



FROM STAGE TO SCREEN: APPLYING SEMIOTIC COMEDY IN MODERN ENTERTAINMENT FORMATS

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Abstract. *The article focuses on analyzing the transformation of semiotic humor in the context of its transition from theatrical performance to screen-based forms of contemporary entertainment. The aim of the study is to examine how the use of semiotic humor has evolved across different forms of modern entertainment – from stage performances to digital media platforms. The research employed general scientific methods of cognition: analysis; synthesis; induction; deduction; generalization; comparison; systematization. The findings show that the evolution of semiotic humor from stage to screen reflects a gradual complication of communicative strategies. While theatrical humor primarily relied on physical expression, irony, grotesque, and dramaturgy, the rise of digital and visual media introduced complex multi-code systems. In these systems, humor emerges through the intricate interaction of visual, auditory, textual, and cultural signs. Theatre served as a foundation for interpretive play with meanings, but it was film and digital platforms that allowed this play to scale to a global level. It was found that in the visual-screen environment, semiotic humor acquired new qualities thanks to technical and expressive tools such as editing, color, camera angles, and sound intonation. The study demonstrates that contemporary digital platforms, particularly social media, have transformed humor into a horizontal practice: humorous content no longer belongs solely to the creator but is shaped through interaction with the audience. Memes, videos, and emojis were explored as dynamic sign units that serve aesthetic, social, and ideological functions. The conclusion states that humor in modern entertainment is not just a form of leisure but an effective cultural code and means of communication within post-media culture. The transition from stage to screen marks a paradigm shift: humor becomes a scalable interpretive tool functioning in art, advertising, social interaction, and digital exchange. The practical significance of the study lies in its potential application for analyzing contemporary cultural practices, digital content, and communication strategies within the media space.*

Keywords: *semiotics, humor, media, culture, interpretation.*

Introduction

Throughout human history, entertainment has played a central role in the social, cultural, and psychological life of society. Its forms have evolved alongside technological advancements and changing social needs, yet its core function has remained constant – providing emotional release, shared experiences, and symbolic navigation in a complex world. From ritual games, theatrical performances, and urban carnivals to cinema, digital content, and interactive media, entertainment has always reflected the dominant values of its time, acting both as a cultural mirror and a tool for shaping new behavioral models.



Among various forms of entertainment, humor holds a special place as a universal mode of communication that entertains, integrates, satirizes, and critically engages with social realities. It is not a secondary element but often a structural component that sets the tone and determines how the audience interacts with content. Through humor, societies construct and transmit cultural identity codes, create distance from traumatic experiences, or, conversely, highlight tensions through irony and satire. In this context, studying humor as a semiotic phenomenon in contemporary forms of entertainment offers deeper insights into the communicative function of laughter within cultural dynamics.

The use of semiotic humor in contemporary entertainment – from stage to screen – remains insufficiently addressed in scholarly literature. Most existing studies tend to focus on either specific aspects of semiotics or humor in media, while a comprehensive analysis of how humorous codes transform across different entertainment platforms is lacking. Therefore, the topic carries an original perspective and introduces a novel contribution to the field.

Literature Review

In order to conduct this study, scholarly sources from various disciplines were analyzed. In the field of humor linguistics, significant contributions include the work of S. Attardo [2], while modern intercultural aspects are addressed in the study by J.M. Al-Issawi, W. AlAhmad, and N.W. Awajan [1]. In film studies, notable references include the works of M. Brodovicz [3] and V. Chandrana, S. Jagadisana [4], which provide examples of semiotic codes in cinema. More theoretical and philosophical perspectives are offered by D. Davis [5], as well as the classical approaches to semiotics presented in the writings of U. Eco [6] and C.S. Peirce [11]. In the domain of digital media, important insights come from M. Hasyim, B. Arafah [7], and A. Primadipta et al. [12], who examine visual humor and its role in social media. Stage and physical humor are explored in the works of M. Keisalo [8] and W. Krynski, R. Mikkanen [10], while the directorial perspective is addressed in the study by M. Krypchuk et al. [9]. In advertising, semiotic humor is discussed in the work of G.B.R. Saputra and E. Santoso [13].



