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Long Live Taylor Swift

A Case Study on building and growing a brand through loyalty

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Abstract

The present situation teaching case examines strategies used by singer/songwriter Taylor Swift to obtain a loyal fan community and to instigate in-class discussion on building and maintaining brand loyalty while balancing customer acquisition for growth. The case – developed using primary and secondary data – highlights the issues of long-term brand building, addressing the balance of retention and acquisition. It provides students with the necessary information to analyze Swift's strategies for building loyalty, diagnosing her problems in maintaining this loyalty, and connecting with the younger GenZ audience, thus, urging students to develop ways to maintain loyalty while investing in new customer acquisition.

Keywords

Case Study, Taylor Swift, Brand Resonance, Brand Loyalty, Customer Based Brand Equity, Brand Revitalization, Brand Reinforcement.

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Case Note

This situation case gives students the necessary information to analyze and outline Swift's loyalty-building efforts. Unlike other teaching cases categories like the Background Case, which focuses primarily on providing data on a specific topic to understand a particular issue, or the Decision Case, which illustrates a specific problem and asks the reader for an answer to an individual decision, a Situation Case focuses on a general issue in which the students are asked to answer "*Why did things go right(wrong) and how could this success(failure) be continued(avoided)?*" (Heath 2015).

The case was developed using primary and secondary data, including articles, papers, social media accounts, and benchmarks of HBR cases focusing on celebrities; as a benchmark, two cases about Beyonce and Lady Gaga were used as they also focus on a management issue of a celebrity-brand in the music industry. Two one-on-one interviews with Fans were conducted to gain a qualitative understanding of a Fan's perspective on Swift and her community. To complement the findings of the interviews, a large-scale quantitative survey was conducted amongst Fans (see Exhibit 4). Recruitment was done through Taylor Swift's Reddit discussion page, the author's personal Instagram, several WhatsApp groups from Nova SBE and Louvain School of Management, and Taylor Swift's Facebook groups (Taylor Swift Swifties, Taylor Swift International). The final sample consisted of 2,532 responses, of which 1,896 identified as Swifties, 578 as Fans, and 58 as occasional listeners, living primarily in the US.

The case is structured as follows: Part A contains the Case Study as students would see it, while Part B contains the Teaching Note, which includes the case synopsis and detailed information for the instructor to guide the in-class discussion.

Part A – Case Study

1. Introduction

On November 1st, 2022, Taylor Swift brought down Ticketmaster, the US' leading ticket-booking service provider, by announcing her new tour, "Eras," as her Fans - the *Swifties* - had been waiting to see her live for five years (Sklar 2022). For the ticket pre-sale, one day before the official sale, Ticketmaster expected 1.5 million users; however, 14 million Fans flooded the site, comparable to filling a stadium every night for 2.5 years (Pallotta 2022; Good Morning America 2022). Selling out all 2.4 million tickets available for this tour, making many Fans wait in online queues for up to 8h (Sky News 2022) and leaving the majority without one, led Ticketmaster to cancel the general ticket sale (Pallotta 2022). Fans left without a ticket could find one in the secondary market, where even the least desirable spots were sold for \$350 to \$700, while original prices for all ticket types ranged between \$49 to \$499 (Smith 2022). While other artists would be thrilled about selling out a tour, Taylor Swift expressed her disappointment with Ticketmaster's inability to ensure a smooth selling process, leaving many Fans without a chance to purchase a ticket (Pallotta 2022). Posts like *"Seriously? I tried the verified fan route and that didn't work. [...] What the hell? Swifties, rise up in protest!"* (Biron 2022) or videos of Swifties crying (ABC News 2022) were the response given by Fans. This event led to an antitrust investigation hearing by the US Justice Department (Pallotta 2022).

This wasn't the first time Swift's Fans caused an uproar over the chance to see her. Earlier that year, she received an honorary diploma of Doctor of Fine Arts from NYU for her extraordinary performance in music. Hundreds of Fans tried to buy tickets for the graduation ceremony, but NYU prohibited its sale (Brown 2022). To celebrate this achievement together with her Fans, she came out with merchandise called *Feeling '22* (Dupes 2022).

Millions of Fans wanting to see the artist live, their extreme feelings towards her, and their need to communicate and interact with Swift illustrate Swift's ability to create artistic and

commercial success and extreme customer loyalty. An important question remains: “How did she get there?”. This case examines her story, her Fans, and how she interacts with them to create loyalty.

2. Taylor Swift

The Beginning: Country era

Born December 13th, 1989, in Pennsylvania, Taylor Swift grew up inspired by music. At 12, she started to write songs in her diaries and learned to play the guitar, having her own life experience and other country artists as her main inspirations. One year later, her parents decided to move to Nashville, the capital of country music, to help her get a record deal (Ray 2023), which happened at 16. In 2006, she launched her first single, *Tim McGraw*, about a short relationship with a man; the song stayed for eight months on the Billboard country singles charts (Ray 2023). The first album sold over one million copies in the US alone, and that same year she received the Best New Artist Award from the Country Music Association (CMA) (Ray 2023). Her unique point of view as a girl and her autobiographical nature made her stand out from the mainly male-dominated genre (Quality Culture 2020), and she quickly started developing into America’s sweetheart (Lyon 2019).

Two years later, her second album, *Fearless*, was released, with lyrics that read like high school romance narratives and the tone of a teenage girl writing to other teenage girls on how to figure life out (Rosen 2008; Quality Culture 2020). The album won 4 Grammys in 2010, among which was the Album of the Year Award, making her the youngest artist ever to receive it (McDowell 2022). In 2009, *Fearless* won the best female video award during the MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs). During her acceptance speech, rapper Kanye, who claimed that the award should have gone to Beyoncé (Ray 2023), interrupted her, resulting in a major crowd uproar with significant booing against Kanye West’s statements. However, at the time, young Swift thought the audience was booing her, marking a turning point in the development of her

future persona and artistic evolution as she later commented that "*For someone who's built their whole belief system on getting people to clap for you, the whole crowd booing is a pretty formative experience*"(West 2020).

The Transition: From Country to Pop

After that, Swift slowly started introducing more pop songs into her music (Princiotti 2021), culminating in her fourth album, *Red* (2012), filled with intense emotions around love (Walters 2021). During a BBC interview in 2014, when asked if she was scared about making the transition to pop, Swift answered she wasn't, as her Fans love her "biographical and story-like lyrics about heartbreak, relationships, and grief", which she aimed to continue to bring up in the new genre (Tinubu 2022). At the same time, she swapped her innocent-looking appearance for a more mature one, starting to use her iconic red lipstick and straight blond hair instead of her cowboy boots and curly hair (Lyon 2019).

After selling over one million copies in the US during its first week, *Red* became the highest one-week sales album in the past ten years, bringing her first number-one hit on the Billboard pop singles charts (Ray 2023). In her acceptance speech for winning Artist of the Year by Billboard Music Awards, she thanked her Fans by saying, "*To the Fans, who come to the shows and buy the albums, I just want you to know this one thing: You are the longest and best relationship I've ever had*" (in Touch 2013).

Her first official pop album, *1989* (2014), was also a success, being awarded the Album of the Year Grammy in 2016 and making her the first woman in history to win this award twice (Biography 2022). Once again, her lyrics reflect what is happening as she entered her young adult phase, moving to New York and being single during the album's recording (Quality Culture 2020; Greene 2022). She never left the topic of love in her songs, and she brings her listeners along to these exciting but uncertain times.

The way she announced this album is representative of how she listens, wants to be close and gives back to her Fans. Promoting the album two months before the release on an ABC News live stream, she is seen with freshly cut hair on a couch, surrounded by some of her Fans, asking them to dance to her new song with her, giving further insights to the album and answering their questions (Clarence Archive 2014). Having gotten many questions about her song-creating process, she decided that the deluxe album was going to include initial versions of her songs to bring her Fans along on the process of transforming a melody into a song, stating that “*all that I decide to do on albums is based on what you would like*”. She also announced that she developed the so-called *Swift Sticks*, which contained a certain amount of concert tickets and meet-and-greets to give to her biggest Fans. She got this idea upon noticing on social media the effort Fans put to be able to see her, intensifying her urge to give back to them (ABC News 2014a).

She also initiated the *Secret Sessions* with pre-selected Fans based on their social media posts, inviting them to her house to eat cookies, listen to her pre-release songs and spend quality time together. Once back home, Fans share on social media how unique this experience was (TGNS 2014) (see Exhibit 3.2). The phenomenon of Swift looking Fans up on social media, sometimes interacting with them through liking, commenting, or re-tweeting, is called *Taylurking*, and it helps her get to know them better (Jao 2015). In an interview with ABC News, she states: “*I’m really in touch with my Fans, and I know what they like. I want to come up with as many ways that we can spend time together and bond because it keeps me normal. It keeps my life feeling manageable*” (ABC News 2014b).

Swift’s efforts for personal interaction with her Fans didn’t stop there. During her 1989 album era Swift sent her biggest Fans Christmas gifts in what became known as *Swiftmas*. She looked for the Christmas wishes of her biggest Fans, understanding what they might like or need based on their Instagram posts, packed the gifts herself, and sent them. In some instances,

she personally handed the packages out to Fans she had met or noticed their extra engagement (Swift 2014).

Following another public dispute in 2016 between her, the rapper Kanye West and his then-wife Kim Kardashian, she disappeared from the public eye (Acuna 2017).

The Transformation: New Taylor's Album Reputation

One year after her disappearance, she deleted all her social media posts and opened her new feed with a snake post (Oswald 2017; Swift 2017a), which made Fans believe that she was responding to the fight with Kim and Kanye (Kardashian 2016). Her new album *Reputation* was announced shortly after, opening with the single *Look What You Made Me Do*, filled with references, or as Swift calls them, *easter eggs*, to her life and reinvention. In an interview with The Tonight Show (2021), she revealed that she had been putting out such easter eggs since her first albums when for instance, publishing the lyrics, they would all be lowercase letters except for some selected capital ones, which combined would spell out a secret message. Additional *easter eggs* can be found in her music videos. In the case of the song “*Look What You Made Me Do*” lyrics like “*I’m sorry, the old Taylor can’t come to the phone right now. // Why? Oh ‘cause she’s dead!*” (AzLyrics 2017), signals a clear message to a new chapter in her life. Her dark, decisive, and dangerous new image is a contrast to the more vulnerable ‘old Taylors’: in the video, she is seen standing on top of the ‘old Taylors’, not letting any of them push her down while the others are fighting to reach the top (amydellrx 2018; Swift 2017b).

With *Reputation*, Swift changed her Instagram and how she appeared in public. The number and regularity of Instagram posts decreased, TV performances became less frequent, and so did appearances on red carpets. Not even the paparazzi were able to spot her as easily.

