through digital platforms and its effects on the visibility, perception and marketability of musical productions. Furthermore, the extent to which musicians and music industry professionals in Turkey use or do not use humor in brand building and audience engagement processes will be evaluated.

Combining theoretical discussions with qualitative interviews, field experiments and survey-based data analysis, this research aims to reveal the potential of creative strategies based on humor as a departure from traditional music marketing models.

1.2 Hypothesis

This study is structured around one main hypothesis to understand the relationship between humor and music: Humor not only plays strategic roles in music marketing such as attracting the attention of the target audience, increasing interaction and strengthening artist or brand recognition; it also strengthens social bonds by creating emotional closeness and a sense of collective belonging among individuals, and functions as powerful, similar communication tools with music in conveying emotions and thoughts, supporting rapid interaction and common discourse development processes in both daily life and social issues.

2. HUMOR AND MUSIC IN THEORETICAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

2.1 Memes and Social Impact of Humor

A meme is a communication element with layers of social and cultural meaning, often with humorous or critical content, produced in visual or textual forms and rapidly shared by users on social media platforms. A key challenge of meme research is that, due to its interdisciplinary nature, it is difficult to place it within a specific academic framework. Despite being one of the most dynamic areas of digital culture, meme studies is seen as a field that is marginalized within academic discourse. One of the main reasons for this is that memes are often perceived as ephemeral, anonymous and for entertainment purposes. However, this approach ignores the cultural, political and economic implications of memes. Galip (2024) states that meme communities are not confined to digital platforms; they also enable creative, artistic, and entrepreneurial interactions among individuals in both local and global contexts (Internet Histories, p. 312).

A meme community is a group of online users who develop a collective digital practice around a particular theme, area of interest or social issue through the production, sharing and interpretation of memes, and who produce common symbols and humor language within themselves. This definition reflects my own research-based perspective.

Meme communities operate beyond digital spaces, enabling networks of interaction that span into economic, political, and marketing spheres. However, in the academic world, the interactions of memes with social media algorithms and the dynamics of their visibility are still understudied. This neglect risks creating a significant literature gap on the cultural and sociological impacts of the digital age. Failure to systematically analyze the data generated by digital media may limit future scholarly production in these fields and weaken academic debate.

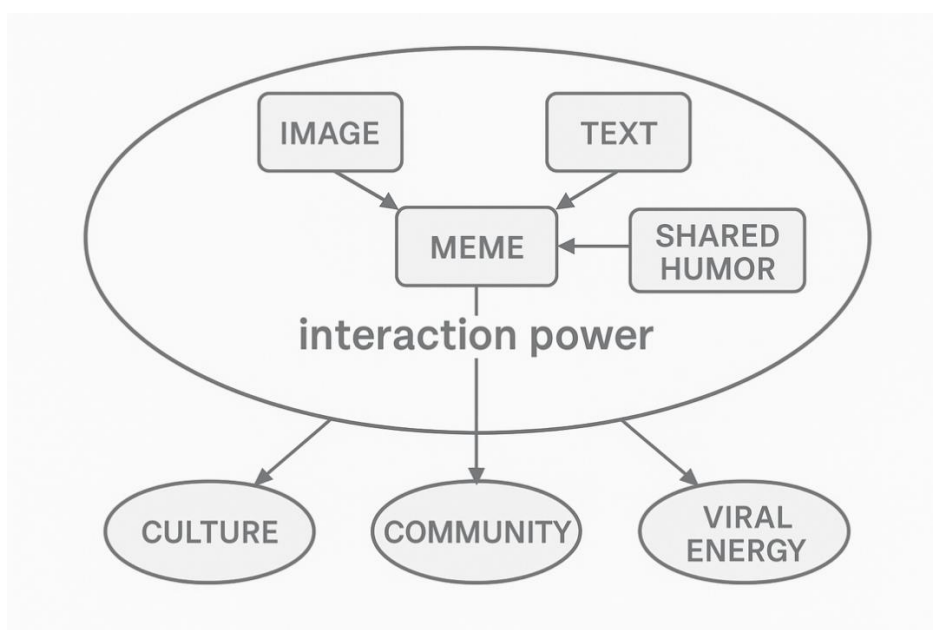
Another challenge of meme research is the methodological obstacles encountered when conducting digital ethnography. The constant change of digital content and the

uncertainty of platform policies pose a major challenge for researchers. As Galip (2024) explains, an ethnographic study of a meme community typically begins with the act of screenshotting—an initial step that precedes any real-life engagement with meme spaces (Internet Histories, p. 319).

However, this screenshot method has some problems in itself. Deleting digital content from platforms or suspending user accounts can lead to significant data loss for researchers. However, there are also problems such as the long-term degradation of screenshots, loss of context and disorganization of the research process. Kneese (2021) suggests that screenshots can function as tangible records of digital moments that can no longer be accessed or replicated (p. 152).

While these challenges are not insurmountable, one of the biggest obstacles is the lack of institutional adaptation to rapidly changing digital methods, and the fact that such issues remain marginalized in traditional academic agendas. Because digital ethnography requires constant methodological innovation and responsiveness to platform changes, it poses difficulties for academic institutions grounded in more static and formalized research traditions. Table 2.1 below illustrates how memes combine image, text, and shared humor to generate interaction power, which drives culture, community, and viral energy.

Table 2.1: Diagram showing how image, text, and humor generate a meme’s interaction power, shaping culture, community, and virality by author.



2.1.1 Memes, cultural transmission and digitalization

The term “meme” was coined by Richard Dawkins, inspired by the concept of “gene” in biology. In his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976), Dawkins defines memes as “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” to explain cultural transmission (Dawkins, 1976, cited in Jordan, 2014). According to him, ideas, beliefs and behaviors multiply and spread within societies just like genes. The word is rooted in the Ancient Greek word “mimeme” (that which is imitated).

Dawkins also characterizes memes as “mind viruses”. “Memes, just like viruses, are indifferent to the welfare or otherwise of their hosts and the only thing that counts, from their perspective, is that they persist” (Jordan, 2014). This perspective emphasizes that the measure of success of memes is not benefit to their host, but spreadability.

Over time, memetics has developed as an independent field of research, but has remained controversial in academia. According to Jordan, “the ‘meme concept’... has been viewed with suspicion by many, derision by some, and outright hostility by not a few” (Jordan, 2014). Despite all these criticisms, the meme concept remains an important theoretical tool to explain cultural diffusion, especially in the digital age.

This implies that the concept of meme is not only an internet phenomenon, but also an important topic in terms of knowledge transfer. Today, internet memes have also become a tool for spreading cultural and social messages. An internet meme is usually created by using an image or video clip as a template and adding different alternative words, phrases or contexts. This process has become an effective way of conveying information through humor. According to Kırık and Saltık (2017), internet memes, which emerge within user-generated media environments, differ significantly from traditional forms of humor production.

One of the key strengths of meme culture is that the content is involved in a collective production process. Many people use the same meme template, add different interpretations to it, update it and re-share it, and in this way, memes spread like a virus. Content that goes viral on the internet can reach large audiences in a short period of time and create a huge impact within the social media ecosystem. Yılmaz (2017) emphasizes that memes, as cultural artifacts of the digital age, play an active role in internet-based communication.

It is important to examine how identity perception and identity representations on social media have changed over time through meme formats. While in the Web 1.0 era, users mainly produced text-based, anonymous content, the proliferation of social media platforms with Web 2.0 has transformed users into not only consumers but also active content producers.

This transformation has also profoundly affected humor and meme culture. Especially with the rise of social media, meme production has accelerated and the rate of sharing content has increased exponentially. In this new era, users not only produced humorous content, but also started to use it as a communication tool and a platform to react to social events. Kırık and Saltık (2017) point out that memes have become an integral part of everyday life, serving as a form of self-expression enabled by the advancement of digital communication technologies.

In this framework, memes are transformed into dynamic content that forms the collective memory of digital culture. Users use meme formats as a form of digital rhetoric to react to current events, question social norms or share social emotions. In this context, memes are becoming a form not only of entertainment but also of criticism, solidarity and collective discourse production. Despite their visual simplicity, memes, which carry a high density of meaning, convey multi-layered messages and resonate with the audience on both emotional and cognitive levels. At the same time, thanks to their flexible and reproducible nature, memes can be quickly adapted and transferred to different contexts on digital platforms, thus becoming common symbols among diverse social groups.

By its very nature, a meme is a spontaneous phenomenon that spreads spontaneously within digital culture, that is, it is shaped not by a specific plan or strategy, but by the creativity and collective sharing of users. On the other hand, when musical works are directly humorous in nature - for example, through their titles, lyrics, clips or performance styles - they often naturally become memes and are treated as such in social media environments. For this reason, I personally think that it is not correct to distinguish humorous music, both in terms of content and structure, from a written or visual meme, because meme-ness here is determined not only by the visual format, but also by content and aesthetics. Therefore, I believe that a music work should be considered as a “meme” not only when it spreads as a written-visual meme, but also

when it circulates among users due to its humorous content and creates a humorous partnership.

2.1.2 Meme culture, digital activism, and political humor

In the digital age, humor stands out with its capacity to spread critical thinking, question social norms and generate political discourse. Especially in social media environments, humor can make complex or sensitive social issues more accessible and shape public debates by increasing the spreadability of such content. This multi-layered nature of humor makes it an effective communication tool in the context of both individual expression and collective action.

In this context, memes are not only a product of digital entertainment, but also a creative form of cultural critique, political commentary and social awareness. Humorous content has the potential to lighten the emotional burden of the message while simultaneously increasing the recipient's interest and engagement. Sometimes this content not only makes us laugh, but also makes us think, question and build solidarity.

Currently, the ways in which meme culture spreads and its effects are determined by the algorithms of social media platforms. Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and Reddit stand out as the most important spaces that enable the rapid circulation of meme content. The content that users produce and share through these platforms can be considered as a part of both individual and collective knowledge production.

In order to understand how memes and humor function in social movements, it is necessary to consider how humor is used both “externally” and “internally”. This distinction highlights that humor serves various strategic purposes within social movements. Kutz-Flamenbaum (2014) distinguishes between two types of humor in activist contexts: external humor, which is directed toward broader audiences like the public, media, or political adversaries, and internal humor, which functions to reinforce group identity, uplift morale, and build a sense of solidarity among activists.

For example, in the 2010 “Target Ain’t People” protest in the United States, activists entered a Target store and unexpectedly delivered their political message through a musical performance. This action illustrates humor’s power in framing political

critique. As Kutz-Flamenbaum (2014) notes, “The activist-performers emerged from within the regular crowd of shoppers to perform their critique of Target in the form of a musical comedy.”

Humorous performances help activists communicate their political messages to broader audiences by making protests more accessible and engaging. As Kutz-Flamenbaum (2014) cites from Scott (1987), humor can serve as a powerful “weapon of the weak,” yet in some cases, it may also diminish political efficacy and inadvertently reinforce existing power structures (p. 296).

In this context, comedic expression is seen to have a dual nature: On the one hand, it functions as a creative means of resisting oppression; on the other hand, when used in a too superficial or reductionist manner, it risks losing its political impact. Today, memes provide a rapid dissemination of information in many fields, from political debates to social events, and create a collective consciousness through social media. Especially during certain events and crisis periods, memes are also considered as a form of digital protest that allows people to express their reactions. Kırık and Saltık (2017) argue that social media not only shapes how users express themselves but also reflects collective responses to social events.

Kirmani (2024) emphasizes that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have enabled individuals to organize beyond geographical boundaries and facilitated faster information sharing. As Kirmani(2024) notes, “One of the most profound impacts of social media is its ability to break down geographical barriers, allowing people from different corners of the world to connect in real-time”.

Boysan (1985) highlights the resilience of humor in the face of oppression, noting that even when authoritarian regimes attempt to suppress it through official media channels, humor inevitably finds alternative outlets. He further reflects on the nature of humor production, emphasizing that it often stems not from joy, but from suffering: according to Boysan, creating humor is less about amusement and more about enduring hardship—“even joy comes at the price of suffering” (p. 194).

