

“I GUESS THIS IS GROWING UP”: ANALYSIS OF POP-PUNK’S REGAINED POPULARITY AND ITS SHIFT FROM BANDS TO PERSONAS

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ABSTRACT

This research article examines the transformation of pop-punk from bands to solo artists and how the genre regained popularity due to new popular personalities and the transmedia engagement in social media and with established media. Through a three-pronged approach, this study adopts phenomenological, theoretical, and empirical perspectives to understand the transition and regained popularity fully. The phenomenological angle delves into the case studies of musicians, revealing key factors behind the shift to solo artists in pop-punk. Theoretical explanations contextualize the phenomenon within broader cultural frameworks, considering industry and transmedia dynamics, audience preferences, and technological advancements. Empirical evidence, including statistical data from social media profiles, quantifies the impact of the shift. This study contributes to a comprehensive understanding of pop-punk's transformation, offering an exploration of its past, present, and future within the ever-evolving music industries and transmedia landscapes.

KEY WORDS

Pop-punk; Popular Musical Personas; Solo Artists; Social Media; Transmedia; TikTok.

INTRODUCTION: A SHORT HISTORY OF POP-PUNK

“Pop-punk is back” is what YouTuber Finn Mckenty (The Punk Rock MBA 2021) proclaims in his video about the comeback of a popular genre in which he discusses his reasons to believe that the musical style will gain popularity again. He also mentions the term “Nu Punk” which describes the modern variations of the old label pop-punk. The genre in question gained popularity in the mid to late 1990s. Key albums were *Dookie* by Green Day in 1994 (sold over 10 million units in the US alone according to the RIAA and over one million in Europe according to the IFPI) and *Smash* by The Offspring released in the same year (sold over 11 million units worldwide according to the IFPI). These releases and the genre gained a lot of mainstream music and media industries’ attention during this time (Strauss 1995). In 1999, one of the most popular pop-punk acts Blink-182 released their most successful long-player *Enema of the State* (which sold over 15 million units worldwide according to the IFPI) including numerous hit singles like “All the Small Things” and “What’s My Age Again”, a song that claims “... nobody likes you when you’re 23”. Which is arguably the opposite of what Mckenty says about the genre pop-punk; a musical style that is very much liked despite its twenty-something age. Popular movies like the *American Pie* series featured so-called College Rock, especially pop-punk songs like those of Blink-182 and helped the genre to gain awareness with teenagers. Many similar bands

and acts like Sum 41, Good Charlotte, Avril Lavigne and Simple Plan followed in the early 2000s and had very popular releases, too (*Let Go* by Avril Lavigne for example sold over 7 million units in the US according to the RIAA and over 2 million units in Europe according to the IFPI). The Vans Warped Tour, a very popular traveling rock show in the USA and Canada, which featured many of these bands in their line-up helped the genre gain further attention (Diehl 2013). The genre was mainly a North American phenomenon in the beginning, with key bands like Blink-182, Green Day and The Offspring coming from California followed by many other popular groups from other parts of the United States (Bowling For Soup, New Found Glory, and SR-71) and Canada (Sum 41 and Simple Plan).

After various successful releases in the late 2000s by bands like Fall Out Boy, Paramore, and bands that were influenced by other genres who were considered to be “emo” like My Chemical Romance or Panic At The Disco, the ongoing popularity of the genre declined. In the 2010s less and less pop-punk bands had major hits or headlined popular live music festivals (Maloney 2013). A notable exception is Hayley Williams from Paramore who started a successful solo career in the late 2000s while still working with her band and releasing a critically acclaimed album in 2023 with Paramore again. In the mid-2010s a number of bands formed that followed the tradition in terms of sounds, looks and aesthetics and considered themselves pop-punk (Cohen 2013). Major groups in this period were State Champs, the Wonder Years, Real Friends, Knuckle Puck (all from the USA), and Neck Deep (UK). Those bands were considered more underground and did not embrace mainstream culture¹ like previous pop-punk bands did; the critically acclaimed album *The Greatest Generation* from 2013 by The Wonder Years and all of their other albums never received an RIAA or IFPI certification like Gold status for over 500,000 units sold, nor did the works by the other previously mentioned bands. Looking at the streaming numbers, the most successful song by The Wonder Years “Came Out Swinging” has about 30.000.000 and State Champs’ “Secrets” about 43.000.000 streams on Spotify, while “Basket Case” by Green Day has 984.000.000 and “All the Small Things” by Blink-182 over one billion streams on Spotify. This might be part of their self-identity but also due to a lack of charisma, persona and pop star material as pop-punk expert and YouTuber Mckenty (The Punk Rock MBA 2021) describes it. Nevertheless, this generation also was rooted in or at least had connections to mainstream popular music. This was shown, for example, by the interest of many bands in mainstream pop songs which they covered – not only by imitating but transforming the originals into their own punk rock version (Upton 2021).

