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Taylor Swift: Celebrity, Impact, and the Poetics of Songwriting

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Taylor Swift: Celebrity, Impact, and the Poetics of Songwriting

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The main aim of this thesis is to determine Taylor Swift´s influence on her audience from the perspective of her songwriting. In this thesis, I will analyze selected samples of Taylor Swift's work regarding the lyrics of her songs and the content of her video clips. The data will be used to characterize specific attributes of Taylor Swift, such as her appearance, worldwide popularity, and political actions, which play a major role when affecting and approaching her audience.

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11. dubna 2026 Kateřina Kobrová

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Anotace

Cílem této práce je zjistit, jaké faktory přispěly k formování statusu celebrity Taylor Swift a jaký vliv má na své publikum. Práce rovněž zkoumá její styl psaní písní a snaží se charakterizovat jeho dopad na utváření publika a jeho zájmů. Práce zároveň popisuje další vybrané aspekty celebrity jakožto prostředky k získávání pozornosti publika a k formování vztahů mezi celebritou a jejími fanoušky. Práce využívá primárně zdroje odborné literatury zabývající se kulturními studiemi a sekundárně zdroje z mainstreamové mediální roviny s cílem interpretovat veřejné vnímání celebrity a její tendence k adaptaci influencerských praktik, jako je používání sociálních médií k participaci fanouškovských komunit. Součástí práce je literární analýza vybraných děl celebrity, která se zabývá jejich interpretací s ohledem na politickou artikulaci celebrity.

Klíčová slova

Taylor Swift, celebrita, vliv, publikum, psaní písní, sociální média, populární kultura.

Annotation

The aim of this thesis is to determine what factors have contributed to the formation of Taylor Swift's celebrity status and what influence she has on her audience. The thesis also examines her songwriting style and attempts to characterise its impact on shaping the audience and its interests. The thesis also describes other selected aspects of celebrity as a means of attracting audience attention and of forming relationships between the celebrity and her fans. The thesis primarily draws on academic literature in cultural studies and, secondarily, on mainstream media sources to interpret public perception of the celebrity and her tendency to adopt influencer practices, such as using social media to engage with fan communities. The thesis includes a literary analysis of selected works of the celebrity, focusing on their interpretation in relation to the celebrity's political articulation.

Key Words

Taylor Swift, celebrity, impact, audience, songwriting, social media, popular culture.

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, *Taylor Swift: Celebrity, Impact, and the Poetics of Songwriting*, I will examine the impact on the audience of one of the most influential US celebrities in the current time.

The reason why I chose to study the impact of Taylor Swift is based on the notion that celebrities have become an integral part of shaping our opinions, especially regarding social, political, and economic issues. In an era of dispersed flow of information, especially through digital platforms, the public encounters celebrities' personas, attitudes, and actions on a daily basis through social media platforms, online newspaper articles and interviews, live broadcasts, and other means of media representation. Taylor Swift can be considered one of the most depicted public personas in today's society.

The purpose of this thesis is to interpret the features leading to Swift's celebrity status and to define the effects on her audience. In examining her impact, attention will be paid to Swift's performative construction of celebrity identity, her modes of communication with fans in digital environments, the dynamics of fandom and audience engagement, and the ways in which her public expressions, including selected socio-political themes, may shape the perception of her persona and influence audience attitudes. Simultaneously, Swift's songwriting and music videos of selected songs will be analysed to further explore the methods of capturing the audience's attention and affecting the audience's attitudes and preferences through the use of various poetic devices, musical structures, and visual elements, which can contribute to the active involvement of individuals in various processes and the formation of public opinion.

In the first part, the thesis draws on the key factors that have shaped Taylor Swift's celebrity status and public position within the contemporary music and media landscape. It firstly outlines the theoretical definition of celebrity, conceptualising it as a culturally produced

form of visibility sustained through media circulation, audience recognition, and symbolic value within popular culture. This section then examines the construction of her physical appearance, including age and visual self-stylisation, the role of autobiographical storytelling in forming her narrative persona, and the ways in which media discourses interact with her own carefully curated forms of self-presentation, including stereotypical framings related to gender and appearance. It also considers her outspoken public advocacy for artistic autonomy in relation to legal and industrial constraints placed on celebrities.

The subsequent part turns to the question of audience impact. It begins with an exploration of Swift's artistic identity as performed in live settings, followed by an analysis of digital self-presentation through paratexts and branded paraphernalia. Further attention is devoted to the formation of parasocial relationships in digital environments, strategies of online audience engagement, and the conceptualisation of fandom as a participatory and meaning-producing community. The study then examines the specific dynamics of *Swifties* as a highly active fan base, and situates Swift within the broader patterns of digitally mediated cultural influence, examining how her position blurs the boundaries between traditional celebrity and influencer practices. The final section addresses her political articulation and its potential role in shaping audience perceptions and forms of engagement. The first two parts will be constructed with examination of sources such as books (*Celebrity* by Rojek; *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* by Marshall; *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* by Jenkins; *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* by Duffett), articles (*A Vernacular of Surveillance: Taylor Swift and Miley Cyrus Perform White Authenticity* by Dubrofsky; *Fostering Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities on Social Media: Implications for Celebrity Endorsement* by Chung, Siyoung, and Hichang Cho), and a documentary (*Miss Americana* by Lana Wilson), concerning the study of the selected celebrity, as well as the role of influencer and media in general. This section is partially

supplemented by a cultural analysis of selected articles from online mainstream newspapers and business magazines (such as *The Guardian*, *Forbes,* etc.) to interpret Swift's public image from the perspective of mainstream media.

The next part of the thesis proceeds to a literary analysis of selected song lyrics and accompanying music videos by Taylor Swift. "The Man", "You Need to Calm Down", "Only The Young", and "Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince" will be analysed and interpreted in order to further substantiate the arguments concerning Swift's celebrity status and audience impact examined in the preceding sections. Through close reading and contextual interpretation, the analysis demonstrates how Swift's songwriting style, including her distinctive approach to lyrical, musical, and visual structures, contributes to the construction of her public persona and the influence on her audience.

In the final part, my findings and results will be presented by answering the research questions:

1. What are the main features leading to Taylor Swift becoming a celebrity?
2. How can Taylor Swift's impact on her audience be defined?
3. How can Taylor Swift's songwriting style be interpreted as a factor in her popularity and audience impact?

2. Celebrity in the Context of Popular Culture

Celebrities can be understood as forms of representation within popular culture that are dependent on media structures to acquire visibility, influence, and public voice (Marshall 2014). According to Rojek (2001), celebrity functions as a force shaping public awareness.

Rojek (2001) further conceptualises celebrity as the process through which an individual is ascribed a glamorous or notorious status within the public sphere, where glamour denotes positive public recognition, while notoriety signifies negative public recognition.

To achieve public recognition, celebrities rely on the support of *cultural mediators,* a term referring to branding professionals such as agents, publicists, promoters, and photographers, whose role is to manage the public presentation of celebrity personas in order to sustain long-term audience engagement (Rojek 2001).

Because mass media representation is central to the establishment of celebrity culture, celebrities are frequently perceived as extraordinary or supernatural. This impression arises from the highly staged and mediated manner in which they are presented to the public (Rojek 2001). Celebrity status inherently involves a division between private identity and public persona. The public self is not a natural expression of the individual, but a carefully constructed performance, in which only selected aspects of identity are made visible while others remain concealed. For celebrities, this persistent separation can be psychologically challenging, often leading to feelings of identity confusion as the publicly mediated persona begins to overshadow the private self (Rojek 2001).

Rojek (2001) further distinguishes between renown, celebrity, and notoriety by focusing on the form of public recognition and the degree of mediation involved. Renown is grounded in direct or personal contact, through which an individual is perceived as distinctive or exceptional within a limited social context. By contrast, both celebrity and notoriety depend on

mediated visibility, as public recognition is produced through platforms such as stages, screens, or other mass communication channels that create distance between the individual and the audience. While celebrity is associated with positive public recognition, notoriety refers to similarly mediated visibility that carries predominantly negative connotations.

One possible interpretation of popular culture suggests that it can be understood as a commercially driven and media-based form of culture produced for broad public consumption (Storey, 2021). In contemporary society, popular culture operates through mass media and digital platforms that create the conditions of visibility necessary for individuals to gain public recognition (Marshall 2014). In this context, celebrities emerge as symbolic actors in the public sphere, embodying values and identities that resonate with wide audiences. At the same time, popular culture is not defined solely by top-down production; audiences actively interpret and negotiate meanings, thereby participating in the construction of celebrity significance (Jenkins 1992).

2.1. Factors Defining Celebrity Popularity

According to Chartmasters, Taylor Swift holds the title of the most-streamed artist on the Spotify platform with over 104 billion streams as of June 9, 2025 (Chartmasters 2025). During the *Eras Tour*, Taylor Swift performed a total of 149 shows across five continents, drawing over 10.1 million fans worldwide (Pollstar 2024). As reported by the Recording Academy, Taylor Swift has won 14 Grammy Awards and has had seven albums sell over one million copies in their first week (Grammy 2025).