The study also draws on expert sources from modern online publications such as Artforum, aithor.com, and Multidisciplinary Science Journal, which highlight current developments in media and humor through the lens of semiotics.

Despite the considerable number of works devoted to specific aspects of the topic, there is a noticeable lack of systematized material on the application of semiotic humor in modern entertainment formats. For this reason, various scientific methods were used to analyze, group, and systematize information and present it in accordance with the research topic.

Purpose of the article

The aim of the study is to examine how the use of semiotic humor has evolved across different forms of modern entertainment – from theatrical performance to digital media platforms. In order to achieve this aim, the study sets out to define the theoretical foundations of semiotics and the features of humor as a semiotic phenomenon; describe the specifics of its function in theatrical art; and analyze the transformation of approaches to understanding humor in other forms of entertainment content, particularly in cinema and social media.

Research results

Semiotics is the science of signs and sign systems that studies how meanings are created, interpreted, and function within the framework of cultural exchange. According to the classic definition by Charles S. Peirce, a sign is something that stands for something else to someone in a particular context [11]. Signs do not exist in isolation — they operate within systems where their meaning is shaped by relationships with other signs, social codes, and context [6]. In the context of the humanities, semiotics becomes a tool for analyzing communication not only at the level of linguistic messages but also through visual, bodily, auditory, and kinetic signs. It provides a deep understanding of how meaning is produced in texts, performances, visual media, and particularly in humorous forms.

Humor, in turn, is a complex semiotic phenomenon that emerges from play with signs, disrupted expectations, and the subversion of conventional perception codes. From a semiotic perspective, humor operates as a mechanism of double interpretation:



the comic effect arises when a single message can be understood in at least two incompatible ways [2]. This incongruity is a key condition for generating humor – the collision between the expected and the actual, the formal and the contextual.

The semiotics of humor involves analyzing both the material components of the message (gestures, words, shots) and the cultural codes that determine which displacements are perceived as funny. As noted by M. Keisalo, the humorous sign does not always convey a clear message. Humor often functions as an open, “floating” signifier, capable of suggesting different – and sometimes opposing – meanings depending on the context. This creates a risk of meaning being reduced when figures of humor are interpreted as either universal or empty. Instead, the author suggests a balance between the openness of humorous interpretation and structural grounding: comic figures may be ambivalent, but their inventiveness is still rooted in established cultural patterns [8]. For instance, clown characters may parody social norms or reinforce them – such as when they promote collective labor or moral behavior. This shows that humor is not limited to critique or carnivalesque inversion – it can also serve normative communicative functions.

Semiotic humor within theatrical performance emerges as an element of artistic practice that reveals deep cultural processes through the play of signs, symbols, and codes. Theatre does not merely present comic plots but constructs a multilayered system of signs, where humor appears as an aesthetically structured message requiring interpretation [9]. In this sense, theatre becomes a laboratory for exploring how comedic effects arise from cultural collisions, irony, parody, or grotesque. A stage production acts as a text that activates the viewer’s interpretive mechanisms, inviting participation in a humorous dialogue.

Contrary to reductive views of humor as purely subjective or “automatic” emotional response, semiotics enables the analysis of the internal structure of comedy, identifying which signs, symbols, and contexts contribute to humorous situations [9]. As a result, theatre becomes not just a site of comedic representation but a space of complex communication, where the “code of laughter” is formed through the interaction between the work, the viewer, and cultural tradition.



Moreover, the humorous work creates its own interpretive framework, comprehensible only to a recipient who possesses the relevant cultural background. In this receptive model, the artist ceases to be the sole generator of meaning, delegating interpretive authority to the viewer, whose reactions – whether laughter, critique, or irony – shape the final significance [9].