Pop-punk, like often attested for its predecessor punk rock (Tanner 2008), has defiant elements, especially considering music videos (Grebe & Winkler 2021), artwork (Prinz 2014) and lyrics (Diniati & Fitrawatti 2022) and artists like Blink-182 or New Found Glory often represented white middle-class suburban teenagers and high school or even college students. It could be argued that pop-punk is a popularization of the punk rock genre, which is comparable to what happened to other genres like grunge.² However, throughout the history of pop-punk the major artists were usually bands, mainly consisting of White American male musicians.

In the years 2020 to 2022 a new wave of pop-punk artists surfaced and many bands from the 1990s and 2000s gained popularity again which led fans and experts (like YouTuber Mckenty, The Punk Rock MBA 2021) to believe that pop-punk has had a revival. An interesting observation, which was stated by critics like Mckenty, is that these new artists are in most cases solo artists and that there was a shift from bands to individuals while the music itself did not change too much. The aim of this paper therefore is on the one hand to analyze the shift from bands to personas in pop-punk and on the other hand to investigate which factors impacted the popularity of the genre in recent years. Both developments can be seen as parts of transformation in pop or transformational pop (see Flath, Jacke & Troike 2022). This research focus on musical personas within the culture of pop-punk reveals a broader trend in popular culture where narratives and personas are increasingly spread across multiple media platforms (Jenkins 2007 and 2020). This transmedia concept could be linked to the rise of social media

platforms and digital content creation which the current study will investigate later on.³ However, the first step is to get a deeper understanding of the new wave of the genre.

BACKGROUND: HOW DID POP-PUNK SUBCULTURE CHANGE?

In 2020, the American rapper Machine Gun Kelly released the album *Tickets to My Downfall*. This was his fifth LP and the first that featured only pop-punk songs, while the four previous ones were hip hop albums. Kelly seemed to be inspired by Blink-182's drummer Travis Barker with whom he produced several songs and by trending videos on social media that featured pop-punk music (Cicchetti 2022). One year before in 2019, he released his first song featuring Barker on the drums following his interest in vocals from pop-punk recordings that inspired many emo rappers like himself. Around the same time various solo artists were acknowledged by the music scene media for releasing pop-punk songs and reviving the genre (e.g., Richardson 2020). The top credited musicians besides Machine Gun Kelly were KennyHoopla (USA) and Yungblud (UK).

Other solo artists like Mod Sun, WILLOW (the daughter of Jada Pinkett Smith and Will Smith), Sueco (all from the USA), and Løllø (Canada) followed. At the same time, it seemed that there was only a small number of new bands who would be part of this rise of the genre. The Australian band Stand Atlantic, Waterparks from the USA, and bands from the UK like Trash Boat and Boston Manor were emerging but not as prominent and successful as the solo artists with regards to their following on social media, streams on streaming platforms, and sales figures. Like Mckenty music influencer for alternative music, Jesea Lee also suggested to label this next wave of pop-punk as Nu-Punk (Lee 2021). From a music analytical viewpoint, the music itself sounds much like previous pop-punk recordings. Most songs feature riff orientated guitars with a distorted sound, bass, drums, and easily recognizable hooks. The major difference according to Lee is that the music was hip-hop influenced, meaning there were more verses in a rap-style present. Additionally, the focus seems to be on solo musicians and not bands anymore. Still, many musicians from the first pop-punk wave like Mark Hoppus (Blink-182), John Feldmann (Goldfinger), and Avril Lavigne collaborated with the new and upcoming artists but in the case of Hoppus and Feldmann not as (solo) artists but as producers.

Since the music of the new pop-punk artists is not that different from previous recordings and new solo artist as well as established pop-punk musicians expressed how they enjoy the regained popularity of their music and culture, it could be argued that there is a new wave of pop-punk rather than a new subgenre that would need a new label (e.g., Nu Punk like suggested by Lee 2021). The major change seems to be a kind of personal transformation that solo artists are preferred over bands as representatives of this wave.

