

Crafting Celebrity: The Strategic Fan Engagement of Taylor Swift

Analysing the strategies behind Taylor
Swift's unprecedented fan loyalty

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Abstract

This thesis delves into the intricate strategies employed by Taylor Swift to cultivate and sustain an extraordinarily large and loyal fan base. By examining her career through the lens of celebrity studies and fan culture, the research explores how Swift's celebrity persona is created through primary texts (such as music releases, merchandise, and live performances), secondary texts (including media coverage and public narratives), and tertiary texts (fan-generated content) and how this has contributed to her sustained popularity and influence. The study analyses how Swift has adeptly adapted her public image across multiple platforms, creating a dynamic and interactive relationship with her fans. This interaction fosters a deep personal connection that goes beyond typical fan-artist relationships, positioning Swift as a unique figure in contemporary celebrity culture. The research fills a critical gap in existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the mechanisms behind Swift's influence and her ability to maintain a devoted fan following. The findings not only contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of celebrity culture and fan engagement but also offer practical insights for other artists seeking to build and sustain a loyal following in the digital age.

Keywords: Taylor Swift, celebrity studies, fan culture, media strategy, fan engagement, celebrity influence.

Samenvatting

In deze thesis wordt onderzocht hoe Taylor Swift, een van de meest invloedrijke popartiesten van deze eeuw, haar enorme en loyale fanbase heeft opgebouwd en behouden. Dit onderzoek valt onder *celebrity studies* en *fan studies*, en analyseert hoe beroemdheden zoals Swift hun publieke imago strategisch vormgeven en beheren om een duurzame band met hun fans te creëren. De studie is bijzonder relevant in het digitale tijdperk, waarin directe interactie tussen beroemdheden en hun publiek steeds crucialer wordt. Het biedt diepgaande inzichten in de mechanismen achter Swifts succes, wat waardevol is voor zowel academici als professionals in de muziekindustrie.

Het onderzoek richt zich op drie soorten teksten die Swift gebruikt om haar imago te vormen: primaire teksten (zoals haar muziek en merchandise), secundaire teksten (mediaberichten en verhalen over haar persoonlijke leven), en tertiaire teksten (fancontent). Elk type tekst wordt grondig geanalyseerd om te begrijpen hoe deze bijdragen aan het opbouwen en onderhouden van Swifts imago. De gebruikte methode bestaat uit een casestudy en kwalitatieve inhoudsanalyse van zowel officiële als door fans gemaakte bronnen.

In het eerste deel wordt ingegaan op de primaire teksten, zoals Swift's muziek en live optredens, en hoe deze haar imago van authenticiteit en toegankelijkheid versterken. Het tweede deel onderzoekt de secundaire teksten, met een focus op hoe de media haar persoonlijke leven en publieke persona presenteren, inclusief de manier waarop media omgaan met controverses en haar relaties. Het derde deel analyseert de tertiaire teksten en hoe fans Swifts imago actief beïnvloeden via sociale media en andere platforms, evenals de interactie tussen Swift en haar fans. De bevindingen tonen aan dat Swifts strategische benadering van imago- en fanmanagement cruciaal is voor haar aanhoudende succes. Haar vermogen om een sterke, persoonlijke band met haar fans te onderhouden door middel van een zorgvuldig opgebouwd en flexibel publiek imago blijkt een sleutelcomponent van haar carrière.

De conclusie benadrukt dat Swifts succes niet alleen te danken is aan haar muzikale talent, maar ook aan haar strategische imago- en fanbeheer in een tijd waarin fans direct invloed hebben op het succes van beroemdheden. Deze studie biedt waardevolle inzichten in strategisch fan engagement en is van belang voor artiesten die streven naar een langdurige carrière in de muziekindustrie.

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Introduction

“It’s rare to ascend to the pinnacle of pop stardom, as Swift has, and rarer still to impact the business so profoundly. Since the debut of her first album at age 16, Swift has shown a preternatural gift for engaging with her fans, inspiring the kind of devotion that leaves them to await each new song, album and merch release with bated breath[.]”

--- Marc Schneider, *Billboard*.¹

Since the launch of The Eras Tour in March 2023, Taylor Swift’s fame has soared to extraordinary levels, making headlines daily and solidifying her status as a global media fixture. Swift, who began her career in country music before successfully transitioning to pop and indie-folk, has demonstrated an exceptional ability to continually reinvent herself. Her talent for storytelling through her lyrics, combined with her musical versatility, has allowed her to connect deeply with a diverse audience. This connection, coupled with her strategic deployment of personal branding and media presence, not only amplifies her influence but also sets new standards for how celebrities interact with their audiences. Her fiercely devoted fan base, known as Swifties, exemplifies a level of dedication and enthusiasm rarely seen in contemporary celebrity culture.

Taylor Swift’s unprecedented impact has been the subject of several academic studies, which have explored various aspects of her career and persona. Maryn Wilkinson examines Swift’s transition from country to pop, highlighting her “zany” persona that balances hard work with playful self-awareness, allowing her to meet commercial demands while retaining a relatable image.² Paul Théberge builds on this by contextualising Swift’s career within the shifting music industry landscape. He explores how Swift has successfully navigated the transition from physical CDs to digital and streaming formats, using social media and forming strategic partnerships to maintain her success.³ Margaret Rossman adds another layer by analysing Swift’s use of emotional rhetoric and nostalgia. She shows how Swift’s personal and nostalgic content deepens fan connections and drives physical album sales, enhancing her commercial

¹ Marc Schneider, “9 Ways Taylor Swift Had Changed the Music Business,” *Billboard*, October 30, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/lists/how-taylor-swift-changed-music-business/>.

² Maryn Wilkinson, “Taylor Swift: the hardest working, zaniest girl in show business...,” *Celebrity Studies* 10, no. 3 (July 2019), doi: 10.1080/19392397.2019.1630160, 441-444.

³ Paul Théberge, “Love and Business: Taylor Swift as Celebrity, Businesswoman, and Advocate,” *Contemporary Music Review* 40, no. 1 (2021), doi: 10.1080/07494467.2021.1945227, 41-59.

success.⁴ Adriane Brown's study focuses on Swift's authenticity from the fan perspective. Through online forums, Brown reveals that fans view Swift as an "ordinary girl" with relatable lyrics and a genuine image, fostering a deep personal connection and reinforcing her authenticity.⁵ Despite these insights, gaps remain in understanding the specific strategies that set Swift apart from other artists and how these contribute to her exceptional fan loyalty. While existing studies illuminate various aspects of her business strategies and public persona, a comprehensive analysis that integrates these elements to explore the strategic mechanisms behind her extraordinary influence and devoted fan base is still needed.

The central problem addressed by this research is understanding how Taylor Swift, a leading pop star, has successfully developed and maintained an extraordinarily large and devoted fan base. Although Swift's immense popularity is well-documented, the mechanisms behind her exceptional ability to engage and maintain this large following have not been thoroughly examined. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the unique elements that differentiate Swift's approach from other artists. The research question guiding this investigation is: How has Taylor Swift acquired a fandom of such unprecedented size and loyalty and what distinctive strategies have contributed to this phenomenon? Addressing this question is crucial for gaining insights into the evolving dynamics of celebrity culture and fan relationships, offering valuable perspectives on how strategic fan engagement can drive celebrity success.

To explore the strategies Taylor Swift employs to cultivate and sustain her vast and devoted fan base, this study uses a multi-faceted case study methodology grounded in established theoretical frameworks. Drawing on Caitlin E. Lawson's approach in "Stars as Texts: Analyzing Celebrities Across Platforms" (2020) and P. David Marshall's concept of the celebrity as a text with multiple levels (2006), the research will analyse Taylor Swift's public persona through a review of primary, secondary and tertiary texts. Primary texts include her new music releases, merchandise and live performances. Secondary texts encompass media coverage and public narratives, while tertiary texts involve fan-generated content and online interactions. This approach will elucidate how Swift's image is carefully constructed and sustained through a complex interplay of media strategies and fan engagement. By examining these elements, the study aims to uncover

⁴ Margaret Rossman, "Taylor Swift, remediating the self, and nostalgic girlhood in tween music fandom," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 38 (2022), doi: 10.3983/twc.2022.2287.

⁵ Adriane Brown, "'She isn't whoring herself out like a lot of other girls we see': Identification and 'Authentic' American Girlhood on Taylor Swift Fan Forums," *Networking Knowledge* 5, no. 1 (February 2012), doi: 10.31165/nk.2012.51.252, 161-180.

the intentional strategies behind Swift's public persona and the reciprocal dynamics that contribute to her remarkable popularity and influence.

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that Taylor Swift employs to engage and expand her fan base, thereby contributing to the broader field of celebrity studies. By identifying the key strategies Swift employs, examining the role of fan interaction in shaping her public image, and offering a framework for analysing the interplay between celebrity and fan culture, this research aims to address existing gaps in the literature. The anticipated outcomes will not only advance academic knowledge of celebrity dynamics but also offer practical insights for artists and public figures aiming to build and sustain a loyal following. Through this analysis, the study will enhance our understanding of the mechanisms driving celebrity influence and fan engagement, with implications for both theoretical inquiry and practical application in the domain of celebrity culture.

It is important to clarify that when referring to Taylor Swift in this thesis, this includes not only Swift herself but also her management team. Nearly every celebrity has a management team responsible for generating marketing strategies and engagement techniques. Consequently, many ideas attributed to Swift may, in fact, originate from her team. Furthermore, online celebrity accounts on social media are often managed not by the celebrities themselves, but by assistants, dedicated teams or hired professionals. While various methods exist to discern whether the celebrity personally engaging with fans or if someone else is acting on their behalf, it is impossible to determine with complete certainty. Therefore, references to Taylor Swift and her business strategies or social media interactions should be understood as encompassing the collective efforts and strategies of both Swift and her management team. When a business strategy is attributed to Swift, it should be interpreted as originating from her and/or her team, unless explicitly stated as a direct quote from her.

The first chapter of this thesis explores the concept of celebrity, defining it through various theoretical frameworks and examining how celebrities are constructed, maintained and perceived in contemporary society. It will also highlight the crucial role of fan engagement and public perception in shaping a celebrity's image. The second chapter delves into fan culture and fan studies, discussing fan communities, motivations behind fan behaviours and the impact of fandom on both fans and celebrities. Following these theoretical foundations, the third chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study. The fourth chapter presents the core case study on Taylor Swift her fans, structured into three parts. The first part focuses on Swift's primary texts, including new music releases, merchandise, and live performances, analysing how

these are crafted and marketed to engage and expand her fan base. The second part examines secondary texts such as articles and media coverage, exploring her high-profile feuds and relationships and their impact on her public persona and fan relationships. The third and final part of the case study delves into tertiary texts created by fans, emphasising social networking websites and in investigating how fans interact with Swift's content, form online communities, and contribute to her sustained fandom.

1. Celebrity Studies

1.1. Defining Celebrity

When talking about celebrities, we often describe them as famous and well-known individuals, which frames the noun ‘celebrity’ a personal and binary quality: you are either a celebrity, or you are not.⁶ However, the concept of celebrity can be defined in numerous, more nuanced and elaborate ways. In his book *Understanding Celebrity*, Graeme Turner provides a comprehensive definition of celebrity, framing it within multiple contexts and dimensions. Turner writes:

“Celebrity is a genre of representation and a discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity and media industries that produce these representations and their effects; and it is a cultural formation that has a social function we can better understand.”⁷

This definition reveals four distinct perspectives through which we can examine the concept of celebrity, all interconnected with each other. Turner elaborates on these perspectives in his article *Approaching Celebrity Studies*, detailing how celebrities can be analysed as representations, as discourse, as an industry and as cultural formations. He argues that each approach leads to different research agendas and analytical methods, providing a multifaceted framework for understanding the phenomenon of celebrity.⁸

Moreover, the definition of celebrity as given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* adds an extra dimension to the concept. The OED defines celebrity as “the state or fact of being well known, widely discussed, or publicly esteemed” and “personal fame or renown as manifested in public interest and media attention.”⁹ These definitions underscore that a celebrity’s status is not an isolated phenomenon but is deeply rooted in public recognition and media coverage. There simply is no celebrity without those who “celebrate” them. A celebrity, by definition, is known, discussed, and followed by others.¹⁰ The public's and media's interest in celebrities is what elevates them to their celebrated status. This intrinsic link to audiences will become evident in the following discussion of various definitions of celebrity.

⁶ Marwick and boyd, *Celebrity Practice on Twitter*, 140.

⁷ Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2014), 10.

⁸ Graeme Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” *Celebrity Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2010): 11-20. doi: 10.1080/19392390903519024.

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “celebrity (n.),” revisited 2016, doi: 10.1093/OED/8399419072.

¹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “celebrity (n.),” revisited 2016, doi: 10.1093/OED/8399419072.

The Celebrity as a Representation

Graeme Turner defines celebrity as a “genre of representation,” highlighting that celebrities constitute a semiotically rich body of texts and discourses.¹¹ This link between semiotics and celebrity was introduced by Richard Dyer¹² and is further explored in P. David Marshall’s *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. Marshall argues that, like a sign in semiotics, ‘the celebrity represents something other than itself.’¹³ Viewing a celebrity as a sign turns them into an organising structure for meaning rather than an individual person. Thus, the material reality of the celebrity, meaning the actual person, fades into the background, becoming a vessel for cultural meanings and representations. Marshall differentiates between the denotative and connotative levels of meaning in the celebrity sign. At the denotative level, the celebrity is simply a person with a name and a face. However, the connotative level imbues the celebrity with additional meanings and associations that reflect broader cultural values and ideologies. This connotative process involves cultural investment, where society collectively assigns meanings and values to the celebrity. These signs can transform, representing different meanings to various audience groups over time.¹⁴

If the celebrity is considered a sign, as Marshall argues, their representation is constructed through various texts and media forms, making them fundamentally intertextual¹⁵. Jonathan Gray’s concept of intertextuality and paratexts offers a valuable framework for understanding how texts shape and are shaped by a celebrity’s persona. Gray suggests that texts derive meaning from their relationships with other texts, implying that no text exists in isolation. Paratexts surrounding a “main” text, both preceding and following it, influence and frame our interpretations of that main text. Celebrities function as paratexts themselves, influencing our understandings of their films, music, tweets, and other creative outputs. Simultaneously, their personas are crafted through paratexts: the interviews they conduct, the films they act in, their performances and other media appearances tell us more about who they are. Thus, celebrities emerge as representations formed from interconnected texts that collectively create and sustain their public image.¹⁶

¹¹ Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 13.

¹² Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979).

¹³ P. David Marshall, *Celebrity, and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014), 56-57.

¹⁴ Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 57-58.

¹⁵ Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 58.

¹⁶ Jonathan Gray, *Watching with the Simpsons: Television, parody, and intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

In *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, Marshall expands on this idea by categorising celebrity representation into three distinct levels. At the primary level, celebrities are defined by their core works, such as films, music, and performances. These primary texts serve as foundational elements that establish a celebrity's presence in the public eye. The secondary level includes supplementary texts like interviews, paparazzi photos and media coverage of their personal lives, providing additional context and insights into celebrities off-screen and off-stage personas. Lastly, at the tertiary level, audiences actively interpret and reinterpret these texts, imbuing them with personal and collective meanings. This participatory aspect underscores how fans and the public engage with and contribute to the ongoing construction of a celebrity's image.¹⁷

This extensive textual landscape, which Marshall refers to as the "cultural economy of celebrity production," highlights the role of the media industry in fabricating and disseminating the celebrity image.¹⁸ This cultural economy involves collaboration among media outlets, public relations firms and marketing agencies to maintain celebrities' public personas and keep them in the public eye. Additionally, audiences play an indispensable role by actively consuming and interpreting these texts. Fans engage with the primary works of celebrities, but they also delve deeply into secondary and tertiary texts. This engagement is not passive; audiences contribute to the celebrity's narrative by sharing and discussing these texts on social media, creating fan art, and participating in fan communities. Through these actions, audiences continuously reshape and redefine the meanings associated with the celebrity.¹⁹ The dynamic interplay between industry production and audience interpretation demonstrates that celebrity representation is a collaborative process involving both media producers and consumers.