Becoming a public persona with such an impact over society is determined by various aspects such as her age, life story, public celebrity status and public perception, sexual attraction, but also her expression of femininity, her employment status as an employee of a large multinational corporation, her value as a pop musician and as a trend and fashion follower

(Vannini 2011, 50). In the next sections, focus will be on defining these aspects in relation to Taylor Swift, which are the key characteristics when establishing popularity.

2.1.1. Age and Visual Identity

Celebrity appeal and brand value are influenced by factors such as age, appearance, and public achievements over time (Hoegg and Ueno 2016). The age of a celebrity is one of the determining aspects when it comes to becoming a public persona, because her appearance, public image, and ability to perform on stages are of high importance to the audience.

Taylor Swift started to produce music from a very young age. In her own documentary, *Miss Americana* (Wilson 2020), one can observe that she appeared at concerts around age 13. At 33 years old, Taylor Swift remains at the top of her career, which she accomplished by over two decades of consistent work and evolution within the music industry.

According to Taylor Swift, a celebrity has a limited chance to impress the audience, which diminishes with increasing age (Wilson 2020, 1:10:00–1:11:45). Taylor Swift herself is aware of these requirements, including physical attractiveness, and attaches great importance to it, as we can see her appearance is marked by following glossy outfits, stylized hair, specific makeup, and caution towards body shape (Wilson 2020, 00:29:30–00:32:12). These expectations can be demanding for the celebrities to manage and can contribute to developing eating disorders and other serious health diseases.

A recent study indicates that celebrities are continuously displayed in media and public scrutiny, causing celebrities to be compared to societal beauty stereotypes and images, which are often impossible to achieve. Such public pressure can lead to celebrities perceiving an unhealthy idea of how their body should look, possibly ending up in eating disorders and body dysmorphia (Divya and Emerson 2023). Taylor Swift herself has acknowledged she has had

problems with eating disorders due to receiving criticism over her weight and posture in certain periods (BBC 2020).

2.1.2. Storytelling and Narrative Identity

Taylor Swift's storytelling in her song lyrics is rooted in her personal experiences, which contributes to their perceived authenticity. By addressing universal themes such as love, heartbreak, betrayal, and loneliness, her songs are likely to impress a significant part of the population.

The fact that Taylor Swift writes the lyrics by herself adds value to her credibility, as well as an evolution of her music style and genre versatility, which enabled her to access a broad part of the audience. As Devlin (2024, 30) notes, "*T.S. songwriting breaks generational barriers*", indicating Swift's music captures wide audiences across distinctive age groups and preferences. Additionally, "*Taylor Swift is the genre unto itself*" (Procházková 2025, 12). Her Eras Tour is a reflection of the individual albums, and, therefore, her musical direction cannot be compared to a single genre. The albums symbolise Swift's transition from country to pop rock and from rock to indie folk.

At the beginning of her career, Swift started addressing audiences with country music background elements marked by personal expression, such as distinctive instruments and thematic content. According to Dyck (2021), country music power emerges from accessibility by addressing the lower-class society and maintaining simplicity, which merges communities together. Swift's popularity rose because of her attractiveness to the media, which was interested in a young star making her way through writing and performing in the country music scene.

It is reasonable to assume that someone who performs confidently on the stage from a young age and has a clear vision for their future must be sort of talented. However, one of the

most influential factors of Taylor Swift becoming a popular music icon is her responsible approach to songwriting and performing, which gives her value as a pop artist. Her dedication is further reinforced by her personal conviction to be a good person. (Wilson 2020, 00:01:08–00:01:49).

When Taylor Swift released her first fully pop album, *1989,* in 2014, she ultimately became a pop icon – her first official pop song, "Shake It Off," debuted at number one on the Billboard Hot 100 and became one of the best-selling singles, earning a Diamond certification in the United States (Trust 2014).

Taylor Swift has acknowledged that her urge to work hard is driven by a sense of not fully belonging to the broader community of musicians and a difficulty in sharing her success with others. The fact that she felt isolated and unconfident may be interpreted as a motivating factor behind her professional discipline and artistic independence (Wilson 2020, 00:19:30–00:22:47).

Swift's songs appeal to multiple generations because her lyrics reflect the specific life stages and experiences present at the time of writing. Over the course of her long career, which began at a young age, she has released a large number of songs that capture different emotional and personal phases of her life. This creates a sense of continuity in which both the artist and her audience evolve together. As a result, listeners from different generational layers can identify with her music, using it to interpret their own experiences from youthful relationship struggles to questions of identity in adulthood.

2.1.3. Media Representation and Self-Presentation

Marshall (2014) refers to traditional forms of media such as film, television, and newspapers as *representational media* that are responsible for filtering and forming celebrities out of individuals. The representational media are part of the *representational culture*, which remains a dominant and influential force in shaping contemporary experience. The role of

traditional media started to be challenged around the 1980s, due to the development of cable television, mobile devices, and personal computers through which the information was transmitted. With the introduction of the internet to the public, the flow of information became more diverse due to various online sources, and the audience started to be dispersed, as fewer people were watching broadcast schedules of major networks (Marshall 2014).

The information transformation contributed to the development of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr. Marshall (2014) conceptualises social media as *presentational media*, in which the role of individuals becomes more important, as they help distribute the content through mediation. *Presentational culture*, which is constructed within presentational media, is increasingly prominent and assumes a more central role in the production of meaning, significance, and power (Marshall 2014).

Hall (1997) argues that representation in media is a cultural process through which meaning is constructed through signs, language, and cultural codes. At the same time, media texts do not simply depict reality; they re-present people and ideas through processes of selection, framing, and classification that reflect broader ideological norms and power relations. Within this representational system, stereotypes function as simplified and stabilising narratives that present particular interpretations of identity as self-evident (Hall 1997). In Taylor Swift's case, traditional media frequently framed her through the stereotype of the "serial dater," reducing her public image to romantic relationships.

Self-presentation can be understood as a strategic performance aimed at managing impressions on the audience (Goffman 1956). Digital media expand this capacity by allowing celebrities to more actively manage and shape their public image. At the same time, however, they contribute to audience fragmentation, as different groups interpret and disseminate varying versions of the celebrity persona (Marshall 2014). While Swift uses digital platforms to reframe dominant narratives, stereotypical representations continue to shape her media image.

2.1.3.1. Stereotypical Depictions of Taylor Swift

Media representations play a significant role in shaping sociocultural norms and expectations, particularly in relation to gender. Despite progress in civil rights, restrictive gendered portrayals remain pervasive across media contexts, where men and women are frequently stereotyped and objectified. In the case of women, they are often evaluated primarily through appearance (Santoniccolo et al. 2023). Such portrayals reinforce dominant cultural ideals and normalise the constant evaluation of women's bodies and identities. Within celebrity culture, female public figures are often framed through narratives that emphasise their appearance, romantic relationships, and gender performance rather than their professional achievements.

Crenshaw (1989) argues that forms of discrimination such as race and gender cannot be analysed separately, as they intersect and shape one another. From this perspective, stereotypes are not structured only by gender but are also influenced by racial norms that define which identities are treated as standard or marginalised. Dyer (1997) further suggests that whiteness often functions as a neutral and universal cultural norm. This helps explain how stereotypes surrounding Taylor Swift are shaped not only by expectations of femininity but also by dominant ideals of white, Western womanhood that frame her identity as culturally familiar and socially acceptable.

According to Junes, feminine artists are more exposed to stereotypes than men, because they are idealised by society and the media. They must fight against social conventions and norms to achieve recognition for both their professional and personal identities. Women, who can be considered highly recognised producers in the pop industry, are only a small part of the total number of independent artists. This demonstrates that achieving success for young women in the music industry requires great dedication, effort, and other uncontrollable circumstances, as female artists must confront typical female stereotypes shaped by the American music

industry (Junes 2020, 17–22). As a white, feminine musician, Taylor Swift is often depicted with certain stereotypes related to her gender, appearance, and racial identity.

It is essential to recognise that femininity is not a characteristic of a natural origin, but is constructed and formed by social norms, cultural expectations, and personal experiences. The American feminine stereotypes are affected by the media representation and its visual depiction of idealised women. Women are often depicted as skinny and appealing to follow ideal beauty standards, further shaping societal perceptions of a perfect feminine image. The typical American girl image, marked by characteristic appearance features including blonde hair, blue eyes, and a joyful nature, has become the standardised image of feminine beauty and idealised depiction of femininity across American popular culture (Khediri 2023, 23–30).

It has to be acknowledged that Swift is aware that physical attractiveness is one of the determining aspects that has a significant impact on her success, as indicated in the documentary *Miss Americana* (Wilson 2020). However, the beginnings of her career are often connected with stereotypical depictions of "*a young, innocuous, good-looking girl*" (Jimenez 2024), as illustrated by the media. This could give the impression that Swift did not build her position in pop culture through her talent for creativity and conscientious work, and one could imply that her physical attractiveness adds more value to her successful career.