ANALYSIS: A TRANSDISCIPLINARY, MULTIPERSPECTIVAL CURSORY APPROACH

To comprehensively explore this transformational shift and the rise of popularity, we decided on applying a three-pronged analytical framework: the phenomenological perspective, theoretical explanations, and empirical evidence. Embracing a cursory approach allows us to delve into the lived experiences of both musicians and fans, uncovering the influential factors behind the transition from bands to solo endeavours. Moreover, our investigation delves into theoretical explanations, drawing from academic literature and discourse surrounding music industries and media dynamics. We aim to contextualize the phenomenon within a broader cultural framework, understanding the factors that may have driven the rise of solo artists in pop-punk. By analysing audience preferences and (transmedia and music) technological advancements, we seek to unravel the complex interplay of forces that have shaped this evolutionary trajectory.

Lastly, we support our analysis with empirical evidence, examining social media presences of pop-punk bands and artists. These primary sources offer valuable insights into their experiences, artistic choices, and the reception of their work. We will therefore examine statistical data from music charts, social media profiles and trending hashtags to quantify the rise of solo artists and discern patterns that signify the genre's evolving landscape.

Findings on the Shifts from Bands to Personas

One of the key figures in the comeback of pop-punk is Blink-182's drummer Travis Barker. He not only collaborated with several artists for a vast number of singles, he also acted as a role model for careers. As Lee (2021) puts it, Barker was one of the few pop-punk artists who embraced mainstream culture and media. He played with multiple artists from various genres at major pop events like MTV's video music awards, had his own reality TV show, and he had affairs and relationships with female celebrities that had a lot of attention from the yellow press. Coming from a subculture he acted like a transmedia star continuously and consistently telling small narrative elements that were in line with his overarching narrative (Jenkins 2007) and helped not only his person and band but the whole genre to gain mainstream popularity.

Through catchy melodies, lyrics often cantered around growing-up, and distinct sounds, pop songs often become intertwined with significant life moments, as well as through protagonists as musicians and their personas as visible public images and performances (personas originally meaning masks) serving as time capsules of individual and collective experiences. Analysing these protagonists following Auslander (2004) and Jacke (2018 and this issue) one has to differentiate between real persons, star personas and characters. As such, established pop music artists like Travis Barker emerge as specific transmedia zeitgeist markers within attention economies, even for various generations, bridging the gap between the past and present, and leaving an indelible impact on the musical, cultural, and media landscapes, maps, and memories (Jacke 2015; Jacke & Zierold 2015; Strong 2011). Musicians and artists as personas in pop music are a mutable concept (Fairchild & Marshall 2019) and therefore personalized markers of public and media attention especially within popular music cultures. In other words: "The current configuration of the entertainment industry makes transmedia expansion an economic imperative, yet the most gifted transmedia artists also surf these marketplace pressures to create a more expansive and immersive story than would have been possible otherwise" (Jenkins 2007).

Moreover, Barker's exceptional drumming style and innovative contributions to the genre have extended beyond Blink-182, collaborating with a myriad of artists across various genres, further cementing his legacy as a musical allrounder. As the music industries evolved, Barker's adaptability and willingness to embrace new musical directions have continued to resonate with younger generations, allowing him to maintain relevance as an artist and to become a generational marker once again.

Machine Gun Kelly (short MGK) or Mod Sun both can be regarded as popular musical stars as real persons, star personas, and characters, who did not only collaborate with Barker but also followed his example by embracing established media and engage in public displaying their personal life and relationships and therefore becoming transmedia and mainstream popular music celebrity or star personas. For example, MGK is in a relationship with movie star Megan Fox. They both post a lot of information like the announcement of their engagement in January 2022 to their social media accounts. MGK worked as an actor in movies playing, for instance, iconic Mötley Crüe drummer Tommy Lee. MOD SUN was in a publicly well documented polyamorous relationship with influencer Tana Mongeau (5.7 million followers on Instagram) and actress Bella Thorne. Moreover, he will be playing a role in a movie co-starring MGK and Megan Fox. Lil Huddy was in a relationship with one of the most influential TikTokers Carli D'Amelio and Jxdn was in a relationship with TikTok star Nessa Barrett and both collaborated

on their social media channels with their partners and therefore were exposed to a broader audience.