The Celebrity as a Discourse

Closely related to the celebrity as a representation, Graeme Turner also discusses the concept of celebrity as a "discursive effect," which means that individuals who achieve celebrity status are not just recognised for their personal qualities but are also transformed and shaped by the systems and representations of celebrity culture. This process, known as "celebritisation," involves integrating individuals into a complex representational regime of celebrity, where one's image and identity are reshaped to fit

¹⁷ P. David Marshall, *The Celebrity Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 179.

¹⁸ Marshall, *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, 9-10

¹⁹ Marshall, *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, 9-10, 179.

societal expectations and fantasies. This transformation is not a neutral one; it is deeply embedded in power dynamics and cultural ideologies. Celebrities are often crafted through media narratives that emphasise specific traits, behaviours, and personal stories, which serve to fulfil public expectations and reinforce cultural norms. This discursive construction is highly influential, as it determines not only how celebrities are perceived but also how they navigate their public and private lives.²⁰

Moreover, the implications of celebritisation are multifaceted and can vary widely across different contexts. On one hand, it can provide individuals with significant opportunities for influence and empowerment. For example, celebrities like Beyoncé use their platforms to advocate for social and political causes, leveraging their fame to drive change and support communities. Conversely, the same process can lead to exploitation and objectification, where individuals become commodified and subjected to intense public scrutiny. This can have severe effects on mental health, as evidenced by the struggles faced by celebrities such as Britney Spears.²¹ Ultimately, viewing celebrity as a discursive effect highlights how fame is constructed through intricate societal interactions and media representations, illustrating the ways in which broader cultural dynamics shape and reshape individual identities within the public sphere.

The Celebrity as an Industry

As the celebrity has been objectified as an outcome of the discursive effect, Graeme Turner states that the celebrity is itself a commodity.²² Much like commercial goods, celebrities can be created, promoted, and traded. Turner further explains that the production, marketing, and consumption of celebrities have become integral to the media and entertainment sectors.²³ Celebrities are not just cultural icons but economic entities whose public personas are carefully crafted and monetised. They are developed and maintained primarily for financial gain: their names and images are not only used to promote products related to their fields, such as movies or music, but also a wide range of consumer goods, such as clothing and fragrances. Various sectors of media and entertainment industries use celebrities to draw attention and investment, such as film producers who use stars to attract funding for their films and television programs that feature celebrity guests to boost viewer ratings.²⁴

²⁰ Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 13-14.

²¹ Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 13-14.

²² Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 14.

²³ Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 14.

²⁴ Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 2nd ed., (London: Sage Publications, 2014), 36-37.

For celebrities themselves, their fame is a critical financial asset. Their public image, or “celebrity-commodity,”²⁵ must be strategically managed and developed to maximise their earning potential. As their fame grows, so does their ability to generate income. This management often falls to third parties like managers, agents, or publicists, who have a personal stake in the celebrity’s success because their income is tied to the celebrity’s earnings. Managing a celebrity’s career involves strategic decisions that balance short-term gains with long-term sustainability. Sometimes, agents or managers might push for immediate profits when a celebrity is highly in demand, even if it could potentially harm the celebrity’s long-term career prospects. This is especially relevant in industries with limited longevity, like popular music or sports, where fame can be fleeting.²⁶

Two external parties play a key role in the commodification of the celebrity. First, the media is crucial in maintaining a celebrity’s visibility. Continuous promotion, publicity and media coverage keep celebrities in the public eye, ensuring they remain relevant and marketable. The media also shapes public perception, crafting narratives that can enhance or diminish a celebrity’s brand. Second, audiences and fans are central to the consumption of these celebrity commodities. Fans do not just passively consume; they actively engage with and support the celebrities’ branded personas. Every move, statement and representation by the celebrity becomes part of a broader consumption culture where fans invest emotionally and financially. This fan engagement drives the commercial success of the celebrity’s ventures, from buying endorsed products to attending events and engaging on social media. The interplay between media representation and fan consumption creates a dynamic market where celebrities as commodities continue to thrive and evolve.²⁷

The Celebrity as a Cultural Formation

The last perspective that Turner uses to define celebrity is that of the celebrity as a cultural formation that has a social function. He argues that celebrities are significant cultural and social entities that influence and engage in various aspects of social life.²⁸ In *Understanding Celebrity*, Turner explores several social and cultural functions that celebrities fulfil. One significant function is the creation of para-social interactions, which are one-sided relationships where individuals feel intimately connected to celebrities despite lacking real-life interactions. Originally seen as poor substitutes for

²⁵ Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 14.

²⁶ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 37.

²⁷ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*.

²⁸ Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 14.

real relationships, these interactions are now seen as meaningful and impactful. Para-social interactions can compensate for the weakening of traditional social bonds in modern society, providing a sense of community and emotional support.²⁹

Turner also discusses how celebrities play a crucial role in the formation and negotiation of cultural identities. Celebrity gossip, for instance, serves as a social process through which relationships, identities and cultural norms are discussed, evaluated, and shaped, reinforcing societal values and personal identities. Furthermore, celebrities embody ideals of individualism and democratic values, resonating with themes of personal success and self-expression central to Western culture. They symbolise the ideological connections between consumer capitalism, democracy, and individualism, legitimising the capitalist model of personal success and consumer culture.³⁰ This aligns with Richard Dyer's concept of stars as semiotic systems³¹, which highlights that celebrities function as cultural symbols loaded with meanings that audiences actively interpret. Celebrities thus help society navigate complex issues of personal and social identity by offering models for both individualism and social conformity.³²

Additionally, Turner explores the parallels between celebrity culture and religion.³³ With the decline of traditional religious institutions, celebrity culture has taken on some of their social functions, providing new forms of meaning, community, and social integration in a secular society. Celebrities offer recognition and belonging, performing a role similar to religious figures in providing moral guidance and a sense of community. Celebrity culture fills the void left by the decline of organised religion, establishing new orders of meaning and solidarity.³⁴ Celebrities become symbols through which people seek recognition and belonging, performing a role like that of religious figures in providing moral guidance and a sense of community. As focal points for fan communities and subcultures, celebrities influence social practices, languages, and identities, setting standards and expectations that particularly impact the young, shaping lifestyle choices, aspirations and perceptions of success and happiness.

²⁹ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 27.

³⁰ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 27.

³¹ Dyer, *Stars*.

³² Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 27-28.

³³ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 29.

³⁴ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001), 99.

The Celebrity as a Performative Practice

Another perspective, which may not fit neatly into any of the categories discussed above but arguable encompasses all of them, is the concept of the celebrity as a performative practice, as discussed by Anna Marwick and danah boyd.³⁵ Celebrities are not just passively represented or consumed, they actively perform their personas in ways that engage and interact with the audience, media, and broader cultural narratives. This perspective emphasises the continuous efforts celebrities must undertake to maintain their fan base through performed intimacy, authenticity, and access, which are prominently displayed on social media. Celebrities construct a consumable persona by presenting a seemingly authentic and intimate image, meeting fan expectations and sustaining key relationships. Successful celebrity practice involves creating the illusion of ‘backstage’ access, offering fans the impression of uncensored glimpses into their lives. This performative practice is sustained through the mutual recognition of unequal status between fan and celebrity.³⁶

Celebrity practice involves a set of learned techniques.³⁷ To build and maintain a fandom, celebrities need to constantly interact with fans by making connections and giving back to loyal followers. This involves the affiliative use of cultural markers and symbols, such as specific language, cultural symbols, and conventions, to create a sense of community. Furthermore, celebrities create a sense of intimacy between themselves and their fans. By offering insight into their personal lives, celebrities give fans the idea that they have a close connection, even though it is a parasocial dynamic. Social media suggests that a celebrity might respond, which intensifies fan interaction. Another important aspect is authenticity and sincerity. Fans closely follow celebrities' social media accounts to gain insight into their hidden lives, hoping to catch a glimpse of the uncensored person behind the scenes and they expect celebrities to be honest when sharing private details. However, fans are often unsure whether social media accounts are managed by the celebrities themselves or by their management teams.³⁸

³⁵ Marwick and boyd, *Celebrity Practice on Twitter*.

³⁶ Marwick and boyd, *Celebrity Practice on Twitter*, 139-140.

³⁷ Marwick and boyd, *Celebrity Practice on Twitter*, 141, 144.

³⁸ Marwick and boyd, *Celebrity Practice on Twitter*, 149-150.

1.2. The Popular Music Celebrity

The definition of celebrity discussed so far focuses on celebrities in general. However, the popular music celebrity has certain aspects that are specific to them, as discussed by P. David Marshall in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. According to Marshall, one key aspect of the popular music celebrity is that of authenticity³⁹ – an aspect that has been discussed by Marwick and boyd as well.⁴⁰ In the realm of music, authenticity holds significant importance, placing the popular music performer at the centre of ongoing debates. Performers are judged as authentic based on their ability to convey the music's emotional depth and their personal emotions, creating a bond between the artist and the audience that is rooted in perceived sincerity and emotional truth.⁴¹

However, the advent of recording technology complicates the notion of authenticity. This technology has been instrumental in authenticating individual performances through the continual refinement of sound recording and production techniques. The personal ownership listeners feel when buying records fosters a sense of connection with the music and the performer. Even though technology mediates this relationship, recorded music brings performers and audiences closer, making entertainment more personal and intimate. Recordings are frequently seen as the definitive representation of the music, presenting a polished, perfected version of the artist's work. In contrast, live concerts are often viewed as reproductions of these "authentic" recordings. Audiences frequently notice the limitation in live performances compared to the studio versions, which benefit from advanced editing capabilities that cannot be replicated in the variable acoustics of live venues or by human performers who are susceptible to making errors. This dynamic creates a dual perception of authenticity in music, where both recorded and live performances hold different yet significant places in the audience's experience.⁴²

Despite the potential for mistakes in live performances, concerts offer a unique and powerful form of interaction between artist and audience. Unlike theatrical or cinematic performances, music concerts establish a direct and personal connection, which is central to the live music performance. This direct engagement encourages audience participation, creating ritualistic exchange during performances. Concerts and prior recordings share a symbiotic relationship, where live performances often serve to promote and sustain interest in the artist's previously released music. For fans, concerts

³⁹ Marshall, *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, 205-206.

⁴⁰ Marwick and boyd, *Celebrity Practice on Twitter*.

⁴¹ Marshall, *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, 205-206.

⁴² Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 153.

are less about discovering new music and more about celebrating their existing appreciation. This enhances the significance of both the recordings and the performer, as live concerts bring the recorded music to life, enriching the fan's connection to the artist and their work. At concerts, fans demonstrate their dedication to the artist and their message, turning the event into a communal celebration that transcends mere appreciation of live performance skills.⁴³

Community is another vital element of the popular music celebrity, one that is vividly expressed through the collective reactions of the crowd at concerts. These reactions symbolise a communal celebration of the performer and their music, reinforcing the sense of unity and shared identity among fans. Concerts serve to authenticate this sense of community, strengthening the bond between the performer and the audience. Fans' loyalty, regardless of how they perceive the balance between artifice and authenticity, creates a community centred around the music and identity of the celebrity. This close bond between the artist and their audience defines the essence of the popular music celebrity, making it a distinct and compelling phenomenon in the broader landscape of fame and celebrity culture.⁴⁴

In conclusion, the concept of celebrity, as defined by Turner and elaborated through various perspectives, reveals its multifaceted nature, encompassing representation, discourse, industry, cultural formation, and performative practice. Celebrities are constructed through complex media narratives and societal discourses that shape their public personas and commodify their images. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in the realm of popular music celebrities, where notions of authenticity and community play a critical role. These artists navigate dual perceptions of authenticity through their recorded and live performances, each contributing distinctively to their public image. This interplay underscores how popular music celebrities uniquely bridge entertainment, emotional engagement, and cultural impact, reflecting broader dynamics of fame and media representation.

⁴³ Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 158-159.

⁴⁴ Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 193-195.

2. Fan Culture and Fan Studies

2.1. A Dive into Fan Theories

As previously noted, celebrities cannot exist without fans to “celebrate” them. Mark Duffett explores the history of fans and fan studies, tracing the term ‘fan’ back to late seventeenth-century England, where it was short for ‘fanatic’, meaning a religious zealot.⁴⁵ Over time, the concept of fans has evolved to encompass a wide range of people who engage positively with popular culture and form close connections with texts, images, performances or public figures’ creative works.⁴⁶ This modern view of fans and fandom has been significantly influenced by Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers*⁴⁷, a seminal book that challenged existing stereotypes and laid the foundation for diverse approaches to fan research.⁴⁸ Within fan studies, multiple waves can be distinguished, as explained in *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* by Cornel Sandvoss, Jonathan Gray, and C. Lee Harrington. This book describes three waves of fan studies, each with its own aims, conceptual reference points and methodologies.⁴⁹

The first wave of fan studies focused on issues of power and representation, viewing the consumption of popular mass media as a site for power struggles. Early scholars like John Fiske⁵⁰ and Henry Jenkins⁵¹ portrayed fandom as a tactic of the disempowered, a subversive act against media producers and industries. Fans were seen as marginalised groups who used fandom as a collective strategy to form interpretive communities that resisted the dominant meanings imposed by the “power bloc.” This wave sought to redeem fan activities – such as convention attendance, fan fiction writing and fanzine editing – that had been criticised as pathological, showcasing them instead as creative and productive. Early fan studies defended these communities against ridicule, presenting fans as active and critical participants. In recent years, social media has amplified fans’ voices, allowing them to publicly respond to belittling portrayals, creating more humanising and respectful depictions of fans.⁵²

⁴⁵ Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 28.

⁴⁶ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 48.

⁴⁷ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁸ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 6.

⁴⁹ Cornel Sandvoss, Jonathan Gray, and C. Lee Harrington, *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

⁵⁰ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁵¹ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*.

⁵² Sandvoss et al., *Fandom: Identities and Communities*, 3-5.

The second wave shifted beyond the “incorporation/resistance paradigm’ by focusing on the sociology of consumption, heavily influenced by Pierre Bourdieu’s work⁵³. This wave highlighted the replication of social and cultural hierarchies within fan cultures, examining how fan’s choices and practices reflect their social, cultural, and economic capital. It emphasised that fandom is embedded in existing social conditions rather than being an inherently empowering space. While still concerned with issues of power, inequality and discrimination, second-wave studies suggested that fandom’s interpretative communities continue broader social inequalities. This wave aimed to create a conceptual framework to position and compare specific studies and findings, moving the focus from fans as subversive to understanding the structured nature of fan activities.⁵⁴

The third wave expanded the scope of fan studies to include a diverse range of audiences and the evolving nature of fandom. With the rise of the Internet and mobile media, fan communities migrated online, making fan engagement an integral part of everyday life. This wave explored the intrapersonal pleasures and motivations of fans, examining the relationship between fans and their fan objects. Third-wave studies also addressed broader social, cultural, and economic transformations, aiming to understand modern life through the lens of fan consumption. This approach suggested that fandom is not just an object of study but a means to gain insight into contemporary communication and consumption patterns. It emphasised the importance of studying fans to understand how we relate to ourselves, each other, and mediated texts around us.⁵⁵

In summary, the three waves of fan studies illustrate an evolution from seeing fans as subversive and marginalised to understanding fandom as a complex and pervasive aspect of modern culture.