A recent article (Ford and Macrossan 2024), commenting on the political nature of the documentary *Miss Americana* (Wilson 2020), suggests that Taylor Swift's white identity, in addition to other factors, has had a fundamental influence on shaping her successful career, as "*Whiteness and neoliberalism are implicit in Swift's celebrity*". According to Ford and Macrossan (2024), the documentary *Miss Americana* promotes values of individuality, female creativity, and both professional and personal discipline, yet it hits upon the limits associated with normalising the experience of a white Western woman as universal, since the aspect of Swift's racial identity was not discussed in the documentary.

Swift herself has stated at the beginning of the movie that her success is primarily caused by treating people nicely and working hard. Swift's depiction of "*a good, moral woman*" could therefore contribute to a stereotypical understanding and moral conception of white women, whose aim is to behave kindly to others and to avoid failure.

Simultaneously, Swift's perception of herself could be affected by depictions of stereotypical norms of white women as ideals of purity and attractiveness, which are portrayed across the media. According to Natarajan et al (2022), purity culture practices have influenced the idealisation of white women and the experiences of Women of Colour, as "*purity culture teachings perpetuate whiteness by situating the ideal embodiment of sexual purity in attractive white girls*" (316).

Perhaps Swift, with her assertions about kindness and morality, endeavoured to emphasise her character rather than her appearance, not to be associated with ideologies and norms about white femininity. At the same time, she attempts to reconstruct the values of American pop culture through a moral authority. According to Dyer (1997), although whiteness is often perceived as a neutral or universal norm, it carries moral and aesthetic associations that have historically been attributed to white-skinned people.

From another perspective, Swift's attitude can be perceived as a fight and protest against conventions about feminine stereotypes portrayed across cultures, striving to point out the role of all women, regardless of their racial or cultural identity, as equal to themselves. Dubrofsky (2016) describes Taylor Swift's attempts to perform rationalised identities in her video clip of the song "Shake It Off" as unnatural and ironic, since her performance intention lies in direct conflict and contrast with her natural personality and authenticity. Whiteness is often associated with an authentic and stable identity, since authentic expressions depicted by the popular media are perceived by contemporary society in accordance with whiteness. The authenticity of white identity is naturally accepted by society and displays itself through the inability to be hidden by

performed behaviour. During the performances, "*she is not what she appears to be (the other). She is what is implicitly presented as her most natural, authentic self: blond, thin, white*" (192). There is nothing wrong with realistically portraying oneself, because an authentic person reflects their true, honest values and intentions (Dubrofsky 2016).

2.1.4. Legal Aspects of Celebrity

Being a celebrity comes with certain demands, such as behaviour in public speaking and social media presentation, that are acceptable to the media and audience. Establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with fans is a crucial aspect of sustaining public support and long-term success. A celebrity has to be able to handle potential conflicts through public speech and performance, along with managing audience obsession, given their significant influence on audience perceptions and opinions. This demand can be frustrating and disconcerting for most celebrities, resulting in depression and burnout.

Celebrities are more likely to suffer from mental health issues due to the need to align with public expectations, intense exposure, and mendacious media presentation of their image or behaviour. Furthermore, celebrities are often unable to seek medical attention because their reputation in the public eye as a perfect individual could be disrupted (Divya and Emerson 2023). In the documentary, we can see Taylor Swift's ambivalence and uncertainty about how to react when being disrupted by Kanye West during the award nomination, or to be present during the unexpected marriage proposal after her performance (Wilson 2020, 00:15:50–00:18:42; 00:43:41–00:44:17).

Engaging in partnerships with global corporations involves certain expectations that celebrities must negotiate and accommodate. In 2005, Taylor Swift signed a record deal with Big Machine Records (Guardian 2025), committing as a contracted artist. When a celebrity signs a record deal, it refers to a legal contract between the musician and a record label that

commits to producing a certain number of music recordings as part of their collaboration, known as masters. A common principle of such a contract is to require artists to give up rights to their copyrights, performances, and master recordings in return for services such as representation, publishing, production, marketing, and public promotion (Junes 2022, 8). By signing a contract with a record company, the artist also agrees to present themselves according to specific requirements to guarantee marketability of the product (17).

Swift was only 15 years old at that time, having almost no experience with corporate contract conditions, which heavily influenced her presentation as an artist and the content she released. The collaboration later escalated into conflict over her rights, as she had lost the ownership of her master recordings. As a consequence, Swift started to seek autonomy over her work and artistic independence, signing a new contract with Republic Records in 2018, which guaranteed her ownership over her forthcoming master recordings (Music Week 2018).

In 2021, Swift also re-recorded her first six albums under "Taylor's Version," whose rights originally belonged to Big Machine Records, acquiring them back in 2025 (Guardian 2025). Nowadays, Swift has made herself almost an independent artist, having her own brand and merchandise. She also negotiated with streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music to advocate for better pay conditions for artists. (Program on Negotiation 2014; CNBC 2015).

These facts demonstrate that celebrities have to be able to develop communication and negotiation skills when cooperating with multinational corporations, even at a very young age, at the beginning of their career. To prevent misunderstanding, it is necessary to be aware of the conditions and implications concerning the rights of the released content that may be part of such collaboration.

Additionally, facing significant pressure from agents and managers celebrities cooperate with in their profession, as well as involving strategies to establish an individual artistic identity and maintain success, is an essential part of a celebrity's commitment.

3. The Impact of Taylor Swift on Contemporary Popular Culture

Celebrities often have the advantage of changing social and cultural customs because of their exceptional social status, which can happen even unintentionally. Celebrities can not only have a significant impact on their audience, but also on those individuals who do not identify themselves as a part of a celebrity's community. A musician can present their performance to the audience through media portrayal, which can be partly controlled by the celebrity and the team members themselves. What a celebrity cannot control is how the content will be perceived by the audience, since the impression of a celebrity image is based on one's individual sense of understanding. (Junes 2020, 13–15). Building on the recognition that celebrity influence extends beyond intentional messaging and remains partially shaped by audience interpretation, this chapter examines how Taylor Swift's cultural impact emerges through the interplay of performance, digital mediation, fandom practices, and political articulation.

3.1. Artistic Expression in Taylor Swift's Live Performances and Album Promotions

To examine Taylor Swift's performative identity in live settings, this section focuses on her Eras Tour, which has significantly shaped her fan community and provides a comprehensive representation of her musical personas. The ideas in the following part draw in part on the study *Divadelnost hudební události: Taylor Swift a Eras turné*. (Procházková 2025). As the author mentions, fans created special costumes characteristic of each era, which they wore during the concerts, and they let themselves be inspired by verses from Taylor Swift's lyrics, for instance, when wearing and swapping friendship bracelets (6).

During the concerts, Taylor Swift portrays many of her personas, characterising each era, i.e., released album (13). A musical persona is constructed by its clothing, facial gestures, and body language (Philip Auslander 2021 as cited in Procházková 2025, 13). It is important to mention that Swift portrays her musical persona during her performances on stage, but she abandons her role by leaving the stage (Procházková 2025, 24).

According to the author, Eras Tour cannot be considered as an event, whose perception and experience would be limited only to the place and time of the actual performance of the individual concerts. The interpretations between a musical persona and its audience are further developed through the technologies, for example, via livestreams and fans' reactions on social media, or by broadcasting a concert film in cinemas (Procházková 2025, 14–16).

Interestingly, Taylor Swift achieved the incorporation of concert participants themselves into the scenography by providing the audience with LED strips, which were synchronised with the actual music being performed. Thanks to their visual connection to the stage, fans could feel as if they were part of the entire performance. Swift further uses the front of the stage to achieve greater interaction with her fans. Swift was often inspired by her music videos when performing individual sets. As a result of this, it was easier for the fans to recognise the performed scenes because they related to her earlier work, which evoked nostalgic memories in the audience (Procházková 2025, 26–28).

The scenes themselves are thematically arranged according to the albums and follow various visual features: screen sceneries and animations, dancers and their choreographies, smoke, light and visual effects (e.g. mirror effect creating the impression of illusion), props and backdrops constructions, luminous floor panels, specific body movements and postures, eye contact and face gestures, thematic costumes relating to her lyrics and music videos, confetti and musical instruments (as part of the scene). For each scene, Swift adjusts all components to reflect her past public and personal perceptions of her personality. For instance, while

performing the album *Reputation*, Swift used visual elements in the form of attacking snakes to refer to the criticism of her persona displayed across the media after she conflicted with Kanye West. Swift's narrative performances, therefore, serve as an intense experience for the audience, as they engage more senses, focusing the audience's attention not only on listening to the music but also on following the scenes that are composed of dynamic transitions (Procházková 2025, 28–48).

Procházková (2025) further notes on the depiction of three personas across the performances, which consist of a 'performing persona', a 'real persona', and a 'character from a performed piece'. These three personas mingle with each other at certain moments during the performance. Emotions, body gestures, and synchronised movements, as well as face gestures and eye contact, are significant in depicting these personas, as they either intensify or minimise the interactivity with the audience (45–53).