In this context, humor has not disappeared in the face of rulers; on the contrary, the role of humor in political and social issues has become more prominent, especially in the age of social media. Today, political messages are also disseminated through memes, a format that combines humor and cultural transmission, full of short and

striking content. Halversen and Weeks (2023) point out that political memes have emerged as a prevalent means through which individuals encounter political content and articulate their political opinions in online spaces.

According to Mihăilescu (2024), meme creators see themselves as active agents of change, playing a vital role in contemporary political communication by shaping public discourse and influencing collective attitudes. The indirect acknowledgment of this power of interaction by politicians shows that political memes have begun to play an important role in contemporary political communication. However, the involvement of politicians in these spaces also brings ethical debates about the impact of memes on democratic processes. Kirmani (2024) argues that misinformation spread through memes threatens the credibility of digital activism. The softening effect of humor sometimes paves the way for this misinformation to spread and be accepted more easily. Studies on far-right groups' use of meme culture as a tool of ideological propaganda support these concerns. In their analysis of the transnational visual media strategies of far-right organizations, McSwiney et al. (2024) reveal that memes play a limited role in these discourses. Similarly, Gunawat and Kapoor (2023) argue that memes and trolls are used as propaganda and digital revenge tools during election periods. The fact that the boundaries of humor on social media platforms are unclear and subject to much less control than in traditional media can lead to the normalization of offensive and harmful content. All these examples show that despite the potential of memes as a form of political expression, they also carry ethical, ideological and social risks that need to be carefully considered.

2.1.3 The interaction between music and meme culture

The similarities between music and humor in conveying information and emotions are interesting. Today, the intertwining of digital culture and music has become inevitable. In addition to this digital environment, the place of communication in music production and the delivery of music to listeners is always very important. Humor and music have very similar powerful functions in communication. Especially from the perspective of communication sciences, the music market was also affected in this period when memes created a public communication mechanism independent from traditional media.

In today's music industry, where social media is important for music discovery, TikTok has taken its place as an important platform. Music professionals direct a large portion of their budget and energy to this platform in their music marketing campaigns. For instance, Lil Nas X's song "Old Town Road" went viral on TikTok as a meme and subsequently broke records on the Billboard charts (Zimet, 2022).

Moreover, musicians even compose compositions for the algorithm in order to create a trend on the platform during their music production processes. Thompson (2020) explains that the strong association between certain songs and their corresponding dance routines has led some artists to intentionally compose tracks that lend themselves to TikTok challenges and mimicry. Justin Bieber's "Yummy" serves as a notable example of this approach.

In digital activism context, Bermudez (2022) notes that TikTok users often parody everyday situations through seemingly spontaneous jokes, which are enhanced by their choice of music. In doing so, they not only produce musical memes but also contribute to shaping a distinct aesthetic and stylistic form of TikTok-based comedy. These performances, which blend humor and acting, cover a wide range of themes—from mundane daily experiences to politically charged and activist content (p. 23).

Megan Boni, known by the username @girl_on_couch on TikTok, initially shared as a joke, but quickly went viral, attracting the attention of producers such as David Guetta, Alesso, and Billen Ted. Following the remixes, she received offers from record labels, and the sound titled "Looking for a man in finance" was used in countless content on TikTok, turning into a global music trend that entered international charts (Robinson, 2024).

Similarly, Mason Ramsey's yodel performance at Walmart became an internet phenomenon under the name "Yodeling Boy," and this viral success propelled him into a professional career with Atlantic Records and Big Loud with his single "Famous" (Billboard, n.d.). Both examples strikingly demonstrate that memetic content can not only be a digital entertainment tool but can also turn into tangible career opportunities in the music industry.

When examined from a separate perspective, when it comes to music industry professionals, the rise of viral meme content in the music industry is also changing the traditional concept of artist representation; internet celebrities who don't know how to

play guitar or have no stage experience are now on the radar of indie rock managers and are being guided by professional representatives. Characters such as Grumpy Cat, Marnie the Dog, and The Fat Jew are managed by experienced music industry figures such as Ben Lashes, We Are Free, and Alexander Ferzan, respectively, and generate significant income through content production, brand partnerships, and product launches. The managers of these figures emphasize that humorous content production offers alternative career paths that are not directly based on music production but are equally effective, while emphasizing the importance of maintaining creative control with the content creator and establishing authentic partnerships with brands. For example, Grumpy Cat's \$100 million revenue generation in just two years is a striking demonstration of the economic potential of memetic characters and why they are attractive to managers (Smith, 2015).

All these examples reveal that the relationship between meme culture and music in the digital media spans a wide and influential ground. The ways in which viral content spreads transforms not only music marketing, but also the construction of artist identity, interaction with the audience and creative production strategies. Circulating through social media, this content stretches traditional models of representation and promotion, and introduces a new form of cultural economy that combines visuality, humor and algorithmic dynamics.

2.2 Music And Social Impact

2.2.1 The sociopolitical and communicative role of music

>Lorem The sociological and communicative functions that humor has had throughout history are similarly valid for music. Music has continued its existence not only as an aesthetic experience or entertainment tool, but also as an effective tool in shaping social, political, cultural and economic processes. Although the function and usage of music have changed throughout history, it has preserved its fundamental roles such as expressing individuals' feelings and thoughts, creating collective identity, carrying social memory and directing the masses. In this respect, music has been positioned not only as a form of artistic expression within social structures, but also as an active actor in the processes of producing ideological and cultural meaning.

Similar to meme culture and humor, understanding how music is positioned in a social context, requires examining how it has been used in different contexts throughout history. Functioning in areas such as propaganda, cultural integration, political mobilization and economic discourse production, music has become an inseparable part of everyday life, reaching larger communities, especially with the development of mass media. In this context, music has contributed to the development of a common sense of belonging among individuals, has been a means for historical events to take their place in the collective memory, and has built bridges of meaning between different social groups. Thus, music has gone beyond its aesthetic boundaries and become a multi-layered means of communication and representation.

For example, in a study examining the impact of music on social identities, it was emphasized that music is an important social tool for individuals to express themselves and is an area where social identities are reflected. (Sağır&Öztürk, 2015)

In the past, artists were largely dependent on the support of a ruler or a patronizing authority; the economic support required for the sustainability of art and music forced many artists to collaborate with powerful authorities such as kings, aristocrats, or the church. This situation paved the way for music to cease being a solely individual creative process and to be shaped in line with the political and ideological goals of the ruling class. For example, in Ancient China, music was used as a powerful ideological tool in the hands of the ruler and functionalized for the moral education of the people; each new emperor rearranged the pitches and shaped the music in line with his own understanding of governance (Zaychenko, 2016).

Similarly, in the Ottoman Empire, music was used as a tool to reinforce the power of the ruling class and support the ideological structure. Musicians in the palace environment were encouraged, and musical education was institutionalized with institutions such as Enderun-i Hümayun, Mehterhane-i Hümayun, and Musika-i Hümayun (Somakçı, 2017).

The transformations experienced in the production of art in the modern age have radically changed the forms of relationship between artists and political authorities. Historically, artists who had to receive economic and ideological support from central authorities such as the state, church or aristocracy, have become more independent with the developing market economy, technological advances and diversification of

media channels as of the 20th century. This situation has paved the way for both the diversification of artistic production processes and the redefinition of the social role of the artist.

Artists no longer have to be just representatives of an ideology or political power; They can be positioned as autonomous figures who reflect their own individual perspectives and often take a critical stance. In this process, especially in democratic societies, the state's controlling and guiding power over art has diminished, while the artist's original creative space has expanded. However, this freedom has not always been absolute; indirect effects such as censorship, market pressure and social norms have continued to affect the artist's production process.

However, when evaluated in a general framework, "in the modern age, artists have become independent from political institutions, and the state's influence and degree on artists have changed" (Göher, 2015, p. 306). This process of independence has allowed artists to form their individual identities and increase their freedom of artistic expression.

Social movements provide new meanings to music by encouraging the interaction of musical and artistic genres and pave the way for the emergence of alternatives to the dominant culture's understanding of music.

In this context, rock music in particular has created a culture based on rebellious creativity values; however, it has subsequently been rapidly assimilated to commercial values: "Rock in particular accompanied the kind of historical changes tracked by Boltanski and Chiapello, producing a culture that was centered on values of rebellious creativity, but which, in retrospect, was assimilated very quickly to values of commercialism" (cit. Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 54).

These movements, which periodically challenged the cultural understanding of the ruling elites, have created an alternative popular culture while making music, song and dance one of the fundamental elements of this process. At the same time, these approaches, which question the dominant value categories of art, have brought the assumed frameworks of musical understanding to a conscious and critical level, and have made music a carrier of ideas against the existing social and cultural order. Although the independence of the artist and the prominence of individual expression are developments specific to modern times, the transformative role of music in society

has maintained its importance throughout history. The efforts of rulers to control music have not been limited to the past, but continue in different forms today; music continues to be an effective tool in the dissemination of political and ideological messages, the construction of collective identities and the direction of social movements.

The control of states over music was not limited to censorship or direct intervention; it also manifested itself in the instrumentalization of music in the construction of national identity, the reinforcement of official ideology, and cultural transformation strategies. Along with the formation of nation-states, many countries made major investments in music and established state-supported institutions and research to shape art within certain ideological frameworks. Music education was also one of the fundamental elements of these strategies. For example, in Turkey, within the scope of education policies led by Hasan Âli Yücel, music education was provided in village institutes even during periods when the literacy rate was very low, aiming for the cultural transformation of the people (Vargün, 2023).

Similarly, during the founding of the Republic of Turkey, music was brought to the masses through community centers, radio broadcasts, and music schools in order to spread Westernization ideals (Sarı & Varlı, 2019).

In this process, many countries have structured folk melodies and traditional musical forms in accordance with the representation of national identity by coding them, supported music within ideological boundaries and directed academic production in this direction. Especially in the 20th century, music has become not only a means of cultural transmission but also an element of ideological struggle.

During the Cold War, the USA used jazz music as a cultural propaganda tool around the world with the "jazz diplomacy" strategy; American values were introduced through artists such as Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie (Puncy, 2020). Similarly, in the Soviet Union, music was used as an effective propaganda tool in the dissemination of communist ideology during the Lenin period (Karaburun, 2019).

Nowadays, many states allocate financial resources to musical genres that support their cultural policies, encourage certain styles and direct artistic production within ideological boundaries. This situation shows that the historical tension between

individual freedom of expression in music and collective ideological control still continues; However, artists have also used music as a form of resistance against these interventions throughout history, making their voices heard against oppressive regimes, social inequalities and injustices through music.

To sum up, throughout history, music has functioned not only as an aesthetic form of expression but also as a powerful social, cultural and political tool. Similar to humor, music has gone beyond individual pleasure and has played a decisive role in the construction of collective identities, the dissemination of ideologies and the shaping of social order. Although the individualization of the artist and the increase in freedom of expression have been possible in the modern era, the impact of music on social transformation is a multi-layered process that has continued from the past to the present. The ruling classes have used music to guide the people, internalize values and legitimize their own power; states have shaped music not only through censorship and intervention, but also through educational, propaganda and cultural policy tools. On the other hand, music has also existed as a carrier of resistance, alternative identities and critical discourses; throughout history, it has undertaken a dual function as both a control mechanism and a field of liberation. From this perspective, the relationship between music and power should be evaluated as a field of struggle woven with the ideological conflicts of the social structure.

2.2.2 Social media and musicians

The music industry has undergone a fundamental transformation with the rise of social media. While the relationship between artists and listeners was more distant and limited in the past, today these boundaries have become increasingly blurred; artists forced to constantly engage with their followers, establish personal connections and have an active presence on social media. Baym (2018) explains this transformation as follows: “Audiences, especially those who came of age in a time of ubiquitous media, expect the musicians they follow to be ‘constantly accessible, especially on social media, offering unique and intimate moments to their fans’” (p. 1). This new expectation has redefined the public role of the artist, turning him or her a digital figure who is expected to be constantly connected and engaged.