Fandom and Identity

Fandom plays a crucial role in shaping both personal and group identity, serving as a significant source of self-expression, community, and social belonging. When it comes to personal identity in contemporary society, traditional markers of identity – such as employment, class, marriage, national belonging, age, religion, sexuality and gender – are increasingly unstable.⁵⁶ As Sandvoss et al. argue, fandom has become an essential

⁵³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1984).

⁵⁴ Sandvoss et al., *Fandom: Identities and Communities*, 5-6.

⁵⁵ Sandvoss et al., *Fandom: Identities and Communities*, 6-7.

⁵⁶ Sandvoss et al., *Fandom: Identities and Communities*, 11.

identity resource, providing individuals with a stable and meaningful sense of self in an era of flux.⁵⁷ Fandom involves elements of elements of passionate identification, elevating it beyond a mere hobby and making it integral to the realisation of personal identity.⁵⁸ However, fandom can also involve a complex relationship with cultural identity, as it remains an ‘improper’ identity, based on one’s commitment to something that is seemingly unimportant and ‘trivial’ such as a film, book series or celebrity.⁵⁹ This notion of triviality can lead to societal stigmatisation, where fans might be perceived as obsessive or irrational. Despite this, many fans find immense pride and self-affirmation in their fandoms, often forming subcultures that celebrate their interests.

Group identity is also a crucial aspect of fandom, as fans care about shared values, rituals, and practices. For example, fans of singers and bands highly value attending concerts, where they partake in certain rituals such as fan chants, singing along and screaming. These practices are not just expressions of excitement but are deeply symbolic acts that reinforce the collective identity of the fan group. Mark Duffett explains that this screaming is a legitimate fan practice that offers a form of collective emotional expression and participation. It reflects a deep engagement with the fan object and fosters a sense of unity and belonging, making each fan feel like an integral part of a larger community.⁶⁰ Benedict Anderson’s theory on imagined communities⁶¹ can be aptly applied to fandoms. Fans often form communities that, although dispersed geographically, share a deep sense of connection and common purpose. In modern times, technology even enables fans to transcend physical boundaries, creating a ‘sense of simultaneous, shared popular cultural experience.’⁶² Online platforms like social media, forums and streaming services allow fans to interact, share experiences and participate in global fan events such as streaming parties and virtual concerts.

In this evolving landscape, fandom encompasses a diverse range of participants, each with varying levels of engagement and forms of expression. Duffett conceptualises fandom as a continuum, reflecting different degrees of fan commitment. This

⁵⁷ Sandvoss et al., *Fandom: Identities and Communities*, 11.

⁵⁸ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 60.

⁵⁹ Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xii.

⁶⁰ Mark Duffett, “I Scream Therefore I Fan? Music Audiences and Affective Citizenship,” in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. 2nd ed., ed. Cornell Sandvoss et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 143-153.

⁶¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁶² Berta Chin and Lori Hitchcock Morimoto, “Reimagining the Imagined Community: Online Media Fandoms in the Age of Global Convergence,” in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. 2nd ed., ed. Cornell Sandvoss et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 174.

perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of fandom by considering factors such as the breadth versus depth of interests, varying points of access and various aspects of fan engagement. Making rigid distinctions between minimal, typical, and extreme fans has become less relevant in times where media property is rapidly evolving. As media products grow more interactive and immersive, the line between fans and ordinary viewers has blurred, suggesting that many individuals might be considered fans to some extent. Nonetheless, true fandom still requires a genuine and intense interest or fascination.⁶³ Additionally, the concept of the anti-fan, as described by Jonathan Gray, includes those who actively hate or oppose certain fan objects. These anti-fans can generate significant activity and community dynamics, much like enthusiastic fan communities.⁶⁴ Whether one identifies as a casual fan, an extreme fan or a non-fan is largely a matter of self-identification, which is a central aspect of the personal and cultural processes of fandom.⁶⁵

Fan Practices

When talking about fandom, most people connect it to a set of practices. Fan practices encompass a wide range of activities that reflect both personal and collective engagement with beloved media and celebrities. According to Duffett in *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture*, fan practices are not merely about watching or listening but involve deeper interactions with media texts and performances. Fans immerse themselves in various activities that enhance their connection to the fan object they love, creatively reinterpret it, and actively participate in the culture surrounding it. Duffett categorises these experiences into three main types of pleasures associated with fandom: connection, appropriation, and performance.⁶⁶

One of the core pleasures of fandom is the direct connection fans establish with their idols or the media they adore. This connection manifests in various forms, such as seeking autographs, attending live events, or interacting with celebrities through social media. For fans, these encounters offer a sense of personal bond and intimacy with their heroes. Such interactions often highlight the asymmetry in knowledge and power within the fan-celebrity dynamic, where fans possess extensive knowledge about their idols,

⁶³ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 89-91.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Gray, "Antifandom and the Moral Text: Television Without Pity and Textual Dislike," *The American Behavioral Scientist (Beverly Hills)* 48, no. 7 (March 2005): 841, doi: 10.1177/0002764204273171.

⁶⁵ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 61.

⁶⁶ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 276-277.

while the idols hold the position of power. Meeting a celebrity in person is valued as it allows fans to bridge this gap, gaining deeper insights and creating memorable experiences.⁶⁷ Ferris and Scott describe these interactions as moments where fans view celebrities as “intimate strangers,” feeling a sense of entitlement akin to that of friends or family. This direct engagement, despite its fleeting nature, provides fans with a unique and cherished sense of connection. Many celebrities are not interested in these interactions, but those who generously greet their fans are often celebrated for it.⁶⁸

Fans also find significant pleasure in appropriating and reinterpreting media content, transforming it to fit their creative visions and personal preferences. This practice is evident in activities like writing fan fiction, creating fan art or engaging in detailed analyses for plot spoilers. Fan fiction allows enthusiasts to delve deeper into character arcs, or even alter plot outcomes to suit their personal preferences. This creative engagement not only enhances their connection to the media but also provides a platform for self-expression and imaginative exploration. Similarly, the practice of spoiling—where fans intentionally reveal plot details before official releases—serves as a form of intellectual engagement, allowing fans to demonstrate their predictive skills and insider knowledge. These activities demonstrate fans’ desire not only to consume media but also to shape and influence it, extending their engagement beyond the original narratives. By reworking and expanding upon the source material, fans forge a deeper connection and transform their enjoyment into an active, participatory experience.⁶⁹

Lastly, fan engagement often involves performative elements where fans actively participate rather than passively consume. This includes behaviours like singing along at concerts, shouting catchphrases or reciting movie lines in daily life. Such interactions demonstrate how fans integrate popular culture into their daily lives, finding joy in both overt and subtle forms of participation. Collecting is another key fan activity, encompassing the accumulation of items related to a specific theme or media. Fans might collect albums, merchandise, or unique memorabilia to express their dedication and differentiate themselves. The act of collecting can serve both personal and social functions, from showcasing one’s collection to narrating a personal story through accumulated artifacts. Additionally, blogging and writing fanzines, although fanzines have largely been replaced by blogs, provide platforms for fans to express their creativity and sustain community conversations. Practices like the creation of fanvids, filking and

⁶⁷ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 277-280.

⁶⁸ Kerry Ferris and Scott Harris, *Stargazing: Celebrity, Fame and Social Interaction* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁶⁹ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 280-285.

cosplay showcase the creative and interactive ways fans connect with media. These activities highlight the active and dynamic nature of fan engagement, transforming media consumption into a meaningful, shared experience.⁷⁰

Fan practices illustrate the multifaceted ways in which fans engage with media, deriving pleasure from connection, appropriation, and performance. These practices go beyond mere consumption, involving deep personal and social interactions with media texts and their creators. Collectively, these practices underscore the active role of fans in transforming and enriching their interactions with the media they love, turning consumption into a vibrant and participatory culture.

Economic and Social Impact of Fandom

The influence of fans extends well beyond the cultural and creative realms into economic and social spheres. The economic impact of fandom is substantial. Merchandising plays a key role, encompassing the sales of official products from popular franchises like Star Wars and Harry Potter, as well as fan-created goods and collectibles sold on platforms like Etsy. Concerts, particularly those by mega-stars or bands with large fan bases, are another major economic driver. For instance, the Glastonbury Festival, held annually in Somerset, England, attracted more than 140.000 attendees in 2023, generating approximately £168 million for UK businesses through spending on local hotels, restaurants and other services.⁷¹ Additionally, film tourism, where fans visit locations featured in their favourite movies or TV shows, injects millions into local economies. Iconic sites like the Harry Potter studios in the UK or New Zealand's Hobbiton attract visitors worldwide, generating substantial tourism revenue and creating jobs.⁷² Overall, fandoms contribute to a vibrant economic ecosystem through diverse streams of revenue and extensive economic ripple effects.

Fans are consistent and predictable consumers, often referred to as 'ideal consumers' due to their loyalty and eagerness to purchase tickets, merchandise, and recordings.⁷³ Businesses capitalise on this, giving rise to the fan economy. According to Aibo Li, this

⁷⁰ Duffett; *Understanding Fandom*, 296-315.

⁷¹ Glastonbury Festivals, "Economic Impact Summary 2023," last modified 2023, accessed on June 2, 2024. <https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/information/educational-resources/economic-impact-summary-2023/>.

⁷² Sue Beeton, "Understanding Film-induced Tourism," *Tourism Analysis* 11, no. 3 (October 2006): 181-188, doi: 10.3727/108354206778689808.

⁷³ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 56.; Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), as cited in Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 29.

economic model thrives on interactions between fans and the entities they follow, generating income through engagement, loyalty, and word-of-mouth marketing. Centred on emotional capital, the fan economy uses fan communities for marketing, with consumers leading the process. Businesses tap into fan sentiments to enhance the emotional value of brands or individuals. As fan bases expand, the fan economy's market influence grows, evolving from supporting celebrities through direct purchases to encompassing dedicated services like fan support and communication platforms. The internet has broadened this economy's reach, enabling businesses to stimulate fan consumption with customised services, thus creating new opportunities, boosting economic development, and enhancing corporate marketing and production efficiency.⁷⁴

Fandom also profoundly impacts social structures, creating communities that foster connection and a sense of belonging. These tight-knit communities offer social support, encourage friendships, and cultivate a shared identity centred around common interests. Beyond personal connections, fans significantly shape popular culture. They often create and sustain vibrant subcultures, fostering communities centred around shared interests in media, sports, or celebrities. These subcultures drive trends in for example fashion and beauty, as seen with the widespread adoption of K-Pop culture.⁷⁵ Language and social behaviour also evolve within fan communities, with phrases and expressions from fandoms entering mainstream usage. For example, terms like cosplaying⁷⁶, binge-watching⁷⁷ and spoiler alert⁷⁸ are now widely used and even included in online dictionaries.

Fans also exert significant social influence by channelling their enthusiasm into activism and addressing broader societal issues. They often unite to advocate for changes in media and support various social causes, such as campaigning for the renewal of TV shows or engaging in social justice initiatives.⁷⁹ Henry Jenkins highlights how fans, when

⁷⁴ Aibo Li, "The Impact of the Fan Economy on Market Operation: A Review," *Proceedings of the 2022 2nd International Conference on Economic Development and Business Culture (ICEDBC 2022)* (December 2022): 1209-1210. doi: 10.2991/978-94-6463-036-7_179.

⁷⁵ Chenyue Liu, "The Research on the Influence of KPOP (Korean Popular Music) Culture on Fans," *The International Conference on Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies* 4, no. 1 (May 2023) 65. doi: 10.54254/2753-7064/4/20220177.

⁷⁶ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "cosplay," last modified August 2, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cosplay>.

⁷⁷ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "binge-watch," last modified July 30, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/binge-watch>.

⁷⁸ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "spoiler alert," last modified July 30, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spoiler%20alert>.

⁷⁹ Duffett, *Understanding Fandom*, 454.

organised into communities, can exercise political power.⁸⁰ He introduces concepts like ‘narrative activism’, where fans impact the content and direction of media narratives in real time by using their collective voice.⁸¹ Another form of activism, known as ‘Avatar activism’ involves using popular culture icons and symbols for political expression and protest. This type of activism gained prominence in February 2010 when activists painted themselves as characters from the film *Avatar* to protest the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. This striking use of popular culture captured international attention and sparked widespread discussion.⁸² Fans’ ability to influence market dynamics and participate in activism underscores the broader significance of fandom in both economic growth and societal change.

2.2. Music Fandoms

Music fandoms are vibrant, multifaceted communities united by their passion for specific artists or bands. While they share common traits with other types of fandoms, music fandoms have distinct characteristics shaped by the nature of music and its consumption. Nancy Baym, in her book *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection*, explores the evolution of music fandoms and the impact of digital media on the relationship between musicians and their audiences.⁸³

Traditionally, the relationship between musicians and fans was built through live performances, fan letters and in-person events like album signings.⁸⁴ These interactions, often one-time events, created a formal dynamic where musicians were the focal point and fans were primarily passive observers. In concert settings, for example, the physical setup – with performers on stage and fans in the audience – reinforced this power dynamic, though fans could influence performances through their reactions.⁸⁵ The advent of digital media has revolutionised these dynamics by offering new platforms and modes of interaction. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook allow musicians to engage with fans continuously and more personally. These digital

⁸⁰ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

⁸¹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 53.

⁸² Henry Jenkins, “Avatar Activism and Beyond,” *Pop Junctions: Reflections on Entertainment, Pop Culture, Activism, Media Literacy, Fandom and More* (blog), September 21, 2010, accessed on June 30, 2024, https://henryjenkins.org/2010/09/avatar_activism_and_beyond.html.

⁸³ Nancy Baym, *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

⁸⁴ Baym, *Playing to the Crowd*, 139.

⁸⁵ Baym, *Playing to the Crowd*, 142-143.

interactions, unlike concerts, are not confined to specific times or places and offer varied forms of engagement, such as likes, comments and direct messages. Despite these changes, the relationships on these platforms remain asymmetrical, with musicians able to follow and interact with fans more selectively than fans can with them.⁸⁶

Music fandoms are characterised by deep emotional investment. Fans form profound attachments to artists, often viewing them as integral parts of their lives. This emotional connection drives fans to follow every release, attend concerts and engage in various fan activities. The immediacy of social media allows fans to provide instant feedback, fostering a sense of closeness and direct involvement with the artists' work. Fans offer unwavering support during both public and private phases of an artist's career, including times of personal downtime or creative lulls. This continuous engagement nurtures a powerful, reciprocal relationship where artists draw inspiration and motivation from their fans' enthusiasm and loyalty. However, this emotional investment can also lead to intense scrutiny and criticism, as fans feel personally invested in the artists' actions and decisions. The personal nature of social media interactions magnifies both the positive and negative aspects of this relationship, highlighting the complex dynamics of modern music fandoms.⁸⁷

Beyond emotional ties, music fandoms significantly impact the economic landscape of the music industry. Fans contribute to artists' financial success through purchasing music, attending concerts, and buying merchandise. Their engagement extends beyond direct purchases; fans add value to intangible items, such as autographs, by imbuing them with personal significance.⁸⁸ The creative output of fans, including remixes, covers and fan art, often gains substantial popularity, further promoting the artists' work. Fans also play a crucial role in marketing, acting as unofficial promoters who spread the word about new releases and concerts. They maintain extensive archives and fan sites that preserve and celebrate the music, contributing to the cultural and economic sustainability of the industry. This enthusiastic participation not only supports artists financially but also fosters a vibrant, interconnected community that enhances the overall musical experience.⁸⁹

Despite their vibrant nature, music fandoms face significant challenges. The ease of communication on social media can result in both positive and negative interactions. While fans provide valuable insights and encouragement, the anonymity of the internet

⁸⁶ Baym, *Playing to the Crowd*, 157-164.

⁸⁷ Baym, *Playing to the Crowd*, 165-169.