Swift also often surprises her fans with unexpected moments (such as providing fans with a gift or making fun of herself), which causes a sense of excitement and fascination in the audience (55). The use of specific gestures (e.g., moving her arms toward the audience) signals her affection for the audience and strengthens her relationship with the fans. Swift is aware that fans are an essential part of her musical career (47). She becomes more of an actress than a singer during the scenes. Her convincing portrayal of each role, including an authentic expression of emotions, further reinforces the audience's theatrical experience.

In addition to her live performances, Taylor Swift's album releases are also presented thematically, with each album cover corresponding to a specific life era. This enables the audience to connect the visual aspects of the album releases with the intent of the message, which is further conveyed in the song lyrics and their videos. According to Hubáček (2025, 40), strong visual transitions between the albums are a reflection of Taylor Swift's artistic evolution, and the contrast of each album allows the audience to analyse the content from different

perspectives. The author further compares the visual depiction of the album *Reputation* (2017) based on shadow aesthetics with *Lover* (2019), characterised by soft romance, emphasising the importance of visual aspects as being an essential part of non-verbal communication between a celebrity and their community and having a fundamental influence on forming a bond between them. Visual depiction of albums *Reputation* and *Lover* also reflects their central themes, as *Reputation* critically responds to the controversies surrounding Taylor Swift and her persona speculated through social media, while *Lover* symbolises elements of love and is inspired by relationships from the singer's personal life (Hubáček 2025, 30–32).

Characteristics of new album releases and Taylor Swift's social media communication are also *easter eggs*: secret lyric messages originally left in album notes, later expanded into the form of hidden clues in the videos, song lyrics, or posts (Hubáček 2025, 37). This unique and entertaining communication style contributes to maintaining constant contact with the celebrity.

Swift paid special attention to her fans with the release of her latest album, *The Life of a Showgirl*, as the fans received gifts in the form of poems or photo cards with the limited-edition products (such as Vinyl and CDs) they purchased. Swift's deliberate approach is based on the careful creation of her merch and an effort to offer her fans something unique with each purchase. This seems to be a successful marketing tactic, considering that some of her products were sold out immediately (Campbell 2025). The originality of the limited-edition goods is an essential element of this, as fans are striving to get pieces that are authentic to the singer and that will no longer be available in the future.

3.2. Parasocial Relationships, Paratexts, and Paraphernalia as Tools of Digital Self-Presentation

Social media offers an environment where the audience can feel connected to the celebrity, thanks to close interaction and shared authenticity. Public personas increasingly communicate via various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram to share their personal experiences with their audience. Thanks to this, a celebrity's followers can consider themselves not only as observers of a celebrity but also as a more integrated part of a celebrity's community. The increasing interactivity of the social media environment allows for building relationships between a celebrity and their fans (Chung and Cho 2017, 482, 483).

The relationship between a celebrity and a consumer on social media can be defined as a *parasocial relationship*, which enables the audience to identify with a celebrity's identity and feel a close sense of understanding (Wohl and Horton 1956 as cited in Chung and Cho 2017, 482). Parasocial relationships are one-sided long-term imagery relationships, which can be developed through a *parasocial interaction*, which is a direct response of the audience to the celebrity's content, provoking a current audience interest in the celebrity (Xu et al., 2023, 368, 369).

One of the key aspects affecting the relationship on social media is Taylor Swift's authenticity (Dobias 2017 as cited in Hubáček 2025, 40). The authenticity, which is an essential part of Swift's strong identity, is primarily marked by her autobiographical lyrics and by her personal communication with her fans (Hubáček 2025, 40).

In the context of celebrity culture, two related concepts also help explain how public images are constructed and consumed: paraphernalia and paratexts. *Paratexts* are communicative or textual frames that surround the main content, shaping how it is interpreted by audiences (Gray 2010). In Swift's case, paratexts encompass social media posts, interviews,

album booklets, trailers, and promotional narratives, all of which guide how fans perceive her music, image, and personal identity. According to Gray (2010), paratexts can be even user-generated, which includes fan theories and discussions.

Paraphernalia, on the other hand, are material objects that accompany a person or activity, providing additional context or means of engagement (Merriam-Webster 2026). Gray (2010) describes paraphernalia (although he uses different terminology) as paratexts that can function as merchandise, collectables, or visual symbols, which extend the presence of the celebrity beyond performances or media appearances. For Taylor Swift, this includes items like friendship bracelets, tour merchandise, special edition vinyl, and other branded objects that allow fans to engage physically with her persona.

3.3. Engaging Audience and Fandom in the Context of Digital Media

In media studies, it is important to distinguish between audience and fandom, as these terms describe different modes of engagement. 'Audience' generally refers to the broader group of recipients of media content, whose interpretations may vary according to their social and cultural positioning (Hall 1980). While audiences are not passive, their engagement does not automatically imply identification, collective organisation, or sustained participation. By contrast, 'fandom' signifies a more intensive and identity-based relationship to media texts, characterised by emotional investment, shared practices, and community formation (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002).

Duffett (2013) describes 'media fandom' as personal identification with a media-promoted object of popular culture, characterised by a strong, passionate bond with the depicted element. According to one study, more than 3/4 of young adults examined were personally deeply interested in a celebrity at some time in their lives, and more than half of the respondents

stated that their individual stances or beliefs were affected by a celebrity (Boon and Lomore 2001 as cited in Duffett 2013, 2).

The distinction between audience and fandom is particularly relevant in the case of Taylor Swift. She addresses a global audience of listeners, yet simultaneously formulates a more tightly connected fandom, the Swifties, whose engagement extends beyond consumption into organised and visible participation.

As Jenkins (2006) argues, media convergence enables content to circulate across platforms and communities beyond geographic boundaries. In Taylor Swift's case, this circulation sustains a globally connected fandom in which Swifties participate in coordinated streaming practices, online discussions, and real-time engagement during releases. At the same time, these global fan practices are controlled by local cultural contexts: interpretations of her lyrics, political statements, or public persona vary depending on national histories, media environments, and social norms. For example, Swift's narratives of romantic autonomy, reinvention, or celebrity self-authorship may resonate differently in societies with divergent gender norms or media systems. Similarly, reactions to her political statements, such as voter registration campaigns, vary: U.S. audiences often mobilise actively, whereas European or Latin American fans interpret them more as symbolic gestures than actionable instructions. Thus, Swift's fandom operates simultaneously as a transnational participatory network and as a set of locally situated responses.

In the context of digital media, Swift engages with her audience and fandom across multiple platforms, using them for different communicative purposes. For example, Swift deleted her accounts on social media before the release of her album *Reputation* to get fans more curious. After she released her song "Look What You Made Me Do", she liked many posts of her fans on Tumblr speculating about the message of this song or discussing the content of the video clip, as well as the hidden clues about the whole album (Business Insider 2017).

Swift has created many ways to interact with her fans. Besides liking, re-posting, and commenting on the posts of her followers, she also gives her fans an opportunity to meet her in person by taking part in secret listening sessions of her album. Her most dedicated fans are also excited by the chance to win a ticket to her concert or to be rewarded with special benefits or items from her brand. These motivating factors encourage Swift's fans to stay loyal to their idol, engaging actively in promoting her persona and brand by sharing her posts, using branded hashtags, and purchasing vinyl records or other branded items (Nexgen Dynamics 2018).

Swift uses social media to provide her audience with personal feedback, which makes them feel validated. Her direct communication with her fans is one of the aspects of her authentic persona, emphasising audience relationship as the most important element of her career. Swift's approach to digital interactivity further makes her fans feel as if they were part of her work (Dobias 2017 as cited in Hubáček 2025, 49). By establishing a close connection with her fans and consistently motivating their social media engagement, she has also developed a comprehensive marketing strategy to support her brand.

3.4. Participatory Culture and Collective Meaning-Making

Central to fandom is *participatory culture*, a media environment in which fans actively contribute to the production, circulation, and interpretation of content. Rather than merely receiving meaning, fans reinterpret and expand texts through discussion, digital interaction, and content creation, thus challenging the boundary between the roles of producer and consumer. This process contributes to what can be understood as *collective meaning-making*, where interpretations are negotiated within a community rather than determined solely by the creator (Jenkins 1992).

In Swift's case, collective meaning-making becomes visible in practices such as decoding easter eggs, interpreting lyrical references, or collaboratively speculating about future releases. Meaning emerges through shared analysis and digital interaction.

Hubáček (2025) states that using social media, fans become a part of the artist's work, as they actively participate in sharing and re-creating the content associated with the celebrity. The artist also inspires fans to create their own content. Thanks to this support, the celebrity is motivated to provide the audience with personal feedback. A reliable connection is established between the celebrity and the fan community, as well as between the fans themselves. This mutual communication can also affect the production of other artists or sociocultural relations in general. For instance, Taylor Swift's fans actively contributed to the discussions about artistic independence (42–47).