This clearly shows how social media plays a decisive role in the modern music industry in terms of artists’ ability to sustain their careers. Today, artists regularly interact with

their followers and present a “personality” that goes beyond music. The idealized, almost perfect human image created especially on digital platforms has become a suppressive norm for musicians; over time, this situation has drawn a boundary that can even inhibit the emotions and messages they want to express in their music. At this point, humor and music have the potential to create a space of freedom for artists. Humor can break the mold through exaggeration and distortion; music can transform this critical approach into an aesthetic language. In this context, an example from the past is an anecdote that Boysan shared: “Richard Strauss loved the work ‘Don Quixote’ and during this time he conducted the orchestra extraordinarily. Sancho Pansa in this work also had the character that Cervantes wanted to give him. He also wanted the alto violin solo in this section to be played ‘squeaky and choppy’ rather than ‘beautifully’. Once, when the musician defended himself by saying, ‘Nobody has ever asked me to play ugly or funny’, Strauss said, ‘Humor is a great art.’” (Boysan, 1984, p. 181). This statement reveals the power of humor in artistic expression and the value of alternative aesthetic approaches developed against traditional understandings of beauty.

This situation also raises the question of how the perception that everything should look “perfect”, which is frequently encountered on social media today, can limit artistic expression. The pressure for aesthetic perfection can cause the artist to lose their original and human aspect; however, humor, fragility and even ugliness can become one of the most powerful forms of expression in art.

In order to understand how social media has transformed the music industry, it is necessary to compare the industrial model of the past with the digital structure of today. In the past, artists were discovered by major record companies and introduced to the market, and they shaped their careers within this industrial structure. Nancy Baym (2018) criticizes this structure and states the following: "Few recording artists liked the old model—even Travers derides it as industrialism rather than music—but at least they felt like they knew the game." (p. 2). This explanation shows that although the old system was limiting in many ways, it offered a more predictable career path for artists. However, in today's music world, this predictability has largely disappeared, replaced by digital structures dominated by constantly changing algorithms and the attention economy.

Artists now have to use social media and digital tools effectively to build their careers. Especially for independent artists, this transformation has become both an opportunity

and a burden. As in the case of Zoë Keating, many artists promote their music through social media and earn income by connecting directly with their fans. Baym (2018) describes this situation as follows: "She oversees the creation, production, distribution, and sales of her recordings, using the direct-to-fan platform Bandcamp, which allows her to sell her work at a minimum price she sets and allows buyers to overpay if they choose." (p. 3). This model offers artists the opportunity to reach listeners directly and build their own communities without the need for intermediaries. At the same time, this directness allows for more intimate, fragile, and even humorous aspects to be included in music; because this one-on-one relationship with the listener breaks the perception of uniform perfection.

The social media environment has transformed the way musicians relate to the audience and created a new plane of interaction. Beyond sharing their works, artists are now faced with the necessity of maintaining their presence in the digital environment and being in constant contact with their followers. This raises new questions about how music shapes the bonds between individuals. Over time, these relationships that develop through digital platforms go beyond a listening practice centered solely around the artist and transform into communities where listeners interact with each other. These music-centered online structures create a shared memory through shared emotions and comments. Interacting individuals build intimacy through music and gain a social space in which they can express their identities, values and lived experiences. These developments are important for understanding how social bonds are shaped in the digital environment. It also shows that music has become a collective cultural practice that is constantly reproduced through user participation.

2.3 Humor And Music: Social Bonds

2.3.1 Art and social connections

With the industrial revolution, the opening of music and humor to mass production and the development of radio, television and recording technologies brought the artist together with a wider audience. However, especially since the second half of the 20th century, the development of large recording technologies, powerful sound systems, giant speakers and live concert technologies have brought the artist to a point where they are almost deified in the eyes of the society. Artists are no longer just individuals

who perform their art, but have become figures that millions of people follow, admire and have almost detached from their individual identities. In this regard, Boysan (1984) states that “in the art of music, humor is not included in the purposes of composition and performance. However, one can see that music-human relations have turned into comedy” (p. 54).

While this process of distancing caused musicians and artists to break away from society, a similar process was also valid for individuals who make humor. While humor used to be a phenomenon that came from within society and was a part of daily life, today it has become a professionalized show on digital platforms. Now, humor is not just individuals sharing funny situations they encounter in daily life, but it exists as a form of content that is suitable for a certain format, produced for the masses and made ready to be consumed. According to Avcı (2020), entertainment, which was a participatory action in traditional lifestyles, has turned into a passive and unparticipated activity in the age of spectatorship.

Today, anyone can become an artist in one way or another; digital platforms, social media and accessible production tools give individuals the opportunity to make their artistic productions visible. However, making this visibility permanent, establishing a foothold in the market and creating a sustainable artist identity is a much more challenging process. The elevation of the artist to an inaccessible and privileged position further complicates this process, creating a lack of motivation in individuals who want to take the next step and weakening the power of collective participation that art has historically carried. In the past, art was not only the production of a specific group, but also a practice in which the consumer was actively involved in the process; whereas today, artists are increasingly idealized, and audiences are transformed into passive consumers who only admire and passively consume. This assessment is a personal interpretation based on my field research and observations. Aydın Boysan, who shared an anecdote reading notes from the past;

“After Bülow and Toscanini, Stokowski also joined the ranks of orchestra conductors who conducted concerts without notes. The day after a concert they gave in Philadelphia, Stokowski heard a society beauty say the following about him; - Unfortunately, he does not know how to read notes. If he knew that, who knows how far he would have advanced?” (Boysan, 1984, p. 138)

Artists today have become figures who have separated from their social identities, positioning themselves above the public and presenting their art as a favor. This separation weakens one of the most basic functions of art, the power to establish social bonds. However, one of the common points of music and humor is the ability to establish strong social bonds between people. Throughout history, these two forms of expression have allowed individuals to unite around common feelings, have fun together, create collective consciousness and strengthen social solidarity. While these social bonds were sometimes based on common ethnic or cultural values, sometimes they were formed between individuals who shared the spirit of a common period or a similar emotional experience, regardless of any ethnic context. From an evolutionary perspective, music and humor have also functioned as social mechanisms that ensured that human communities remained together.

In this context, Tarr et al. (2014) states that “it has been suggested that a key function of music during its development and spread amongst human populations was its capacity to create and strengthen social bonds amongst interacting group members.” The rhythmic structure of music facilitates people moving simultaneously and sharing a shared experience; this makes music, like humor, a tool for reinforcing group identity and social cohesion. This feature becomes especially visible in collective actions such as dancing, singing, or group music making. Tarr et al. (2014) also highlights that “an important feature that distinguishes musical activities from other social behavior is the importance of shared rhythms, and the externalization of predictable rhythms that allow synchronization to occur between two or more people Tarr et al. (2014) states that ”Tuning into shared rhythms supports individuals in feeling closer to one another, which contributes to the establishment of social bonds. As they emphasize, “more importantly, there is evidence that synchronization between people can influence their subsequent positive social feelings toward one another” (Tarr et al., 2014).

Music and laughter are powerful social bonding tools, both individually and collectively. Laughter helps individuals feel more comfortable and also facilitates emotional bonding with others. Similarly, music activates neurochemical responses such as dopamine and endorphins, making individuals feel happy, safe, and social. Research focusing on the neurobiological basis of social bonding suggests that music synchronizes auditory and motor systems, thus supporting social coordination: “This neuronal entrainment enables selective attention to specific points in time” and

“Groovy music elicits the urge to dance by increasing the auditory cortex’s sensitivity and its coupling with the motor cortex” (Savage et al., 2021, p. 10). Both laughter and the act of listening to music activate the brain’s reward system, creating a sense of sharing, closeness, and emotional resonance. Synchronized actions performed in groups—be it dancing, shared laughter, or collective music making—increase individuals’ feeling of “being on the same team” and strengthen their sense of community: “Dancing in synchrony increases participants’ feelings of connectedness to the group [...], as well as their liking and assessment of similarity with co-dancers” (Savage et al., 2021, p. 9). Listening to music creates the urge to move, consciously or unconsciously. Thanks to its metrical and rhythmic structure, music promotes synchrony and harmony between people over time, which builds enduring social bonds that go beyond face-to-face interaction. Thus, music is an evolutionarily advanced social tool: “Music is a derived bonding mechanism [...] better suited than ancestral bonding mechanisms or language for coordinating behavior and facilitating social bonding in larger and more complex groups” (Savage et al., 2021, p. 6). Like laughter, music reinforces group solidarity and empathy by being easily spreadable, repeatable, and encouraging collective participation. Musical repetition provides memorability and predictability, allowing multiple performers to engage in long periods of coordinated music-making (Savage et al., 2021, p. 5). This pattern resembles mechanisms observed in comedy. In this context, Bergson(1903) states: “Comedy is mechanical plastered on living.”, that is, the comic is the mechanical encrusted upon the living; in this sense, the effect of rhythm and repetition on live participation carries not only a musical but also a humorous potential. “The comic is something mechanical encrusted upon the living.” (Bergson, 1903) Interestingly, it has been observed that these processes are effective from infancy: “Infants also respond differently to songs sung in different styles [...]; singing and musical interactions also directly improve parent–infant social bonds” (Savage et al., 2021, p. 8). Shared actions such as humor and music strengthen social bonds through neurobiological systems, while also forming the basic building blocks of culturally shared experiences. From a different perspective, laughter both makes individuals feel comfortable and helps them establish an emotional bond with others. “Endorphins (and the endogenous opioid system (EOS) in general) are involved in social bonding across primate species, and are associated with a number of human social behaviors (e.g., laughter, synchronized sports).” (Tarr et al., 2014). Humor and laughter strengthen social bonds by increasing the release of

endorphins. Laughter helps to relax physically and psychologically and promotes social interaction between individuals. Research shows that listening to music and laughing activate similar reward systems in the brain: "Listening to music itself may induce thoughts about movement, whether conscious or subconscious." (Tarr et al., 2014). Humor and music increase the brain's release of endorphins and dopamine, making people feel happier and more social. Laughter and music trigger biological processes that help individuals strengthen their social relationships.

There are studies that show that laughing at the same jokes is an indicator of deep and comprehensive psychological harmony between people. While explaining one of the necessary conditions for jokes to arouse a sense of pleasure in a third person, Freud says: "(1) It must be ensured that the third person is really making this cathectic expenditure. (2) It is necessary to guard against the cathectic expenditure, when it is liberated, finding some other psychical use instead of offering itself for motor discharge." (Freud, 1905, p.1738). In this context, he emphasizes that the person listening to the joke must have similar psychological processes to the person making the joke. In addition; "Thus every joke calls for a public of its own and laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far reaching psychical conformity." (Freud, 1905, p.1738). In contrast to this, there are studies on laughter and humor by the thinker Bergson, who lived in the same period as Freud. Bergson's studies on laughter are important (Demir, 2022). In his work titled *Laughter - Essay on the Meaning of the Funny*, Bergson approaches the act of laughter from different perspectives and examines it under various headings. While summarizing the character funny, Bergson emphasizes that everyone who distances himself from society is funny. According to him, the funny largely arises from being distanced from society and therefore it does not matter whether the character is good or bad (Demir, 2022). Moreover, there are criticisms in some studies that Bergson's studies on laughter are limited to the subject of society and do not mention the negative functions of laughter (Demir, 2022). In addition, Bergson touches upon the physiological effects of laughter in one of his essays, stating that as a result of the interruption of the natural rhythm in the respiratory process, short and spasmodic exhalation movements begin with an energetic inhalation and that this special transformation accelerates blood circulation and provides oxygenation of the blood, and perhaps relaxes the brain by activating blood movements in small vessels (Bergson, 1903, p.403).

2.3.2 The impact of digitalization on music and humor

From past to present, music and humor have functioned as part of shared identities and a sense of social belonging. However, today, with the development of technology and social media platforms, these social ties can be established much more quickly on a global scale. People can now connect with individuals not only in their geography but also anywhere in the world through a common music or meme culture. Social media has taken art and humor beyond geographical borders, connecting individuals through shared emotions and experiences. Sources indicate that popular music is in a constant state of “displacement” and that this situation repositions individuals, communities, and places: “The spatial turn in the study of popular music can also be attributed to the acknowledgement of the role music plays in such phenomena as forging local and national identities on the one hand and abetting cosmopolitanism, globalization, and tourism on the other” (Mazierska & Gregory, 2015, p.7).