⁸⁸ Baym, *Playing to the Crowd*, 82-84.

⁸⁹ Baym, *Playing to the Crowd*, 79-80, 123.

can foster harmful criticism and harassment. Musicians must navigate the tension between maintaining public personas and protecting their privacy, balancing accessibility with personal boundaries.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the commercialisation of music fandoms raises ethical concerns about fairness and sustainability. Fans' deep emotional investments can be exploited for economic gain, highlighting the need for ethical practices that recognise and fairly reward fans' contributions, both monetarily and socially.⁹¹ Ensuring that fans' efforts are valued is crucial for maintaining a healthy and supportive relationship between artists and their audiences, fostering a sustainable and ethical music industry.

In conclusion, fandom plays a crucial role in shaping personal and group identities, serving as a source of self-expression and community. Fan studies have evolved from viewing fans as subversive consumers to recognising them as active participants in cultural production, economic activity, and social advocacy. Music fandoms exemplify these trends with deep emotional investment and significant economic contributions. The shift from traditional fan interactions to dynamic digital engagement has reshaped the relationship between musicians and audiences. Fans form profound attachments to artists, support them financially and promote their work, enhancing the musical experience.

⁹⁰ Baym, *Playing to the Crowd*, 166-169.

⁹¹ Baym, *Playing to the Crowd*, 82-83.

3. Research Method

The previous two chapters have explored how celebrities can be studied, the characteristics of fandoms and the intricate relationship between the two. By focusing on popular music celebrities and their fandoms, these chapters provide theoretical foundations essential for understanding the dynamics between celebrity personas and fan interactions. Building on these theories, this research conducts a case study on popular music artist Taylor Swift and her fans, aiming to answer the question: What strategies does Taylor Swift use to obtain such a large and devoted fandom? The theoretical frameworks discussed earlier — celebrity as representation and celebrity as performative practice — are pivotal for analysing how Swift's persona is crafted and maintained across different media platforms. These frameworks also help to understand how fans interact with and contribute to the construction of her celebrity image.

This study's methodology draws inspiration from Caitlin E. Lawson, a professor in Communication and Media Studies at Emmanuel College in Boston and her lesson plan "Stars as Texts: Analyzing Celebrities Across Platforms."⁹² Lawson's approach revisits two key definitions of celebrity. The first, from Graeme Turner, views celebrities as representations, emphasising how they are constructed and discussed across various platforms.⁹³ The second definition, from Marwick and boyd, considers celebrity as a performative practice, focusing on how celebrities gain and maintain popularity through deliberate self-presentation and interaction with the public and media.⁹⁴ Building on these definitions, Lawson contends that celebrities are collections of texts, composed of photos, interviews, social media posts and other forms of media. This multiplicity of representations makes celebrity personas inherently intertextual, with their identity and image being continuously constructed and reconstructed through various media texts and public performances.⁹⁵

Focusing on Taylor Swift, this research will specifically examine the media texts that construct her persona. Drawing on P. David Marshall's concept of the celebrity as a text with three levels,⁹⁶ this research will analyse primary, secondary, and tertiary texts to understand how Swift's public image is created and sustained. Primary texts include Swift's own content, such as her music, merchandise, and performances. Secondary texts involve media coverage, such as news articles and commentary. Tertiary texts

⁹² Lawson, "Stars as Texts."

⁹³ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*.

⁹⁴ Marwick and boyd, *Celebrity Practice on Twitter*.

⁹⁵ Lawson, "Stars as Texts," 2.

⁹⁶ Marshall, *The Celebrity Culture Reader*.

encompass fan-generated content, including fan accounts and social media discussions. A selection of representative moments from Swift's career will be analysed. These moments are chosen based on their significance and how they distinguish Swift from other artists. The criteria for selecting these moments include their media coverage, fan engagement and cultural and/or economic significance.

This intertextual approach emphasises how diverse types of texts interact to create a cohesive and dynamic celebrity persona that is both desirable and marketable. This method not only reveals the deliberate construction of Swift's public image but also provides insights into the reciprocal relationship between Swift and her audience. It enables an exploration of how Swift's persona evolves in response to fan engagement and how her fan's active involvement contributes to the continuous reconstruction of her celebrity identity. This comprehensive analysis aims to provide a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics that sustain and enhance Swift's popularity and influence. Through this approach, the study will identify the unique strategies and interactions that set Swift apart from other artists, offering valuable insights into the mechanisms of contemporary celebrity culture.

4. Case Study: Taylor Swift and the Swifties

4.1. Primary Texts

4.1.1. Release of New Music

A Master Reinventor

Taylor Swift's approach to releasing new music is a masterclass in strategic planning, personal engagement, and artistic reinvention. Her career, spanning over roughly two decades, is marked by a series of meticulously crafted album releases that showcase her versatility as an artist. With eleven studio albums, Swift has continuously evolved her sound, moving from country roots in her early work to pop, rock and indie-folk.⁹⁷ Each new album release is not just a collection of songs but an entirely new chapter in her artistic journey and a reinvention of her public persona.

There have been two significant shifts in Swift's music style. The first moved her from 'Country Princess Era' – including her debut album, *Fearless*, *Speak Now* and *Red* –, to full-on 'Pop Queen' with *1989*, later followed by *reputation* and *Lover*. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the second shift occurred, transforming her into an indie-folk storyteller with *folklore* and *evermore*. Her most recent albums, *Midnights* and *The Tortured Poets Department*, have been more genre-blended while still heavily relying on pop elements. This constant evolution prevents stagnation, keeps her fanbase engaged and attracts new listeners. Fans eagerly anticipate what Swift will do next, knowing that each album will bring something fresh and exciting. This anticipation is a key element of her enduring appeal and commercial success.

Each era in Taylor Swift's career is accompanied by a new visual and stylistic identity, reflecting her growth and creative exploration. For instance, the album *1989*, named after her birth year, symbolises a rebirth of her image and artistry as she fully embraced the pop genre. The album is infused with 80s synth-pop elements⁹⁸ and has an urban, hipster aesthetic that reflects her life in New York City. Themes of freedom, friendship and shaking off criticism are central, a reflection of the immense popularity Swift gained during this time, as well as the scrutiny she faced.⁹⁹ The album cover features a polaroid-

⁹⁷ Gaston Franssen, "Policing the celebrity of Taylor Swift: introduction," *Celebrity Studies* 13, no. 1 (February 2022), 90.

⁹⁸ Extratv [@extratv], "Taylor Swift Talks '1989,' Takes our Rapid-Fire Quiz on Her Favorite Things," YouTube video, 2:54, October 29, 2014, accessed on July 20, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXeytWRS1so>.

⁹⁹ Raisa Bruner, "Taylor Swift's '1989' is Back and Better Than Ever," *Time*, August 8, 2024, accessed on July 20, 2024, <https://time.com/6328790/taylor-swift-1989-2/>.

style photo with a sepia filter, enhancing its nostalgic 80s vibe and Swift's style – including iconic white sunglasses, sequined outfits and a chic bob haircut – embodied a cool, modern look.

A few albums later, Swift introduced *Lover*, ushering in a more feminine and romantic era that celebrated love in all its forms. The aesthetic of *Lover* was characterised by pastel colours and butterfly motifs, with Swift herself adopting a vibrant style with blue dip-dyed hair, coloured nails, and playful outfits. This era also marked a period of political growth for Swift, as she became more vocal in advocating for gay rights and encouraging young people to vote.¹⁰⁰ Each era not only showcases Swift's versatility as an artist but also creates a unique, immersive experience for the audience, continually reinforcing her dynamic presence in the music industry.

A Personal Storyteller

Taylor Swift's songwriting is characterised by personal storytelling and autobiographical elements that resonate deeply with her audience. Her lyrics often draw from her own experiences, relationships, and emotions, creating a sense of authenticity and relatability.¹⁰¹ Her lyrics are rich with specific details that vividly paint the scenes and emotions she describes. For instance, in "All Too Well (10 Minute Version) (Taylor's Version)," she recounts a past relationship with such precision that it feels like flipping through the pages of a diary set to music. These meticulous details – like the mention of the season, her age at the time and a specific scarf – bring her songs to life and create a profound emotional impact. Swift's willingness to reveal not just the highlights of her experiences but also her struggles and insecurities deepens this authenticity. By being open and vulnerable, she not only fuels her songwriting but also enhances her overall public persona, making her music feel like a personal conversation with each listener, fostering a strong, intimate connection with her audience.

Swift's personal storytelling has cultivated a deep connection with her fanbase, who often find parallels between her experiences and their own lives. As listeners often find reflections of their own lives in her experiences. As Swift has grown, so have her themes, allowing her fans to mature alongside her. Her early albums, such as *Fearless* and *Speak Now*, centre on teenage experiences and fairy-tale romances, capturing youthful idealism. In contrast, albums like *Red* and *1989* delve into the complexities of adult

¹⁰⁰ Simone Driessen, "Campaign Problems: How Fans React to Taylor Swift's Controversial Political Awakening," *American Behavioral Scientist* 66, no. 8 (2022): 1062-1063.

¹⁰¹ Brown, "Identification and "Authentic" American Girlhood on Taylor Swift Fan Forums."

relationships and the challenges of fame, while *reputation* addresses themes of reinvention and resilience amidst public scrutiny. This evolution reflects her own life stages and allows her music to resonate with listeners at different points in their own lives. With *Lover*, Swift returned to a more optimistic tone, celebrating love in its many forms. While this may seem like a return to the youthful exuberance of her earlier work, many fans who have grown up with her find a nostalgic echo in this music, reflecting their own transitions from adolescence to adulthood.¹⁰² By consistently sharing her personal growth and emotional experiences, Swift creates a relatable narrative that invites fans to see themselves in her stories, deepening their connection through shared experiences and mutual evolution.

The Release Process

When Taylor Swift releases a new album, the process unfolds in carefully orchestrated phases, each marked by strategic announcements and promotional efforts designed to build anticipation and maximise impact. She effectively uses various media platforms to engage her fans, ensuring they feel included in the journey. A key element of this strategy is the "Secret Sessions," exclusive listening events where Swift personally invites select fans to her homes or other private venues for an intimate preview of her new music.¹⁰³ These gatherings foster a strong sense of community and belonging, as Swift engages in personal conversations with attendees, making them feel like valued participants in the album's creation. This personal touch is a testament to Swift's commitment to building a close, meaningful bond with her fanbase.

Prior an album's official release, Swift often teases her audience with cryptic posts and subtle hints, gradually building anticipation. One of the most intriguing aspects of her album releases is the use of "Easter eggs" – hidden clues and references embedded in her music, videos, interviews and even her clothing and jewellery. Swift explains that these easter eggs are a way of 'expanding the experience.'¹⁰⁴ This playful interaction with her audience not only generates buzz but also deepens the connection between Swift and her fans, who eagerly engage in the hunt for these hidden messages. For example, in August 2017, Swift erased all content from her social media accounts, sparking widespread speculation and drawing significant media attention. This suspense

¹⁰² Rossman, "Remediating the Self."

¹⁰³ Taylor Swift [@TaylorSwift], "The reputation Secret Sessions," YouTube video, 2:45, accessed on July 20, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGOmPmlLndU>.

¹⁰⁴ Swifties Land [@SwiftiesLandVideo], "Taylor Swift reveals Easter eggs about TS7," YouTube video, 6:55, May 9, 2019, accessed on July 20, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3YGh73XQU8>.

culminated in the release of a cryptic snake video, which fans quickly began sharing and analysing. This post, along with carefully timed hashtag campaigns, created a sense of anticipation and unity among fans, who adapted their own social media profiles to match the emerging themes of the upcoming album, *reputation*.¹⁰⁵

The announcement of a new album is typically accompanied by the release of a lead single, which sets the tone for the upcoming project. Swift's management team cleverly integrates fan engagement into the campaign, leveraging fan creativity across various social media platforms to enhance promotional efforts. For the premiere of the “Look What You Made Me Do” music video, fans were encouraged to participate in a collective viewing event, with hashtags and social media challenges driving widespread participation. Her team used coordinated efforts to maximise YouTube views within the first 24 hours, breaking previous records and reaching more than 30 million views. The campaign extended to platforms like TikTok and incorporated place-specific activities, such as hidden phone booths in London, which further energised the fanbase. Swift's management closely monitors fan responses, adapting their strategies to keep the campaign dynamic and responsive to fan culture.¹⁰⁶

Swift has also upended the traditional release strategy by surprising fans with unannounced albums, as she did in 2020 with *folklore* in July and *evermore* in December. These surprise drops generated massive online buzz, with fans and media outlets scrambling to react and analyse the new material. Following these surprise releases, or any other album release, Swift continues to build excitement by frequently releasing additional singles, music videos and behind-the-scenes content. She further amplifies the impact through strategic collaborations with streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music, offering exclusive playlists, behind-the-scenes footage and artist commentary.¹⁰⁷ These partnerships often include unique album-related experiences, such as spatial audio versions, lyric videos, and curated listening sessions, keeping fans deeply engaged and the album in the spotlight.

After an album's release, Swift ensures it stays in the spotlight through a variety of strategic efforts. She continues to engage with her fans through promotional events, interviews, and live performances. To keep the momentum going, Swift often releases

¹⁰⁵ Linda Ryan Bengtsson and Jessica Edlom, “Commodifying participation through choreographed engagement: the Taylor Swift case,” *Arts and the Market* 13, no. 2 (2023), 71.

¹⁰⁶ Bengtsson and Edlom, “Commodifying participation,” 71-72.

¹⁰⁷ @taylornation, “We’re the drunk girl at the party who’s telling you to pre-add #TSmidnightTS and stream the new Quill Pen, Fountain Pen, and Glitter Pen Songs playlists on @applemusic,” Instagram post, October 14, 2022, accessed on July 20, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/CjrmD1asRKK/?img_index=1.

deluxe editions of her albums, which may include bonus tracks, alternate artwork, or behind-the-scenes footage, enticing fans to revisit the album. For example, *Midnights (3am Edition)*, released seven months after the original album, featured a collaboration with Ice Spice on "Karma," an updated version of "Snow On The Beach" featuring more Lana Del Rey and a completely new track, "Hits Different."¹⁰⁸ She also typically announces a tour, turning the album's themes into immersive, large-scale concert experiences that sustain its popularity. Additionally, Swift often follows up with documentaries or concert films, such as *Miss Americana* on Netflix or *Folklore: The Long Pond Studio Sessions* on Disney+, offering deeper insights into the album's creation and keeping fans engaged long after the initial release. She also collaborates with other artists or drops remixes of her singles, introducing her music to new audiences and keeping it relevant on the charts.¹⁰⁹ This comprehensive approach not only solidifies Swift's position as a cultural icon but also exemplifies how artists can innovate within the music industry to build enduring fan loyalty and maintain relevance over time.

4.1.2. Merchandise

Physical Music Copies

In a music industry increasingly dominated by digital streaming, selling physical copies of albums presents a significant challenge. Taylor Swift, however, has navigated this landscape with remarkable skill, employing a range of innovative strategies to ensure the success of her physical music sales. Her approach to selling physical copies is a masterclass in leveraging nostalgia, exclusivity, and fan engagement.

To appeal to collectors and enthusiasts, Swift releases her albums in a variety of physical formats, including vinyl, CD, and cassette. This diverse offering caters to different tastes and helps boost sales in an era where digital streaming predominates. In addition to the standard releases, Swift often introduces deluxe editions featuring exclusive content such as extra tracks, artwork, and personal notes. For example, the *Lover* album has four deluxe variants, each offering a unique set of extras. These special editions include bonus audio memos from Taylor's songwriting sessions, a selection of her journal entries, handwritten lyrics, archived photos, a poster, blank journal pages and a lyric

¹⁰⁸ @taylorswift, "Um. SO much to tell you," Instagram post, May 24, 2023, accessed on July 20, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/CsoinmFOxNa/?img_index=1.