With the development of postdramatic theatre, the semiotic understanding of corporeality undergoes redefinition. Whereas the body was once considered a somatic vehicle for expressing psychological or verbal content, contemporary performance interprets the body as an independent sign – as *Leiblichkeit*, or the phenomenon of bodily being that is not reducible to rational communication [10]. This transformation signals a shift in the foundations of theatrical representation, where nonverbal elements (movement, posture, presence) acquire symbolic value independent of dialogue or narrative. However, this semiotization of the body presents researchers with the challenge of finding an interpretive language capable of encompassing both the materiality of the body and its function within the performative sign system.

Thus, the stage becomes a space for visual-semiotic play, where ironic, grotesque, or contrapuntal bodily expressions add additional layers of humor – not mediated through language but rich in symbolic connotations.

In the transformation of humor from stage to screen, visual semiotics plays a decisive role. Film, television, and digital platforms utilize a complex system of signs, including editing, lighting, color palettes, camera movement, as well as sound and silence – all functioning as tools for conveying comedic meaning [9]. In this context, the viewer is not a passive consumer of humor but an active “reader” of the visual text, decoding layered semantic messages.

Semiotics reveals what is “invisible” in the humorous texts of film and television – the ideological and cultural layers that remain hidden from superficial reading. Through this lens, humor in audiovisual media becomes not merely a form of entertainment but a mode of symbolic representation of social reality, balancing expression with critique, pleasure with deconstruction.



These processes reach an even deeper dimension when humor interacts with architectural form. Visual gestures in contemporary architecture – tilted façades, decorative volumes, “excess” elements – function as analogues to theatrical or cinematic tropes, operating as metaphors or parodies that deconstruct and simultaneously satirize the very concept of structure [5]. In such cases, humor extends beyond art as form, becoming a cultural gesture that reflects the ambivalence of contemporary aesthetics.

In recent decades, humor has undergone active transformation, moving beyond the domains of stage and literature and integrating into numerous areas of modern culture – particularly in commercial, digital, and visual practices. Today, humor not only accompanies entertainment but increasingly serves as a key tool of strategic communication, branding, and building emotional connections with audiences. This trend is especially evident in advertising, digital marketing, social media, and the travel and tourism sector, where humorous strategies acquire new functional relevance.

In advertising, humor has traditionally been viewed as an effective way to attract attention to a brand, aid message retention, and create a positive image [13]. However, its effectiveness largely depends on the context of perception – cultural codes, gender differences, and the sensitivity of the target audience. For example, in the case of Djarum 76, humor became a powerful tool for constructing a mental image of the brand, but in times of social tension (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), humor must be used with particular care to avoid unethical or misinterpreted messaging [13].

From a semiotic perspective, humorous elements in advertising discourse serve not only as entertainment but as components of a sign system that encodes brand values, emotional cues, and social ideals. Humor in advertising fulfills the function of “emotive coding,” triggering processes of selective attention, perception, and memory [13]. As a result, humor becomes a means of establishing long-term emotional bonds between brand and consumer – a critical factor for integrated communication.

In the digital era, humor is actively adapting to visual formats – memes, short videos, graphic series – which serve as primary communication channels in social media. This trend is gaining increasing importance in tourism marketing. Empirical



observations show that visual humor (as opposed to textual) generates significantly higher user engagement, evokes positive emotional responses, increases loyalty, and strengthens brand identification [12].

The semiotic approach to analyzing visual humor allows images to be interpreted as signs that carry both material markers and conceptual meanings. For example, the visual metaphor of “the fleeting nature of life” depicted through the dynamic image of a car illustrates how a humorous sign encodes experience, emotion, and social imagination [12]. In this context, humor functions as a semiotic mediator between the brand and the consumer, translating abstract values into concrete symbols.

Moreover, the use of humor in digital marketing relies on complex psychological and linguistic mechanisms: theories of relief, incongruity, and superiority explain how and why humor creates emotional impact, releases tension, challenges social taboos, or, conversely, reinforces social norms [12]. Applying these mechanisms in advertising or visual travel presentations opens new possibilities for customer-oriented communication.