Social media and technology have accelerated this displacement process, making it easier for people to establish common ties with music from different parts of the world. However, this situation has contradictory consequences. On the one hand, social media and digital platforms increase individuals’ interaction with art and humor, turning them into active producers; on the other hand, they further increase the distance between artists and society, leading to art becoming an object of consumption. Žaneta Jamrozik’s analysis of Eminem’s “Beautiful” video states that music videos have become “shapers” of public opinion as they have moved to the internet: “because of the online relocation of music videos and their positioning next to other media content like news, commercials, or political campaign videos, music videos cease to be merely ‘shaped by’ and become also ‘shap-ers’ of public opinion” (as cited in Mazierska & Gregory, 2015, p. 233).

In today’s world, music and humor continue to establish social bonds between individuals, but the nature and functioning of these bonds are gradually transforming. While digitalization has the potential to bring art and humor to wider audiences, it also carries the risk of weakening the social participation dimension of art. Therefore, it is of great importance that music and humor do not become merely a means of consumption, and that the process of individuals’ involvement in art is re-encouraged.

As the distance between artists and society increases, it is seen that the side that reacts to this process and is actually in a stronger position is the society that feeds the artist. Social interaction and collective production, one of the basic dynamics of art, are currently being transformed by individual star systems and fan culture. Especially in the field of humor, the decrease in interest in traditional humorists and the fact that social media users produce humor through instant sharing have led to humor becoming an area shaped by collective production rather than individual artists. While this transformation enables society to directly shape its own humor culture, a similar transformation is observed in the music world. Although social media plays a central role in the careers of musicians, this popularity is often not permanent; individuals with limited musical knowledge but successful content production can quickly reach large audiences. This new form of celebrity is similar to meme culture. Social media figures, like viral content producers, rise suddenly, but cannot maintain long-term permanence. This surge of attention, which appeals to a momentary cultural or emotional mood, remains far from depth and sustainable artistic production. In this environment where music is also shaped by social media strategies, artists who adapt to the wave of popularity but have a weak musical foundation lose their influence over time. In this period when artists have become more fragile than before in the face of society, it has become a necessity to exist on social media, but this situation has created a serious contradiction with the basic qualities of art such as timelessness and depth of meaning. "What musicians sought with MySpace after 2002, gig workers around the world seek today on sites like Facebook and LinkedIn where, with the right contacts and a well-maintained, engaging presence, you might find your next career opportunity." (Baym, 2018, p.11)

Fandom culture, which examines internet usage in terms of music consumers, emerges as a dynamic structure where individuals gather around common interests and form strong social bonds. This culture is shaped around admiration for a particular popular culture object or artist. Fandoms function as social structures where individuals create collective intelligence, develop a sense of belonging, and participate in creative production processes. With the widespread use of the internet, these communities have become more global and accessible, making it easier for individuals to interact and share common interests. "Fandoms pool and generate collective intelligence and affect. Individuals create self-concepts and self-presentations within fan groups. Some

become well known to other fans through fandom. These groups also develop a sense of shared identity. Personal relationships are formed amongst some members of fan groups" (Baym, 2007).

Fandoms create a sense of common identity by creating strong social bonds among their members. For example, in the 1980s, fans of the band R.E.M. came together on Usenet forums and formed their own communities. These communities have become larger and more organized over time, and have deepened their interactions with the opportunities offered by new communication tools: "This development is nicely illustrated by the online fan activity around the American band, R.E.M. That fan base began its online life with a mailing list in the late 1980s. When the band's popularity and the size of that list grew in the early 1990s, the list voted to disband and created a Usenet newsgroup, rec.music.rem, in its stead" (Baym, 2017). Today, fandoms reach larger audiences and increase their interactions through social media platforms. Platforms like Last.fm make it possible to share music listening habits and connect with people who share a common musical taste: "Last.fm, the oldest and largest music-based social networking site, allows users to download software that tracks their listens and generates personal listening charts which are displayed on their profiles. Last.fm users can also use their profiles to write self-descriptions and blogs, to 'friend' other music listeners, to see their 'musical neighbors' (users who, according to Last.fm's algorithms, have tastes most similar to their own), to join groups, to build playlists, to access personalized radio streams, to write and read private personal messages, and to leave messages in one another's public 'shoutboxes'" (Baym, 2017).

Fandom culture is not just a structure of passive consumers; fans actively participate in the processes of content production, reinterpretation, and distribution. MP3 blogs have been one of the important tools used by fans to spread and comment on music: "Another important development in online music fandom has been the rise of fan-authored MP3 blogs, in which individuals post sound files of songs accompanied by brief description and/or analysis. Though it's easy to dismiss this as "pirating," these blogs serve crucial publicity roles, especially in independent music scenes. Indeed, many such bloggers are deluged by requests from independent labels and bands to write about their music" (Baym, 2017).

With the impact of digitalization, music marketing has transformed beyond traditional album and concert promotions into a multi-layered, platform-oriented, and

audiovisual-based structure. As Ertürk (2010) points out, promotional activities play a key role in increasing sectoral collaborations and shaping consumer orientation. This transformation accelerated with the emergence of Napster in 1999, and the free sharing of MP3 files radically changed the way music was consumed. While digital music sales became legal with Apple's introduction of the iTunes Store in 2003, social media platforms became central to the music industry in the mid-2000s by offering low-cost promotional opportunities for independent musicians. One of the greatest advantages offered by digitalization is that it minimizes production and distribution costs; this has accelerated the transition to an interaction-based marketing approach. However, it is also a fact that digitalization does not offer equal opportunities for everyone.

As Binark et al. (2023) emphasize, while algorithms emerge as new cultural intermediaries, they create visibility problems for independent artists, and platform economies make this structure even more central.

Taşbaşı (2023) argues that streaming platforms such as Spotify have transformed into a structure that bureaucratizes music production and consumption, and that they have caused the McDonaldization of music because content is presented through algorithmic filters. In this system, the value of musical content is measured by its compatibility with algorithms and its click potential, which limits creative diversity. At the same time, platforms have updated their marketing strategies; Spotify's "Me, Also Me" campaign, launched in 2019, integrated internet meme culture into its advertising language, turning humor into an emotional marketing tool. "Spotify has transformed the way people find and enjoy music and podcasts... This multifaceted campaign sets the stage as we seek to deepen our connection with the people who already know and love Spotify and cultivate relationships and moments of discovery in areas of the world where we are looking to expand." (Cirisano, 2019).

On the other hand, digitalization has affected not only artists but also producers and distribution companies; small local firms have been replaced by giant structures centered in big cities, which has brought about the problem of centralization and monopolization in cultural production (Ertürk, 2010). This centralization of streaming platforms structures music marketing through user data and algorithmic manipulations, while causing certain formats and emotional templates to come to the fore in both humor and content production. Digitalization enables the use of humor in marketing and highlights musical identities shaped by social media aesthetics.



3. HUMOR, MUSIC, AND MARKETING IN TURKEY: FIELD RESEARCH, AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Turkish Music and Humor

In Turkey, absurd humor and parody music have served as tools for social criticism, allowing artists to highlight social tensions, question authority, and reflect everyday realities through an ironic and often exaggerated aesthetic, in parallel with global examples where music and humor intersect as means of activism and commentary. Humor has historically stood as a medium through which the public could express its thoughts, even in times when state-society relations were tense. As Aydın Boysan also stated, “No matter how much the state tries to crush humor, it still gets excited, but this time it starts to flow through thinner veins” (Boysan, 1984, p. 102). This saying shows that despite the political transformations in Turkey in particular, humorous productions in music have continued to exist and have taken on new forms over time. It has been seen that in the early period of the Republic, music was used as an extension of symbolic power and supported the state’s modernization ideology (Kaygusuz, 2023). Despite all this, many powerful examples of humor have been produced. Examining these examples is important in understanding the humorous music produced in Turkey today. If examined chronologically, one of the earliest notable figures blending music and humor in the Turkish context is Celal Şahin. Celâl Şahin is considered one of the pioneers of the modern one-man musical comedy concept in Turkey and has particularly stood out with his political and social satire. He has established a strong bond with the audience by treating current events and social issues with a sarcastic language in the shows he performed accompanied by the accordion. His performances in the TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) archives document not only the popular entertainment concept of the period but also the

humorous representations of the political atmosphere. In the entertainment program format that dominated TRT in the 1970s and 1980s, artists like Şahin transformed entertainment into a multifaceted form by participating in a wide variety of musical performances including Turkish Classical Music, Turkish Folk Music and Turkish Western Music with sketches and monologues together with theater artists. Indeed, a source describing the entertainment concept of the period includes the following statements: “The entertainment concept of TRT Institution continued for many years in the 70s and 80s. When entertainment programs are mentioned, they are understood as broadcasts where Turkish Classical Music, Turkish Folk Music, Turkish Western Music and Soft Western Music pieces are played in the same program... The sections where the aim was to make people laugh with the participation of artists such as Orhan Boran, Celal Şahin, Erol Günaydın and Suna Pekuysal were unforgettable sections of entertainment programs” (Cankaya, 2016, p.295).

In this period, entertainment was not only a passive viewing activity, but also shaped as a public experience where music, theater and humor were intertwined and interaction with the public was constructed.

As another important example, Ahmet Faik Şener, known as "Balarısı Ahmet" (1925, Gemlik - 28 June 2022, Istanbul), is one of Turkey's leading mouth harmonica virtuosos, known for both his versatility in music and his humorous approach. Şener, who acquired his first harmonica in his primary school years, founded the group "Balarıları" with pianist Şerif Yüzbaşıoğlu and flutist Şefik Uyguner while studying law at university, and this group quickly became one of the well-known musical comedy groups of the period (İKSV, 2022).

Şener, who turned to polyphonic music especially in the period after 1970 and arranged the works of important composers, was also one of the pioneering figures who integrated humor into music with satire records such as "Avradını". As shown on Figure 3.1, this vinyl, released by Tiko Plak, combined humorous discourses with the form of folk music and presented an early example of musical comedy that contained both entertainment and social criticism (bitmezat.com).

These contributions not only reflect Şener's musical innovation but also illustrate how humor has historically been used as a cultural tool to comment on societal issues, challenge norms, and engage audiences through a unique combination of artistry and

satire. His work paved the way for later artists and remains a valuable reference point for understanding the intersections of humor, music, and social commentary in Turkey.



Figure 3.1 : Şener's "Avradını" satire record, an early example of musical comedy in Turkey (bitmezat.com, n.d.).

As shown on Figure 3.2 below, Şener drew attention with his regional accents, folk jokes and humorous exchanges accompanied by the Black Sea Kemeñçe (fiddle) in his performances, developed a narrative language that established a direct connection with the audience (YouTube, 2022).

This example highlights how local humor, combined with regional musical elements, creates an intimate and culturally rooted performance style, reinforcing the audience's sense of belonging and shared identity. By blending entertainment with cultural meaning, they foster emotional connections between performers and audiences, strengthening collective memory and contributing to the continuity of cultural heritage across generations.



Figure 3.2 : Screenshot from the performance recording of “Domuzdan Yana Mısın Bal Arısı” by Ahmet and Özdemir (YouTube, 2022).

At this point, while language differences and class diversity stand out as elements that increase the effect of humor, it is understood that, as Bergson (1903) also stated, “in more complex societies, where different social groups live together, each class adopts the same defensive attitude towards other classes, and differences in clothing, behavior and language increase the opportunities for laughter” (p. 406).

Öztürk Serengil is an important comedy artist known for the folk characters he portrayed in Turkish cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, and is remembered for his exaggerated facial expressions and unique style of speaking. In his career spanning from theater to cinema, he has made significant contributions to Turkish humor culture with his characters that both make people laugh and reflect the social structure of the period. Serengil has added a different dimension to the tradition of political satire by producing not only in cinema but also in the field of musical satire. His record titled “İsmail’in Meyhanesi”, a parody of Timur Selçuk’s song “İspanyol Meyhanesi”, humorously questions the distance between high art and the public by satirizing theatrical style (Kuklacı, 2022).