¹⁰⁹ @taylorswift, "Jack's version of 'sexy baby' is 'art bro' and we sincerely hope it confuses just as many people," Instagram post, November 7, 2022, accessed on July 20, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkrJeKjOPPy/>.

book.¹¹⁰ This approach of deluxe and limited-edition releases has become a popular tactic to counter the dominance of streaming services.¹¹¹ These special editions, marketed as collector's items, counter the dominance of streaming services by enhancing their appeal and encouraging fans to purchase physical copies.

Swift's keen ability to connect emotionally with her fans is especially evident in the deluxe editions of *Lover*. These editions feature intimate elements like handwritten notes and diary entries, thoughtfully crafted to forge a deeper emotional bond between Swift and her fans. These personal touches are designed to create a sense of intimacy and closeness, allowing fans to feel as though they are getting a glimpse into Swift's private world. They evoke a powerful sense of nostalgia, taking fans on a journey back to earlier stages of Swift's career. This connection to her past not only reinforces their sense of personal history with her music but also enhances the overall emotional impact of the album. The inclusion of blank journal pages in the *Lover* deluxe editions is particularly interactive, inviting fans to write their own entries. Rather than simply consuming the content, fans are encouraged to contribute their own thoughts and reflections. By writing their own entries, fans create a unique connection to the album's themes, making the physical copy a more significant and meaningful artifact.¹¹²

Swift's marketing and promotional strategies significantly enhance the allure of physical copies, turning each release into a highly desired collectible. To motivate fans to purchase every deluxe or limited edition, Swift creates variants that ensure fans will miss out on exclusive content if they do not collect them all.¹¹³ Through social media and her promotional team, Taylor Nation, Swift taps into the popular fan practice of collecting, suggesting that owning all four versions of *Lover* is essential.¹¹⁴ This approach creates a sense of urgency and exclusivity, driving fans to acquire every edition to complete their collection and experience the full spectrum of what Swift has to offer. Taking this tactic to the next level, Swift's approach is exemplified by albums like *folklore*, which features eight distinct variants. Unlike the *Lover* deluxe editions, these variants differ only in cover design and colour and do not include additional tracks or content. This minimalist variation strategy further deepens the allure of collecting, as fans are enticed to seek out every edition solely for its unique visual appeal.

¹¹⁰ Taylor Swift, "Collect all 4 deluxe versions of #Lover!," Facebook video, August 27, 2019, accessed on July 22, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2538138576206184>.

¹¹¹ Rossman, "Remediating the Self," 1.3.

¹¹² Rossman, "Remediating the Self."

¹¹³ Rossman, "Remediating the Self," 1.3.

¹¹⁴ Rossman, "Remediating the Self," 2.1.

To enhance the exclusivity of these special editions, they are strategically limited in availability. Often, these editions are only offered for a short window of time, such as “available for 48 hours,”¹¹⁵, or in restricted quantities, indicated by phrases like “while supplies last.”¹¹⁶ Additionally, some editions are made available only through specific retailers, such as the “Target Exclusive Lavender Deluxe Edition.”¹¹⁷ This limited availability creates a sense of urgency, compelling fans to purchase quickly to ensure they do not miss out. However, Swift's approach has faced criticism. For example, when she first released *The Tortured Poets Department*, fans rushed to preorder the vinyl, only for Swift to later announce a new edition that included a bonus track. The staggered announcements of new editions led to frustration among fans who had already placed preorders before learning about the additional versions. This situation forced fans to place multiple orders to obtain each edition, incurring extra shipping costs each time.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, despite being marketed as “limited editions,” some of these special versions reappeared for sale after their initial release, contributing to fan dissatisfaction.¹¹⁹ Despite this backlash, the appeal of these variants remains strong. Dedicated fans, particularly long-time supporters with disposable income, continue to buy and collect these editions. For many, the ability to own multiple CD or vinyl variants of Taylor Swift's albums reflects their deep loyalty and appreciation for her music.¹²⁰

Apparel and Collectibles

Taylor Swift employs similar tactics with her merchandise, creating a sense of scarcity, exclusivity, and wide appeal. To maximise the impact, she strategically ties merchandise drops to significant events like album releases, tours, or special announcements. This timing ensures that fans are already excited and more likely to purchase items as part of

¹¹⁵ @taylornation, “As the time until #TSMidnightTS disappears, so will your chance to get these Special Edition vinyl with photos signed by the mastermind herself...,” Instagram post, October 12, 2022, accessed on July 22, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjmXzzNA4Wf/>.

¹¹⁶ @taylornation, “She gave so many sign...ed copies of #TSMidnightTS,” Instagram post, October 7, 2022, accessed on July 22, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjZfg6MgW2F/>.

¹¹⁷ @taylornation, “If we like it... we’ll just grab it in a different color,” Instagram post, September 13, 2022, accessed on July 22, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cicq8jXOnyE/?img_index=3.

¹¹⁸ Erin Kayata, “Taylor Swift keeps releasing different vinyl editions of ‘The Tortured Poets Department.’ Is this wasteful?,” *Northeastern Global News*, April 17, 2024, accessed on July 22, 2024, <https://news.northeastern.edu/2024/04/17/taylor-swift-vinyl-records/>.

¹¹⁹ @taylornation, “#TSTTPD Special Edition Albums are back for 24 hours!,” Instagram post, June 4, 2024, accessed on July 22, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C7zaDO1RsHY/>.

¹²⁰ Julia MacCary, “Taylor Swift Super-Collectors: Meet the Fans Buying Every ‘Tortured Poets Department’ Edition, No Matter the Cost,” *Variety*, June 23, 2024, accessed on July 22, 2024, <https://variety.com/2024/music/news/taylor-swift-fans-vinyl-variants-tortured-poets-1236044111/>.

their overall experience. Each album cycle is accompanied by a themed collection of merchandise that visually and thematically aligns with the album's content. For instance, with *The Tortured Poets Department*, which features a “dark academia” aesthetic, Swift leaned into the “department” aspect by offering items like a journal, fountain pen and notepad, all reflecting the album's style. This thematic consistency enhances the fan experience, making the merchandise feel like a natural extension of the album's artistic vision.

A key aspect of Swift's approach is the clever use of limited availability. Merchandise drops are often time-sensitive or produced in limited quantities, which creates a sense of urgency among fans. This scarcity not only drives immediate sales but also enhances the perceived value of the items, as owning them becomes a symbol of dedication and exclusivity within the fan community. For example, the original “cardigan” from her *folklore* era, released in limited numbers, quickly became a must-have for fans. This overwhelming demand led Swift to release additional cardigan variations for *folklore*, as well as for *Red (Taylor's Version)*, *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)*, *1989 (Taylor's Version)* and *The Tortured Poets Department*. These releases have turned the cardigan into an iconic piece of Taylor Swift merchandise, beloved across multiple album cycles. Fans frequently share their purchases on social media, further amplifying the exclusivity and buzz around these items.¹²¹

Swift's merchandise offerings are also designed to be inclusive, catering to a wide range of fans. Her global reach ensures that fans from around the world can access her merchandise through her seven official websites (covering regions like Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Southeast Asia, the United Kingdom, and the United States). With online platforms and international shipping options, geographical barriers are minimised, allowing her to maintain a broad and diverse fan base. Moreover, by offering a variety of products at different price points – from high-end collector's items like jackets and bags to more affordable options like t-shirts and keychains – Swift ensures that fans with varying budgets can engage with her brand. This inclusivity is further supported by the diversity of products available, ranging from apparel and accessories to home goods and digital downloads, allowing fans to find something that fits their personal style and preferences.

¹²¹ Taylor swift superfan account [@swiftpedia], “my biggest flex is I own all the taylor swift cardigans,” X (formerly Twitter), December 27, 2023, accessed on August 2 2024, <https://x.com/swiftpedia/status/1739931434985652487>.

4.1.3. Live Performances

Taylor Swift's live performances are a cornerstone of her career, playing a pivotal role in building and maintaining her massive, devoted fanbase. Whether on radio shows, at festivals, award ceremonies or during her meticulously planned world tours, Swift consistently demonstrates a deep understanding of how to forge meaningful connections with her audience. Her concerts are much more than a series of songs; they are meticulously crafted spectacles that create unforgettable experiences for her fans. These shows are characterised by elaborate set designs, multiple costume changes, and unexpected surprises, making each concert feel unique and memorable, encouraging fans to attend multiple shows across a tour. A prime example of this is The Eras Tour, launched following the release of her album *Midnights*. This tour is not merely a promotion of her latest work but a comprehensive celebration of her entire career, showcasing how Swift masterfully creates memorable concert experiences that resonate deeply with her audience.

What It is Like at the Eras Tour

The Eras Tour is designed as a celebration of Taylor Swift's entire discography, revisiting various "eras" that her fans have loved over the years. Each segment of the concert is dedicated to a different album, allowing fans to experience the evolution of her music and persona in one grand event. This format taps into the deep emotional connections that fans have with specific albums, often linked to significant periods in their lives. By revisiting each era, Swift offers fans a nostalgic journey through her artistic evolution, allowing them to relive cherished memories and creating a powerful, shared emotional experience. The tour is a tribute to the enduring relationship between Swift and her fans, and its structure reflects the deep connection she has cultivated with her audience over the years.

Swift's performances are more than just a showcase of her music; they are immersive experiences that draw fans into her world. The Eras Tour is particularly known for its elaborate stage design, intricate costumes, and thematic coherence. Each era is brought to life with specific visuals, setlists and choreography that reflect the themes and aesthetics of the corresponding album. For instance, during the *Red* segment, Swift dons a red, sparkling outfit while singing "All Too Well (Ten Minute Version) (Taylor's Version)." As she sings about falling autumn leaves, the stadium is showered with leaf-shaped

confetti, perfectly complementing the song's nostalgic atmosphere.¹²² This diligence creates an immersive experience, making the performances a rich, sensory experience that goes beyond just the music.

In addition to the visual and thematic elements, Swift excels at making her concerts highly interactive, fostering a deep sense of engagement with her fans. She incorporates various interactive elements, such as encouraging the audience to sing along, hold up lighted bracelets or participate in specific choreographed actions. During the song “Fearless,” for example, fans join Swift in forming hearts with their hands, a gesture that intensifies the communal atmosphere and strengthens the bond between Swift and her audience.¹²³ These interactive moments make fans feel like active participants in the show, further enhancing the shared experience and reinforcing the sense of community among her followers.

Swift’s ability to connect with her audience on a personal level is another defining feature of her performances. Between songs, she often shares personal anecdotes, expresses heartfelt gratitude, and speaks directly to her fans, making them feel included and valued. At The Eras Tour, Swift expressed her deep appreciation by saying:

“This has been the most extraordinary experience of my entire life, being on this tour, getting to share these moments with you. I know you’re like supposed to play it cool, you’re supposed to be like “aw I like you guys a little bit,” but genuinely this has meant more to me than anything I’ve ever done or been a part of in my life, this tour.”¹²⁴

Interactions like these make the show feel more intimate despite the large venues, deepening the emotional connection between Swift and her fans. Additionally, Swift makes a point of recognizing individual fans during her performances, sometimes calling them out by name or acknowledging them from social media interactions.¹²⁵ This level of fan recognition builds a sense of community and belonging among her audience, who feel seen and appreciated by their idol.

One of the most anticipated aspects of The Eras Tour is the inclusion of surprise songs that vary from show to show. This element of unpredictability creates a unique experience for each concert and encourages fans to attend multiple shows or closely

¹²² *Taylor Swift | The Eras Tour (Taylor’s Version)*, directed by Sam Wrench (Taylor Swift Productions; Silent House Productions, 2023), 01:31:40.

¹²³ *Taylor Swift | The Eras Tour (Taylor’s Version)*, 00:25:59.

¹²⁴ *Taylor Swift | The Eras Tour (Taylor’s Version)*, 00:43:07.

¹²⁵ Wigconicc [@wigconicc], “HER EYESIGHT IS AMAZING,” TikTok video, 00:08, July 26, 2024, accessed on July 28, 2024, <https://www.tiktok.com/@wigconicc/video/7395990818445610245>.

follow the tour online to see which special songs are performed. The excitement surrounding these surprises is so intense that a group of dedicated fans developed an app called "Swiftie Alert" to provide live updates during Swift's performances. Fans also enjoy guessing which songs she will play or what outfits she will wear, with gifts for the best predictions.¹²⁶ Swift is also known for bringing out surprise guests adding another layer of excitement and unpredictability to the tour. For instance, she recently brought out Gracie Abrams, with whom she released the song "us" just two days prior to their live performance.¹²⁷ These surprise elements keep fans engaged and excited, ensuring that each concert is a fresh and memorable experience.

Inclusivity is a core element of Swift's performances, extending beyond just her interactions with fans. She consistently includes a diverse group of dancers and musicians in her shows, reflecting her commitment to representation and inclusivity. This diversity not only enhances the visual and artistic richness of her performances but also resonates with a wide audience. For example, during the song "Lover," multiple couples dance on stage, including same-sex pairs,¹²⁸ which underscores Swift's embrace of love in all its forms. By showcasing performers from various backgrounds and orientations, Swift ensures that her concerts are not only entertaining but also socially relevant, reinforcing her image as an artist who values and promotes inclusivity in every aspect of her work.

Cultural and Economic Impact of The Eras Tour

The Eras Tour has transcended the traditional concert experience, emerging as a cultural phenomenon that has left a lasting imprint on both the music industry and popular culture. Its influence stretches far beyond the stadiums and arenas where it takes place, permeating mainstream media, dominating social media platforms, and fuelling global fan discussions. The tour's thematic celebration of Taylor Swift's entire career deeply resonates with fans, who eagerly share their experiences, creating a ripple effect that amplifies its visibility. From viral trends on TikTok (like showcasing concert outfits¹²⁹) to

¹²⁶ "About Us," *SwiftAlert Online*, accessed on July 22, 2024, <https://www.swiftalert.online/about>.

¹²⁷ Avi Bains [@avibains], "Taylor Swift - us. (with Gracie Abrams) [Live from Wembley, London] | The Eras Tour," YouTube video, 8:15, June 24, 2024, accessed on July 22, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgBtKlpAA_g.

¹²⁸ Taylor Swift | *The Eras Tour (Taylor's Version)*, 00:16:20.

¹²⁹ CMcG [@clairejulia13_], "Era's Tour Houston READY," TikTok video, 00:10, April 21, 2023, accessed on July 26, 2024, https://www.tiktok.com/@clairejulia13_/video/7224600783298350362.

in-depth fan analyses on forums (such as speculating on new album releases)¹³⁰, The Eras Tour has woven itself into the fabric of everyday conversation, cementing its status as an unmissable cultural event. This widespread engagement not only underscores Swift's enduring relevance but also marks the tour as a defining moment in modern entertainment.

The overwhelming demand for tickets led to a highly publicised controversy with Ticketmaster, which further intensified the spotlight on the tour. When Swift announced The Eras Tour, 3.5 million people registered for the Ticketmaster's Verified Fan pre-sale program in the U.S. On November 15, 2022, when sales went live, over two million tickets were sold, breaking the record for highest single-day ticket sales ever by an artist. However, many fans were unable to secure tickets due to Ticketmaster's system being overwhelmed by the massive demand. Despite their attempts to manage the influx using their Verified Fan system, the site was overwhelmed by both legitimate fans and bots, resulting in 3.5 billion system requests – four times their previous peak. This led to long wait times and numerous issues during the purchasing process.¹³¹ In response, the company apologised to Taylor Swift and her fans during a U.S. Senate hearing.¹³² The media frenzy surrounding the Ticketmaster debacle only intensified public interest, making it a major topic across fan forums and mainstream media alike. These ticketing problems became part of the tour's narrative, contributing to its legendary status as a milestone in pop culture.