Swift’s primary source of connection with Fans is during concerts, where she openly discusses diverse topics like women’s rights or the LGBTQ+ community’s struggles. To further connect with her Fans and to be able to get to know them better, she created the *Rep Room*

which is a place where her pre-selected Fans - based on their social media, or handpicked by her mother as she goes to the crowd and looks for the most excited ones (Johnson 2018) - have the opportunity to meet her pre or post-concert (Bate 2018). The *Reputation* tour became the highest-grossing US tour between the beginning of Billboard tracking and 2018, with over 2 million tickets sold and generating a gross of \$266.1 million (Hodak 2018).

The artist's interactions with her Fans continue with the same intensity and begin to move beyond concert interactions, blurring the lines between Fans and friends (Osborne 2015). She makes it a point to go above and beyond to help Fans when they are in need. In 2016 Swift donated \$10k to fund a service dog for a five-year-old boy with autism. She also gifted front-row seats and backstage passes to the family for *Reputation*, when she found out that his older sister was a fan. The boy's mother recalls, "*She didn't see my son's disability; she just saw him.*" (Durkan 2018). This list goes on; she keeps giving, whether paying for a Fan's university tuition fees helping them continue their studies (Juneau 2019), or surprising them at their wedding (Vogue 2016). Such interactions became known as Fans post them on social media and then get picked up by the press.

The Empowerment: Becoming Herself.

Her next album, *Lover* was published in 2019 and was a complete contrast to the dark *Reputation* album as it was very colorful and filled with butterflies, which are a reference to her first CD's cover (Insider 2019). Additionally, instead of being as direct about writing songs that connect to recent events in her life, she takes a step back and gives her music more space to speak for herself, still including clues. The few clues remaining became the only way to understand what might be happening in her life. Still, unlike her previous albums, Fans needed to listen attentively and look closer, as they were not as noticeable anymore (Insider 2019). In *Lover* she chose to sing about all the different types of love other than the one for a different-sex partner. During that same year, she created a petition to draw attention to the Equality Act

that had yet to be passed by the Senate (Daw 2019). Before the announcement, her Instagram feed changed again; instead of the darker black and white, she started using pastel colors and enigmatic posts with the caption “4.26”, hinting that something would happen on April 26th, corresponding to the announcement of *Lover*. On April 25th, she made a surprise appearance at a mural in Nashville where a street artist had painted enormous butterfly wings that same day. In the wings, 3 cats were depicted, representing Swift’s cats, 13 hearts, symbolizing her lucky number, and 7 stars as *Lover* is 7th album. Over 200 Swifties suspected that she would make an appearance there and waited patiently for hours, some of which had left work or school just to be able to see her. When Swift finally appeared, she stated “*You guys are amazing for figuring this out because no one knew we were coming. No one knew this was a part of the campaign and what we're doing. You figured out the clue. You're the best. I love you so much.*”, proceeding to hug and take pictures with her Fans (Wynne 2019).

Later that year, she won Artist of the Decade from the American Music Awards (ThinkWithNiche 2021), marking Swift’s timeline by recognizing her artistic and commercial success.

She released the sister albums *Folklore* and *Evermore* during the pandemic. What differentiates these albums from her previous work is not only the music style, which was alternative indie, but also that she left the autobiographical element behind, exchanging it for folk stories instead but still adding the same amount of emotions she does with previous work (Elizabeth 2023; Alvar 2020). This more distant perspective on the songs enabled her to make Fans relate to the feelings expressed while gaining creative freedom (Alvar 2020). *Folklore* was awarded Album of the Year during the Grammys, breaking her record as the only female artist to have won this many times in this category (Alvar 2020).

Her newest pop album, *Midnights* was released in October 2022, focusing on stories that keep her up at night (Genius 2022). It broke several records in the music industry's history:

it occupied all of the top 10 of Billboard Hot 100, became Spotify's most-streamed album and artist within the same day, as well as the latest record of weekly LP sales since 2015, with over 1 million sales according to the New York Times ((Ahlgrim 2022); Sisario 2022). After the first week since its release, the songs from the album took over TikTok. The most used song for videos at that point was *Anti-Hero*, which Fans found to be relatable, generating 84,000 videos just a few days after its release, with the lyrics "*It's me. Hi. I'm the problem it's me*" (Cavender 2022).

In 2023 Swift was the only woman to make the Forbes' top 10 highest-earning entertainers (Voytko 2023), and in March of the same year, she was awarded iHeartRadio's Innovator award, honoring artists that impacted pop (Bloom and Minsker 2023). Her acceptance speech was highly relatable, focusing on an honest message of resilience and growth mindset directed explicitly at youngsters. She highlighted that awards only reward and celebrate successes and the decisions that worked out, not giving a voice to all the others that did not, mentioning that "*The hundreds or thousands of dumb ideas that I've had are what led me to my good ideas. You have to give yourself permission to fail*" (Aniftos and Atkinson 2023).

3. Overcoming obstacles

In 2018 Swift did not renew the contract with Big Machine Label, whom she had been signed with since the beginning of her career, signing instead with Universal Music Group (Rizzo 2018), which caused her to lose all her rights to her first six albums as she did not own the final produced version of her music (LegalEagle 2021). To get her music rights back, she came out with the re-recorded version of *Fearless (Taylor's Version)* and *Red (Taylor's Version)* in 2021 (Sager 2021), including songs written the first time the albums were published but never made it on them (Quality Culture 2021). One of these songs is the 10-minute version of *All Too Well*, making it the longest to reach No.1 on the Billboard Hot 100 (Pilastro 2021). *All Too Well* is the 5th song on her fourth album; since the beginning, the 5th track represents

her most personal and vulnerable songs (Browne 2022). Swift claims that she began doing this unconsciously; however, when Fans started to realize it after *Red*, she consciously put her emotionally exposed songs that address the issues directly on track 5 (Browne 2022) (see Exhibit 2).

Her next re-recorded album will be *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)*. Fans have been speculating that her 3rd album would come next due to hints left on a music video of a *Midnights* song. *Speak Now* is Swift's album, which she wrote entirely on her own (Reichard 2019), including songs like *Long Live*, in which she honors the Fans, "*the people who I feel that we are all in this together, this song talks about the triumphant moments that we've had*" (Songfacts 2010).

4. Beyond Music

During the pandemic, her documentary *Miss Americana* was released. In it, Swift's story was told differently from the one the press had been telling (Alvar 2020). *Miss Americana* provides insight into the artist's struggles, like an eating disorder and body image issues, which made her spend less time looking at photos of herself as "*there's always some standard of beauty that you're not meeting*". There are vulnerable moments, like crying because none of her songs got nominated in any significant category for the Grammys or when Swift talks to her friends about not feeling ready to have children. She shows behind the scenes of her music-making; her cats and parents often appear, playing a significant role in her life (West 2020). Addressing how happy she is in her current relationship without going into detail, not even mentioning her boyfriend's name, is a significant change from the younger Taylor, that used to write songs about her exes, letting Fans in on details about the relationship, especially during *Red*. In general, this documentary gives an insightful view of her life, showing that the main difference between her and everyone else is her public appearance and that otherwise, she continues to be human like everyone. Gratefulness is the emotion she feels when thinking about

the journey she has been able to take, knowing that none of that would have been possible without her Fans, making her want to work harder to make them further appreciate her (West 2020).

In November 2021, *All Too Well*, a short movie show casting actors Sadie Sink and Dylan O'Brien, premiered, entirely directed by Swift. She reveals that moving to film came naturally as it is another way of telling stories, which she loves (Variety 2022). The short movie made her win her second Grammy in the Best Music Video category and was shortlisted for the Oscar nominations (Dellatto 2022). When it came out that it was not nominated, Fans went on social media and gave her support and strength to continue her directing dream (Rossigol 2022) (see Exhibit 3.3).

5. The Taylor Universe

General fan characteristics

Taylor Swift has a considerable amount of Fans; in the US alone, more than half of the adult population considers themselves a fan, and the ratio of gender is almost balanced (see Exhibit 3.1) (Briggs and Blancaflor 2023). However, based on survey results (author's own research) (see Exhibit 4), although most respondents identified as Swifties, an overwhelming 83.5% were females. Looking at the retrieved data, Swifties between the ages of 18 and 54 state that they have been Fans since her first four albums. For everyone under 18, the recent albums are the entry point (see Exhibit 4.1). Most of her Fans are millennials, just like Swift herself, with a minority being GenZ (see Exhibit 3.1)(Briggs and Blancaflor 2023). In general, Swifties show the most interest in her music as they are very likely to listen to her albums the day it is released and pay attention to the clues she leaves and her posts rather than her merchandise, CDs, and Vinyl (see Exhibit 4.2) even though buying and pre-ordering her products helps getting tickets to her shows (Lounghrey 2017).

Fans' Relationship to Taylor and her music

Swift's music is one of the main drivers of her Fans (Briggs and Blancaflor 2023). Her catchy melodies make many people recognize it, and the lyrics are what make them connect with her, even when sometimes they don't know it is her playing. This is due her use of the one-note melody and her ability to visualize a story with only some words (BBC 2017). Once people start enjoying her music they will start following her on social media and streaming platforms.

Based on survey results (author's own research), Swifties have established a relationship of a *best friend / big sister* that speaks to their most genuine feelings and is always present with Swift's music; in some cases, some even see it as their soulmate (see Exhibit 4.3). However, closeness to Swift herself is neutral (3.92/7) even though there are approximately 14% who feel as close to her as to their best friend (see Exhibit 4.4); this might also be because she tends to interact with her Fans (see Exhibit 4.5, for examples of interactions). The fact that she covers a lot of different genres, topics, and emotions makes them spend a lot of time listening to her discography in the same cases instead of shifting to other artists, a fan revealed. Her diversity does not mean Fans find all her songs equally good (Demarest 2023); a Swiftie believes that with the right playlist and explaining the interactions of the clues she leaves, many non-Fans would be converted.

Swift's universe does not just consist of her music, the videos, and the clues, as many believe; she has inspired other authors, directors, and songwriters who use some of her famous images and symbols in their work (uncarley 2022). This complex universe that she has been crafting for almost two decades gives her the top three characteristics of "mastermind", "talented", and "iconic" (see Exhibit 4.6) when asking Fans to describe her using a single word. Fans state that seeing all these connections that now go beyond Swift herself makes them immerses in this universe, seeing objects, words, and numbers that make them consistently

think about her due to the imagery in her lyrics and music videos. Swifties state that due to that symbology, they can identify other Swifites. For instance, in a discussion with a fan (author's own research), it revealed that if somebody is wearing a red scarf, they must be a fan of Swift as that is a clear association with the scarf in the song *All too Well* from *Red* which symbolizes failed love (Matadeen 2021). These symbols that she puts out also help form the community as they share the same points of view. For example, her Fans know on which side they stay when it comes to public outings between Swift and her exes, as in her songs she gives more background to what happened in the different relationships (Quality Culture 2020). Due to that, the same values and emotions have been built throughout the community, making them understand each other on deeper grounds.