Following the argument of their professional utilization of social media, we can see that indeed current pop-punk artists have much more followers and engagement on their social media accounts (see Table 1). To be fair, musicians from bands do not have to be celebrities or active social media characters and many bands from the first wave naturally started their social media accounts long after their initial musical success. But individuals like Travis Barker managed to become such a prominent star persona in mainstream culture that he has more followers on Instagram (8.200.000) than other musicians from his generation and even more than some of the current solo artists. Lee (2021) describes the new generation as the people “who sit at the cool kids” table now instead of those from older bands who were usually “not cool” or misfits. Artists like MGK or Jxdn grew up with social media and know how to act and perform on the platforms. They can be considered as influencers or even star influencers – Lil Huddy was even part of the influencer community Hype House.

Frontmen of first Pop-Punk wave bands	Follower on Instagram	Frontmen of 2010s Pop-Punk bands	Follower on Instagram	New generation of Pop-Punk solo artists	Follower on Instagram
Billie Joe Armstrong (Green Day)	2.600.000	Ben Barlow (Neck Deep)	200.000	Willow Smith	11.000.000
Tom DeLonge (Blink-182)	1.200.000	Parker Cannon (The Story So Far)	97.700	(Lil) Huddy	10.600.000
Pierre Bouvier (Simple Plan)	318.000	Derek DiScanio (State Champs)	90.400	Machine Gun Kelly	9.100.000
Deryck Whibley (Sum 41)	139.000	Dan Campbell (Wonder Years)	61.000	Yungblud	3.800.000

Table 1. Comparison of the number of Instagram followers of the most popular pop-punk artists of the three waves in July 2023

Solo artists seem to be well suited to achieve a star status because all public as well as niche and established media attention will be focused on this one persona in the center of a marker or even brand as constructions (and deconstructions) of expressive individuality and uniqueness within the context of star and celebrity systems (see Jacke 2018). In combination with being content creators who usually operate their social media channels on their own (at least in front of the camera), individual musicians can showcase much more of their personality and reflect the social and cultural change like seismographs (see Jacke in this issue). Seeing other solo artists thrive in this re-explored genre might have motivated musicians in a much better way to produce pop-punk music than seeing bands from previous generations and building of a network of references and interplay of innovation and tradition.

Building on the analysis of artist personas in the pop-punk genre, we can further explore the transmedia aspect that has become increasingly pivotal in shaping these personas and their influence. The concept of transmedia, with its emphasis on narrative and identity extension across multiple media platforms (Jenkins 2007 and 2020), offers a deeper understanding of how artists like Travis Barker, Machine Gun Kelly, and others have expanded their reach and impact. First, they use cross-platform real person, star persona, and character storytelling. Artists in the pop-punk scene have leveraged various media platforms to construct and disseminate their persons, personas, and characters. This isn't limited to music releases but extends to social media platforms, collaborations with artists from other genres, appearances in films and television, and even participation in online viral challenges. Each of these platforms contributes a unique narrative strand, enriching the overall narrative or concept of the artist within Auslander's and Jacke's three dimensions.

Second, they engage with diverse audiences. By utilizing different media channels and formats, pop-punk artists can engage with a broader audience base. For example, Travis Barker's involvement in reality TV shows and collaborations with artists from varied musical backgrounds allowed him to connect with viewers and listeners who might not typically engage with pop-punk music.

Third, the integration of personal life and artistic identity in public forums, as seen with Machine Gun Kelly and his relationships, plays a critical role in transmedia storytelling. This blending of personal and professional life creates a more relatable and humanized image of the artist, further drawing in audiences. Lastly, they leveraged digital media. The digital era, particularly the rise of social media, has been a game-changer for artist and especially celebrity and star personas (Marshall 2021). Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X, formerly known as Twitter, allow artists to craft and share aspects of their persona in real-time, offering fans an ongoing and interactive narrative experience. This immediacy and interactivity are key components of transmedia storytelling.

Another interesting explanation for this transformation might be that artists evolved to be artistic entrepreneurs, like Steffen Just (2014) described in detail. It is much easier for artists to communicate "directly" with fans over social media. They can therefore advertise their music products much more efficiently and without music companies, promoters, distributors or even journalists "interfering". Many of the older pop-punk musicians embraced the possibilities and used trends and challenges on social media to promote themselves and their music.