The Eras Tour has a profound economic impact, benefiting both Swift and the cities it visits. It is the first concert tour to cross the billion-dollar mark, making Swift the first musician to achieve billionaire status solely from songwriting and performing.¹³³ By the tour's end in December 2024, total revenues are expected to exceed \$4.1 billion.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ u/aran130711, "Theory Megathread July 2024," *Reddit*, July 1, 2024, accessed on July 26, 2024, https://www.reddit.com/r/TaylorSwift/comments/1dsmocb/theory_megathread_july_2024/.

¹³¹ "Taylor Swift | The Eras Tour Onsale Explained," *Ticketmaster Business*, November 19, 2022, accessed on July 26, 2024, <https://business.ticketmaster.com/press-release/taylor-swift-the-eras-tour-onsale-explained/>.

¹³² Mark Savage and Jason Armesto, "Ticketmaster apologises for Taylor Swift tour sales fiasco," *BBC*, January 24, 2023, accessed on July 26, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-64384304>.

¹³³ Monica Mercuri, "Taylor Swift Didn't Need Lucrative Side Hustles To Become A Billionaire," *Forbes*, April 3, 2024, accessed on July 26, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/monicamercuri/2024/04/02/taylor-swift-didnt-need-lucrative-side-hustles-to-become-a-billionaire/>.

¹³⁴ "How much does Taylor Swift earn from each show? Know about her Eras Tour earnings and total net worth," *The Economic Times*, July 3, 2024, accessed on July 26, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/us/how-much-does-taylor-swift-earn-from-each-show-know-about-her-eras-tour-earnings-and-total-net-worth/articleshow/111440478.cms?from=mdr>.

Beyond Swift's earnings, the tour significantly boosts the economies of the cities it visits. The arrival of fans from around the world has led to a surge in tourism, with local hotels, restaurants and businesses seeing major revenue increases. Typically, every \$100 spent on live performances generates about \$300 in ancillary local spending, but *The Eras Tour* magnifies this effect significantly. Fans are estimated to spend between \$1,300 and \$1,500 on items such as outfits, merchandise and travel, which has resulted in local economies experiencing boosts of hundreds of millions of dollars in just one weekend.¹³⁵ This impressive economic impact highlights the tour's profound significance, making it not only a major cultural event but also a powerful catalyst for local economic growth.

The release of the concert film *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour* has further amplified the cultural and economic impact of the tour. This concert film offers fans who could not attend the live shows a chance to experience the spectacle, while also providing those who did an opportunity to relive the moments. The film, released in theatres on October 13, 2023, has become the highest-grossing concert film of all time, earning over \$261.6 million globally. The film's success continued with a streaming release on December 13, featuring additional content not included in the original theatrical version.¹³⁶ By bringing the performance to an even wider audience, including international fans who may not have had the chance to see the tour in person, the film has expanded the tour's reach and influence. The film also features visuals of fans before and during the concert, showcasing their elaborate outfits and excitement, making them feel included in the celebration. Swift's heartfelt message in the movie credits – “Thank you to the most generous, thoughtful, loving fans on the planet. This is all because of you and for you”¹³⁷ – further solidifies the connection between the artist and her audience, making the Eras Tour not just a musical event but a shared cultural experience.

This chapter has explored how Taylor Swift expertly crafts her public persona through her music, merchandise, and live performances, profoundly affecting her fanbase. Her continual reinvention with each new album offers fans fresh experiences that mirror her artistic and personal growth. Every album era is thoughtfully designed with unique visuals and themes, enhancing her dynamic presence, and keeping fans consistently engaged. Swift's strategic approach to merchandise leverages nostalgia and exclusivity,

¹³⁵ Jeannie Kopstein and Mariah Espada, “The Staggering Economic Impact of Taylor Swift’s Eras Tour,” *Time*, August 24, 2023, accessed on July 26, 2024, <https://time.com/6307420/taylor-swift-eras-tour-money-economy/>.

¹³⁶ Steven J. Horowitz, “Taylor Swift’s ‘Eras Tour’ Becomes Highest-grossing Concert Film of All Time, Surpassing Michael Jackson,” *Variety*, January 7, 2024, accessed on July 26, 2024, <https://variety.com/2024/film/news/taylor-swifts-the-eras-tour-highest-grossing-theatrical-concert-film-1235863956/>.

¹³⁷ Taylor Swift | *The Eras Tour (Taylor’s Version)*, 03:03:50.

transforming physical copies and collectibles into emotionally significant treasures for her audience. Her live performances, notably the immersive Eras Tour, provide unforgettable experiences that celebrate her career and foster a powerful sense of community among fans. By merging personal storytelling with innovative marketing, Swift maintains her relevance while cultivating a deeply personal and transformative connection with her audience.

4.2. Secondary Texts

4.2.1. Feuds

Taylor Swift has been at the centre of several high-profile feuds, two of which have notably impacted her career. In an interview with *Time*, Swift attributes part of the success of her Eras Tour to these events, stating: “The first was getting cancelled within an inch of my life and sanity, [t]he second was having my life’s work taken away from me by someone who hates me.”¹³⁸ These remarks refer to her public conflicts with Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, as well as her dispute over the ownership of her masters with Scott Borchetta and Scooter Braun. These controversies have been widely covered in tabloids and articles and were recently explored in the documentary *Taylor Swift vs. Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, which explores the connections between these events.

Kanye West and Kim Kardashian

The feud between Taylor Swift and Kanye West has roots stretching back to the 2009 Video Music Awards (VMAs), where Swift won the award for Best Female Video. During her acceptance speech, West went on stage, interrupting her with the now-infamous line, “I’m really happy for you, I’mma let you finish, but Beyoncé had one of the best videos of all time.” Swift was left visibly shaken and vulnerable, standing awkwardly as her moment was overshadowed. Swift later revealed that she had been a fan of Kanye West before the incident, making his interruption feel like a crushing blow from a hero who did not believe she deserved the award.¹³⁹ The media quickly painted West as the villain and Swift as the innocent victim. Artists like John Rich and Pink took to Twitter to

¹³⁸ Sam, Lansky, “2023 Person of the Year: Taylor Swift,” *Time*, December 6, 2023, accessed on July 27, 2024, <https://time.com/6342806/person-of-the-year-2023-taylor-swift/>.

¹³⁹ “Taylor,” *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Kate Siney, originally aired on June 21, 2024, on HBO, 00:04:23.

voice their support for Swift.¹⁴⁰ Fans echoed these sentiments, flooding social media with messages of sympathy for Swift and condemnation for West. Fans viewed the incident as a symbol of a young artist being unfairly overshadowed by a more established male figure.

A week after the VMAs, Swift performed on *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), delivering a monologue that humorously referenced the incident, signalling her desire to move past the drama. This response resonated with fans, reinforcing her image as a wholesome, relatable country-pop star who could rise above petty conflicts.¹⁴¹ For years, it appeared that Swift and West had moved on, with both making public efforts to show they had buried the hatchet. They were even seen conversing at events, suggesting that the 2009 incident was water under the bridge.

Everything seemed to go well, but in 2016, the feud reignited in explosive fashion when Kanye released the song "Famous," which included the controversial lyrics, "I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex / Why? I made that bitch famous." The accompanying video featured a scene of Kanye in bed surrounded by lifelike figures of various celebrities, including Swift. The backlash was immediate and fierce. Kanye claimed that he had received Swift's permission to use the line, but Swift vehemently denied this, expressing her anger during her Album of the Year speech at the 58th Grammy Awards. She called out the sexist implications of Kanye's claim that she owed her success to him, a sentiment that deeply resonated with her fans.¹⁴²

The situation escalated further when Kim Kardashian released a video of a phone call between Swift and West, which appeared to show Swift approving the song. However, the video omitted any mention of the line "I made that bitch famous," which was central to Swift's outrage. Despite this omission, the video sparked a massive backlash against Swift, with social media users bombarding her Instagram with snake emojis, accusing her of deceit. Kim and Kanye declared victory, but the fallout was devastating for Swift. She later tweeted that she had tried to support Kanye but was never informed about the offensive lyric, stating, "You don't get to control someone's emotional response to being called 'that bitch' in front of the entire world."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Rennie Dyball, "Taylor Swift Wins Best Female Video – Upsetting Kanye West," *People*, September 13, 2009, accessed on July 27, 2024, <https://people.com/tv/taylor-swift-wins-best-female-video-upsetting-kanye-west/>.

¹⁴¹ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:06:40.

¹⁴² Constance Grady, "How the Taylor Swift-Kanye West VMAs scandal became a perfect morality tale," *Vox*, August 26, 2019, accessed on July 27, 2024, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/8/26/20828559/taylor-swift-kanye-west-2009-mtv-vm-as-explained>.

¹⁴³ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:20:41.

The 2016 chapter of the Taylor-versus-Kanye feud mirrored the 2009 episode but with a significant shift in public discourse. In 2009, the focus was on Taylor as the wronged party, while Kanye was criticised for his rudeness. But by 2016, the conversation had evolved. Some questioned whether the intense backlash against Kanye in 2009 was fuelled by racial stereotypes – the image of the aggressive Black man disrupting a young, blonde white woman.¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the criticism of Swift grew so intense that she retreated from the spotlight, a move that sparked further discussion among fans and media. When she reemerged in 2017 with her album *reputation*, she faced criticism for continuing to address the feud in her music. Yet for many of her fans, the album was a powerful statement of resilience, turning the narrative of victimhood on its head and reclaiming her story.

Throughout the years-long feud between Taylor Swift and Kanye West, fans reactions played a crucial role in shaping the public narrative. From the outset, Swift's fans rallied behind her, flooding social media with messages of support after the 2009 VMAs incident. the backlash against Swift intensified, but this negative attention only strengthened her fanbase. As Swift herself noted, “when people find something to mutually hate together, it bonds them.”¹⁴⁵ The outrage from Swift's fans towards West and Kardashian created an even stronger sense of community. Despite the controversy sparked by Kardashian's Snapchat reveal, fans acknowledged that this type of drama kept them engaged. Whenever Swift references the VMAs or the "Famous" saga in her songs or interviews, fans eagerly dissect these moments, with entertainment media often following suit. For many fans, these references have become something they expect and appreciate from Swift.¹⁴⁶ This episode illustrates how intense media scrutiny, even when negative, can deepen the connection between an artist and their fanbase, turning controversy into a source of solidarity and strength.

Master's Dispute

The controversy surrounding the release of Kanye West's song "Famous" also introduced Scooter Braun, who would later become a significant adversary in Taylor Swift's career. The public feud between Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun is deeply rooted in her early

¹⁴⁴ Grady, “Taylor Swift-Kanye West VMAs scandal.”

¹⁴⁵ Laura Snapes, “Taylor Swift: ‘I was literally about to break’,” *The Guardian*, August 24, 2019, accessed on July 27, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/aug/24/taylor-swift-pop-music-hunger-games-gladiators>.

¹⁴⁶ Daisy Pignetti, “Petty things and nemeses,” *Celebrity Studies* 13, no.1 (2022), doi: 10.1080/19392397.2021.2017744, 110-111.

career and the music industry's power dynamics. Swift's rise to fame began with Big Machine Records, a label founded by Scott Borchetta. Swift, one of the label's first signings, played a crucial role in its success.¹⁴⁷ Over time, her relationship with Big Machine and its executives would become central to one of the most high-profile disputes in contemporary music history.

The conflict escalated in June 2019 when Scooter Braun's Ithaca Holdings acquired Big Machine Label Group, thereby gaining control of the master recordings for Swift's first six albums. Swift had previously attempted to renegotiate her contract to secure ownership of her masters but faced resistance. Borchetta proposed that if Swift released new albums under Big Machine, she could eventually gain ownership of her old ones. Swift rejected these terms and instead signed with Universal Music Group in November 2018, ensuring she would own the masters of her future work.¹⁴⁸ Although Swift anticipated Borchetta might sell her masters, she was shocked to learn that it was to Scooter Braun. Swift expressed her dismay in a Tumblr post, revealing that she found out about the sale through public announcements rather than personal communication from Borchetta or Braun. She described the news as her "worst nightmare," recalling that her discussions with Borchetta about Braun often left her in tears. She described the situation as a "betrayal" and accused Braun of bullying her. "Now Scooter has stripped me of my life's work, that I wasn't given an opportunity to buy," she continued. "Essentially, my musical legacy is about to lie in the hands of someone who tried to dismantle it."¹⁴⁹

In response to the acquisition, Swift announced in August 2019 that she planned to re-record her early albums as soon as she was legally allowed. Tensions escalated three months later when she publicly revealed that Borchetta and Braun were preventing her from performing her older music at the American Music Awards (AMAs). Swift explained that performing these songs on live television would be considered a re-recording before she was legally permitted to do so the following year. Frustrated, she took to Tumblr, urging her fans to take action: "Please let Scott Borchetta and Scooter Braun know how you feel about this," she wrote, effectively rallying her fanbase and other artists to support her.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:08:16.

¹⁴⁸ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:27:31.

¹⁴⁹ Taylorswift, "For years I asked, pleaded for a chance to own my work," Tumblr post, June 30, 2019, accessed on July 28, 2024, <https://taylorswift.tumblr.com/post/185958366550/for-years-i-asked-pleaded-for-a-chance-to-own-my>.

¹⁵⁰ Taylorswift, "Don't know what else to do," Tumblr post, November 14, 2019, accessed on July 28, 2024, https://taylorswift.tumblr.com/post/189068976205/dont-know-what-else-to-do?is_related_post=1.

The media response was swift and polarised, with celebrities quickly taking sides. Female artists like Selena Gomez and Halsey supported Swift, while Braun's clients, including Demi Lovato and Justin Bieber, defended him.¹⁵¹ Swift's fiercely loyal and organised fanbase reacted strongly against Braun, creating significant public pressure. They mobilised through social media campaigns, such as #IStandWithTaylor, and some even sent death threats to Braun. This intense backlash was driven by Swift's portrayal of herself as a victim of both artistic and personal mistreatment.¹⁵²

In response to Swift's allegations, Big Machine Label Group issued a statement denying that they had prevented her from performing her back catalogue at the AMAs. They asserted that Swift's claims were misleading and that they had not interfered with her performance plans.¹⁵³ However, this rebuttal did little to dampen the overwhelming support for Swift, as many fans and commentators remained sceptical of Big Machine's intentions. Ultimately, Swift performed "The Man" at the AMAs, wearing a blouse emblazoned with the names of her "stolen" albums. The song addresses how Swift might be treated differently in the industry if she were a man, highlighting themes of feminism.¹⁵⁴

Despite the challenges posed by Borchetta and Braun, Swift moved forward with her plan to re-record her early albums, beginning with the release of *Fearless (Taylor's Version)* in April 2021. By June 2024, she had released four out of six re-recordings, all achieving significant global commercial success.¹⁵⁵ These re-recordings not only preserved her artistic integrity but also offered her fans a guilt-free listening experience. They symbolise Swift's resilience and determination, reinforcing her creative control and sparking ongoing discussions about artist ownership and industry practices. Swift's public struggle also illuminated systemic challenges faced by women in the music industry, highlighting issues of gender inequality and exploitation.¹⁵⁶ Her ability to turn adversity

¹⁵¹ Kelsie Gibson, "A Complete Timeline of Taylor Swift and Scooter Braun's Feud," *People*, June 25, 2024, accessed on July 28, 2024, <https://people.com/taylor-swift-and-scooter-braun-feud-timeline-8668845>.

¹⁵² "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:38:04.