Fans' Relationship to the Community

The primary way of interaction among Swifties is virtual, through social media. Due to the Era's tour, many use Facebook groups to help choose their outfit or get opinions on whether second-market ticket sites are trustworthy (see Exhibit 3.5). One of the main drivers of communication between the Fans and one of the reasons for their content creation are the clues Swift leaves behind in her lyrics, music videos, performances, and posts. Analyzing her every move generates a lot of content and engagement, mainly because everything is carefully crafted. Being able to find references to older songs in the newer ones and vice versa makes Fans review her full discography in search of another clue, with some stating that even if she stopped putting out clues, they would never stop speculating (Quality Culture 2021; Teen Vogue 2023). Due to this level of engagement by her fanbase, some Fans don't even follow her official social media accounts, as they get all the information through other fan accounts, according to a fan interview (author's own research). On this matter, the main reasons why Fans create content about Swift are due to love and admiration for her, for self-expression, and for connecting with her community rather than getting noticed by Swift (see Exhibit 4.7).

An account that may be mistaken for a fan account is *Taylor Nation* as it belongs to Swift's management team. Here the main content is re-posted fan videos, together with other Taylor Swift content where she sometimes looks like a fan herself or shows some behind-the-scenes content (Taylor Nation 2023). Comparing the number of followers on her personal account with those of Taylor Nation, she still has more reach on every social media (see Exhibit 1.4). When subscribing to her Newsletter, Taylor Nation is the one who sends the e-mail with the subject "You're on the list!" sharing their different social media accounts and asking users to connect and stay in touch.

6. Cracks in Taylor Nation

Early 2023, after six years of dating, Taylor Swift and her boyfriend, Joe Alwyn broke up, leaving many Fans in shock (see Exhibit 3.4). While for some Fans this means the breakup would offer materials for new songs on heartbreak, to others the news might cause them to lose interest in the artist's story and question her relevance as they get older and evolve. Most Swift's Fans are millennials aged 27 to 42, and in the US 44% are already married. While millennials are known to reinvent the term settling down compared to other generations as they take more time for self-discovery and exploring the world (Szuba 2021), they are the generation that prioritizes cohabitating with their partner. They may even buy houses together before tying the knot, waiting an average of five years to do so (Hoffower 2020). With the upper half of this generation moving into a more stable chapter of their lives may mean that her most significant fan base is slowly choosing a different path from her, making her life's experience and songs less relevant and meaningful than they used to be.

However, this life change might make her more relatable to GenZ, as they are further away from married life. According to the generational music cycle, they are the next ones shaping the music industry trends (Bailey 2020). This younger generation is streaming the most music, with over 578 billion minutes between 18-24 (Spotify 2022). The pandemic made social

media one of the major players in the way artists and new music are discovered (see Exhibit 5.1) (YPulse 2021b); for instance, songs trending on TikTok appeared on Billboard Hot 100 and Spotify Viral 50 (Whateley 2023). While pop music used to be the genre's favorite for people between 13 and 39, Hip-Hop/Rap and Rock have been rising in popularity (see Exhibit 5.2) (YPulse 2021a). GenZ is currently discovering *nostalgia* focusing on old songs and looking at them from their current perspective while using different types of music to get to know themselves better (Spotify 2022) (see Exhibit 5.3). Inclusivity, authenticity, transparency, uniqueness and purpose (PixleeTurnTo n.d.; Fromm 2019) are what this generation values in brands, and that extends to artists. They seek importance in seeing the imperfections that make people feel real and want to be part of the whole experience by accessing behind-the-scenes content (Harris 2023). Even though Swift's music is relatable to many Fans, she, as an individual, is seen as more distant, which could start to question her popularity and ability to connect with this generation.

Seeing how Taylor Swift's fan base predominantly comprises millennials and only 11% GenZ (Briggs and Blancaflor 2023) poses the question of how she might keep herself on Forbes' top 10 highest-earning entertainers (Voytko 2023) in the long run. With the Eras tour coming to an end, Swift is yet again able to close a chapter and move to the next. How should she reinvent herself to continue with her success and ensure her Fans' loyalty while attracting new ones?

Part B: Teaching Note

1. Case Synopsis

This case follows Taylor Swift's development from a teenage country singer to an award-winning musician that has changed the music industry while facing challenges and public disputes with other artists, forcing her to reinvent herself and find creative solutions to return to the top. It outlines her ability to go through different genres and uniquely engage with her Fans by gathering information on social media to give back to them in personalized ways or by leaving clues that help form a tight community/fanbase that sees her music as their best friend. Most of her success comes from her millennial fanbase, which grew alongside Swift, whose songs helped them understand their own experience. However, they are now moving towards a more stable phase of their life, while Swift, freshly single, takes on a different path than them. This path seems to take her closer to GenZ, who currently represents only 11% of her Fans, casting doubt on how she will continue her success while trying to acquire new Fans and still maintain the loyalty of her current ones.

2. Pedagogical objectives and intended use of the case study

The present case is meant to be used in graduate, master's, or executive programs in courses like Brand and Marketing Management. However, Entrepreneurship courses could also use the case when studying strategies for building customer brand loyalty.

This case aims to create the foundations for a more detailed analysis and discussion on the strategies brands use to build and maintain customer loyalty, including identifying the key drivers of customer loyalty and visualizing the impact of those strategies on customer behavior. It exemplifies the benefits of customer loyalty to the brand, such as increased revenue and brand reputation, as customers not only buy but also advocate for it.

This case gives background on the singer/songwriter Taylor Swift and the strategies used by her to keep her Fans engaged. Therefore, students can learn her customer resonance

strategies and discuss future steps that should be taken to maintain this level of resonance, while at the same time attracting new customers. By analyzing and discussing this case, students can experience the following learning points:

1. Use the **CBBE model** (Keller 2001) to assess the brand's equity, gaining a better understanding of the six building blocks.
2. Improve one's knowledge of **brand resonance** and its four sub-divisions (Keller 2001).
3. Understand the importance of positive **word of mouth, brand architecture structure, customer engagement, and loyalty reward programs** when building and developing a **community**.
4. Understanding how to **balance acquisition** with **retention**.

Suggested questions for the discussion are as follows:

- A. What is Taylor Swift's current brand **strategy**?
- B. What are the sources of **brand equity** for Taylor Swift?
- C. How is Taylor Swift building the **resonance** of her brand?
- D. What should Taylor Swift do **next** to maintain her Fans' **loyalty** and **acquire** new ones?

3. Discussion

The following section provides answers to the case questions mentioned above, as a guide to the in-class discussion. Approximate time for each discussion point is also provided in parenthesis to help instructors manage the session. Overall, the material can be covered in a 90-minute session.

A. What is Taylor Swift's current **brand strategy**? (15min)

This question focuses on the Brand Platform, namely the positioning, identity and essence. The positioning model used is based on Keller's Customer Based Equity Model (Keller 2001). The identity and essence that are reviewed are based on Kapferer's Identity Prism model (Kapferer 1994). Starting with this question is essential to ensure that students have a clear

understanding of what the Swift brand is about, in terms of what she tries to project (representing management's intent), acting like a foundation to the main discussion, which focuses on the sources of equity and resonance in particular.

Positioning: Target: Taylor Swift reaches various people of all ages and nationalities. Her fan base is mainly composed of millennials whose gender representation is balanced (Briggs and Blancaflor 2023). *Unique Value Proposition:* She captures the human experience and voices different feelings and emotions, connecting with her Fans on more profound and personal levels. *Reason to believe:* She writes and co-writes her songs (Pascual 2022). *Positioning Statement:* For music listeners who search for catchy melodies and meaningful lyrics, Taylor Swift is the singer that best captures the human experience and gives a voice to a variety of feelings by forming a symbolic universe that Fans can immerse in as only Swift writes or co-writes all her music, having full control of what she puts out there. *Brand essence:* Authenticity and empowerment.

Brand Identity. Physique: For Taylor Swift, it would be herself, the way she started out as a country girl, with her curly hair and cowboy boots, to her pop era, where she swapped her appearance to the straight hair and red lipstick look, sticking with that until today. *Personality:* The brand's personality can be described as the archetype Sage, as she gives a voice to the deepest feelings and emotions, trying to help digest them, giving advice, and being present when they appear. When receiving awards or showing herself packing Christmas gifts for Fans, she presents herself as being down-to-earth, friendly, generous, and grateful. Her fight to get back her music rights shows her as fearless, innovative and proactive, and the scandal with the Ticketmaster's sale is an excellent example of how direct she can be. The clues she leaves behind and the universe she was able to build with them show a playful and strategic side of her. *Culture:* She brings out the image of the girl next door that happens to be famous, as she does not take her popularity for granted. This is especially clear during her movie *Miss*

Americana where she is shown in vulnerable moments, displaying insecurities that everyone has and openly addressing that she would not have the fame she has if it weren't for her Fans. When receiving the Innovator award and telling the audience how failure is part of the journey, she again highlights her authenticity, resilience and the work she has been putting into her art for all those years. Relationship: When looking at the conducted survey, there is a discrepancy between her Fans' relationship with her music and with Swift herself. While to her music, they see it as a best friend that speaks to their most genuine feelings, is present in every moment, and listens to them, a soulmate or even a time-capsule and escape relationship; to her, the associated relationship is, on average positive neutral. Reflection: I am part of a supportive and strong community that has inside jokes and is helpful and filled with advice to each other. Brand self-image: I am strong and powerful; even though things might be difficult, I can get through them.

B. What are the sources of **brand equity** for Taylor Swift? (25min)

This question focuses on breaking down the CBBE model, developed by Keller (Keller 2001).

Brand Salience. Depth: Listeners recognize her music easily, even if sometimes they may know the song but not associate it with the singer. The longer a fan is a listener, the more aware they are due to the imagery in her lyrics; they start to recall her brand when seeing particular objects like, for instance, a red scarf. *Breadth*: Fans or Swifties are most likely to name all the products she has other than her music and music videos, like her merchandise (clothes, accessories, or vinyl) and her movie.

Brand Performance. Her music is the primary source of her brand equity, and Swift herself embodies it; Fans are most likely to listen to her album on the day it is released and help her break records and get awards, showing how satisfied they are with it. Describing her music as their best friend is evidence of the reliability and durability of the brand, as a best friend is

someone who will stay for an extended period and be present in diverse situations. By eliminating the lines between Fans and friends, through her actions and her lyrics, Fans live through difficult moments with her, like her recent breakup. The accessibility of her music is free, through YouTube, or with little expense, through streaming, however if Fans want to see her live, through tour tickets, it can be expensive.

Brand Imagery. When Fans think about her music, they mainly describe it as their Best-Friend which shows relatability to her expression. They feel they can share common ground and values, as she sings a lot about love, heartbreak, emotional connection, and empowerment. Another strong relationship present in her music is Time Capsule, which shows how her music helps Fans go back into certain moments. In general, the fact that she offers various themes makes her music present in multiple situations for them. Even if they feel somewhat positive and neutral about her, she is not untouchable as other superstars, showing how Fans see her authenticity and relate to it. The fact that Fans are likely to listen to her music the day it is released or follow her clues shows a high level of excitement towards her brand.