3.5. Swifties as Superfans

The term *superfan* is commonly defined as "*an extremely enthusiastic or devoted fan*" (Merriam-Webster 2026). Hills (2002) argues that fan communities are shaped by what he calls *fan cultural capital*, meaning that knowledge, long-term dedication, and visible participation can influence a fan's standing within the community. In other words, fandom involves internal hierarchies, performances of authenticity, and negotiations of legitimacy. Fans who demonstrate detailed knowledge of the artist's work and actively engage in fan practices may thus be perceived as more committed or authentic (Hills 2002).

In the case of Taylor Swift, certain Swifties exemplify this heightened devotion through their detailed knowledge of her symbolic references, repeated participation in live events, engagement in symbolic practices such as bracelet exchanges, and sustained activity in online fan communities, such as public defence of the artist online. These activities demonstrate how fandom can transform from a mode of reception into a capacity for mobilisation.

Procházková (2025) indicates that Taylor Swift's musical persona, characterised by openness and authenticity towards her fans, is a major factor affecting her audience rapport. The principle of direct communication with fans during concerts or on social media platforms has contributed to forming the most dedicated and loyal part of her fan community, Swifties. Since the beginning of her career, Swift shared her personal thoughts and experiences on social media, by which she constructed her identity on values of trust and affinity (57, 58). Also, Swift's credible songwriting shaped the audience relationship, as it closely reflects each part of her authentic persona.

According to Procházková (2025), there are many habits characteristic of Swifties that we can observe at Swift's concerts. To promote her persona during the Eras Tour, Swifties wore special outfits, and they actively participated during the event by dancing, singing, and imitating their idol. Because Swifties shared the same values and their actions were synchronised, they experienced moments of collective enthusiasm. Swifties' bond with the singer is so intense that it is sometimes associated with following religious beliefs. In most cases, Swift is the originator of traditions that the Swifts then imitate and repeat, but sometimes the Swifts initiate a custom that the celebrity then follows, further reinforcing their interactions with each other (58–60).

3.6. Celebrity-Influencer Convergence: Taylor Swift as Hybrid Figure

A 'social media influencer' is generally defined as a person who has the ability to affect the opinions, behaviours, or purchasing decisions of others, particularly through social media platforms. In common usage, the term refers to individuals who build a significant online presence and use that visibility to shape audience preferences, often in relation to lifestyle, products, or cultural trends (Cambridge Dictionary 2026).

Influencers can be understood as a type of micro-celebrity who build and sustain their audience on blogs and social media platforms by sharing written and visual accounts of their everyday lives. Commercial promotions for products and services are often embedded within these personal narratives (Abidin 2016). Their influence is therefore grounded in the strategic performance of relatability and intimacy rather than distance or exceptionalism traditionally associated with celebrity status.

This dynamic is closely linked to practices of *self-branding*, understood as the deliberate construction of a public persona for commercial, social, or cultural gain. Self-branding can be described as a central mechanism through which micro-celebrities, including influencers, emerge and maintain their visibility in digital culture (Khamis, Ang, and Welling 2017). Influencers thus operate not only as content creators but also as managers of their own public identities, strategically balancing authenticity, visibility, and marketability.

The figure of the follower becomes central to influencer culture, as influencer visibility is grounded in ongoing digital self-presentation and necessarily depends on an identifiable and measurable audience. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2026), a 'follower' is someone who chooses to see a particular person's posts, such as messages or pictures, on a social media

site. The term refers to a user who subscribes to another account in order to receive its content updates.

In this sense, the relationship between an influencer and their follower represents a platform-based connection. Unlike fandom, such a connection does not necessarily imply emotional commitment, identification, or active participation.

Nowadays, social media has become an effective means of sharing information, including in the political sphere. As each influencer establishes a follower community, there is a strong bond between the viewer and the content released by its creator. Therefore, influencers can not only present the current political situation to their audience, but they can also affect the political engagement of their followers. Young people's political attitudes in particular seem to be affected by influencers, as Generation Z is considered the most active social media participant (Citarella 2021).

According to recent social media usage and platform statistics, 84% of people between the ages of 18 and 26 actively use at least one social media site. Americans use an average of 7 social media accounts, spending about 127 minutes on social media daily. Another social media statistic aimed at advertising and influencers reports that 76% of users have purchased a product they saw on social media, 50% of Millennials follow their influencers' product recommendations, and 88% of them have acknowledged they appreciate values such as authenticity in their influencers (Wong 2023). These facts demonstrate that society is increasingly susceptible to social media influence, particularly in the consumer and political spheres. Social media becomes a powerful tool for marketers and politicians, using the role of an influencer to shape the audience's interests on a daily basis.

In digital media environments, the distinction between traditional celebrities and social media influencers has become increasingly blurred. While celebrities historically derived their

status from institutional recognition and mass media exposure, influencers build audiences through platform-based content creation, specialised expertise, and relational engagement. Influencers may lack the glamour traditionally associated with celebrity culture, yet they compensate through perceived authenticity, contextualised product knowledge, and direct dialogue with followers. By sharing functional information, personal experiences, and tailored brand advice, influencers address both consumers' instrumental needs and their relational desire for intimacy and trust. These practices position influencer endorsement as a powerful driver of brand persuasion and sales (Hung 2021).

As established celebrities adopt similar strategies, including curated self-disclosure, strategic authenticity, and continuous interaction, they expand their capacity not only to promote products but also to shape public discourse. In this context, figures such as Taylor Swift operate simultaneously as global celebrities and influencer-like communicators, capable of extending persuasive influence beyond commercial promotion into broader social and political expression.

In the contemporary media landscape, political engagement is increasingly becoming an implicit feature of celebrity and influencer visibility. Rapid shifts in social dynamics, changing media consumption patterns, and growing distrust toward traditional opinion-forming institutions have expanded the communicative role of digitally visible public figures. As conventional political authorities face declining credibility, celebrities and influencers often occupy a space in which they articulate political positions and mobilise their audiences.

Within this context, Taylor Swift's political engagement can be understood as part of a broader structural transformation rather than as an isolated case. Swift uses social media not only for direct communication with her followers and as a marketing strategy, but also as a platform for expressing political views. In doing so, she operates within influencer logic, where visibility, audience reach, and platform-based interaction enable political messaging. Swift's

political stances, forms of participation, and their implications for her audience will be examined in the following chapters.

3.7. Taylor Swift's Political Articulation and Audience Influence

Taylor Swift's political approach can be examined from multiple perspectives. To provide insight into the construction of her political identity in public discourse, I focus on a cultural analysis of popular mass media journal articles portraying her political activism and its reported effects on audience engagement and participation between 2018 and 2024. The documentary *Miss Americana* (Wilson 2020) will also be analysed to explore Swift's own articulation of her political intentions and actions, which will then be contrasted with recurring media frames in mainstream journalistic coverage.

From one perspective, Swift can be seen as aligning herself with feminist discourse through her public engagement with issues such as sexism, misogyny, and structural inequalities within the music industry. She became the subject of a highly publicised controversy in 2016 when Kanye West referenced her in his song "Famous." The dispute revolved around whether she had approved the specific lyrics prior to the song's release, a claim that was publicly contested and widely debated in the media. The controversy led to intense public scrutiny and questioning of her credibility, contributing to her temporary withdrawal from public life (Wilson 2020, 0:33:05–0:36:20).

Swift also publicly addressed her experience of sexual assault by radio DJ David Mueller during a backstage photograph. The subsequent court case required her to testify and defend her account, attracting extensive media attention and generating polarised public reactions. In *Miss Americana*, she reflects on these experiences and expresses solidarity with other survivors of sexual assault, encouraging them to speak out and seek justice (Wilson 2020, 0:55:15–0:59:00).

Swift's support for women's rights and her critique of patriarchal structures are reflected not only in her music (e.g., "The Man") but also in her social media activity. In 2018, she publicly opposed the election of Republican candidate Marsha Blackburn as U.S. Senator for Tennessee, criticising Blackburn's voting record, including her stance against the Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. In an Instagram post addressed to her more than 112 million followers at the time, Swift expressed her disagreement with Blackburn's candidacy and endorsed the Democratic candidates Phil Bredesen (Senate) and Jim Cooper (House of Representatives), marking her first explicit public political endorsement (Wilson 2020, 1:03:00–1:06:25).

Following her post during the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, voter registration increased significantly, particularly in Tennessee, Swift's home state. More than 240,000 new voter registrations were recorded within 48 hours, over 100,000 of which were among individuals aged 18 to 29. This suggests that the increase was especially visible among younger voters, a demographic that constitutes a significant part of Swift's fan base (Cunningham 2018). Gabbatt (2018), also citing Vote.org, reported more than 160,000 new registrations during the same period. Media outlets referred to this surge as the "Swift lift," highlighting a notable rise in youth political participation, with reports stating that turnout among young voters was seven times higher than in the previous midterm elections (Wilson 2020, 1:11:55–1:12:05).