In addition, with his satirical record titled “Unuttun Bizi Süleyman” released in 1970, he satirized the then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel and his economic policies, and especially criticized the pressure of collectors on the people with the following words:

“Unuttun Bizi Süleyman / Ne işler açtın başıma / Maliye ortak aşım / Tahsildar taktın peşime / Aaahh! Unuttun bizi Süleyman, dağıttın bizi...” (Nadirkıtap, n.d.).

("You forgot us, Süleyman / What troubles did you cause me / The finance company shared my food / You put a collector after me / Aaahh! You forgot us, Süleyman, you scattered us...")



Figure 3.3 : Cover of record “İşte Vergi, İşte Maliye” (Plakburada, n.d.).

This Figure 3.3 draws attention as one of the early examples of political humor and music intertwining in Turkey, both with its lyrics and theatrical interpretation. Similarly, his record titled “İşte Vergi, İşte Maliye” critically addressed the tax system and the relationship between the state and the citizen (Plakburada, n.d.). All these productions show that Serengil was also a critical artist who looked at the socio-political structure of the period from a humorous perspective.

As one of the longest-running duos of stage humor in Turkey from 1954 to 1980, Ateş Böcekleri left their mark on the popular nightlife entertainment culture of the time with their musical shows blended with political satire. In Cumalı’s (2013) words, the group, which was “sympathetic representatives of current and political jokes,” managed to both make people laugh and think by working with important names such as Aziz

Nesin, Kayhan Taşkıran and Cem Yılmaz. Sharing the stage with popular musicians of the period such as Zeki Müren and Emel Sayın, the duo also gained fame with their imitations of political leaders; Süleyman Demirel's tolerant approach to these imitations in particular made their humorous style even more visible (Cumalı, 2013). Reflecting the socio-political structure of the period through the stage, some of Ateş Böcekleri's records also carried political content, and their records such as "Bir Başkadır Benim Memleketim" established a strong bond between humor and music (Nadirkitap, n.d.).

From the 1980s onwards, the relationship between music and humor in Turkey continued to develop in new forms by moving from stage shows to pop music, and one of the most obvious examples of this transformation was Grup Vitamin. The group, which became popular in the 1990s, combined absurd humor with musical parody, satirizing the media, magazines and daily life; and found a response among the younger generation with songs such as "İsmail" and "Takmayacaksın". The band, which imitated aesthetics ranging from Turkish arabesque to pop with ironic transitions, took on the role of mass representation of humorous music in Turkey. The band's success stems not only from its funny lyrics, but also from its understanding of parody that criticized media culture.



Figure 3.4 : The gravestone of Gökhan Semiz (Grup Vitamin Fan, 2015).

The phrase in Figure 3.4 "People who cannot have fun together cannot build a future together" on the tombstone of the group member who died at an early age offers a deep commentary on the social importance of art and humor. Grup Vitamin's song "*İsmail*", on the other hand, treats the clumsy male stereotype as a comic figure.

“Ali Desidero” humorously caricatures class-based miscommunication while conveying the cultural differences between an intellectual woman and the character Ali, who comes from a neighborhood culture, through satire (Türe, 2018). Ahmet Kaya’s “Entel Maganda” stands out with its criticism of superficial intellectualism . All three of these songs reveal the power of music and humor to make one think about social identities, cultural codes, and social roles.

In interview with Soner Günday, a cartoonist from the 1990s, it emerged that the artist became a unique figure at the intersection of music and humor with the humorous album covers he produced at Lemar Kültür in 1995. Günday responded to commercial productions with a humorous language by criticizing the musical clichés of the period on satirical tape covers as shown on Figure 3.5. These productions were shaped by absurd jokes and wordplay with the character of “Orçun KuneK”, and patterns such as “Peru’dan adam çıkmaz” (A man from Peru doesn’t come out) were transformed into comic elements (Keskin & Tunalı, 2020, p. 6; p. 8).



Figure 3.5 : Orçun KuneK’s ironic cover art example “Perudan Adam Çıkmaz” (Günday,1999)

This approach, evaluated in the context of Bergson’s theory of laughter, presented an effective humorous response to the stereotypical productions of the music industry (Keskin & Tunalı, 2020, p. 1). This sense of humor, which bears similarities to avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, aimed to break the molds of the period. Günday,

who stated that Günday crossed paths with artists such as Teoman and Yavuz Çetin, stated that social media could reach humorous music projects to a wider audience and that characters like Orçun Kuneke could be much more effective today. “When buying an album, a music listener makes a choice in the light of his personal charisma... the person's social, economic and cultural situation affects the choice” (Serbezler, 1997, p. 31). Accordingly, Soner Günday's ironic humor is an outcome of his ability to observe social, economic and cultural issues regarding these people. (S. Günday, personal communication, February 27, 2025).

In a comparative interview conducted with Kanat Atkaya, one of Turkey's leading music journalists, the relationship between contemporary and past uses of humor in music was explored. The discussion addressed topics such as the satire tradition of the period, parody songs, humorous album covers, and the role of humor in rock culture. Atkaya stated that in the past, artists such as Öztürk Serengil and Ateş Böcekleri presented political satires on stage in song form, and that this tradition was strengthened by caricatured album covers and satirical lyrics. Atkaya stated that in the 90s, humor magazines established a direct connection with music; the productions of artists such as Fikret Kızılok, Bülent Ortaçgil and Bulutsuzluk Özlemi overlapped with ironic language and daily observations. For example, he stated that the song Pastanede reflected daily life in a humorous way (Bulutsuzluk Özlemi, 1995). Atkaya also mentioned that fanzines such as *LANETH* (shown on Figure 3.6) both spread musical culture and satirized the metalhead identity with subcultural humorous forms (Türkiye’de Ağır Müzik Geçmişi, n.d.). Atkaya, who added that Grup Vitamin centralized music through parody, emphasized that Erkin Koray's song *Öksürük* gained humorous cult status in time (Koray, 1974). Mustafa Özkent's album cover for *Gençlik ile El Ele* (presented in Figure 3.8) and the cover art of the 80s' dance music records also stood out as examples that demonstrate the influence of visual humor (Turkish Vinyl, n.d.). Finally, Atkaya stated that humor is still strongly present today with playlist titles, social media humor, and video clips based on aesthetic irony, but that direct political satires of the past have diminished today (K. Atkaya, personal communication, March 6, 2025).

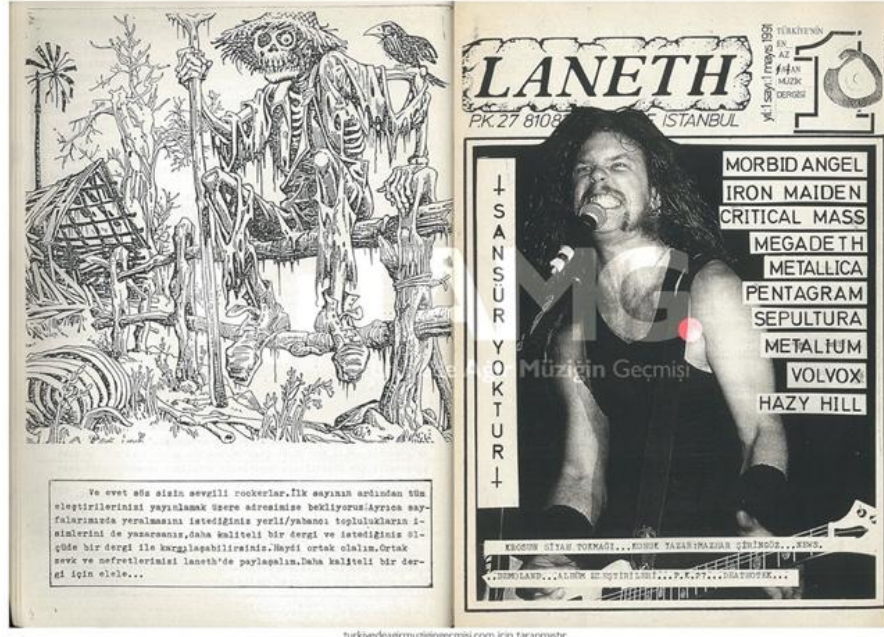


Figure 3.6 : The cover of the first issue of *LANETH* (Türkiye'de Ağır Müziğin Geçmişi,n.d.)

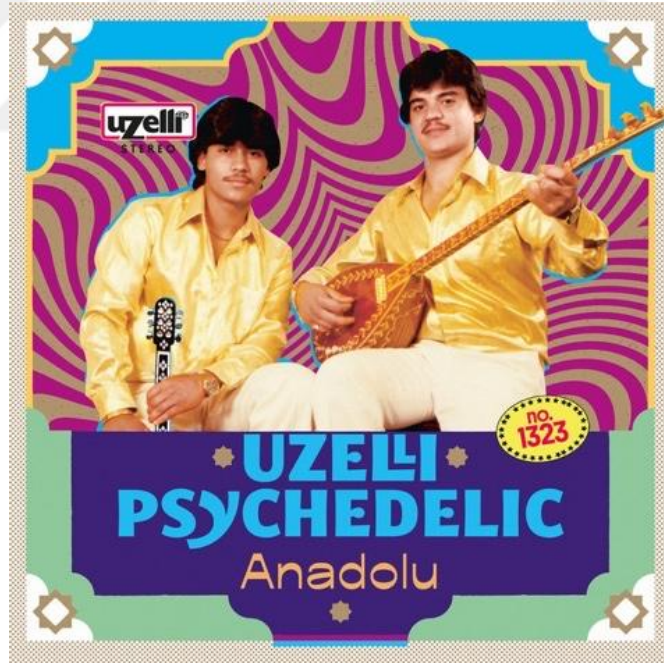


Figure 3.7 : Cover art of “Öksürük”(Koray,1974)

According to Kanat Atkaya, the song “Öksürük” as seen in Figure 3.7 has gained cult status over time due to its unintended humor and is often referenced or recounted in a humorous way. (K. Atkaya, personal communication, March 6, 2025).



Figure 3.8 : Cover art of Mustafa Özkent's "Gençlik ile Elele" (1973) album.

If we examine the current period in Turkish music production, absurd humor has become one of the prominent forms of expression in the Turkish rap scene; thanks to the potential to go viral on digital platforms, humorous rap songs have begun to be preferred more by artists and producers. However, in the past period of Turkish rap in the 1990s and 2000s, humor was a part of political and social criticism; this period rap, which offered a strong field of expression for young people with its anti-system discourses, has evolved into a different plane today as a part of both mainstream and ironic expression. In this sense, Turkish rap, which has a dynamic structure, has come to the agenda again today, shifting from a "political/oppositional" axis to an axis where popularization and mainstreaming come to the fore (Arıcan, 2021). With the influence of the digital age and social media, the shaping of rap music's themes around crime, sexuality and hedonistic lifestyles attracts the attention of young listeners in particular. In this period when social media interaction is at the forefront, clickbait strategies have come to the fore and the use of music as a tool for social criticism has greatly decreased. This causes the artist to produce music only according to perceived popular trends and this situation is explained by capitalist profit purposes.

In this context, Kara (2008), with a quote from O'Hara, draws attention to the impact of capitalism on art with the following words: "Capitalism is based on a theoretical model in which everyone is assumed to try to maximize their own profit. Moreover, people have mostly complied with this model by turning everything around them into

a commodity.” This statement is an important approach that explains why rap artists, in particular, have moved away from voicing social problems and produce content aimed at the market.

However, a similar transformation is observed in terms of gender representations. Köten and Akdemir (2021) stated that a large part of Turkish rap songs reproduce and legitimize gender inequalities rather than criticizing them. The research emphasizes that women are generally objectified and that patriarchal masculinity discourses are dominant.

Despite all this negative picture, the existence of protest examples in the Turkish rap scene cannot be ignored. Aksoy (2022), by examining Şanişer's works in particular, has revealed that rap music can still be used as a tool of social criticism and resistance. Şanişer's music makes current social injustices visible and offers the listener a questioning perspective.

On the other hand, when the alternative music scene is examined, it is seen that humor still plays an important role both in the lyrics and in the social media interactions of the artists. Especially in genres such as indie, rock and electronic music, apart from pop music, humor allows the artist to create a unique identity and strengthens the bond with the audience. The active use of humor in the artist's social media strategies also offers significant advantages in terms of music marketing. Today, artists are known for their identities on social media as much as their music, and humor is used as vehicle for increase interaction with their followers.