Customer Judgement. Judging by the fact that Swifties are likely to listen to her album the day it is released and help her break records like Spotify's most streamed album and artist on a day proves that they believe her music is of good quality. Swift's credibility towards her Fans comes from her writing or co-writing all her songs, giving them her personal touch and reflecting real emotions. The fact that every album responds to occurrences from her life or what is happening around the world makes Fans relate to her. She constantly updates her portfolio and builds Fans' trust, as they know what to expect, which is songs filled with emotions and stories. Her authenticity comes from openly thanking her Fans and being honest with them about how awards only show the glorious moments, not the bad ones, and is yet another aspect of how they further relate to her. By sticking to real-life examples and emotions, she can build common ground with her Fans which reflects in her music. The imagery cohesion

through her work and clues helps Fans immerse in that universe, wanting to know more about the different connections and building a community that understands each other deeply. Fans spend a lot of time listening to her, as her music varies in genre and topics addressed. This, together with the clues, makes them spend more time with her than any other artist.

Customer Feelings. Warmth: Describing her music as a Best-Friend shows a deep emotional connection Fun: Fans discover the links of her clues and further immerse in her universe or dance to her catchy melodies. Excitement: Crashing Ticketmaster's page, filling up the top 10 of Billboard Hot 100 with her songs, breaking several types of records Security: After the Ticketmaster case and having millions of Fans devastated, the way she responded to it by expressing her disappointment towards Ticketmaster makes Fans feel heard. Social Approval: The supportive community gives Fans a sense of belonging and approval. Self-respect: Her music is a constant that reflects various feelings and emotions and is always there when they need it. Love: Brand Love can be easily identified (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000); a good example where this is observed is how devastated Fans are after not being able to acquire tickets for "The Eras Tour" (ABC News 2022), Swift pointing out that what Ticketmaster did was wrong is her form of getting her Fans to "Make up" with her brand (Halloran 2014) instead of having them "Break up".

Brand Resonance. Note that positive word of mouth is essential to drive customers from one loyalty stage to another, as it enhances brand awareness and further loyalty (Keller 2001). Behavior loyalty: Repeated listening to Swift's music (see Exhibit 1.5) Attitudinal Attachment: Following Swift on social media and/or Streaming (see Exhibit 1.3 - 1.6), being more up to date with her releases. Sense of Community: Talking about her clues, also known as easter-eggs, or having an opinion on her relationships, guessing what the song or the symbol might mean, and debating how good different songs are, makes Swifties feel united. Active engagement: Swifties

make videos with her music about her or her easter-eggs. These interactions make her brand self-sufficient, meaning she would not need to put clues out to have Fans look for them.

C. How is Taylor Swift building the **resonance** of her brand? (25min)

This question focuses on the actions Swift takes to engage her audience and build brand resonance (management view), as opposed to how Fans react to the actions she takes.

Catchy melodies. It helps people recognize her songs faster and identify them when re-listening; this helps build behavior loyalty.

Storytelling. Intertwining her story in the songs and filling them with real emotions makes Swift's music relatable to many of her listeners, allowing them to live through her songs. The images she places through her stories make them recall her and associate objects with her music, which gives a common ground to her community.

Taylor Nation. Her endorsed brand, where her team communicates to newsletter subscribers that they are on the list, shows the exclusive community they now belong to; the Instagram page is built like another fan page that posts content about Swift and reposts fan content, valuing their effort. In this case, the endorsed brand helps segment (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000) the Fans as more engaged and curious Fans will follow this page.

Community building. In general, her music's common symbols, images, and themes make Fans share common values, like seeing a red scarf as a symbol of failed love or being overprotective of Swift in outings with her exes.

Clues. The clues in her songs help community building as they are one of the main topics discussed between Swifties, and the hunt for them brings them closer together. Here they can analyze her music and get their point of view into the narrative. Fans even say that if she ever stopped putting them out, they would not stop searching for them, showing that she created a strong foundation for the community that now would be able to live even without her.

Loyalty Reward Program. Her biggest Fans, those that engage the most, get rewarded.

(1) Invitations to Secret Sessions in which they get to interact with Swift on a more personal level, listen to her pre-release songs, and talk about their experience on social media afterward. (2) Getting picked to meet her behind the stage pre or post-concert can also happen if her mother notices them in the crowd. (3) Taylurking is the name given when she looks at Fans' profiles, follows them, comments, likes, or reposts their posts, and gathers information about them. This information is helpful when she does (4) Swiftmas, where she gifts personalized Christmas gifts to a handful of her Fans. Other than that, through Taylurking, she is also able to (5) surprise Fans, like when she gifted a service dog, paid for college tuition, or appeared at the wedding of her Fans.

Thanking. Letting Fans know they matter and that she is only doing this because of them, as seen in *Miss Americana* or her acceptance speeches, and being honest with them about putting things out there because she believes they will like it.

E. What should Taylor Swift do **next** to maintain her Fans' **loyalty** and **acquire** new ones?

(25min)

The discussion of this question uses Keller's brand reinforcement and revitalization strategies (Keller 1999). Note that students might find that these strategies might be conflicting, in some cases, meaning that they will have to come up with the right balance to ensure customer retention and acquisition.

Reinforcement strategies. Swift should keep her marketing support and budget to assure her brand's reputation with her Fans. She should also opt for small innovation, such as continuing to write songs, making use of the on-note melody as it drives memorability, and continuing with her relatable lyrics that make people use them in their social media videos, creating further brand awareness. On a tactical level, it would make sense to sometimes partner

up with other artists with a younger target audience, as she did with Lana del Rey, whose audience is mainly GenZ (Reddit 2021).

Revitalization strategies. Brand depth. Include some songs in new genres like soft rock as it has a better fit with her identity than hip-hop and is higher ranked than pop-music (see Exhibit 5.2). One argument that can be made is that Swift has already reinvented her music style, so it is not entirely impossible to incorporate rock elements. Continuing with re-recording her music can also help her get noticed by the younger generation as they tend to also listen to older music.

Brand breadth. She could move into the movie industry by directing movies. Her ability for storytelling and having already directed short films and music videos shows that she would have the potential to create something on a bigger scale, while continuing to include clues that stay cohesive throughout her universe. To better balance her existing and new customers, she should make further use of social media by creating a more personal account in which she is more transparent with her Fans and letting them co-create music with her, as GenZ wants to be part of the creative process and see behind the scenes. Since this generation longs for purpose in brands, Swift should continue advocating for the LGBTQ+ community and gender equality rights, as she has been doing during *Lover* and maybe consider branching out further towards environmental sustainability.

4. Further instructor information

The following website includes video and multimedia files as further support for this case. These can be shared with the students in advance, or during the session, as extra ‘clues’ to inform discussion. <https://joanadragomitzlaff.wixsite.com/tscl>

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Exhibits

Exhibit 1 – Taylor Swift Facts

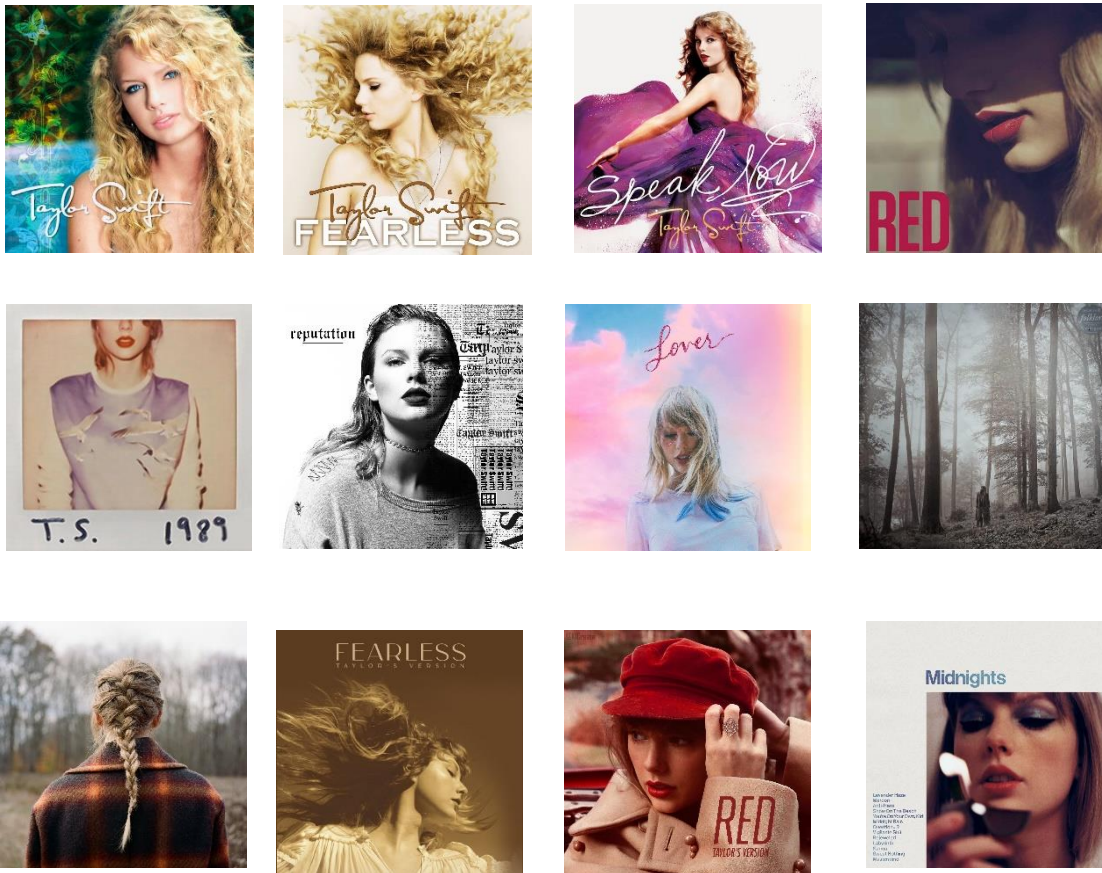
1.1 Visual Timeline

Year	Date	Album	Award
2006	24 November	<i>Taylor Swift</i> - The country album, songs about love and break-up, introducing the young artist to the music world	
2007	7 November		CMA - New Artist of the Year
2008	11 November	<i>Fearless</i> - The country album sings about the difficulties, joys, and lessons of being a teenage girl	
2009	13 September		VMAs - Best female video award
2010	31 January		Grammy - Album of the Year, best female country vocal performance, best country song, best country album
	25 October	<i>Speak Now</i> - The country album is all written by herself; she slowly transitions from teenager to young adult, being in that in-between face.	
2012	12 February		Grammy - Country solo performance, country song
	22 October	<i>Red</i> -The country album that started appearing in the pop charts, with songs about love and heartbreak	
2013	10 February		Grammy - The best song was written for visual media
	19 May		Billboard music awards – Artist of the Year
2014	27 October	<i>1989</i> -The pop album total transition to a young adult experiencing life in a big city and starting to get her life together, showing herself as being secure while continuing to sing about love and heartbreak	
2016	15 February		Grammy - Album of the Year, Best pop vocal album, Best music video
2017	23 August	<i>Reputation</i> -The pop album responds to all the negative media about her, reinventing herself and not letting others' opinions define her.	
2019	23 August	<i>Lover</i> -The pop album responds to all the negative media about her, reinventing herself and not letting others' opinions define her.	
	19 November		American Music Awards – Artist of the Decade
2020	24 July	<i>Folklore</i> -Indie album, is about folk storytelling, filled with the same imagery about emotions	
2020	11 December	<i>Evermore</i> -The indie album is a continuation of Folklore	
2021	14 March		Grammy - Album of the year
	9 April	<i>Fearless (Taylor's Version)</i>	
	12 November	<i>Red (Taylor's Version)</i>	
2022	18 May		NYU – Doctor of Fine Arts
	24 October	<i>Midnights</i> -The pop album describes general thoughts that keep her up at night	
2023	29 January		Grammy – Best Music Video
	27 March		iHearRadios - Innovator Award
	7 July	<i>Speak Now (Taylor's Version)</i>	