In 2019, Swift expressed support for the LGBTQ+ community through the release of the music video of "You Need to Calm Down" and by promoting a Change.org petition advocating for the Equality Act, which she personally addressed in an open letter to Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, calling for stronger legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (McConnell 2024). In 2020, she further encouraged civic engagement with the release of "Only the Young", a song written in response to the 2018 midterm election results and her disappointment with voter participation (Wilson 2020,

1:13:00–1:16:45). Importantly, the song did not promote a specific presidential candidate; rather, it framed voting as a fundamental democratic right and responsibility, particularly addressing young and first-time voters within her audience.

In 2020, Swift endorsed Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in the presidential election in an interview with V Magazine, citing reasons for her voting decision such as racial justice, global healthcare, and LGBTQ+ rights (Shah 2024). Swift also urged her followers on an Instagram story to participate in the 2022 midterm elections, and a year later, on National Voting Day, Swift asked her followers to register on the Vote.org platform, resulting in over 35,000 new registered voters after her post (McConnell 2024).

In 2024, after the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, Taylor Swift endorsed Harris as a presidential candidate and expressed support for her running mate Tim Walz, who, according to Swift's Instagram post, defends LGBTQ+ and women's rights (Dorn 2024). Her support for Harris was followed by other musicians, e.g., Lady Gaga or Eminem (Roeloffs 2024). Thanks to the support of the campaign from mainstream culture, there may have been an increase in voters.

Swift's focus on political participation is particularly affecting the younger population of her fans. In 2018, dependent on Swift's post calling for political engagement, there was a statistically recorded the largest increase in the number of votes of Generation Z and Millennials, historically the least politically engaged group. The reason why the number of votes from young voters increased could be related to Swift's authentic way of communicating and the issues that Swift highlighted in arguing for her political views, which simultaneously concern young people the most. Swift also serves as an inspiration for other celebrities to utilise their impact to actively engage audiences in political participation and promote civil liability (Ian 2025).

Swift also commented on the unique idea of her fans growing together with her, going through the same life experiences, which are reflected in Swift's lyrics (Wilson 2020, 0:11:15–0:12:10). This establishes a strong connection between the audience and her songs. Due to this sympathetic attachment in the personality development between Swift and her audience, Swift might have become a role model for her fans. As the evolution of her political articulation sympathises with changes in her personal life as well as in the lives of her audience, Swift might have a lifelong impact on her audience regarding political opinions or participation.

Swift's positive view of her persona and her public image has been tested by a survey of favourability from 2023, where 50% of likely voters acknowledged they perceived Taylor Swift to some extent positively. Swift's attention and credibility dedicated to candidates may be the key aspects increasing turnout in the future, as 72% of likely voters between 18 and 29 were in favour of Taylor Swift (Harris 2023).

However, Swift's impact in the midterm elections in 2018 seems to be significant only at the local level, as there was a big increase in registrations primarily in Taylor Swift's home state, Tennessee (Cunningham 2018). Thanks to the use of social media, celebrities can effectively approach a broad part of the audience and have the potential to increase the number of registered voters. The audience impact depends on the relationship between the celebrity and its fans, as the most devoted part of the community is likely to follow their influencer's recommendations. In the case of Taylor Swift, generations such as Millennials and Generation Z seem to form a close connection. Young people tend to be less represented in the elections compared to older generations, indicating that the audience Swift is targeting is not a sufficient representation of the population that would cause a major impact on the election results or a significant change in voter representation. The U.S. election results so far, which have not been in Swift's favour, seem to confirm this assumption.

According to a survey from 2023, the largest part of Swift's U.S. fans were in favour of the Democratic Party (Leu 2025), indicating that Swift's advocacy for political involvement may have influenced younger audiences to form their political opinions. It is important to note that Swift's posts primarily encourage her followers to actively participate in elections, not to follow her political views. Although Swift has openly admitted who she will vote for, she always encourages fans to make their own choices based on their own political education.

Swift's songs, lyrics, and musical persona can be considered as a support intended primarily for a female audience (Weinstein 2024). Her former feminist steps include expressing support for other women during a Canadian talk show while discussing gender equality and feminism (Garcia 2015). However, Swift is often criticised for not taking enough participation in the events concerning feminist activism, and her feminist expressions are sometimes limited to white feminism, which prioritises mainly white, skinny women from the upper classes of society. This may be influenced by Swift's role model in the feminist movement, as her friendship with Lena Dunham did not formulate comprehensive feminist practices. In 2014, Swift controversially reacted to Nicky Minaj's Tweet regarding the insult to Swift's music video, as Swift responded by not taking into account the disadvantage of women of different skin colours and body shapes at award ceremonies (Weinstein 2024).

One common feature can be observed in Swift's political stances, as they are a direct reflection of both her personal and public struggles she had to face as a famous female artist in the musical industry. Swift started to publicly promote her political stances after the sexual affair, since she no longer wanted to be silent on opinions of highest importance for her; Swift has acknowledged that stalking is her biggest fear (Wilson 2020, 1:01:05–1:03:50), and by supporting human rights such as safety, fair pay for women and equal inclusion of homosexuals in the society, Swift promotes values such as gender, race and LGBTQ+ equality.

The above detailed cases raise broader questions about the role and responsibility of celebrities in democratic processes. On the one hand, encouraging civic participation, particularly among younger demographics that are often underrepresented in elections, may be viewed as a positive contribution to democratic engagement. On the other hand, the ability of a cultural figure to influence political behaviour through personal endorsement complicates traditional understandings of political authority and expertise. When celebrities leverage their visibility to comment on political issues or endorse candidates, their influence operates not through institutional legitimacy but through affective bonds with followers. This prompts critical reflection on whether such influence enhances democratic participation or risks oversimplifying complex political issues through personalised persuasion.

Some public figures face criticism for openly endorsing or condemning specific political actors, which can contribute to social polarisation. However, Swift's messaging in this instance centred primarily on civic participation itself. By emphasising voting as a democratic right rather than encouraging people to vote for a specific candidate, she framed her influence as a way of motivating engagement rather than directing political choice.

Nevertheless, even such general calls for political participation can become controversial within highly polarised media environments. Swift's public persona illustrates how celebrity interventions are shaped not only by the content of their statements but also by the interpretative practices of audiences and media circulation. Fans may incorrectly conflate an artist's political views with their artistic identity, while social media platforms often decontextualise and circulate celebrities' public statements in ways that intensify division.

4. Poetics of Songwriting

In this chapter, selected songs by Taylor Swift are analysed in terms of their lyrics and accompanying music videos. A literary-analytical approach based on qualitative close reading and interpretative analysis is used here on the assumption that song lyrics share key features with lyric poetry. As outlined in definitions of lyric poems (LiteraryDevices.net 2026), this form is typically marked by the first-person narration, the articulation of personal experience, and the use of various techniques and poetic devices such as metaphor, vivid imagery, rhetorical questions, alliteration, and assonance. These stylistic and rhetorical features are likewise central to contemporary songwriting. Swift's lyrics are demonstrably composed of metaphorical language, symbolic imagery, sound patterning, and emotionally inflected address, which allows them to be examined as poetic texts, even though they are primarily encountered through musical performance.

Moreover, song lyrics possess a particular capacity to engage audiences with social and political issues. According to Frith (1996), popular music operates not only as entertainment but as a medium through which listeners construct meaning, identity, and emotional affiliation.

The combination of narrative storytelling, repetition, and affective resonance enables lyrics to articulate personal experiences in ways that can be collectively recognised and politicised. Because popular music circulates widely through mass media, digital platforms, and participatory fandom cultures, such narratives gain extensive visibility and are strengthened through processes of sharing, reinterpretation, and communal identification.

Listeners frequently connect with artists whose themes resonate with their own lived experiences, allowing personal emotions to be reframed as socially meaningful concerns. In this way, songwriting demonstrates a particular potential to engage contemporary audiences

with ongoing social and political debates, as individual expression is becoming part of broader cultural conversations.

Building on these premises, this chapter undertakes a literary analysis of selected songs by Taylor Swift, focusing on both their lyrics and accompanying music videos. Methodologically, the analysis is grounded in qualitative close reading and an interpretative approach, enabling an examination of how meaning emerges through metaphor, imagery, sound devices, and narrative voice. Instead of applying a strictly formal or musicological framework, the analysis focuses on the semantic and symbolic aspects of both verbal and visual expression in order to examine how Swift's songwriting operates as a form of narrative practice. Particular attention is paid to the interplay between poetic devices and visual elements as strategies of audience engagement, shaping interpretation, emotional response, and potentially attitudes toward contemporary social issues.

The songs "The Man," "You Need to Calm Down," "Only the Young," and "Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince" are selected because they were written and released during the *Lover* era, a period that coincided with Swift's first explicit public political statements. Their analysis thus enables an examination of how artistic expression, mediated visibility, and emerging political positioning intersect within Swift's work. While acknowledging that these songs remain open to multiple interpretations, this chapter considers how their lyrical and audiovisual features may be read as contributing to wider public conversations about gender, equality, civic participation, and political identity.

4.1. The Man

Album: Lover, track number: 4, release year: 2019.