¹⁵³ Big Machine Label Group, "As Taylor Swift's Partner For Over A Decade, We Were Shocked To See Her Tumblr Statements Yesterday Based On False Information," *Big Machine Label Group*, November 15, 2019, accessed on July 28, 2024, <https://www.bigmachinelabelgroup.com/taylor-swifts-partner-over-decade-we-were-shocked-see-her-tumblr-statements-yesterday-based/>.

¹⁵⁴ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:35:06, 00:40:24

¹⁵⁵ Hugh McIntyre, "Taylor Swift's Re-recordings Just Reached A Special Milestone," *Forbes*, March 17, 2024, accessed on July 28, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2024/03/17/taylor-swifts-re-recordings-just-reached-a-special-milestone/>.

¹⁵⁶ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:40:24.

into a powerful narrative of personal and artistic triumph underscores the complexities of the industry and the power dynamics between artists and record labels.¹⁵⁷

In November 2020, Scooter Braun sold Swift's masters to Shamrock Capital. Despite an offer for collaboration, Swift declined, as Braun would continue to benefit financially from her old music.¹⁵⁸ She maintained her focus on the re-recording project to uphold her artistic vision. This strategic response, along with her use of social media, have been celebrated as a powerful assertion of artist rights and personal agency. Swift's handling of the feud has solidified her reputation as a prominent advocate for creative ownership and gender equality in the music industry. Her team has indicated that she has moved on from the conflict, now concentrating on her creative work and advocacy for artists' rights. The feud remains a notable chapter in her career, reflecting her ability to transform challenges into broader cultural and industry discussions.¹⁵⁹

4.2.2. Relationships

Beyond her high-profile feuds, Taylor Swift's romantic relationships have long been a central focus of media scrutiny, often overshadowing her achievements as a songwriter, performer, and businesswoman. This intense attention has transformed her personal life into a media spectacle, reducing her multifaceted career to mere headlines about her love life. Such fixation not only skews public perception but also highlights the challenges Swift faces in being recognised for her professional accomplishments amid relentless scrutiny of her private affairs.

Central to Swift's enduring appeal is her ability to channel personal experiences into her music, particularly her reflections on relationships. Songs like "All Too Well" and "Style" are frequently dissected by both fans and critics, who speculate on the specific relationships that inspired them. This personal storytelling fosters a deep connection between Swift and her audience, as listeners find their own emotional journeys mirrored in her lyrics. Her detailed accounts of love's joys and sorrows resonate widely, allowing fans to feel intimately connected to her narrative. However, this same storytelling has subjected Swift to criticism rarely faced by other artists. While many musicians draw on individual experiences, Swift's focus on her romantic life has often been met with

¹⁵⁷ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:03:42.

¹⁵⁸ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:45:28.

¹⁵⁹ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:50:35.

accusations of oversharing or exploiting her relationships, a critique that underscores the double standards and sexism prevalent in the industry.¹⁶⁰

Swift has long been aware of these criticisms and has actively worked to reclaim her narrative. During her 1989 era, she addressed the media's portrayal of her with the hit song "Blank Space," a satirical take on the "crazy ex-girlfriend" stereotype.¹⁶¹ This era also marked a shift in her public image, as she emphasised her friendships over her romantic life, forming a "squad" of influential female friends. This move was a strategic challenge to the media's fixation on her relationships, highlighting instead themes of female empowerment and solidarity. By redirecting the narrative, Swift not only countered the negative portrayals but also expanded her influence, positioning herself as a leader in discussions about women's roles in the public eye.¹⁶²

In addition to these public strategies, Swift has also responded to relentless scrutiny by becoming more private about her relationships. Her long-term romance with actor Joe Alwyn was notably shielded from the public eye, a stark contrast to the highly publicised nature of her earlier relationships. On the rare occasions when either spoke about it, the media eagerly dissected every word. Swift deliberately avoided discussing their relationship, explaining, "I've learned that if I do, people think it's up for discussion, and our relationship isn't up for discussion."¹⁶³ This intentional privacy allowed Swift to maintain control over her personal life while still drawing on her experiences for her music. The secrecy surrounding her relationship with Alwyn marked a shift in how she balanced her public and private worlds, keeping her personal life hers to share on her own terms. Even when they broke up in April 2023, Swift refrained from commenting, leaving fans and media to rely on insiders and song interpretations for details.¹⁶⁴

Despite her efforts to maintain privacy, not all of Swift's relationships have escaped public attention. Her brief involvement with Matty Healy, the lead singer of The 1975, in May 2023 – shortly after her split with Joe Alwyn – sparked significant backlash,

¹⁶⁰ "Taylor," *Taylor Swift vs Scooter Braun: Bad Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 00:15:50.

¹⁶¹ Nick Maslow, "Taylor Swift Reveals Her Inspiration for 'Blank Space': It's Like A 'Crossword Puzzle'," *People*, October 9, 2015, accessed on July 29, 2024, <https://people.com/celebrity/taylor-swift-reveals-inspiration-for-writing-blank-space-in-nme-video/>.

¹⁶² Hermoine Hoby, "Taylor Swift: 'Sexy? Not on my radar'," *The Guardian*, August 23, 2014, accessed on July 29, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/aug/23/taylor-swift-shake-it-off>.

¹⁶³ Snapes, "Taylor Swift: 'I was literally about to break.'"

¹⁶⁴ Kelsie Gibson, "Taylor Swift and Joe Alwyn's Breakup: Everything We Know," *People*, April 19, 2024, accessed on July 29, 2024, <https://people.com/music/taylor-swift-joe-alwyn-breakup-everything-to-know/#:~:text=Why%20did%20Taylor%20Swift%20and%20Joe%20Alwyn%20break%20up%3F&text=A%20source%20close%20to%20the%2022All%20Too%20Well%22%20singer%20and,to%20ignore%20after%20years%20together.%E2%80%9D>.

particularly from her fanbase. Healy's controversial history, including racist remarks and offensive jokes, led some fans to express their disapproval through an open letter on X (formerly Twitter) under the hashtag #SpeakUpNow. They criticised Swift for her silence on these issues, suggesting that it signalled indifference and urging her to consider the impact of her and her associates' actions.¹⁶⁵ This episode highlighted the ongoing tension between Swift's desire for privacy and the public's relentless interest in her romantic life. It also underscored the complex dynamics where her relationships extend beyond personal matters, shaping her public image and influencing how her fans perceive her.

As of September 2024, Swift is dating NFL player Travis Kelce, a relationship that has played out more publicly than her recent past romances. Despite some backlash from football fans who feel her presence at Kelce's games distracts from the sport,¹⁶⁶ the overall reaction has been largely positive, with many rooting for the couple. Reflecting on the public nature of their relationship, Swift has emphasised that they have nothing to hide: "When you say a relationship is public, that means I'm going to see him do what he loves, we're showing up for each other, other people are there and we don't care." She contrasts this with the alternative, saying, "The opposite of that is you have to go to an extreme amount of effort to make sure no one knows that you're seeing someone. And we're just proud of each other."¹⁶⁷ This openness marks a significant shift from her more private relationship with Joe Alwyn, indicating a new chapter in how she balances her personal life with public attention.

Through all of this, Swift's relationships, as portrayed by the media, have played a crucial role in shaping her public image. They provoke a range of reactions from fans, from intense support to critical scrutiny. Yet, despite these challenges, Swift has adeptly navigated the complexities of public perception, continually reclaiming her narrative through her music, her friendships, and her strategic privacy. Her ability to resonate with fans through her personal storytelling, while simultaneously pushing back against the media's often unfair portrayals, has cemented her status as a pop icon and a relatable figure whose experiences mirror those of her audience.

¹⁶⁵ Maxine [@mgxine], "we need to do a case study on parasocial relationships with celebrities because like," X (formerly Twitter), May 17, 2023, accessed on July 29, 2024, <https://x.com/mgxine/status/1658841708774211585/photo/4>.

¹⁶⁶ Faye Bradley, "Why some NFL fans boo Taylor Swift at Travis Kelce's games: the 'Anti-Hero' superstar might be loved by Swifties, but the hardcore, sport-loving 'Brads and Chads' don't like the shifted attention," *Style*, February 2, 2024, accessed on July 29, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/entertainment/article/3250556/why-some-nfl-fans-boo-taylor-swift-travis-kelces-games-anti-hero-superstar-might-be-loved-swifties>.

¹⁶⁷ Sam, Lansky, "2023 Person of the Year: Taylor Swift."

In conclusion, the media's portrayal of Taylor Swift has significantly shaped her public persona and her connection with fans. News articles, social media, and entertainment reports often emphasize her personal life and conflicts over her professional achievements, creating a continuous narrative around her feuds and relationships. This sensationalism not only boosts her visibility but also strengthens fan engagement, turning controversies into opportunities for deeper connections. Despite the negative aspects of media scrutiny, Swift has adeptly used it to her advantage, leveraging these pressures for personal and professional growth. This interplay between media narratives and fan perception demonstrates how secondary texts can both challenge and elevate an artist's career.

4.3. Tertiary Texts

4.3.1. Social Networking Websites

Taylor Swift's Social Media Accounts

In modern celebrity culture, social media plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the relationships between public figures and their audiences. For celebrities like Taylor Swift, these platforms are not just tools for communication but also vital spaces for cultivating and sustaining a devoted fanbase.¹⁶⁸ Social media allows Swift to directly connect with her fans, manage her public persona and create a sense of intimacy that traditional media cannot offer.

Taylor Swift skilfully uses social media platforms to shape and maintain her public persona by balancing professional achievements with personal insights. On platforms like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, she primarily focuses on promoting her work. Instagram¹⁶⁹ is particularly effective for this, as she often shares updates about her projects alongside occasional candid snapshots featuring friends, family, and her cats. Her approach on Twitter is similar in that she promotes her work and engages with fans, but she also actively replies to their tweets. When she releases a new album, for

¹⁶⁸ Christine Kowalczyk and Kathryn Ponders, "Transforming celebrities through social media: the role of authenticity and emotional attachment," *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 25, no. 4 (July 2016), doi: 10.1108/JPBM-09-2015-0969: 345-356.

¹⁶⁹ @taylorswift, Instagram, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/taylorswift/>.

example, she frequently responds to fans who tweet about buying or listening to it, enhancing her connection with her audience.¹⁷⁰

Taylor Swift's use of Tumblr is particularly distinctive in the realm of celebrity social media, setting her apart from other stars. Since creating her account in September 2014, Swift has used Tumblr to engage deeply with her fanbase, reblogging, liking and commenting on fan posts, deliberately developing parasocial relationships. This interaction not only helps her project a positive persona but also fosters a sense of intimacy that enhances fan loyalty and devotion.¹⁷¹ Tumblr provides a unique platform for Swift to immerse herself in fan culture, actively participating in conversations and demonstrating a rare level of engagement. Her involvement includes practices such as lurking on fan pages, known as #Taylurking, which strengthens the community bond. A notable instance of her connection with fans was when she wore a T-shirt referencing the "No, it's Becky" meme, highlighting her awareness of and participation in fandom in-jokes. This direct engagement, coupled with the potential for personal interaction, keeps her audience invested and enthusiastic.¹⁷²

Swift's presence on TikTok¹⁷³, though relatively recent, has quickly become a key part of her social media strategy, particularly in reaching a younger demographic. The platform allows Swift to engage with viral trends and create playful, short-form videos that display a more casual and humorous side of her personality. This approach makes her more relatable to TikTok's primarily young user base. For example, in a TikTok she shared from the set of the "I Bet You Think About Me" music video, Swift participated in a popular trend where users complete the phrase, "the chances of something happening are low... but never zero." Swift humorously filled in the blank with "the chances of your wedding being ruined by a psychotic ex are low," tying the content back to the theme of her song.¹⁷⁴ This video not only promoted her music and its accompanying video but also

¹⁷⁰ Dana 🌟 ISO ERAS NOLA 🍷 [@DanaBrigoli], "I bought it home from Texas and not going to leave right where they left it!," X (formerly Twitter), June 3, 2021, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://x.com/DanaBrigoli/status/1400248561120550916>.

¹⁷¹ Victoria Sands, "'There Will Be No Further Explanation:' Celebrity Journalism and Taylor Swift's Reputation," *Facts & Frictions: Emerging Debates, Pedagogies and Practices in Contemporary Journalism* 2, no. 2 (2023), doi: 10.22215/ff/v2.i2.01, 7-8.

¹⁷² Joe Coscarelli, "Taylor Swift, Entering a New Era, Sticks to a Safe Space: Tumblr," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2017, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/08/arts/music/taylor-swift-reputation-swifties-tumblr.html>.

¹⁷³ Taylor Swift (@taylorswift), TikTok, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://www.tiktok.com/@taylorswift>.

¹⁷⁴ Taylor Swift (@taylorswift), "miles and Keleigh thank you for making this video so magical, I LOVE YOU !!!!," TikTok, November 17, 2021, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://www.tiktok.com/@taylorswift/video/7031673410866400559>.

showcased her engagement with TikTok's trends, reinforcing her relevance and connection with a new generation of fans through active participation in viral culture.

Content wise, Taylor Swift leverages her social media accounts for a variety of content, including professional updates, cryptic clues, and the cultivation of a relatable, authentic persona. She meticulously crafts her posts to present an image that is both genuine and accessible. For instance, in a YouTube Shorts video promoting her song “Fortnight,” Swift integrated visuals from her everyday life, such as her workouts, cooking, baking, socialising with friends and spending time with her cats.¹⁷⁵ This behind-the-scenes content not only promotes her music but also humanises her, deepening the emotional connection with her audience. Such authenticity is central to her brand, allowing fans to view her not only as a celebrity but also as someone they can relate to on a personal level. By selectively sharing aspects of her private life, Swift reinforces her relatability and helps bridge the gap between her public persona and her fans.

One of the most engaging aspects of Swift’s social media presence is her use of cryptic messages and Easter eggs. These subtle clues, often embedded in her posts, hint at upcoming projects, or reference her past works, keeping fans actively engaged as they decipher hidden meanings. For example, when announcing *Fearless (Taylor’s Version)*, Swift teased six unreleased songs with anagrams of their titles, accompanied by the caption “Happy decoding!”¹⁷⁶ This clear Easter egg invited fans to solve the puzzle. More subtly, in the announcement post for *Fearless (Taylor’s Version)*, Swift used capital letters in an apparently random manner to spell out “APRIL NINTH,” revealing the album’s release date.¹⁷⁷ Such Easter eggs foster a culture of active participation among her fans, turning their interaction with her content into a collaborative and investigative experience. This approach not only keeps fans intrigued but also deepens their connection to her music and brand.

In addition to sharing personal content, Taylor Swift strategically uses her social media platforms to promote her professional endeavours. She regularly updates her audience on new music, tours, merchandise, and other projects, employing tactics such as countdowns, exclusive previews and interactive content to generate excitement. For

¹⁷⁵ Taylor Swift [@TaylorSwift], “Share your “fortnight” recap with #ForAFortnightChallenge,” *YouTube*, uploaded by Taylor Swift, accessed on July 30, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/2hBLC7E8v3A>.

¹⁷⁶ @taylorswift, “The vault door is about to be as unhinged as you’ll think I am after you watch this video,” Instagram post, April 2, 2021, accessed on July 30, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CNK2J5zjgY2/>.

¹⁷⁷ @taylorswift, “I’m thrilled to tell you that my new version of *Fearless (Taylor’s Version)* is done and will be with you soon,” Instagram post, February 11, 2021, accessed on July 30, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/CLJzk9MjcCe/?img_index=2.

instance, she launched a thirteen-part TikTok series titled “Midnights Mayhem with Me” to reveal the track titles from her upcoming album *Midnights* before its official release.¹⁷⁸ This series kept fans eagerly anticipating each new instalment, prompting them to engage deeply with her content. Such strategies not only sustain fan interest but also encourage a more in-depth analysis of her posts, fostering a richer level of interaction and connection with her work.