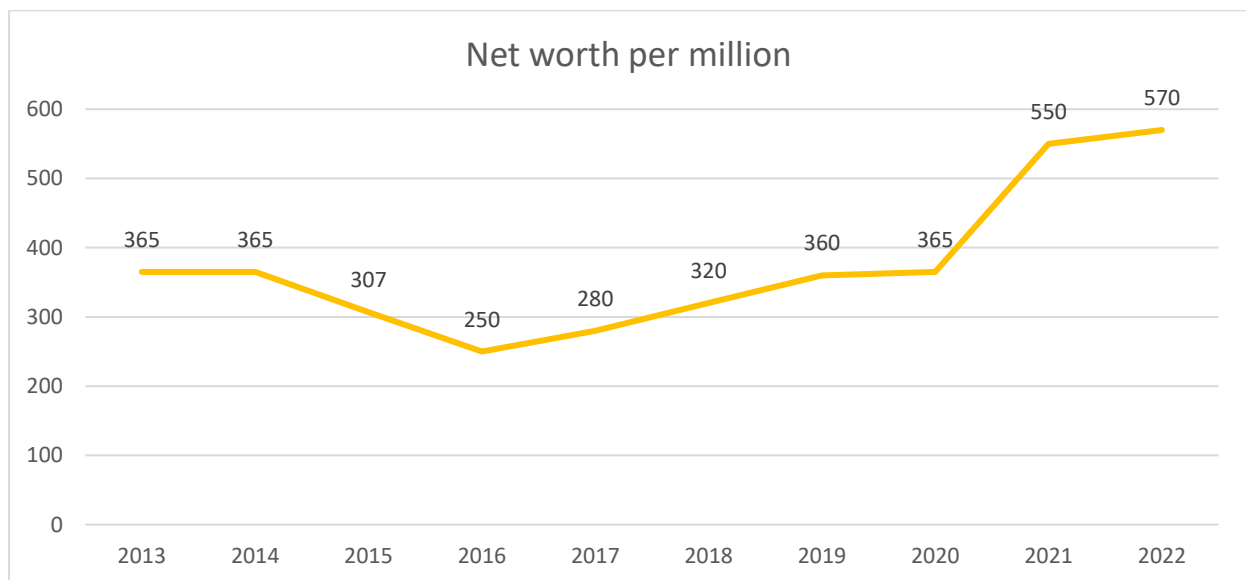
sources:the list - <https://www.thelist.com/463869/every-taylor-swift-era-explained/> , Grammy Awards -

<https://www.grammy.com/artists/taylor-swift/15450> , PW news - <https://www.purewow.com/news/taylor-swift-awards>

1.2 Album Covers



1.3 - Taylor Swift's Wealth History



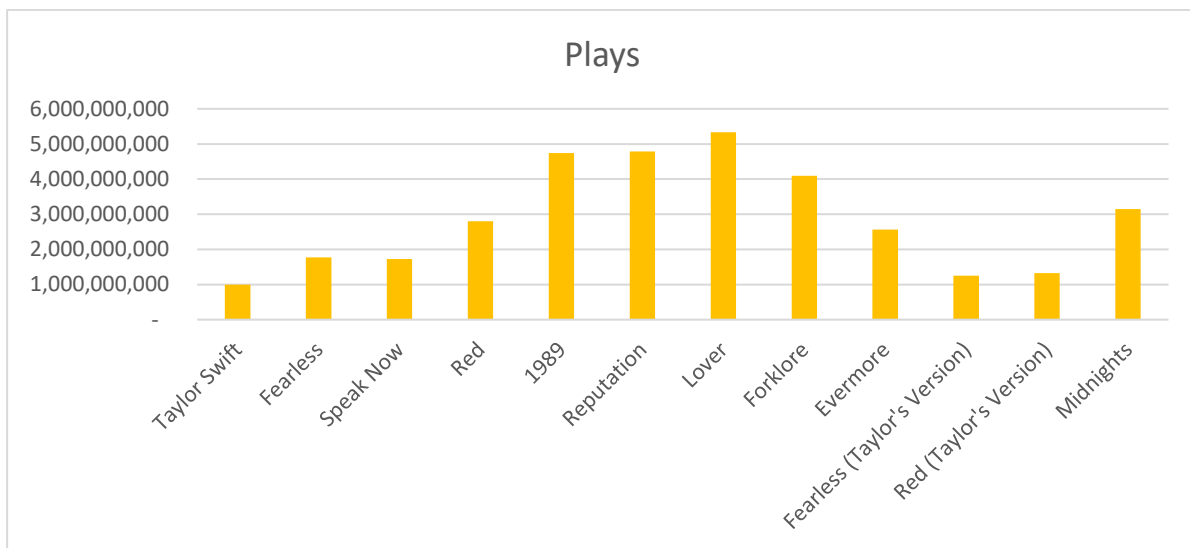
Source: <https://www.forbes.com/profile/taylor-swift/?sh=5243498018e2>

1.4– Reach

Social media	Followers – Taylor Swift	Followers – Taylor Nation
Spotify	84 068 150 monthly listeners (May 2023)	-
YouTube	51 700 000	-
Instagram	575 000 000	4 200 000
Twitter	92 700 000	2 200 000
TikTok	18 300 000	2 100 000

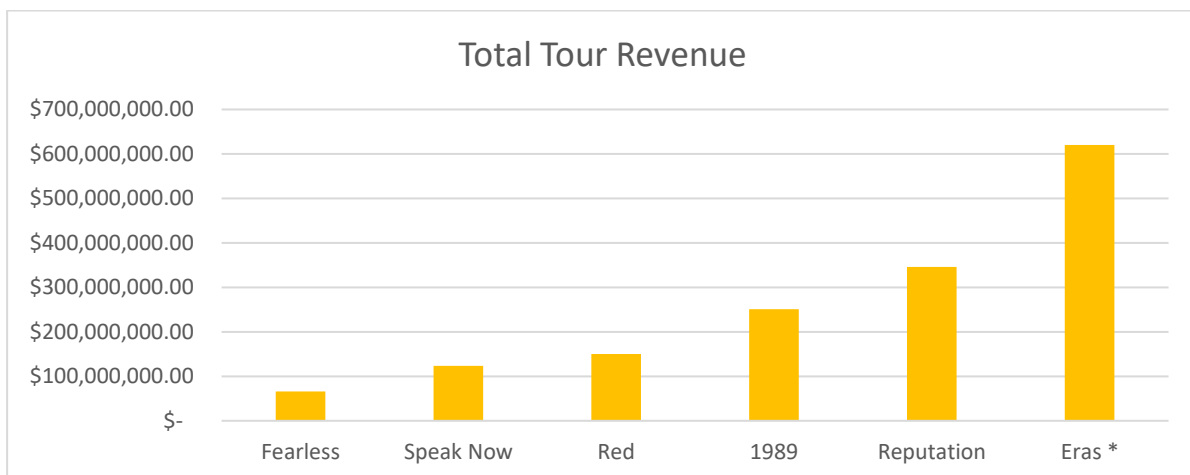
Sources: <https://twitter.com/taylorswift13>, <https://www.instagram.com/taylorswift/>, <https://www.youtube.com/@TaylorSwift>, <https://www.tiktok.com/@taylorswift>, <https://open.spotify.com/artist/06HL4z0CvFAxyc27GXpf02>, <https://www.instagram.com/taylornation/>, <https://www.tiktok.com/@taylornation?lang=pt-BR>

1.5 – Album’s played on Spotify (Accessed March 2023)



Source: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/06HL4z0CvFAxyc27GXpf02>

1.6 – Total Tour Revenues



Source: <https://touringdata.wordpress.com/2020/12/11/taylor-swift-recap/>, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petercohan/2023/04/06/eras-tour-could-net-taylor-swift-500-million-to-15-billion/?sh=318d98d12c5b>

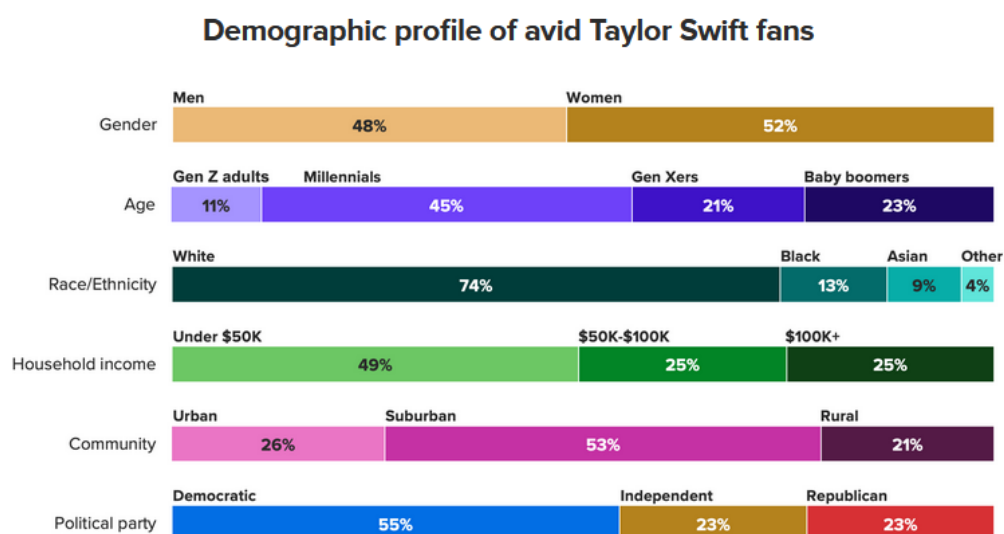
Exhibit 2 – Swift’s Music – Track 5

Name	Explanation
<i>Cold As You</i>	Takes a look at a relationship that was not so great. Not bad. Not terrible. But taxing in its own way.
<i>White Horse</i>	Talks about when the glass shatters and the realization hits that life might not actually be a fairy-tale, and you might have to save yourself.
<i>Dear John</i>	It is a “Dear John” letter to an older man that manipulated her in a relationship — who is most likely her ex John Mayer. In hindsight, it’s empowering. She calls out the guy in the song for everything he did.
<i>All Too Well</i>	“And you call me up again just to break me like a promise, so casually cruel in the name of being honest”. It is unvarnished and honest, narrative and melodic, it’s angry and sad and reminiscent at the same time.
<i>All You Had to Do Was Stay</i>	Like the title says, all he had to do was stay, but he didn’t! The flavor of vulnerability in this song is staying strong when someone you really care about ends things and then comes back, but you stand your ground and turn them away.
<i>Decline</i>	Taylor is essentially standing in front of her crush screaming, “IS IT OKAY THAT I LIKE YOU?” and hoping that doesn’t ruin everything.
<i>The Archer</i>	“The Archer” is basically “anxiety disorder: The Song”. Taylor to really face her neurosis head-on.
<i>my tears ricochet</i>	It may or may not be told from the perspective of a ghost?! ... Or a superhero?! This song also contains some of her most cutting lyrics ever: “And I can go anywhere I want, anywhere I want. Just not home.”
<i>tolerate it</i>	A lingering theme throughout Taylor’s music, from album to album is not being enough in love. It’s the track five for those who love more than they are loved, a terrible situation to be in.
<i>You’re on your own, kid</i>	Here she tells a story of wanting someone who doesn’t want you. Ever felt lonely in a crowded room? Ever find it hard to be at a party when you feel like an open wound?