3.2 Current Humor and Music in Turkey: Digital Trends and Experiments

3.2.1 Current music meme examples in Turkey

This chapter categorizes examples of meme-based music marketing that have emerged in different periods and contexts, revealing the transformative effects of digital culture on the Turkish music industry. The “Serkan is my Girl” video went viral in the early 2000s as an absurd content from the organic era of the internet and was rediscovered over time on platforms. While this video reflects the spontaneous production power of early internet users, it also clearly demonstrates the difference with today's commercialized meme culture. Today, meme production has evolved into a structure

where content producers are anonymized and virality is systematized under the control of pages with high followers.

As other examples, cartoonist Abdülkadir Elçioğlu (Aptülrika) shaped the youth's perception of humor and music with his “Grup Perişan” series in *Gırgır* magazine in 1987 and contributed to the popularization of subcultures such as heavy metal and rock (Wikipedia, 2024). Berk Tokay, one of the prominent figures in the internet age, developed a unique digital production language by combining humor, animation and internet culture with his “Uncle Noel” character and his work under the umbrella of Grafi2000 (Wikipedia, 2024).

It is noteworthy that meme culture affects the marketing of physical events. The videos of Marshmello performing horon before his concert in Turkey are a striking example of how viral trends are integrated into artist's concert marketing. Horon is a traditional folk dance from the Black Sea region of Turkey, performed with fast foot movements and usually performed in a group in a circular or sequential form. This strategy not only demonstrated the artist's interest in local culture, but also generated organic engagement in social media algorithms (Electric Playground, 2019).

Similarly, the appearance of TikTok phenomenon “Yakışıklı Güvenlik” on stage at the Mavi Gri concert enabled viral figures to reach a wider audience by including them in physical events (Onedio, 2024). Yakışıklı Güvenlik 's social media post (Onedio, 2024) inviting his followers to the concert added a participatory dimension to marketing in the context of interaction between the content producer and the followers.

Examples where melancholy and humor are intertwined also stand out on digital channels. The version of Sakiler's song *Dünyadan Uzak* (2020) , combined with a musician dressed in a Batman costume, went viral with an absurd aesthetic (Klarnet Portal, 2019). In the same vein, edits combining the sad performances of Lapsekili Tayfur with scenes from *The Godfather* movie had a tragicomic effect on the audience (Achenatonn, 2023). This shows that the internet creates a new language of emotional expression by bringing together independent sounds and images.

Similarly, when visually impaired musician Bilal Göregen's darbuka Levan Polka (n.d) performance was accompanied by a video of a cat nodding its head, the content went viral globally and was shared on YouTube's official account (YouTube, 2020). This

coincidence proves how social media can create a powerful reach independent of traditional marketing methods.

Another example of meme culture being integrated into promotional marketing is Aytaç Doğan's kanun (a traditional Middle Eastern string instrument played on the lap with picks attached to the fingers) performance, during which his expressive stage presence and distinctive hand gestures gained widespread attention on social media. His joyful state on stage turned into a trend with hand gestures imitated on social media, which was then used by Fiba Bank in its advertising campaign (Doğan, 2024). This content shows how humor-based social media strategies are embraced by brands. Indeed, the statement "We observed that meme-based posts generate greater customer engagement than do non-meme-based posts" (Malodia, Dhir, Bilgihan, Sinha & Tikoo, 2022, p.1792) confirms the impact of this approach in marketing strategies.

Another example showing that memes can be produced not only through music or content but also through elements such as body language and attitude is Aleyna Tilki's performance of "Ya Bu İşler Ne". Tilki's loose mannerisms were recontextualized with various headlines on social media and went viral, demonstrating that body language and emotional intonations can also be transformed into digital humor elements (Fenerbahçe, 2024).

The recirculation power of nostalgic content from the past with memes is also noteworthy. Metehan Polat's childhood folk song performance "Ceylan Gözlüm" went viral years later and a duet with him created a digital narrative based on nostalgia (Halk TV, 2025). This video, which was shot in a village setting, found a second life on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, where users shared videos imitating their clothes, gestures and hand movements. This form of interactive sharing allowed users to reproduce the content both nostalgically and creatively; thus, a local and individual performance gained global recognition. years later, it went viral again and a digital narrative based on nostalgia was created with a duet with him (Halk TV, 2025). This situation makes it possible for content that has remained local in the past to meet new generations through digital media and to regain meaning in new contexts.

Spotify Türkiye's marketing campaigns overlap with strategies that combine music and humor in the digital environment, as seen in examples such as Kandıralı Ferdi and Berk Keklik, which were explained in the previous sections of this text. In parallel

with global meme marketing strategies, Spotify Türkiye's Instagram account also shares neutral and entertaining meme content that offers music recommendations according to mood. Along with these shares, it also stands out with its creative collaborations with viral Turkish content producers. These strategies are branded and planned content, unlike the meme culture that users create spontaneously. In this context, Kandıralı Ferdi's (Ferdı Gülezen) viral success with his improvised and humorous music interpretations turned into a content collaboration within the scope of Spotify Türkiye's Wrapped campaign (Instagram, 2023). Sharing the post as a collaborative post with the influencer highlights that Spotify Türkiye acknowledges the influencer's higher engagement levels compared to their own.

Similarly, Uberkuloz (Berk Keklik), known for his absurd humor style, also produced joint content with Spotify at the end of 2023 and demonstrated the reflections of the humor-music relationship in the field of corporate advertising (Spotify Turkey, 2023). These examples highlight how a global digital music platform commercializes local meme culture at both the content and collaboration levels.

While digital platforms such as Spotify Turkey collaborate with influencers through humor-based campaigns, music companies and musicians in Turkey still remain quite distant from this area. However, many large companies abroad sign direct contracts with the content producers behind viral meme trends; a TikTok video or Instagram joke can turn into a professional music career. For example, the "Man In Finance" trend quickly evolved into a global record deal with remixes by names such as Billie Eilish and David Guetta (Robinson, 2024). Similarly, children's videos or animated characters that go viral abroad can be quickly converted into licensed projects and monetized.

Note: Going viral is a concept that refers to the process by which a meme or digital content spreads rapidly among large user audiences in a short period of time, reaching high interaction rates and exponentially increasing its visibility within the digital communication ecosystem. This definition reflects my own research-based perspective.

In Turkey, although such viral trends contribute to content strategies, the local music sector is inadequate in establishing sustainable, licensed collaborations with these producers. This both renders the labor of the content producer invisible and makes it

difficult for the sector to adapt to the digital age. However, investments should be made in creative content producers in Turkey, and viral humorous trends should be transformed into professional collaborations. Otherwise, even if high interaction is received from global platforms, the local music industry will not be the real winner of this digital transformation.

Digital music streaming platforms in particular tend to personalize playlist naming through humor. The success of platforms like Spotify is not only about listening to music, but also about the user experience that enables the construction of digital identity. Playlists offer the opportunity to personalize music consumption with titles that reflect individuals' emotional states and life contexts, as well as sharing and interacting on social media. As Hagen (2015) states, "Playlists curated by moods, feelings, memories, or biographical/relational representations help the user experience mastery over the self" (p. 642). Pichl et al.'s (2015) study shows that playlist names can increase the accuracy of contextual music recommendation systems by up to 33%: "We show that using our approach aggregating playlist names to contextual clusters and the incorporation of those clusters into the recommendation process boosts the performance of the recommender system by at least 33%." (Pichl et al., 2015, p.1361). In this context, for example Spotify's playlist naming strategy based on meme culture can be interpreted as a current continuation of the past peer-to-peer music sharing culture. However, humorous content may need to be approached cautiously in Türkiye on a general outlook due to ethical, cultural and legal concerns; commented by music industry consultant Cemal Arman. Religious and political sensitivities may need streaming platforms to be hesitant and cautious about user-generated playlisting offerings. (C. Arman, personal communication, March 13, 2025).

The public reactions to some religious playlist names seen on Spotify in 2021 indicate a lack of control in this area (Uç, 2021; Yeni Şafak, 2022). Some also may view this as a insensistivity towards local culture and communities. This report identified this through independent research findings in media.

Similar investments are also among Warner Music Group's global strategies; for example, its acquisition of viral content producer Imgn Media for approximately \$100 million in 2020 clearly demonstrates the desire of music companies to directly control social media-focused humorous content (Dredge, 2020).

Warner Music Turkey's Topsify brand is one of the notable corporate examples in this area. Sencer Piyancı stated that Topsify has included humorous content over time and that they are trying to create a broad area of interaction (S. Piyancı, personal communication, March 6, 2025). The humorous content shared on Topsify's (Topsify Türkiye, 2025) Instagram account is an example of the use of humor in marketing the website, which also hosts playlists of the same name, and the music of its own artists. Piyancı said that although Topsify Turkey generally focuses on highlighting its own artists and content in its posts, they are not limited to artists in the company's catalog and aim to create a broader area of interaction by including any viral topic. (S. Piyancı, personal communication, March 6, 2025)

Only a few companies in Turkey are taking this field seriously, but on a global level this strategic shift is reflected in international hiring trends as well. For instance, a 2023 job listing by Sony Music Entertainment UK for a digital marketing manager specifically required candidates to be fluent in internet culture, including TikTok, memes, and trending digital content (Sony Music Entertainment UK, 2023).

As Cengiz Erdem stated, "Music listeners in Turkey are known for quickly adopting global trends. Seeing this data, all global platforms quickly opened services in our country and reached large user numbers. Thanks to these platforms, interest in Turkish pop, rock and popular music as well as rap and alternative music genres easily found a place for themselves in these media" (Erdem, 2023).

In addition, "Platforms such as Muud and Fizy, which offer millions of local and foreign songs to their members, pay special attention to Turkish editors (Turkish streaming platform playlist editors) and especially Turkish artists and content producers" (Erdem, 2023). In this context, increasing Turkish humorous content can both increase interaction in the local context and contribute to artists reaching wider audiences.

3.2.2 Personal experience and experimental applications

Within the scope of this study, an Instagram humor page named "musicbizinis" (2025) was created by the researcher. Three main experimental strategies were developed and implemented through the page. By sharing humorous music content in both Turkish and English, the account reached a diverse audience in a short time. The account gained significant visibility in the digital environment, reaching over eleven thousand

users in total, including professionals from the music industry in Turkey, musicians and a wide range of followers interested in music. Thanks to this visibility, participation in invitation-only special events and launches was ensured, thus creating a large digital network in a short period of time.

The likes and comments received by the humorous music posts shared on Instagram provided important qualitative data for the analysis of the relationship between music, humor and marketing.

In parallel with the page, after a while, music was also shared under the same name. In this process, in addition to humorous music productions, non-humorous content with anonymous compositions and lyrics was also published for comparison purposes. As a result of the observations made, it was concluded that works with humorous titles attracted more attention and received more listens. At this point, it was analyzed that visual elements also had an impact on listening rates. However, due to limited access opportunities, high listening rates could not be achieved, which narrowed the scope of the data set. Nevertheless, it was aimed to make qualitative inferences through some examples obtained from this experimental process.

In the third experiment, Spotify playlists with humorous titles were created. However, none of these playlists reached even 10 likes, and since no interaction was obtained, the deepening of this method was not continued. Nevertheless, we believe that this approach has potential for future research and it is useful to document the examples in the appendices of this study.

3.2.2.1 Experiment 1: ‘musicbizinis’ meme page

The practical production process carried out within the scope of this research was implemented through the Instagram page called musicbizinis (2025), which served as an experimental and critical platform aligned with the thesis objectives. This page produces critical, ironic, and humorous content about the Turkish music industry, offering a creative space to explore how humor, irony, and meme culture interact with marketing dynamics in the local music scene. Through carefully curated and visually engaging meme posts, the page interprets and critiques various aspects of the Turkish music market, providing commentary on issues such as streaming culture, concert marketing strategies, artist image construction, brand collaborations, fan interactions, and listener behavior patterns. By doing so, musicbizinis not only engages followers

in a humorous and relatable way but also functions as a living laboratory where the relationship between humor, music, and audience engagement can be observed and analyzed in real time, enriching the empirical component of the thesis.