In this song, Swift portrays a male version of herself, called Tyler Swift. The notion of her male image reflects how she feels as a woman. Her male image is stereotypically depicted, drawing attention to the stereotypical perception and depiction of women in society.

In the video clip, Swift, as a man, behaves as a successful businessman, whose arrogance and recklessness are being tolerated by society. For instance, he crumples up and throws away a piece of paper belonging to his subordinate without paying attention to it, or smokes in public transport, ignoring the obvious discomfort he causes to other people. The lines "*And it's all good if you're bad*" and "*And it's okay if you're mad*" indicate that what is considered okay in accordance with the male gender would, in the case of women, be unacceptable.

In the office scene, the self-confidence of manhood is celebrated without proving it by actions, and later in the boat scene, the man is enjoying his party in a crowd of women, which is normalised as a standard entertainment of rich men. Swift is trying to evoke the impression that if a woman were portrayed in this way, she would not escape judgment. Swift uses lines "*Wondering if I'd get there quicker if I was a man*" and "*They wouldn't shake their heads and question how much of this I deserve*" to highlight how she would be supported and respected for what she has achieved as a male musician, noting she wouldn't be judged for the same as she was as a female artist: "*I'm so sick of running as fast as I can*".

Furthermore, there is a contrast between the roles of the father and the mother. The father is praised for caring for his child, which is otherwise taken for granted in the case of the mother. In a club, men can behave badly, for example, fighting or paying for women's company. In the court, the man seeks justice as he is behaving aggressively towards the referee, and at the same time, he is simulating an injury. The scenes show how society

tolerates the use of male power, money, or violence to consolidate one's position. By lines "*Every conquest I had made would make me more of a boss to you*" and "*I'd be an alpha type,*" Swift emphasises the role of male supremacy and natural authority.

Swift is with this song trying to address issues of gender inequality from a critical feminist perspective. However, her message could reinforce the idea of white male supremacy in society. The scenes seem to be out of context (e.g., it is not probable that a millionaire would use public transport), and the main character does not represent hard-working men from lower social classes. Thus, the scenes can not provide a comprehensive image of manhood, as they consist of subjective impressions. Swift's perception of manhood is based on the notion that male and female artists are not subject to the same conditions in terms of media portrayal of their public images, which is influenced by her own experience as a female singer.

4.2. Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince

Album: Lover, track number: 7, release year: 2019.

The song offers neither clear storytelling nor a music video, and therefore, leaves space for multiple interpretations. On the one hand, Swift compares her high school period to her adult life, as naive anticipation and idealised perception of the world through the eyes of a young, innocent girl blend in with recognition of harsh reality and incomprehension. On the other hand, the perception of the high school period can parallel the view of American politics, as there are feelings of overall disappointment, loss, and failure from both the high school system and the current political situation in American states.

In both cases, Swift sees the only purpose in following her dreams, which are unattainable, but still worth pursuing. The dream can be characterised as her ideal partner, which does not exist, or her ideal version of herself, which is unable to achieve. Against the

backdrop of a romantic story, the main motifs are struggle, resignation, helplessness, and hope, which simultaneously contrast with each other.

At the beginning of the story, Swift feels lost in high school, which may signify she has been lost in a certain life period or in the political system. She lacks attention and does not feel confident or comfortable in her current state, as referred to in line "*I'm lost in the lights*".

The line "*American glory faded before me*" indicates that the singer is disappointed by the decline of politics and the economy of the American states. At the same time, the line could refer to disillusionment with the American dream, reflecting the awareness of idealised conceptions that can not be fulfilled. In the following line, Swift uses a metaphor of tearing her clothes to emphasise that she feels desperate about the situation.

The chorus begins with the lines "*It's you and me, that's my whole world*" and "*They whisper in the hallway, 'She's a bad, bad girl' (okay)*" could potentially refer to the media questioning Swift's public action or political statements. The line "*The whole school is rolling fake dice*" can metaphorically represent the popularisation and simplification of politics in American elections, where popularity wins over real interest in solving problems.

The following line, "*You play stupid games, you win stupid prizes,*" can metaphorically represent the fact that following popular content or leaders leads to extremism. In other words, Swift could refer to priming, a method of influencing an individual's cognitive abilities based on subliminal information. In this case, what is repeated by the public gains the greatest electoral power.

Lines "*It's you and me, there's nothing like this*" and "*Miss Americana and The Heartbreak Prince (okay)*" refer to Swift's dreamy and non-existent relationship. Her desire, unfilled love, is the only thing that makes sense, even though her perfect counterpart does not

exist. There is a contrast between a good, virtuous girl and a successful man, who is a heartbreaker, because he is what every woman desires.

The line "*We're so sad, we paint the town blue*" is an example of how Swift uses colours as symbols. The phrase "we paint the town blue" is the opposite of the idiom "we paint the town red," which means hanging out with friends and having fun. Swift uses the colour blue to express melancholy and indignation.

The line "*Voted most likely to run away with you*" signals an alternative way of solving the problem. Swift is aware of the fact that she belongs to a minority that realises real issues, and, therefore, chooses to escape together with her desire, because she feels helpless and believes that love is the only option. "*My team is losing, battered and bruising*" signals that Swift is losing her fight because of the unfair actions of opponents. The line could refer to the cooperation of male political leaders against feminine politicisation.

"*I see the high fives between the bad guys*" potentially alludes to the corruption of politics, as political individuals are collaborating for the purpose of enrichment. In the line "*Boys will be boys then, where are the wise men*?" Swift expresses the trivialization of serious problems at the higher political level and the loss of trust in the political elite.

The bridge of the song consists of the lines "*'Cause nobody's gonna (win), just thought you should know*" and "*That someday we're gonna (win), just thought you should know*" which shows contrast between helplessness and faith. Simultaneously, the lines signalise that it is worth fighting for one's own values.

The song represents an ideal work of art for the listeners to explore their imagination and fantasy, celebrating Swift's comprehensive ability to be creative and tell multiple stories based on one song.

4.3. You Need to Calm Down

Album: Lover, track number: 14, release year: 2019.

In this song, Swift expresses her support for the LGBTQ+ communities by making their representatives visible and giving them personal recognition. Metaphors such as "*Like, can you just not step on my gown?*" and "*And snakes and stones never broke my bones*" are used to discourage people against the LGBTQ+ community from disrespecting and judging them. Furthermore, similes such as "*But you're coming at my friends like a missile*" and "*But you're taking shots at me like it's Patrón*" are used to show the seriousness of unjustified attacks on the community. With the line "*Cause shade never made anybody less gay,*" Swift emphasises that, by insults, nothing is going to be changed, and therefore, all the force and hatred towards people with different sexual orientations and gender identities has no sense.

The song represents Swift's political interests, such as safety and equal conditions for all people regardless of colour, gender, or sexual orientation, highlighting their rights and claims. In the final scene, Swift, dressed in a French fries costume, finds her counterpart, a hamburger. The scene may refer to the promotion of diversity, as each person (even if they represent a minority) is valuable to someone and deserves to be respected. At the same time, Swift specifically addresses American society with the scene, as a hamburger with fries serves as a typical meal for Americans.

However, there are certain limitations that are not in line with the intention of releasing the song. With repeated phrases "*You need to calm down*" and "*You're being too loud,*" along with the accompanying scene where Swift lies in the swimming pool in front of the burning house, one gets the impression that this encourages the audience to be irresponsible and not engage in matters of high importance.

Furthermore, opponents of the LGBTQ+ community are portrayed in the music video as a bunch of peasants; they automatically represent ugly-looking people of lower social classes. Portraying people who are against the LGBTQ+ community as primitive citizens with aggressive behaviour towards others might provoke conflicts within society instead of restoring peace.

On the other side, members of the LGBTQ+ community are portrayed as rich, handsome people. Simultaneously, they are depicted as eccentric, which attracts all the attention in the video. This assumption is underlined by scenes where representatives point out their status, appearance, or figure, or throw food at each other, almost as if they lack self-reflection. Neither side of the community presents a realistic and comprehensive description of society, but only fragments of it.

The contrastive visual impression makes the audience divide into two camps and decide on one side instead of merging the society into one coherent unity where all members share the same values. Expressive visual and textual elements, along with the imposition of one's own identity, force the viewer to decide on their own interests, having two choices.

4.4. Only The Young

Single for Miss Americana, release year: 2020.

The song was written for the documentary Miss Americana (Wilson 2020) as a part of its soundtrack. There is no official music video of the song; therefore, only the lyrics will be analysed. The song was written between 2018 and 2019 during Swift's era of first political activity, calling for political awakening among young voters, mainly for the upcoming 2020 presidential election.

At the beginning of the song, Swift sympathises with the listeners by using metaphors such as "*You're screaming inside*" and "*And frozen in time*". The lines emphasise the emotional

disappointment that may be caused by the election results. She identifies with the audience's side that lost: "*You were outnumbered, this time*".

With the repeated phrase "*Only the young,*" Swift specifically addresses the young audience to take part in the elections, for which she uses the metaphor in the next line: "*can run, so run*". The urge for political participation of young voters is further highlighted by using repetition: "*And run, and run, and run*".