Source: Vulture, <https://www.vulture.com/article/taylor-swift-track-5-songs-ranked.html>

Exhibition 3 – Her Fans

3.1 – Demographics of US Taylor Swift Fans



Source: Morning Consult, <https://morningconsult.com/2023/03/14/taylor-swift-fandom-demographic/>

3.2 - Fans posting that they died after meeting Swift during the secret session

“So then we took a little break to stretch our legs and she was passing around rice crisps, treads and cookies and I was talking to her mom for a little and then I walked back in and she was like “hey babe thanks for coming do you want a treat?” and I was like “I would but I think I’m dead””

Source: *The Gram Norton Show* – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jLWyenqY5Y>

3.3 - Fans showing their support after Swift was not Oscar-nominated



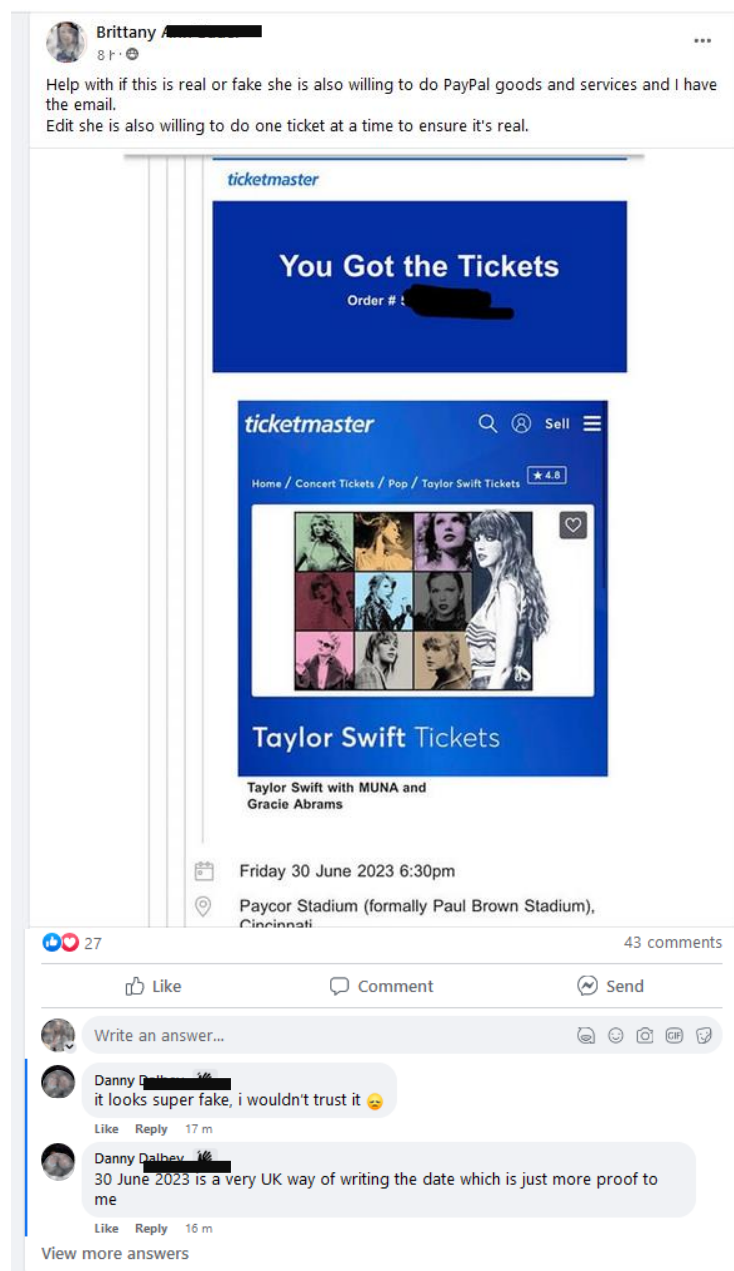
Source: UPROXX - <https://uproxx.com/pop/taylor-swift-all-too-well-snubbed-oscars-shortlist-academy-awards/>

3.4 – Fans reacting to the break-up



Source: Vulture - <https://www.vulture.com/2023/04/swifties-react-to-taylor-swift-break-up.html>

3.5 – Fan Facebook Group discussing about legitimacy of secondary market ticket sites



Source: Taylor Swift (Swifties),

https://www.facebook.com/groups/1002433896451360/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalink=6699867646707928

Exhibition 4 – Survey (author’s own research)

Sample composition

A. Gender distribution

Gender	Total	Swifties
Female	2098	1583
Male	375	269
Other	59	44

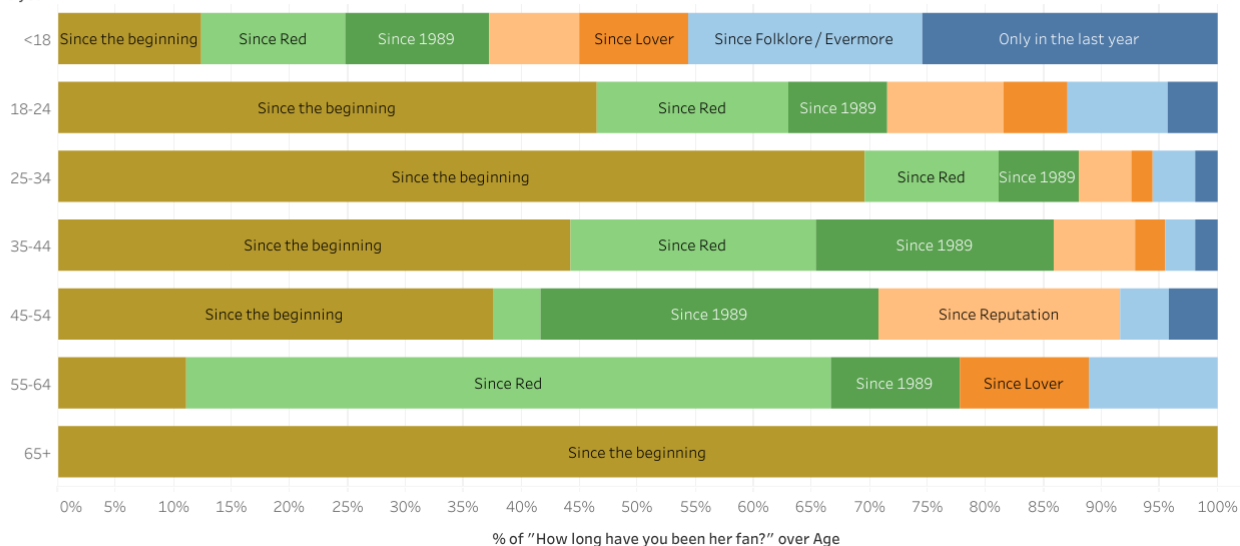
B. Age distribution

Age group	Total	Swifties	Fans	Occasional
<18	205	169	34	2
18-24	740	559	146	35
25-34	1307	978	312	17
35-44	224	156	65	3
45-54	44	24	20	0
55-64	10	9	1	0
65≤	2	1	0	1

4.1 – When did Swifties start following Swift

Swifties per age and when they became fans of Taylor Swift

How old are you?

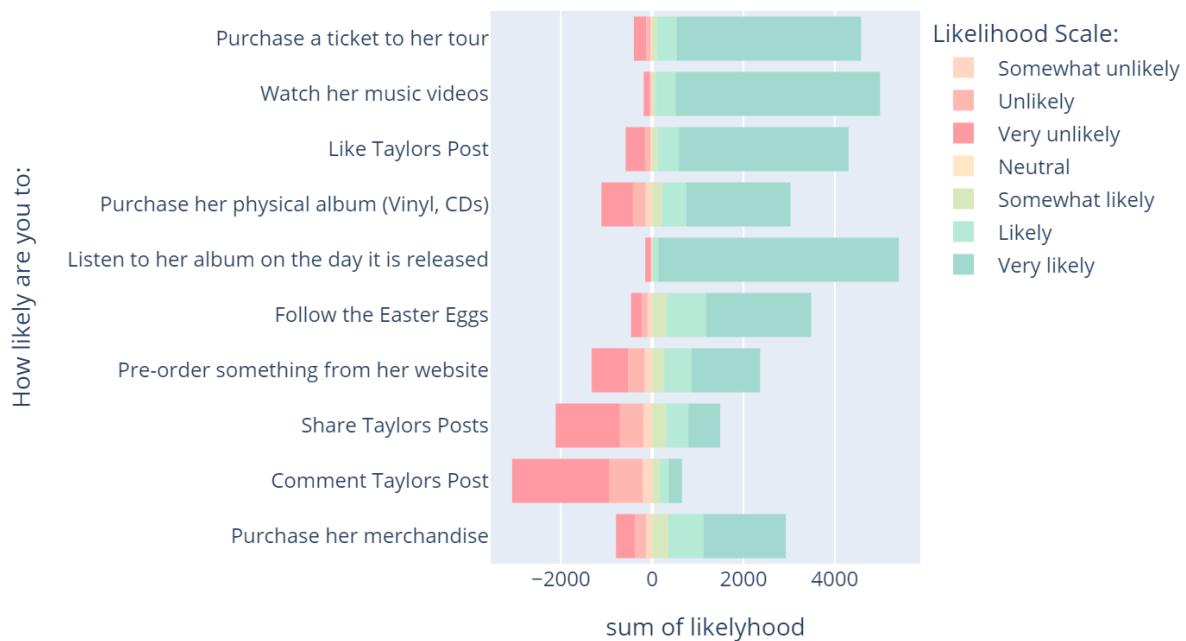


How long have you been her fan?