Fan Activity and the Role of Fan Accounts

Fans in the Swiftie community engage in a variety of creative and analytical ways that distinguish them from other fandoms. Creativity is a defining feature of Swiftie culture, with fans producing a wide range of fan art, memes and other content that celebrates Taylor Swift’s work. These creations offer fans unique and personal outlets to express their admiration. A distinctive aspect of the Swifties is its intense analytical focus. Fans are known for their thorough examinations of Swift’s lyrics, music videos and social media posts, often speculating about hidden meanings and connections. Swift actively encourages this level of engagement by intentionally planting Easter eggs, as she has discussed in a video for Entertainment Weekly.¹⁷⁹ This deep analytical approach fosters a culture of active participation, where fans feel a close connection to Swift’s creative process, transforming their interaction with her content into a collaborative experience that enhances their emotional investment.

Collective celebrations and tributes also define the Swiftie fandom. Fans organise events, streaming parties, and social media trends to mark significant milestones in Swift’s career, such as album anniversaries or tour announcements. For example, on the one-year anniversary of *Folklore*, fans hosted virtual listening parties and used the hashtag #1YearOfFolklore to share their favourite moments from the album.¹⁸⁰ These activities not only honour Swift’s achievements but also strengthen the connections within the fan community. Participating in such collective events fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose among fans, deepening their connection to both Swift and each other. Additionally, Swift herself engages in these celebrations; for *Folklore*’s first

¹⁷⁸ Taylor Swift [@taylorswift], “Midnights tracklist reveal!! Introducing: Midnights Mayhem with Me,” TikTok video, 01:06, September 21, 2022, accessed on August 1, 2024, <https://www.tiktok.com/@taylorswift/video/7145677990385454378>.

¹⁷⁹ “Taylor Swift reveals her Easter eggs about TS7,” YouTube video.

¹⁸⁰ Mitchell Peters, “Taylor Swift Fans Reflect on Powerful Impact of ‘Folklore’ on Album’s First Anniversary,” *Billboard*, July 24, 2021, accessed on August 1, 2024, <https://www.billboard.com/music/pop/taylor-swift-folklore-one-year-anniversary-fans-celebrate-9605996/>.

birthday, she delighted fans by releasing an original version of the album's bonus track "the lakes."¹⁸¹

The Swiftie fandom is supported by a vast network of dedicated fan accounts across platforms like X, Instagram Tumblr and TikTok. These accounts play a crucial role in curating and disseminating Taylor Swift-related content, each often specialising in a particular aspect of the fandom, such as news updates, fan art, or organising fan activities. For instance, accounts like @tswifterastour¹⁸² on Twitter are known for giving updates on Swift's Eras Tour, while Instagram accounts like @taylorswiftstyled¹⁸³ focus on her fashion. This specialisation creates a rich, diverse ecosystem where fans can easily find content that resonates with their specific interests, contributing to a more organized and cohesive fan community.

In addition to these dedicated accounts, there are many other casual fans who use their personal social media accounts to share their thoughts, reactions and analyses of Swift's music, her public appearances, or other related events. These fans contribute to the broader conversation surrounding Swift, often sparking discussions, debates, and trending topics. They also often start trends, such making dances to her songs.¹⁸⁴ While their accounts are not solely focused on Swift, their consistent engagement with her content, through tweets and retweets, highlights their active participation in the fandom.

Interaction Between Taylor Swift and Fan Accounts

One of the most notable aspects of Taylor Swift's engagement with her fans is her practice of "Taylurking." This involves her actively seeking out and interacting with fan content on social media platforms. For instance, she might like and comment on fan art shared on Instagram, reblog posts on Tumblr or even retweet fan reactions on X (formerly Twitter). This direct engagement creates a sense of personal connection, making fans feel seen and valued. For example, when a fan posted *folklore*-themed cake, fully painted

¹⁸¹ @taylorswift, "It's been one year since we escaped the real world together and imagined ourselves someplace simpler," Instagram post, July 24, 2021, accessed on August 1, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/CRtf3hrDviX/?img_index=1.

¹⁸² The Eras Tour [@tswifterastour], X (formerly Twitter), accessed on August 1, 2024, <https://x.com/tswifterastour>.

¹⁸³ Sarah Chapelle [@taylorswiftstyled], Instagram profile, accessed on August 1, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/taylorswiftstyled/>.

¹⁸⁴ Jules [@julieanabba], "IS IT OVER NOW?!?!?", TikTok video, 00:10, November 2, 2023, accessed on July 31, 2024, https://www.tiktok.com/@_julianabba/video/7296992022412512518?q=swifftok%20trend&t=1723496748732.

with frosting, Swift left a comment expressing her gratitude and complementing the fan.¹⁸⁵ This kind of interaction adds an element of excitement and anticipation for fans, as they eagerly await the possibility of a response from Swift. This personal touch deepens the emotional bond between Swift and her audience, fostering greater loyalty and encouraging continued participation in the fandom.

Swift's interactions with fans also serve as an effective marketing strategy. By engaging with fan-created content, she amplifies its visibility and indirectly promotes her music and brand. A notable instance of this occurred when her song "Wildest Dreams" went viral on TikTok. Observing that fans were using the original version because 1989 (Taylor's Version) hadn't yet been released, Swift joined the trend by posting a TikTok with the message, "If you guys want to use my version of Wildest Dreams for the slow zoom trend, here she is!"¹⁸⁶ This direct engagement with the trend not only boosted its popularity but also highlighted her updated version of the song. As a result, the trend gained even more traction, further expanding her brand's visibility. This approach effectively encourages fans to create and share their own content, enhancing her promotional efforts without additional marketing costs.

In addition to her regular interactions with fans, Swift occasionally goes above and beyond with deeply personal and memorable gestures. For instance, she has sent personalised gifts like handwritten notes and exclusive merchandise to dedicated fans. A standout instance occurred when Swift wrote a heartfelt letter and sent flowers to Ashley, a fan who had invited her to her graduation through a touching letter explaining the significance Swift had in her life. Although Swift could not attend, her message of pride and encouragement was deeply appreciated.¹⁸⁷ Another remarkable gesture involved Swift making an unexpected appearance at an engagement party for two fans, Alexander and Ross. Alexander had requested that Swift perform "King of My Heart," a song with special meaning for the couple. Swift's surprise serenade made the event

¹⁸⁵ Taylor Swift [@taylorswift13], "WOW this is incredible!! Thank you so much for making this," X (formerly Twitter), August 4, 2020, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://x.com/taylorswift13/status/1290431583414095873>.

¹⁸⁶ Taylor Swift [@taylorswift], "Someone said slow zoom makes you look like the main character I said make it Taylor's Version pls...", TikTok video, 00:14, September 17, 2021, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://www.tiktok.com/@taylorswift/video/7008876381815803142>.

¹⁸⁷ Mike Vulpo and Meg Swertlow, "Taylor Swift Resurfaces To Send Fan a Sweet Handwritten Graduation Note and Flowers," *E! News*, May 13, 2017, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://www.eonline.com/news/851672/taylor-swift-resurfaces-to-send-fan-a-sweet-handwritten-graduation-note-and-flowers>.

unforgettable.¹⁸⁸ These acts of generosity and personal connection extend beyond typical celebrity behaviour, reinforcing her image as a caring and approachable figure. Such gestures are widely celebrated within the fandom, highlighting Swift's unique ability to create genuine, memorable connections with her fans.

Swift's active engagement with her fanbase profoundly influences the dynamics of her fandom by demonstrating the significant role of digital fan labour in news gathering, promotion, and image maintenance.¹⁸⁹ By acknowledging and participating in fan-driven activities, she contributes to a united and spirited community. Fans reciprocate by circulating updates on album releases, tracking and publicizing Swift's social media activity and creating fan edits and artistic tributes. They also address misinformation and clarify details about her work.¹⁹⁰ This collective engagement not only deepens fans' connection to Swift but also reinforces their sense of belonging within the fanbase. Swift's recognition of these efforts and her active participation in fan initiatives strengthen the bond between her and her supporters, fostering a vibrant and cohesive community where enthusiasm for her work translates into meaningful interactions and a lasting sense of unity.

¹⁸⁸ Ilana Kaplan, "See Taylor Swift Surprise Engagement Party With Acoustic 'King of My Heart'," *Rolling Stone*, February 24, 2019, accessed on July 31, 2024, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/taylor-swift-surprise-engagement-party-king-of-my-heart-799422/>.

¹⁸⁹ Sands, "There Will Be No Further Explanation," 6.

¹⁹⁰ Sands, "There Will Be No Further Explanation," 6.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the strategic mechanisms that have enabled Taylor Swift to cultivate and sustain one of the most dedicated fan bases in contemporary music. Through an in-depth case study, which included an analysis of primary, secondary, and tertiary texts, this research has identified key strategies that distinguish Swift's approach from her peers in the music industry.

Firstly, the research highlighted how Swift's meticulous construction of her public persona, a blend of authenticity and relatability, plays a central role in her fan engagement. This persona is consistently reinforced through her music, public appearances and social media interactions, all of which are carefully curated to resonate with her audience's values and experiences. Swift's ability to navigate between different musical genres while maintaining a coherent and evolving narrative about her personal and artistic journey has been particularly effective in broadening and deepening her fan base. This adaptability not only keeps her existing fans engaged but also attracts new ones, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the importance of both consistency and evolution in personal branding.

Secondly, the study examined the role of fan interaction in shaping Swift's public image. The analysis of tertiary texts, particularly fan-generated content on social media, revealed a reciprocal relationship between Swift and her fans. This relationship is not merely one of idolisation but one of active participation, where fans feel a sense of ownership and involvement in Swift's success. This dynamic has been pivotal in fostering an environment of loyalty and devotion, with fans often defending and promoting her work with fervour. Such an interactive relationship blurs the line between the artist and the audience, creating a community where both parties actively contribute to the narrative of success.

Moreover, the research shed light on the broader implications of Swift's strategies within the context of celebrity culture. Her success underscores the importance of a multi-faceted approach to celebrity management, where authenticity, strategic media engagement, and fan interaction are balanced to create a sustainable and impactful public image. Swift's case exemplifies how modern celebrities must engage with their audiences across multiple platforms and through various forms of media to maintain relevance in an increasingly fragmented and fast-paced cultural landscape. The findings suggest that the strategic curation of one's public image, coupled with active fan engagement, can serve as a model for other celebrities seeking long-term success.

This thesis contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the field of celebrity studies by providing a nuanced understanding of how authenticity and strategic media engagement can coexist in building a successful public persona. The findings support existing theories that emphasise the importance of authenticity in celebrity culture but also challenge the notion that authenticity alone is sufficient. Instead, the research reveals that a successful celebrity image is constructed through a deliberate and strategic blending of authenticity with other factors, such as adaptability and audience engagement. Additionally, the reciprocal nature of fan interaction observed in Swift's case offers new theoretical insights into the dynamics of celebrity-fan relationships, suggesting that this interaction is not merely reactive but proactive and participatory.

The practical applications of this research are significant for artists, industry professionals, and policymakers. For artists, the findings provide a roadmap for cultivating a dedicated fan base by highlighting the importance of authenticity, adaptability, and active fan engagement. Industry professionals can use these insights to develop more effective marketing and branding strategies that resonate with target audiences. Furthermore, the research offers recommendations for policymakers, particularly in the area of digital media regulation. Understanding the power dynamics between celebrities and fans on social media platforms can inform policies that protect fan communities from exploitation while encouraging healthy and constructive interactions.

While this research offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. One key limitation is the focus on a single case study, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Although Taylor Swift's strategies have proven effective, they may not be universally applicable to all celebrities or in all contexts. Additionally, the reliance on tertiary texts, such as fan-generated content, introduces a degree of subjectivity, as these sources may not fully represent the views of the broader fan base. Future research should consider a broader range of case studies and incorporate more diverse data sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Future research could expand on this study by exploring how Swift's strategies evolve as her career progresses and how they are adopted or adapted by other celebrities in different contexts. For instance, examining how emerging artists leverage similar strategies in the early stages of their careers could provide valuable insights into the evolution of celebrity culture. Additionally, further investigation into the role of digital media in shaping celebrity-fan interactions could offer new perspectives on the power dynamics between artists and their audiences. Understanding these dynamics is crucial

for artists and industry professionals who aim to navigate the complex and ever-changing world of celebrity culture. Finally, comparative studies between Western and non-Western celebrities could uncover cultural differences in celebrity management strategies, enriching the global understanding of this phenomenon.

In conclusion, Taylor Swift's unparalleled success in cultivating and sustaining a large and devoted fan base can be attributed to her strategic use of media, authentic engagement with fans, and ability to adapt to the changing dynamics of the music industry. Her case illustrates that in an era where public personas are scrutinized and celebrated in equal measure, the key to long-term success lies in the delicate balance of authenticity, strategy, and adaptability. As the lines between artist and audience continue to blur, future celebrities will need to embrace this new paradigm of interaction, where success is co-created with the very fans who follow them. This research not only sheds light on the mechanisms behind one of the most successful music careers of our time but also offers a blueprint for others seeking to build and sustain their own legacy in the ever-evolving landscape of celebrity culture.

Self-evaluation (SWOT-analysis)

Strengths

- Focus on a contemporary subject: This thesis focuses on Taylor Swift, a highly relevant and influential figure in modern pop culture, making the study timely and appealing to a wide audience.
- Comprehensive theoretical framework: The thesis integrates well-established theories from celebrity studies and fan culture, providing a solid academic foundation and ensuring that the research is grounded in existing literature.
- Multifaceted analysis: By examining a mix of primary, secondary, and tertiary texts, this thesis offers a complete view of how Swift handles her public image and engages with her fans. This approach provides a rich, nuanced analysis that captures the complexity of her strategies.

Weaknesses

- Case study limitation: Focusing solely on Taylor Swift might limit how broadly the findings can be applied to other celebrities or contexts. This focus could narrow the generalizability of the conclusions.
- Focus on key moments: For this thesis, major events and significant periods in Swift's career have been selected. This means some smaller but potentially impactful details might not be covered, which could limit the full scope of the analysis.
- Influence of researcher's bias: As a fan of Taylor Swift, there is a possibility that personal admiration could influence the research, potentially affecting the objectivity of the analysis.
- Limited quantitative data: Without quantitative data, it is challenging to measure the precise impact of Swift's strategies statistically. This could make the empirical aspects of the thesis less robust.

Opportunities

- Expanding the framework to other celebrities: The methodology and findings could be applied to other celebrities across different industries, allowing for comparative studies and broader generalisations.
- Cross-cultural analysis: Future research could expand to include a cross-cultural analysis, examining how Swift's strategies resonate with audiences in different cultural contexts, potentially leading to more comprehensive findings.
- Industry application: The insights from the thesis could be applied by industry professionals to develop more effective celebrity management and fan engagement strategies, particularly in the digital age.

Threats

- Rapidly changing media landscape: The rapid evolution of social media and digital platforms could quickly make some of my findings less relevant. New trends in fan engagement and celebrity culture might shift the landscape.
- Over-saturation of celebrity studies: With a growing body of research in celebrity studies, there is a risk that the thesis could be overshadowed by other works, especially if it does not distinguish itself with unique or particularly impactful insights.
- Subjectivity in interpretation: The qualitative nature of this research means that my findings are open to interpretation. This could lead to debates about the objectivity and accuracy of my conclusions.
- Ongoing career developments: Taylor Swift's career is still evolving, and new developments could affect the applicability of my findings. Staying updated with her career is essential to maintaining the relevance of my research.

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