Table 3.1: Shows the most active audience hours, top content based on views, and top content based on interactions (musicbizinis, 2025).



Based on account (musicbizinis,2025) insights from 28.05.2025 and as shown in Table 3.1 covering the last 90 days, these graphs show how audience behavior varies according to timing and content performance. The first graph shows the time periods when users are most active and reveals that the peak is reached between 6:00 am and

12:00 pm, with the highest engagement at 9:00 am with 7,417 users. This suggests that sharing content in the morning hours may increase engagement. The second graph focuses on the most viewed content. The content shared on April 29 is by far the most viewed content with 69,600 views, followed by the content shared on May 14 and May 26. It can be said that the topic or format of the content on these dates had a higher level of overlap with the target audience.

The third graph shows the content that received the most engagement. Again, the post dated April 29 ranks first with 8,600 interactions, indicating that there may be a direct relationship between high visibility and user interaction. The interaction data of the content reveals that visual humor content not only attracts attention but also encourages users to actively participate.

These graphical analyses clearly demonstrate the importance of considering the impact of timing, format and topic choice on user behavior when developing a content strategy.



Figure 3.9 : Instagram content first example (musicbizinis, 2025, February 27)

Figure 3.9 on the Musicbizinis page is a striking example that combines both gamification and audience-related elements by presenting a message hidden in note symbols. Gamification is the application of game-like problem-solving, tasks, and interaction elements to non-game contexts in order to increase user engagement

(Wikipedia contributors, n.d.). ..When read in the sol(G) key, the secret sentence that emerges turns the viewer into an active analyzer and participant, not just a content consumer. Followers solve this mystery and share their solutions in the comments section; thus, interaction with the content becomes a cognitive participation process, not just a like or a view. According to Instagram (2025) data, this post stands out as the example that received the highest interaction in the normal post (non-reels) format on the musicbizinis page; It attracted attention with 7,180 likes, 127 comments and 5,984 registrations. The post was viewed 271,694 times in total and only 5.6% of this interaction came from existing followers. It also gained 194 new followers as a single post. Translation of post: (Don't hang out with pigs, You'll disgrace yourself, Your stomach will turn, You'll fall for the trap, You'll lose your breath, You'll fall into the sewer, Your nerves will shatter.)

This post, which includes the message “Don’t hang out with pigs...”, can be read like a moral warning reminiscent of phrases written on the backs of trucks. Ironically, even though it doesn’t seem to target an audience with musical knowledge, it has managed to reach a broad audience.

Table 3.2 : Shows views, interactions and profile activity (musicbizinis, 2025).

Views		Accounts reached	
272,398		196.733	
Followers	5.6%	From Home	238,412
Non-followers	94.4%	From Explore	4,635
		From Other	676
Interactions			
15.065			
Total interactions		Likes	7,166
Followers	10.6%	Shares	5,994
Non-followers	89.4%	Saves	1,778
		Comments	127
Profile activity			
Profile visits	1,084		1,084
External link taps	2		2
Business address taps			0
Follows	197		197

Table 3.2 shows that the musicbizinis (2025) Instagram page received a total of 272,398 views, with 94% coming from non-followers. It reached 196,733 accounts

and generated 15,065 total interactions, primarily through likes (7,166) and shares (5,994). Profile activity included 1,084 profile visits and 197 new follows. These results indicate that the humorous and critical content successfully extended beyond the existing follower base, attracting significant external attention and driving meaningful engagement.



Figure 3.10 : Instagram content second example (musicbizinis, 2023, April 28)

This Figure 3.10 is an example of the meme template known on social media as “John Silver explaining to Anna Jay” adapted to the music industry (imgflip, n.d.). The male figure who tries to flirt but remains uninterested makes humorous references to the internal dynamics of the music industry by uttering cliché statements frequently said in the music industry such as (1)“I am an arranger too”, (2)“Which DAW do you use?”,

(3) “We entered the industry from scratch” and (3) “I was a rodie”. This scrolling post, which gained the most followers outside of the Reels format, made sharing easier by reaching different audiences with its multiple jokes; thanks to the profile’s pinned content, it was seen by a wide range of users and gained 354 new followers (Instagram, 2023).



Figure 3.11 : Instagram content third example (musicbizinis,2024, November 20).

This Figure 3.11 , featuring the phrase ‘E hadi johnlennon biraz gençler’ (C’mon johnlennon a little youth) placed over an image of John Lennon, offers an ironic critique of the out-of-context and often fabricated quote formats frequently seen on social media. The phrase itself is a Turkish wordplay—“johnlennon” sounds similar to “canlanın” (meaning “come alive” in Turkish)—adding an extra layer of absurdity to the satire. It became one of the most widely shared non-reels posts, having been shared 9,004 times according to Instagram data (Instagram, 2024). This example illustrates how humorous content not only circulates rapidly but also gains cultural traction by combining linguistic play, visual irony, and platform-specific trends.

Table 3.3 : Shows views, interactions and profile activity (musicbizinis, 2025).

Views 169,606 Followers 6,5% Non-followers 93,5% From Home 145.060 From Explore 3.502 From Other 132.712 Accounts reached 132.712	Interactions 20,765 Followers 5,9% Non-followers 94,1% Post interactions Likes 10,501 Shares 9,007 Saves 1,231 Comments 26 Comments 26
Accounts engaged 13.903 Profile visits 790	Profile Profile activity 885 Profile visits 790 External link taps 4 Business address taps 0 Follows 91

The Table 3.3 reports 169,606 total views, with 93.5% from non-followers, reaching 132,712 accounts and engaging 13,903 users. Total interactions reached 20,765, especially through likes (10,501) and shares (9,007). Profile activity included 885 visits and 91 new follows. These numbers suggest that certain posts were particularly effective in generating high interaction levels, reinforcing the role of humor in drawing in non-followers and stimulating deeper audience engagement.

As a note, although reel videos provide the highest interaction, they were not included in the study due to algorithmic uncertainty and difficulty in qualitative analysis. The musicbizinis content analyzed in this section consists of memes that offer critical and humorous comments on the music industry, on themes such as algorithm criticism, concert culture, social media behaviors, and listener identity.

3.2.2.2 Experiment 2: Song releases and marketing campaigns

Collaboration with the Instagram page “gallogalleycaps” (2025), an Instagram page run by the alumni of a private Italian high school in Istanbul, which produces humor about this high school, was supported by the collaboration with the “musicbizinis”

page. This collaboration not only ensured the dissemination of the work within a specific community, but also mediated its reach to a wider digital audience through social media. Through targeted humor, this campaign provides an example of an effective micro-community strategy in music marketing.

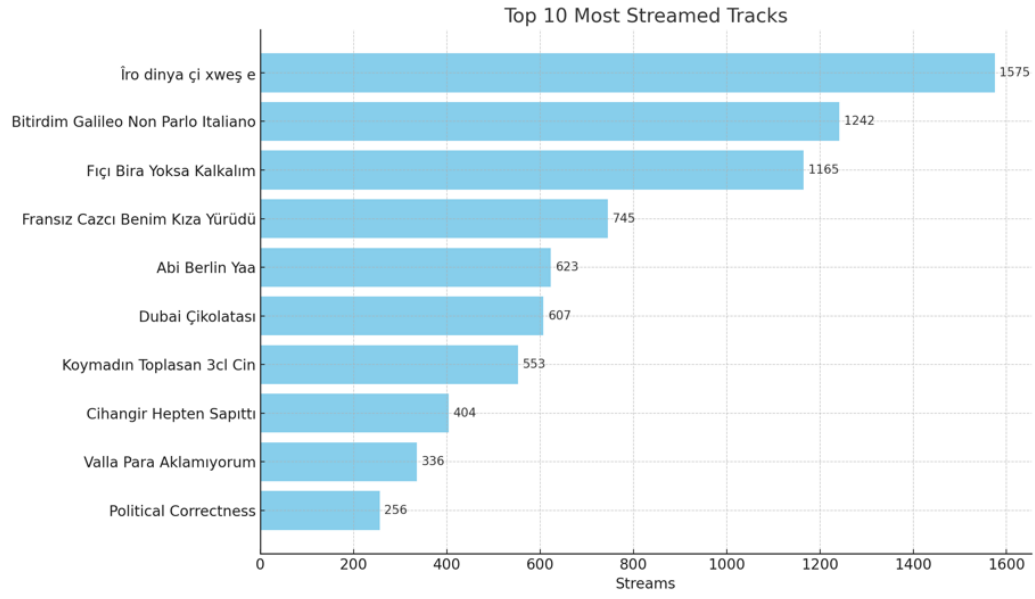
Note that since this collaborative post was only published through Instagram Stories, the permalink could not be found and the related content could not be documented. Since Instagram stories are in ephemeral format, only the profile page is included in the reference list.

According to artist account data (Spotify for Artists, 2025), the unexpected popularity of a Turkish track in Italian cities such as Rome, Bologna, Florence, Turin, Ravenna and Milan suggests that humorous content on Instagram was influential in this diffusion. Although it could not be directly measured whether the users who accessed the content were actually graduates of the Italian High School, which is the area of interest of the collaborated page, it can be said that intercultural crossing took place through individuals who speak Turkish and live in Italy, and music consumption through humor increased despite the language barrier.

The fact that the songs “Un Fake Ristorante Italiano”, “È una ricetta di lasagne” and “Bella Ciao” received zero listens in Italy despite being entirely in Italian shows that content and language are not sufficient for dissemination, while the fact that a humorous song in Turkish was listened to in cities such as Ravenna and Milan reveals the impact of humor collaboration on Instagram.

All tracks were created using the artificial intelligence-supported music production tool Suno (Suno, 2024). The lyrics were originally written by the researcher, while the Azerbaijani and French translations were realized through the ChatGPT artificial intelligence model developed by OpenAI (OpenAI, 2024). All content considered to be anonymous was checked through the database of the Musical Works Owners Group Professional Association (MSG) operating in Turkey; no unlicensed lyrics or compositions were included (MSG, 2024). All music releases are for academic research purposes only.

Table 3.4: Top 10 most streamed tracks of ‘‘Musicbizinis’’ (Spotifyforartist,2025).



Furthermore, an additional analysis of the total catalogue of 161 tracks shared on multiple music streaming platforms under the name ‘musicbizinis’ (2025) showed that tracks with humorous titles were clearly listened to more than other genres (anonymous lyrics and musical works). All pieces were equally promoted through stories on the Instagram meme page “musicbizinis” (2025). The most listened to shown in Table 3.4, Kurdish song, Îro dinya çi xweş e (Musicbizinis, 2024) is an exception in this context, as it does not contain humor and is anonymous. We believe that the high number of listens of this piece can be explained by algorithmic manipulation, because other anonymous works, despite some of them having quite well-known titles, were either listened to very little or not at all according to spotify artist data. This makes the effect of humor and social media interaction on Spotify listen counts even more evident.

It is important that researchers and content producers who wish to replicate this experiment pay equal attention to ethical and legal issues such as copyright, content licensing and the use of AI-generated materials. In the tracks released as part of Musicbizinis (Spotify, 2025), the only AI-generated components are the sound files used in the composition and phonogram.

The dispute over the ownership of rights to musical works produced by artificial intelligence is still ongoing in academic circles, as well as before collecting societies and judicial authorities. This is why I would like to emphasize that the experiment

conducted by me is for academic purposes only. In particular, the fact that the U.S. Copyright Office has stated that only works containing human contributions can be subject to copyright protection (U.S. Copyright Office, 2023) and Sony Music has requested the removal of more than 75,000 AI songs (Tavares Office, 2024) reveal the legal uncertainties in this area. Artists have also raised their voices on this issue; Céline Dion made a public statement against AI voice imitations released without her permission (People, 2024).

As the third experiment, humorous playlists created under the name Musicbizinis (2025), independent of the artist profile, did not generate sufficient data for analysis and remained at the level of observational insight.

When playlists with funny names are analyzed, they bear similarities to meme cultures. Likewise, the fact that it contains visuals and text allows the user to create funny content on the Spotify platform. The fact that other users like these playlists and share them with others is an important music marketing tool that needs to be analyzed.