Swift places her hope in the younger generations of voters. By emphasising the significance of their votes, she suggests that they represent the key force for political change, as reflected in the line: "*Only one thing can save us*". Young voters are further motivated to remain politically engaged and not to fall into inactivity, as expressed in the line: "*Don't say you're too tired to fight*". In line "*Up there's the finish line*", metaphorical language is used to compare participation in elections to a winning strategy. Despite Swift's urge to primarily address the young audience, her intention would not be of much consequence, as young people statistically represent only a fraction of the electorate.

"*And the big bad man and his big bad clan*" refers to Swift's warning against patriarchal political powers, which might have resulted from her disillusionment with the midterm election results in 2018. Alliteration and simple language are used to depict the political forces as evil, to make it easier for young people to understand the message about dangerous male-dominated powers. By noting "*Their hands are stained with red*", attention is drawn to the lack of moral responsibility of the leaders, potentially blaming them for the emerging violence in the country by not undertaking political actions related to the support of security and equality. This line is an example of using synecdoche.

4.5. Patterns of Musical, Lyrical, and Visual Expression in Taylor Swift's Songs and Music Videos

In the course of analysing Taylor Swift's songs and music videos, several recurring features characteristic of her artistic style become apparent. These elements, such as the spanning lyrical construction, musical structure, and visual storytelling, may contribute to her sustained popularity and the heightened visibility of her public persona. Given that this thesis examines celebrity status and its impact on audiences, it is necessary to identify and briefly contextualise the principal attributes that shape Swift's artistic practice and influence audience reception.

While memorable choruses are common in popular music, Swift's songwriting stands out in the way these moments are closely tied to a clear narrative perspective. Her choruses often summarise the central conflict of the song in a direct and easily quotable line. For example, in "The Man," the refrain "*I'm so sick of running as fast as I can / Wondering if I'd get there quicker if I was a man*" condenses the song's broader reflection on gender inequality into a single, striking statement. Such lines frequently circulate beyond the song itself, appearing in social media posts and public discussions, which extends their cultural impact.

A key feature of Swift's style is her ability to connect personal experience with broader social themes. Although her lyrics often draw on autobiographical elements such as public criticism or gender expectations, they are framed in ways that allow listeners to see their own experiences reflected in them. This contributes to her relatability. At the same time, Swift frequently employs irony and self-awareness, particularly when responding to media portrayals of her persona. In "You Need to Calm Down," for instance, the seemingly playful tone and the line "*shade never made anybody less gay*" use irony to address hostility and prejudice. Through tonal shifts, which often occur in the bridge, Swift reframes earlier verses and deepens the

song's meaning, transforming what may initially seem lighthearted into a more pointed commentary.

In Swift's songs, musical structure often supports narrative development. Structural shifts, especially in the bridge, tend to coincide with emotional or thematic turning points. In "Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince," the bridge intensifies both lyrically and musically, reinforcing the darker political undertones that emerge beneath the high-school metaphor. The change in energy and vocal delivery marks a moment of heightened urgency, encouraging listeners to reinterpret the preceding verses in a broader social context. In this way, melody, dynamics, and storytelling work together, contributing to Swift's distinctive artistic identity and strengthening her ability to maintain audience engagement.

Swift's music videos are characterised by carefully constructed visual narratives in which individual scenes are interconnected and closely aligned with the lyrics. Rather than functioning as simple illustrations, the visuals often expand and develop the themes introduced in the song. As Andrew Goodwin (1992) observes, music videos may illustrate, amplify, or reinterpret lyrical meaning; Swift's videos frequently operate through amplification. In "The Man," for example, Swift appears in male disguise, visually enacting the gender privilege described in the lyrics. The exaggerated behaviour of the male character, together with the final reveal of Swift as director, deepens the critique of double standards and adds a meta-commentary on celebrity identity. The visual dimension thus reinforces and extends the song's thematic message.

Beyond structural and thematic features, Swift's songwriting is also characterised by a participatory mode of communication with her audience. She frequently embeds hidden references and intertextual clues in both lyrics and music videos. In "You Need to Calm Down," for example, the visual inclusion of LGBTQ+ celebrities and symbolic colour coding invites interpretative engagement and encourages viewers to decode layered meanings. Fans actively discuss such details on digital platforms, framing interpretation as a collective activity.

At the same time, Swift often addresses the listener in direct and conversational terms, which enhances emotional proximity. In "Only the Young," the repeated line "*Only the young can run*" functions not merely as commentary but as an implicit call directed at a specific generation. Many listeners interpret such moments as affirmations of their own experiences, particularly feelings of political frustration, marginalisation, or generational responsibility.

Swift's lyrics are further distinguished by her use of poetic devices and figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes, apostrophes, symbols, repetitions, and allusions. At the same time, the singer often uses rhetorical questions and unique interjections in her lyrics. For instance, in "Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince," she uses metaphors such as "*cheerleaders,*" "*scoreboards,*" and "*hallways*" that symbolically refer to the transformation of an ordinary school setting into a broader commentary on social division and collective anxiety. In "Only the Young," repetition functions rhythmically and rhetorically, reinforcing urgency through its insistence. Similarly, strategic interjections and shifts in vocal delivery create moments of emphasis that mirror emotional intensity.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine the factors contributing to Taylor Swift's celebrity status and to explore how her public persona and artistic expression shape audience engagement. By combining theoretical perspectives on celebrity culture, fandom, and digital media with the analysis of media discourse, social media practices, and selected song lyrics, the study sought to interpret how Swift's popularity and audience impact are constructed within the contemporary cultural and media landscape. The following paragraphs summarise the main findings in relation to the research questions.

The first research question addressed the main features that contributed to Taylor Swift becoming a celebrity. The analysis suggests that her celebrity status results from the interaction of several elements shaping her public persona. An important factor is the construction of a recognisable visual and generational identity. Swift entered the music industry at a young age, which allowed audiences to follow her development from a teenage country singer to an internationally recognised pop performer. Through visual self-stylisation and adaptation to cultural trends, she has maintained public visibility while remaining relatable to a specific generational audience. Another significant element is the autobiographical dimension of her songwriting. Swift's lyrics are widely perceived as reflecting personal experiences, which strengthens the impression of authenticity and relatability. Her genre versatility and continuous artistic development reinforce a narrative of personal growth, allowing her music to resonate with different stages of listeners' lives. Media representation and Swift's own strategies of self-presentation also contribute to shaping her celebrity image. Rather than passively accepting media narratives, Swift frequently incorporates them into her artistic work, using irony, self-awareness, and digital communication to reinterpret or challenge stereotypical portrayals related to gender, appearance, or celebrity behaviour. In addition, her public advocacy for

artistic autonomy and responses to industry pressures have contributed to framing her as a figure engaged in broader debates about authorship and control in the music industry.

The second research question focused on defining Taylor Swift's impact on her audience. The findings indicate that her influence operates largely through digital communication, fandom culture, and parasocial relationships. Swift's artistic identity is reinforced through performative practices in live performances, where gestures, stage settings, and narrative elements create an impression of emotional accessibility and closeness to the audience. This sense of connection is further strengthened through the circulation of paratexts and paraphernalia, such as merchandise or limited vinyl editions, which function as symbolic markers of fan participation. Swift also maintains communication with her audience through social media platforms, where album announcements, surprise interactions, and direct engagement with fans contribute to sustaining a sense of reciprocity. In this respect, her practices resemble those associated with digital influencers, as they rely on continuous self-presentation and interactive communication. Swift's position can therefore be understood as a hybrid form that combines traditional celebrity visibility with influencer-style engagement. Within this environment, fans actively participate in interpreting and circulating her content through the participatory practices characteristic of the Swifties fandom. Her public expressions addressing selected social or political issues have occasionally contributed to broader public discussion and encouraged civic engagement, particularly among younger audiences. However, the analysis also indicates that such influence operates within complex digital and media environments and should be understood as mediated rather than direct persuasion.

The third research question examined how Taylor Swift's songwriting style contributes to her popularity and audience impact. The literary analysis of selected songs indicated that Swift's songwriting combines elements typical of lyric poetry with accessible narrative storytelling. Her use of poetic devices such as metaphor, imagery, rhetorical questions, and

repetition, together with the autobiographical tone of her lyrics, allows listeners to identify with the emotions and experiences expressed in her songs. At the same time, the narrative clarity of her lyrics and the strategic placement of emotional turning points within song structures contribute to their communicative effectiveness. The interplay between lyrical storytelling and visual narratives in music videos further reinforces these meanings and expands their interpretative possibilities.

Overall, the findings suggest that Taylor Swift's celebrity status and cultural influence emerge from the intersection of artistic expression, media visibility, and participatory audience dynamics. Her case illustrates how contemporary celebrity identity is constructed within hybrid media environments where artistic production, digital self-presentation, and audience interaction are closely interconnected. Swift's career, therefore, demonstrates how celebrity status is sustained not only through cultural production itself but also through ongoing negotiation between the artist, media institutions, and active fan communities.

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