Humor is increasingly integrated into other spheres of cultural production – from tourism campaigns to architectural design, from branded interactive platforms to urban installations. In these cases, humor goes beyond attracting attention or entertaining; it also serves as a tool for social commentary, symbolic representation, or even transgression. Companies that incorporate humor into their communication strategies operate with signs of high emotional density, capable of provoking not only laughter but also social reflection.

This process demonstrates the expansion of humor’s functions as a semiotic category – from a local sign to a global communication mechanism. In advertising and tourism, humor is no longer just a tool for grabbing attention; it becomes a form of cultural language that adapts to new technological, social, and psychological conditions of consumption.

As humor evolves alongside cultural shifts, it increasingly moves beyond traditional stages and texts into visual, audiovisual, and digital spaces. One of the first mediums to adapt semiotic humor in new forms was cinema – an art form in which



meaning is constructed through a complex system of signs, including color, editing, music, and performance. Studies show that film uses symbolic frame overload, metaphorical compositions, and rhythm to generate comic effect, often disrupting the viewer's expectations regarding content or style [3]. For example, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, the spatial motif of the spiral, the specific color palette, and optical effects not only convey the protagonist's psychological state but also create visual allusions with ironic or grotesque undertones. In a semiotic context, humor in film functions through multiplicity of meaning – it emerges at the intersection of symbolic levels, tonal play, visual coding, and audience decoding [4].

This interpretive play with signs continues in the digital space – particularly on social media, where memes have become a primary form of humorous communication. Unlike film, where meaning is directed by the author, memes foster a horizontal model of humor – authorship is dispersed, and the humorous effect depends on context and the audience's cultural awareness [1]. Semiotic analysis of memes reveals not only their literal content but also a connotative level – hidden social allusions, ironic responses to political events, or the transformation of everyday situations into satirical scenarios. By combining the visual, linguistic, and cultural, memes create a new paradigm of communicative humor that merges complexity with immediacy.

This type of communication is expressed in an even more simplified form through emojis – standardized visual symbols that have become a key element of everyday digital interaction. Emojis exemplify semiotic units that combine the signifier (the graphic symbol) and the signified (emotional, cognitive, or pragmatic meaning) in a compact form [7]. Within multimodal communication, emojis function as socio-semiotic resources: they convey irony, sarcasm, or support, enhancing or modifying the meaning of a verbal message. Their function goes beyond emotional tagging – emojis become part of the language, adding an extra layer of meaning that can shift the tone of a message or create comic ambiguity.

All of this demonstrates that as humor transforms, it penetrates deeper into the expanding landscape of digital communication. From the layered symbolism of cinema to the minimalism of emojis, semiotic humor adapts to new channels and practices,



maintaining its ability to activate cultural reflection, evoke emotional responses, and shape new modes of interaction. Contemporary humor is no longer merely a function of entertainment – it becomes a way of thinking, a method of social navigation, and a mechanism of symbolic integration in a post-media world.

Conclusions

The evolution of semiotic humor from stage to screen reflects a gradual complication and expansion of communicative strategies in the modern cultural landscape. While stage humor was primarily shaped through physical expression, irony, grotesque, and dramaturgy, the development of visual and digital media transformed it into multi-code systems where the comic emerges from a complex interplay of visual, auditory, textual, and cultural signs. Theatre laid the foundation for interpretive play, but it is film and digital platforms that scaled this play to a global level.

In the visual-screen format, semiotic humor has acquired new qualities through editing, color, camera angle, and intonation – both in cinema and in digital video content. Modern platforms, especially social networks, have made humor horizontal – it no longer belongs solely to the creator but is shaped through interaction with the audience. Memes, videos, and emojis function as dynamic sign units that fulfill aesthetic, social, and ideological roles simultaneously. Thus, humor is no longer just entertainment – it becomes a cultural code and a mode of communication within post-media culture.

The transition from stage to screen, therefore, is not merely a change of format but a shift in paradigm: semiotic humor evolves from a localized aesthetic phenomenon into a flexible and scalable interpretive tool that operates across art, advertising, social interaction, and digital exchange. It adapts to new technological conditions while retaining its capacity to encode, subvert, and transform cultural meanings in real time.



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