4.2 – Preference Table

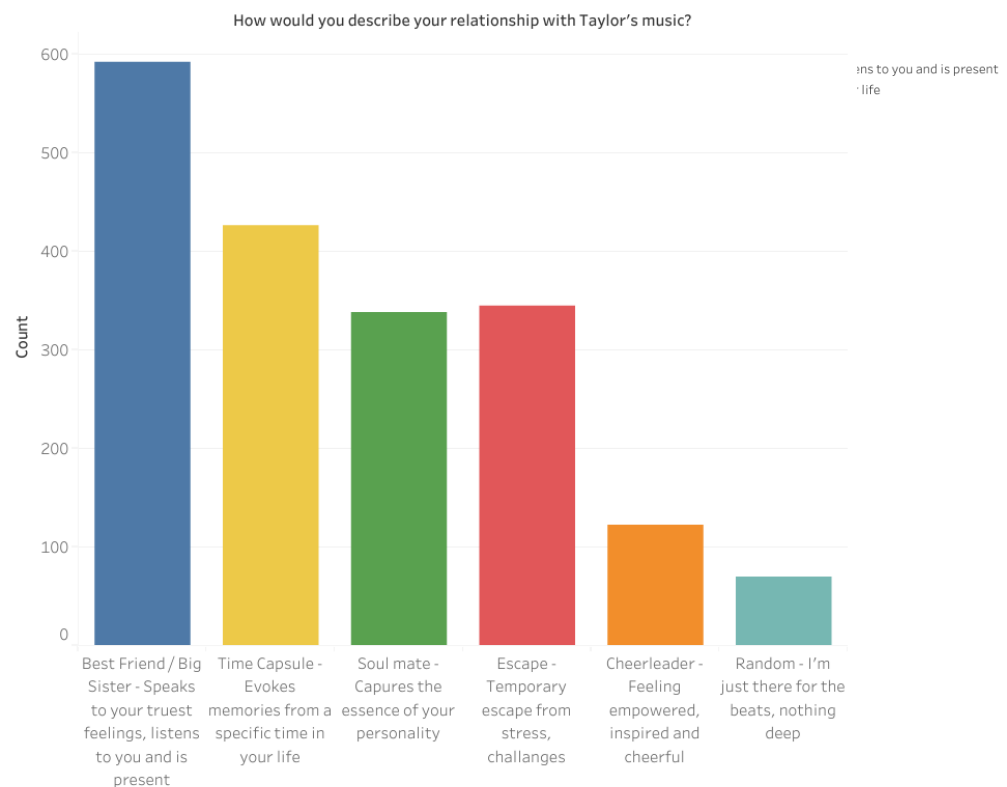
Distribution of likelihood of Swifties performing a given action



4.3 – Relationship to Swift’s Music

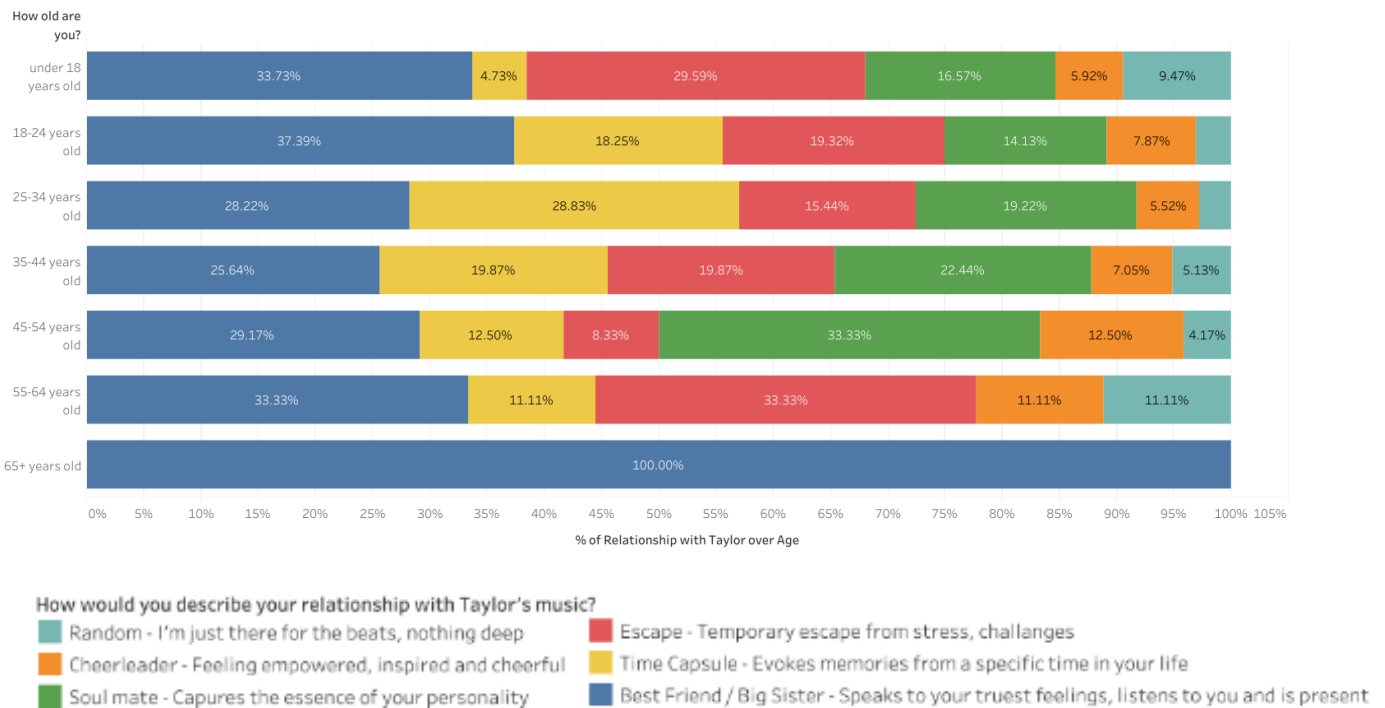
Overall relationship to her music:

Swifties- Relationship with Taylor’s Music



Relationship by age to her music:

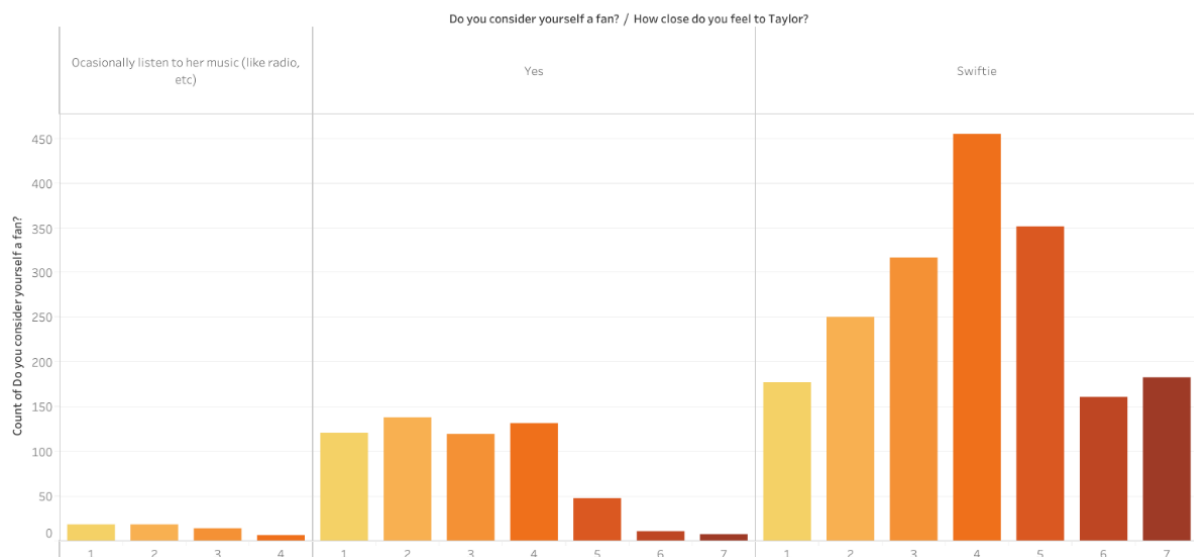
Swifties - Relationship with Taylor's Music



4.4 - Closeness to Swift herself (1= she is untouchable, 7= She is like my best friend)

By Fan category:

Feeling of closeness to Taylor by Fan Type

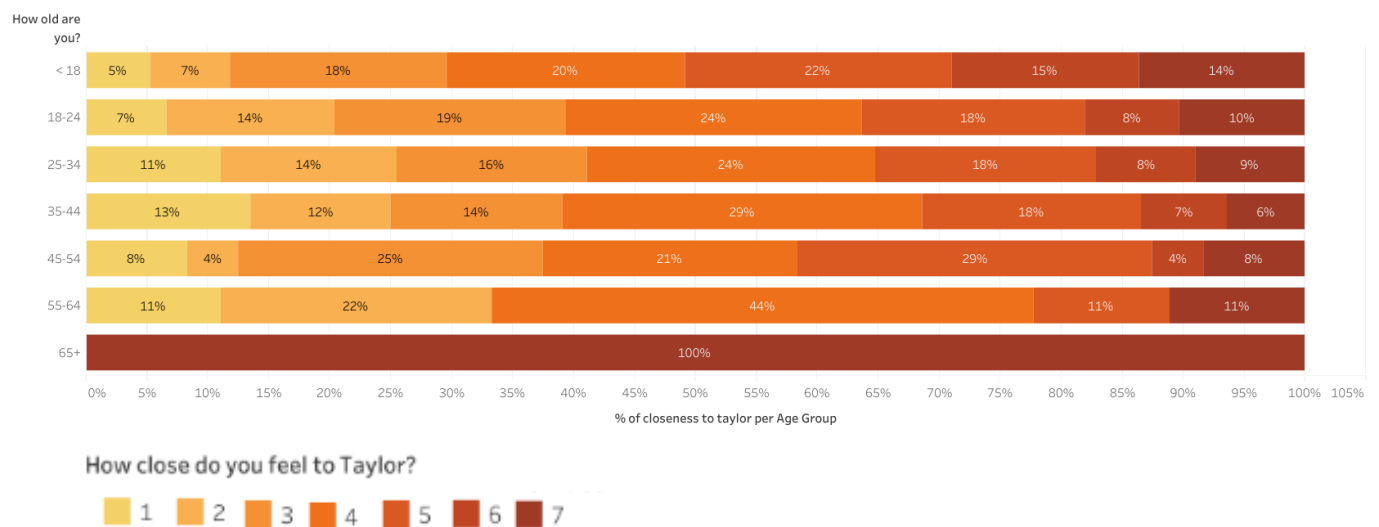


Averages:

Type of Fan	Average
Occasional listener	2.12
Fan	2.85
Swiftie	3.92

Swifties by Age:

Swifties - Feeling of closeness to Taylor Swift (1 to 7) by Age group



4.5- Fans' Experiences of interacting with her

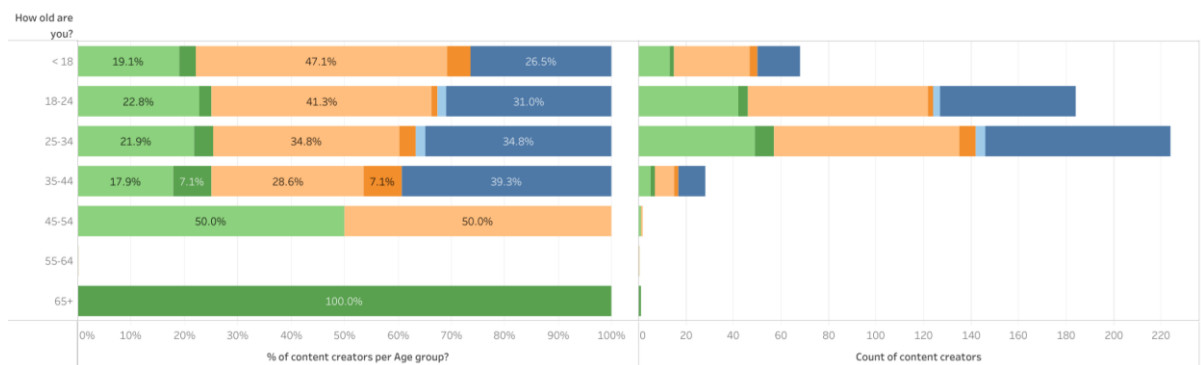
Type of fan interactions from Taylor Swift			
Type	Count	Type	Count
Rep Room / T-party	10	Hugged her	1
Following back on social media	2	Eye contact during concert	1
Liked posts	2	Signed autographs	1
Phone call	2	Mimicked a Fans dramatic face expression	1
Meet and greet	2	Said Hi on a MTV video premier	1
Posted a picture with Fans	1	Shouted "I love you guys so much" to a crowd	1
Letter	1	Gifted tour tickets	1

4.6 -1-word description of Swift

How would you describe Taylor using a single word?			
word	count	word	count
mastermind	153	creative	38
talented	140	relatable	31
iconic	104	incredible	29
genius	95	smart	29
powerful	62	empowering	27
amazing	60	legend	27
icon	51	enchanting	26
brilliant	45	ethereal	25
inspiring	43	fearless	25
queen	41	artist	24

4.7 - Reasons for creating content about Swift

Reasons for content creations (Swifties) by Age group



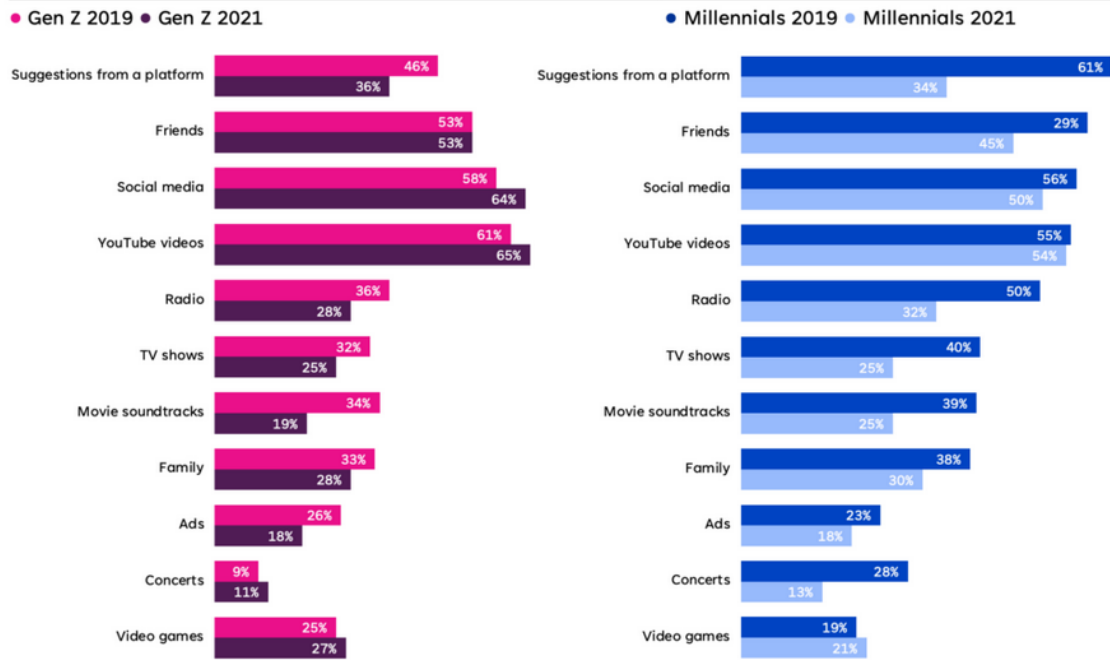
Why do you create content of Taylor Swift?

- Self expression
- Promotion of Taylor
- other
- Love and admiration for Taylor
- Getting noticed by Taylor
- Connecting with the community
- Null

Exhibition 5 – Music Industry

5.1 - how Millennials and Gen Z find new artists pre- and post-pandemic

How do they find out about new artists or songs?



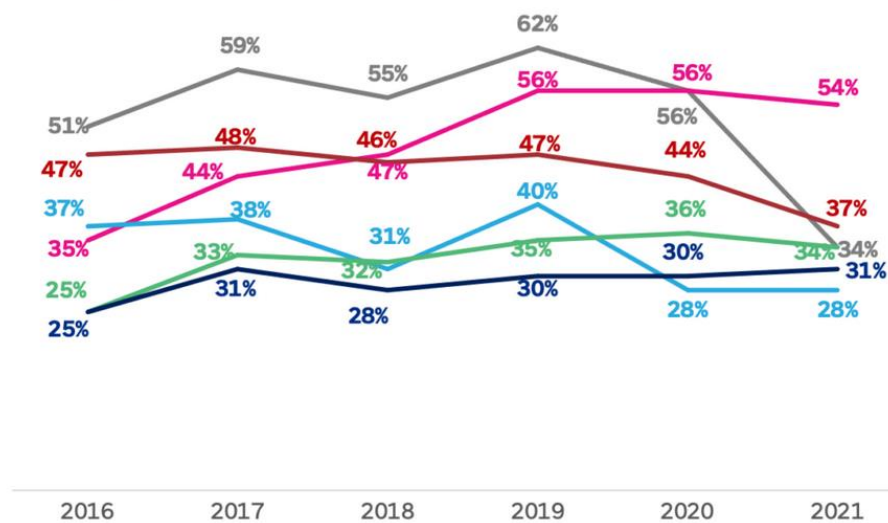
Source: YPulse Survey Data | September 2019, September 2020, September 2021

Source: YPulse, <https://www.ypulse.com/article/2021/12/08/how-gen-z-millennials-music-discovery-has-changed-in-2-charts/>

5.2 – Musical Trends

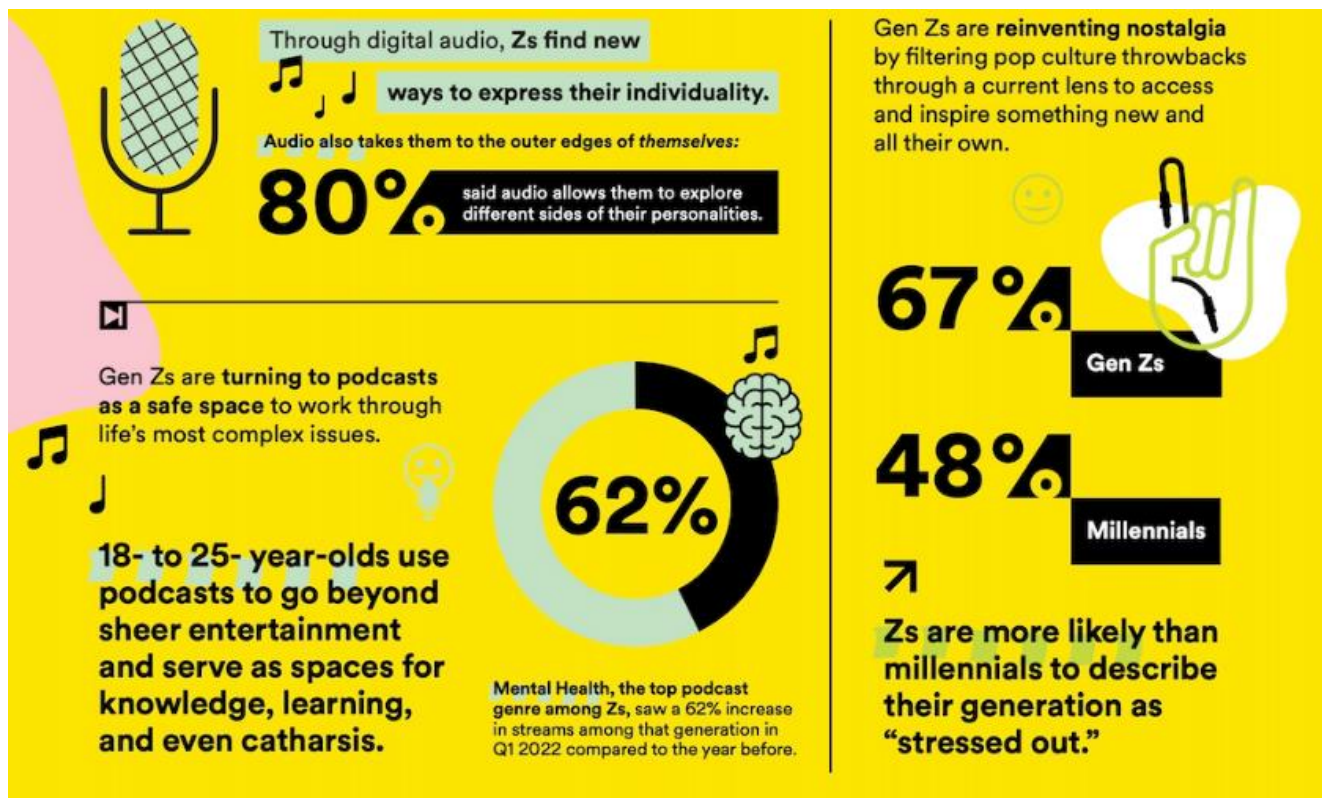
Which of the following genres / categories of music do they enjoy listening to?

● Pop ● Hip-Hop/Rap ● Rock ● Alternative ● R&B/Soul ● Country



Source: Ypulse - <https://www.ypulse.com/article/2021/11/16/this-has-rapidly-become-gen-zs-top-music-genre/>

5.3 – GenZ Musical habits



Source: Spotify - <https://newsroom.spotify.com/2022-06-14/how-gen-z-is-using-audio-to-hear-and-be-heard/>