Another contributing factor to the shift might have been that the old economic model of being a band was continuously replaced by the entrepreneurship model focusing on individuality (Marshall 2021), especially during the COVID 19-pandemic. Producing music as a solo artist is considerably easier and cheaper than with a band, especially while in a quarantine, but one could argue that musicians like Machine Gun Kelly were solo artists before the pandemic and then shifted toward pop-punk. Additionally, recording music as a band with individual band members recording separately is more demanding in terms of managing the project and more time consuming to record while distancing from other band members. Also, the solo artists tended to still record songs with other musicians but labelled them as collaborations or features keeping their individual personas rather than forming a new group.

In the early days of pop-punk, the music industry was organized around physical formats like vinyl and CDs. Bands like Blink-182, Sum 41, and New Found Glory achieved success through traditional record deals and album sales. However, as the music industry transitioned into the digital era, the landscape changed dramatically.

The advent of digital online media and the decline of physical formats like CDs, even if they already were digital, brought about a "crisis" in the music industry. This shift required artists and the industry itself to adapt to new monetization strategies. Meier's (2013) research highlights how, in this evolving digital marketplace, "artist-brands" became central to the

capitalization of music. These artist-brands were not only focused on music sales but were also tied to multiple revenue streams.

This transformation allowed individual artists to take centre stage, as they could more readily adapt to the digital environment. Unlike bands, individual artists could pivot across various digital media platforms, connect directly with fans through social media like influencers, and explore new monetization avenues such as licensing their music for advertising and brand partnerships.

Meier's concept of "promotional ubiquitous musics" underscores how popular music, including pop-punk, became a promotional tool for consumer and media brands. This shift in strategy aligns with the rise of solo pop-punk artists who could easily collaborate with brands and integrate their music into various forms of media to expand their reach and revenue streams.

In conclusion, we can find that individually embracing mainstream culture and established media (like displaying private affairs and engaging in movie acting), identifying with stars from previous generations (through collaborations), and engaging in content creation for social media are contributing factors for why we experience a transformational, transgenerational and, above all, transmedia shift from bands to solo artists in the genre. Theoretically, it seems to be a reasonable behaviour for musicians to strive for a solo career if they want to achieve star status or to become generational zeitgeist markers.

Findings on the Rise of Pop-Punk's Popularity

TikTok and online platforms in general have become very important for distributing, establishing, economizing, advertising, and mediatizing popular cultures and music genres. One key platform for pop-punk in the 2010s was Soundcloud (Achmad & Setiyanti 2015) where a lot of hip hop artists release and explore new music. The platform might have helped rappers discover pop-punk. However, more influential in recent years was TikTok. The platform helped artists, influencers, and users to reach a wider audience organically. Its innovative community functions, like duets and stitches, contribute to the distribution of original videos through the co-creative engagement of fans who describe these features as essential for their motivation to use the app (Omar & Dequan 2020). The app has a great potential for content creators who take advantage of the possibility to grow a genuine audience without paying for advertising like on other social media apps. Especially newcomer musicians benefit from the app and its users' openness to amateur recordings and low-quality sounds that fit the app's "bedroom culture" (Kennedy 2020).

Music challenges help discover unknown and old pop music (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin 2022). But not only music related content can be found on the app. In recent years, TikTok grew to become a casual learning platform which attracted more users (Linke 2022). On the flipside, another study reported that non-users stated that TikTok was perceived to be too juvenile/cringey and providing too much cyberbullying (Vaterlaus & Winter 2021). But since the popularity and media coverage on the app grew constantly some of the non-users might have changed their mind.

Interestingly, millennials became much more interested in the app over the course of the last few years. Adults in their late 20s and 30s uploaded videos to the platform and engaged in (music) challenges (Cuesta-Valiño, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez & Patricia Durán-Álamo 2022). With the growing interest of millennials in the social media app it seems likely that they engaged or even came up with some of the music challenges. Two of the most notable trends on TikTok related to pop-punk were #itsnotaphasemom and #imjustakid. Many adults produced videos for these hashtags. These trends that were popular in 2020 exposed many users to the music of pop-punk bands All Time Low, who's song "Dear Maria, Count Me In" was usually sung after shouting "it's

not a phase, mom. It's a lifestyle" in the first trend, and Simple Plan, who's song "I'm Just a Kid" was used for reenacting childhood photos in the second trend, and to the genre in general.

Another major factor that can be considered as a contributing influence for the new success of the genre is diversity, which was not the case during the first wave of the genre. As previously described, pop-punk bands in the late 1990s and early 2000s consisted mainly of White suburban straight men, whereas the new generation featured much more diverse people like WILLOW, Iann Dior, and Trippie Red. This in turn might have helped attract more people to the genre who previously were not likely to identify with the bands and musicians.