The basis of such humorous playlists is similar to meme culture, one of the most important cultural phenomena of the digital age. Especially with the proliferation of the internet and social media, user generated playlists with funny names or images reach large audiences in a short time. The presence of current social or global viral topics or trends in playlist names in a short period of time and the high popularity of these playlists on the platform is an issue that needs to be examined. In addition to other social media posts, these likes directly return to the artists added to the playlist as the number of listens.

3.2.2.3 Music, humor and listener interaction research survey

In this research, an online, quantitative-based survey was conducted in March 2025 to examine the impact of music and humor on listeners. Data was collected on demographics, music listening habits, and reactions to humorous music. All participation was voluntary, participants were informed in advance and were given the right to withdraw from the survey at any time in line with ethical rules. The questionnaire consisted mostly of multiple-choice questions, with a few open-ended questions added for guidance only; the data were not analyzed qualitatively. All data collected were used securely for academic purposes only; personal information was not included in the analysis. This study aimed to examine the relationships between

variables through quantitative data collection and statistical analysis in accordance with the definition of quantitative research (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

The online survey of 162 respondents conducted in March 2025 reveals that humor is an effective tool in music marketing to attract target audiences, create engagement and strengthen brand/recognition value; humor and music also strengthen social bonds and promote shared discourse and rapid interaction with similar communication functions in conveying emotions and thoughts. Among the individuals who participated in the study, 63% were between the ages of 25-34 and 17.9% were between the ages of 18-24. When gender distribution is analyzed, 57.4% of the participants are male and 40.1% are female. In terms of education level, 54% of the participants have a bachelor's degree, while 39.8% have a master's degree or higher. A significant portion of the participants live in Istanbul (65.6%). In terms of occupational distribution, 27.2% are musicians, 14.2% are academicians or students and 22.2% are professionals in the music industry. 86.4% of the participants are active Spotify users. When the playlist creation behavior is examined, 58% stated that they create playlists occasionally and 12.3% stated that they create playlists frequently. The most preferred music genres are rock (64.2%), alternative/indie (59.9%), pop (48.8%) and electronic music (48.8%). In addition, 53.7% of the participants stated that they periodically discover new music. These findings suggest that playlist curation and genre preferences play an important role in music marketing in today's world of digital music consumption. The survey examined whether humor and music memes are effective tools in music marketing. 64.8% of the participants stated that an artist's use of humor increases their interest in music, 76.9% stated that humorous playlist names facilitate song discovery. 67.1% stated that they had liked or shared a playlist with a funny name before, but 55.3% had never created such a list; 66% thought that humor could give independent artists an advantage over major record labels. 87.6% stated that they would share funny music content that goes viral on social media with their friends, while 55.6% stated that the seriousness of the artist could be questioned if humor is used too much. These findings show that humor is a remarkable marketing strategy, but the dose is important. Other findings support the potential of humor to build a community of listeners and strengthen social bonds: 93.2% think that humor can create an organic community among fans, 85.8% think that it can strengthen the narrative,

and 75.9% think that serious issues can be addressed through humorous songs. 55.6% stated that humor can create community in any music genre, 52.5% stated that humor about Rap/Hip-Hop specific terms and diss culture can be entertaining even for someone who does not listen to this genre. Furthermore, 75.2% said that the use of luxury brands in music or lyrics can emphasize class differences and 74.9% said that the use of brands in music can emphasize class differences. Finally, when the use of humor as a means of emotional expression was evaluated, 80.1% stated that artists do not use humor sufficiently for this purpose, while 79% said that humorous elements in lyrics can strengthen the message. In open-ended responses, it was stated that humor facilitates empathy, reduces tension, makes criticism accessible and breaks taboos. Furthermore, 89.5% think that funny or ironic songs are more effective than traditional media in covering political events. However, some participants also emphasized that humor can have a superficializing effect. These contradictory views show that humor has both transformative and, if not paid attention to, superficializing potential.

In the questions about Spotify-based playlists applied in the study, three different playlists were presented to the participants and these lists were evaluated in terms of content, name and visuals. According to the results, 60.5% of the participants found the third and 49.4% found the second option the most interesting, and 57.4% stated that the third option was the most effective in terms of mood and emotional transfer. Among those who thought that the playlist name and visuals provided clearer information about the content, 56.2% preferred the second option. While the first option was created by Spotify, the second and third options were user-generated, and the fact that the playlists prepared by the platform did not stand out in any of the evaluations shows that humorous and creative titles, combined with attention-grabbing visuals, play an important role in increasing listener interest. All these data confirm the single main hypothesis of the study and its supporting sub-headings. The findings suggest that humor is not only an attention-grabbing element in music marketing, but also an effective tool that creates a more intimate connection with the listener, strengthens the narrative and reinforces a sense of community. For independent artists in particular, the strategic use of humor increases digital visibility and facilitates the communication of serious social or political issues in a more accessible way. However, this approach should be carefully balanced and used with care, as excessive or out-of-context use of humor can lead to a perception of superficiality in the artist's image.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study examines the relationship between humor and music in the digital age, especially through meme culture spread through social media, and analyzes the effects of this relationship on music marketing, listener behavior and digital identity construction in Turkey. Humor has historically been an important tool for social criticism, freedom of expression and the sharing of collective emotions. Music is both the aesthetic and cultural carrier of this expression. In this context, the thesis evaluates the interaction of humor and music both historically and digitally, making original contributions in the fields of cultural production, marketing strategies and user interaction.

In the analysis of Turkey, it is shown how music from the past to the present combines with humor to create a field of social criticism. It is seen that figures such as Grup Vitamin, Öztürk Serengil, Balarısı Ahmet, Ateş Böcekleri have established humorous, parodic or satirical narratives through music and reached large masses with these aspects. Today, however, the number of such content has decreased and music has shifted more to the axis of individual image and algorithmic visibility. Humor, on the other hand, is mostly confined to short-lived, superficial social media content.

At this point, the differences between global and local practices become apparent. There are many examples abroad where humorous content is quickly professionalized and integrated into the music industry after reaching viral impact. For example, the “Man In Finance” video that went viral on TikTok led Megan Boni to work with international producers and sign a record label deal in a short time (Robinson, 2024). Similarly, Mason Ramsey's video of him yodeling in Walmart went viral and was

contracted by Atlantic Records to the professional stage (Billboard, n.d.). These examples illustrate how humor is positioned as a career-launching content type.

In Turkey, these processes are largely left to chance. Many humorous content that goes viral fizzles out without being licensed, owned or included in long-term planning. However, Turkey's cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity has the potential to make humor a multi-layered and creative tool in content production. However, this potential cannot be adequately utilized due to the timid attitude of digital platforms, the lack of adequate structural support for content producers, and the cautious stance of brands towards humor.

The experiments conducted in this context - an Instagram page called “musicbizinis”, songs with humorous titles released on Spotify, and a survey conducted with 162 participants - have shown that humor is a bond-building tool with high marketing value. The vast majority of users reported that humorous playlist titles attracted them, that they felt an emotional connection to the content, and that humor intimated their relationship with the artists. These findings suggest that humor is a strategic narrative that can create long-term loyalty.

The interviews conducted within the scope of the research added qualitative depth to this perspective. Music journalist Kanat Atkaya discussed the historical relationship between music and humor in Turkey through the stage, fanzines and album covers; Soner Günday stated that the absurd album covers he produced in the 90s offered a humorous critique of the music aesthetics of the period and that they can find a much wider response on social media today. Sencer Piyancı, through the example of Topsify Turkey, emphasized that humor can be creatively included in music marketing, but that it is still not systematized at the institutional level.

All these data reveal that humor-based music content in Turkey has a serious creative and economic potential, but this potential is often wasted because it is not supported by professional structures. However, global examples show that humor can turn into career, marketing and branding in a planned manner. The fact that humor in Turkey is still perceived as a category that “goes viral by chance” in this sense is a strategic deficiency in the sector.

In conclusion, this thesis has examined the relationship between humor and music from theoretical, historical and empirical levels in a multifaceted way, showing that

humor is a powerful tool for social bonding, expression and marketing strategy development. In Turkey, utilizing these creative opportunities offered by the digital age in a more strategic manner will offer new openings not only for individual artists but also for digital platforms, brands and music industry professionals. In the future, supporting humor as a form of cultural expression through freer, ethical and creative models will make Turkey a more visible and effective actor in the global digital music ecosystem.

4.2 Future Research Recommendations

In future research, music promotion strategies with humorous content, especially on social media, can be tested more comprehensively. By integrating songs into short videos produced in the form of memes in Instagram Reels format, the effect of humorous content on the number of listens can be measured. The sharing, liking, commenting and access statistics of these contents can be analyzed comparatively with Spotify listening data. A similar method can be applied to other short video-based platforms such as TikTok. Experimental observations can be made on how humor-oriented videos reframe the same music content with different narratives, how they connect with users and how they affect listening behaviors.

In this context, we conducted a multilingual experiment on the Instagram account @vonmusicmax (2024), created specifically for German-speaking countries. The same highly engaging musical content was reproduced in German and shared with German descriptions. However, since the account was managed from Turkey, it was assumed to be a potential spam risk by the Instagram algorithm; the content did not reach the target audience and resulted in very limited visibility. In future research, it is suggested that the same joke or music content be shared simultaneously in different languages and geographical locations through local accounts of those countries. This would allow for a more objective observation of how digital humor and music promotion differ according to cultural contexts.

The music content published in this study had limited reach on Spotify. One of the main reasons for this is that the tracks were not submitted to Spotify editors before they were published. In order to conduct an effective pitching process on Spotify, the songs must be submitted to the platform through a digital distributor before a certain period of time. This procedure was not followed by us. In addition, the “Canvas”

feature was not added to most of the tracks, and promotional tools such as “Artist Pick” were not actively used. Therefore, listening data remains limited and observational. Moreover, we are currently going through a period in which music platforms and editorial teams are generally cautious and hesitant towards AI-generated music. This may have limited the visibility of the content. In the future, when attitudes towards AI-based productions become more balanced, similar experiments can be conducted under more objective conditions.

As a final suggestion, an experimental comparison could be made by creating two separate playlists of exactly the same songs. One of these playlists could be created with a humorous title and cover image and the other with a neutral aesthetic and shared on social media. It can be analyzed whether the playlist with humorous elements receives more engagement, saves and listens. In addition, existing playlists on Spotify can be classified according to humorous and neutral titles, and these groups can be compared with metrics such as listens and user reactions. Such structural analyses will provide quality data to measure the impact of humor in playlist culture.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Examples of Turkish music-related memes and Summary of "Yes" and "No" responses from the survey conducted by the author in January 2025.



APPENDIX A



(a)



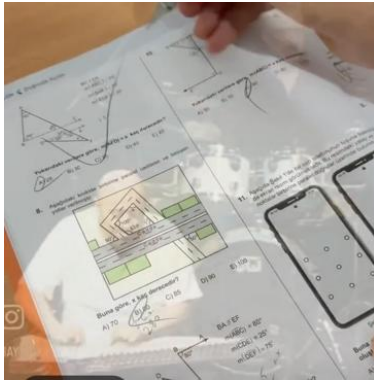
(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

Figure A.1 : Examples of Turkish music-related memes: (a) The Godfather scene merged with Lapsekili Tayfur's melancholic musical performance (Achenatonn, 2023), (b) A viral meme featuring a Batman-costumed street performer playing the clarinet (Klarnet Portal, 2019), (c) A humorous portrayal of Bilal Göregen's viral darbuka performance (Youtube, 2020), (d) A meme using Aleyna Tilki's music video (TikTok, 2022), (e) A satirical image involving kanun virtuoso Aytaç Doğan (Doğan, 2024), (f) a post from the meme page defnekalbim96 (defnekalbim96, 2023).

Table A.1 : Summary of "Yes" and "No" responses from the survey conducted by the author in January 2025.



Note: The reason why hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 are listed in the table is that they were structured as three separate hypotheses in the first phase of the research. However, as the research progressed, hypotheses 2 and 3 were reevaluated as sub-headings supporting the main hypothesis. Tables and graphs were left in their original form to avoid data loss or content change and to maintain comparative consistency. Number 2 focuses on the aspect of creating social bonds and number 3 on the power of expression and communication. Both support the basic hypothesis in terms of content and function.



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