Popular culture is full of retro-eras and revivals – not only in music but in movies or fashion, too. Simon Reynolds (2011) wrote extensively about this phenomenon and pointed out which factors led to revival of certain styles and ideas in his opinion. First, it is the digital revolution that impacted music listening and music production. Second, it is the music industry driven by capitalism that tries to recreate safe trends, whilst investing less in upcoming but uncertain trends. Third, it is the movement and culture of hipsters who are not producing or exploring new music but act nostalgic by curating and archiving old music. This means that engaging in an older genre like pop-punk is much easier due to digital technologies and much more rewarding since being a fan of an older genre is much more accepted and even appreciated today as fan cultures have been fully established and popular music no longer is exclusively a youth culture. "Music history usually is about things that were new in their own time. They were radical, unusual in some sense, breaking with tradition. Most things we think of now as classic were actually innovative in their time" (Reynolds in Reynolds & Jacke 2022, p. 386).

The music industry gladly provides the fans with new releases, re-releases and events (see When We Were Young Festival in Las Vegas) to cater those interests. These explanations lead us to believe that there was indeed a new interest in pop-punk and its personas in recent years that can be theoretically explained as typically transmedia in different dimensions like genre, collaboration, gender, medium, technology, star-audience relationships, participatory relationship culture etc. "This capacity of celebrities to move across fields and to be deployed strategically in these various platforms and domains of contemporary life and society points to their convertible value. Businesses and industries attempt to quantify that value and use it for specific purposes" (Marshall 2021, p. 167). Additionally, we found some indicators that support such a claim.

In 2021, Machine Gun Kelly and Blackbear had a joint hit that reached the 23rd place in the Billboard Year-end Charts. "good 4 u" by Olivia Rodrigo landed on the 5th place of the same charts that year. The song was inspired by Paramore's "Misery Business" which is why Paramore members Josh Farro and Hayley Williams were credited as co-authors. Besides the inspiration and the very similar chorus, the song features various pop-punk characteristics such as guitar driven instrumentation and rock drums with a tempo of 167 bpm. It can be argued that in recent years, pop-punk songs made it to the mainstream charts (in comparison: Blink-182's hit "All the Small Things" made it 40th place in Billboard Year-End Hot 100 in 2000). Additionally, pop-punk artists were considered for performances at mainstream award celebrations. Machine Gun Kelly and Travis Barker performed at the 2021 MTV Video Music Awards and in 2022 MGK performed at the Billboard Music Awards.

Not only the artists but also the fans discovered social media for themselves. As mentioned before, older generations of fans such as millennials managed to enter platforms like TikTok and helped promote the genre as theoretically explained due to nostalgic reasons. Especially music challenges or trends like the #imjustakid challenge and the popular hashtag #itsnotaphasemom helped established pop-punk bands from the 2000s gain attention again. The latter was not only associated with pop-punk but also the emo lifestyle which had a big revival on social media, too.

The success of pop-punk in general and specific bands like Simple Plan in particular who recently started to run entertaining Instagram and TikTok channels benefited from the social media trends evolving from a kind of youth subculture to an transgenerational popular music culture. As Cicchetti (2022) describes it, TikTok's virality helped new artists to reach the charts and for older songs to chart again. The interest of fans, social media platforms, and engagement of the musicians helped to revive a whole genre and further develop a whole way of life and culture.

DISCUSSION: MAINSTREAM SELLOUT

In 2022, Machine Gun Kelly released his long-player called *Mainstream Sellout*, the second album after *Tickets To My Downfall* that consisted entirely of pop-punk songs. Quoting the TikTok trend based on All Time Low's song "Dear Maria, Count Me In" it seems, "this is not a phase". Moreover, the genre gained popularity amongst new listeners and older fans in recent years and returned to the mainstream as MGK puts it with his album title.

One aim of our study was to analyze whether the genre had a rise in popularity and therefore been part of a classical transformation from former subculture to transmedia mainstream culture. As shown in the previous chapters not only new and successful artists emerged but also established bands and musicians were able to gain new popularity – therefore a whole dynamic network of references of popular music culture has been developed focusing on star and celebrity personas as well as persons and characters. It was argued that some factors like a shift to solo musicians, the hip hop influence, and the music itself speak for a new wave of pop-punk. The main factors that influenced the success of the genre in recent years were musicians' usage of music streaming and social media platforms, millennials on TikTok, music challenges on the same app, embracement of mainstream pop culture by individual artists, more diversity, and a movement toward reviving certain pieces of popular music and culture, especially online.

For musicians and professionals in the music and media industries some of these aspects can be considered as relevant for building careers and promoting existing as well as upcoming music products and personas. Musicians who engage in online music challenges use it to promote their own on presences. It helps to communicate and create content that fits the platform instead of just promoting concerts, merch, or new releases. Allowing other users to utilize one's music can be beneficial. Establishing events that cater the new interest in the genre is not only helping the genre to grow further but are also a profitable enterprise. The When We Were Young Festival in Las Vegas featuring Avril Lavigne, MGK, My Chemical Romance, and many more of the most popular pop-punk acts sold out so quickly that the producers scheduled two more dates for the event. The factors that influenced the comeback of the genre are interesting for music business and for music research. Our results might help future studies to investigate other transmedia revivals and transgenerational phenomena.

The other aim of the study was to investigate the shift from bands to solo artists in the genre of pop-punk. We identified several factors that contributed to such a change as part of a popular music and star/celebrity culture focusing on individuality (Auslander 2004; Jacke 2018; Marshall 2021). The personas as the visible masks of stars and celebrities in public differing from characters and real persons who chose pop-punk as their musical and part of an audible style. personas embrace mainstream culture and established media, identify, and align themselves with stars and celebrities, i.e., personas, from previous generations, and focus on social media. The shift seems to fit a new generation or at least group of listeners and fans as co-creators and allows them to learn more "directly", even if still mediated, staged, and orchestrated, about their stars through online platforms and media coverage – therefore completely transmedia. Furthermore, the digitalization of the music industry created an environment where individual artists could more effectively navigate and capitalize on emerging opportunities, thus influencing the shift from pop-punk bands to solo artists. This

transition was driven by the need to adapt to new industry dynamics and capitalize on the changing ways in which music was consumed and monetized in the digital era including the increasing “value of individual visibility” (Marshall 2021, p. 173) and “the proliferation of online micro-celebrities” (ibid., p. 174).

The shift from album-centered music, like traditional rock, to a more individual star- and persona-centered model, as observed in the evolution of pop-punk, might reflect broader trends within the music industry. Rock music, which traditionally, but not exclusively, relied on full-length album releases and band-centric identities, has also seen a transformation. The era of the vinyl/CD and album-dominated sales has given way to an environment where individual artists can thrive by embracing digital media, social platforms, and diverse monetization avenues.

This evolution has allowed solo rock artists to establish and maintain direct connections with their fan bases, sidestepping some of the traditional gatekeepers of the music industry. Moreover, the concept of “artist-brands” and the strategic use of music in advertising and brand partnerships have become common practices for musicians seeking to expand their reach and revenue sources.

In this shifting landscape, the ability of artists to adapt to the digital music industry's new realities has become crucial. While the traditional album format remains significant, it no longer solely defines success in rock music. Instead, artists who can navigate the digital realm, release music more flexibly (e.g., songs, singles, and EPs), and engage with their audience through social media and streaming platforms are positioned for success.

In conclusion, the transition from album-centered music to a more individual star-centered model, as exemplified by the evolution of pop-punk, can serve as a microcosm of broader changes within the rock genre and the music industry as a whole.

Future research might want to explore if a shift like this can be found in other genres, too. To argue with Blink-182's lyrics “this is *not* growing up” – this is adapting to a new fan and media culture, i.e., popular music and transmedia culture.

END NOTES

¹ Following Huber (2013) and Jones (2012) we understand mainstream popular music culture as an imagining of dominant or major culture in music and media industries. Mainstream is seen as a category to describe artists who are successful concerning transmedia publicity, financial and attention economical merit, big audiences, and fan cultures (see Jacke in this issue).

² For an analysis of the German media coverage of the Grunge phenomenon and especially the personas and anti-star cult of Nirvana see Jacke 1998, for research on Grunge, Kurt Cobain and memory see Strong 2011.

³ Jenkins' model of transmedia seems to fit very well for our case study. Nevertheless, one can criticize its lack of definition of media. We understand media as a complex and dynamic interconnection between communication instruments, media technologies, socio-systematical organizations, and media offers (see Schmidt 2007; Jacke 2018).

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