

Taylor Swift and the Art of Meaning-Making

COMMUNITIES, AFFECT AND STORYTELLING



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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



JOYCE GOGGIN

University of Amsterdam

Joyce Goggin is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, where she conducts research on literature, film and media. She has recently edited *Aegean Sponge Fishing and the Island of Kalymnos: An Ethnography and Industrial History, from the Greek* (Brill 2024). Her recent publications include “Framing John Law: G(u)ilt, Fiction, and Finance”, *Moralizing Commerce in a Globalizing World Multidisciplinary Approaches to a History of Economic Conscience, 1600–1900* (Oxford UP 2022), “You are here: *The Handmaid’s Tale* as Graphic Novel”, *Adapting Margaret Atwood: The Handmaid’s Tale and Beyond* (London: Palgrave, 2021), and “Magic and Illusion: From the Tarot to the Playing Card”, *Illusion and Cultural Practice: Productive Deceptions* (Routledge, 2021) and *Comedy and Crisis: Pieter Langendijk, the Dutch and the Speculative Bubbles of 1720* (Liverpool UP, 2020).

ONE HELL OF A DRUG’: MICRODOSING AND TAYLOR SWIFT ADDICTION

In this talk I will discuss various ways in which Taylor Swift—her music and her brand—amounts to a pleasant form of microdosing for some fans, or even a non-substance addiction for others. The pop star’s trippy and addictive potential surfaces in Swifties’ (i.e. the pop star’s fans) frequent expressions of admiration and devotion in terms of drugs, intoxication, and addiction, with comments such as “What drug did @Taylor Swift put in this bridge? ...”, or “New hyperfixation alert @Taylor Swift you really did put narcotics into all your songs”. Significantly, this last comment is a response to Swift’s own self-conscious lament, in “Who’s Afraid of Little Old Me?”, that her critics and detractors claim she puts “narcotics into all of [her] songs”.

My point is not, however, to criticize Swift for her capacity to addict, or to claim that the billionaire pop singer is a narcissistic addict, but rather to argue that the Swift brand is perfectly in sync with the present moment in which our lives are structured around various addictions (Alexander 2008; Dow-Schüll 2014; Goggin 2010; Reith 2019), many of which commonly occur in her lyrics. This will involve a discussion of how, for some, Swift has become the extradiegetic music to the addictive “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011) of our times, offering depressed, anxiety-ridden fans a salve that temporarily alleviates anxiety, clears a “blank space” in the brain, delivers dopamine, or offers lyrical support for a good cry. At the same time, the emotional impact of Swift’s brand will be grounded in recent scholarship on emotion and capitalism (Konings 2015; Illouz 2007; Ngai 2020).

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



CANDE SÁNCHEZ

Universidad de Alicante

Cande Sánchez is a Senior Lecturer in Communication and Social Psychology at the University of Alicante, teaching Media Semiotics, Communication, and Creative Industries. In 2019, she received the Extraordinary Doctorate Award and holds a degree in Journalism from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). With over 12 years of experience in Spanish journalism, she has also held leadership roles in cultural management at Fnac. From 2022 to 2024, she was a Visiting Research Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she co-edited the Spanish book *Rebel Girls! Gender Inequality, Discourses, and Activism in the Music Industry* (Gedisa, 2023). Her research focuses on gender inequality in the music industry, transmedia culture, and advertising in media.

BETWEEN CRUEL MEDIA COVERAGE AND A GOOD REPUTATION: THE MEDIA NARRATIVES ON TAYLOR SWIFT

In 2023, *Time* magazine named Taylor Swift its Person of the Year—a historic achievement, considering the cover has traditionally featured male figures in influential roles throughout its nearly 100-year history. This recognition sharply contrasts with the cruel and sexist portrayal she faced from several Spanish media outlets during her 2024 visit to Madrid for the Eras Tour. Spanish outlets like *El País* and *El Confidencial* have used terms such as “self-obsessed harpy,” “churrera del pop” (a mass-production song machine), and “supermarket product,” undermining her creative talent as a composer. They focus on her personal life and mock Swifties with stigmas that portray them (mostly young women) as irrational and naive. I examine her media representation as a case study of gender bias and the treatment of female pop stars in journalism. Analysing media discourse is crucial, as it shapes public opinion and influences ideologies of gender, power, and culture. Taylor Swift has attracted significant media attention due to her conflicts with Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, disagreements with artists like Nicki Minaj and Katy Perry, her romantic relationships, and her legal battle with Scooter Braun over the rights to her master recordings, among other topics. A critical discourse analysis of Spanish media coverage about Taylor Swift reveals a polarisation between cruel media narratives that reinforce patriarchal norms and a few outlets that contribute to a positive reputation—such as *eldiario.es*, *El Mundo* and *Forbes*—by recognising Swift’s authorship, leadership, and her ability to challenge conventions in the music industry. The analysis emphasises how media narratives often perpetuate gender inequality by prioritising female artists’ private lives, physical appearance, and romantic relationships over their professional and creative achievements within a patriarchal music industry. It also identifies recurring patterns of condescending coverage, particularly directed at female pop stars who challenge the patriarchal public sphere.

PARTICIPANTS

01 Ana Isabel Inácio

Tourists Never Come Alone: Contributions to the understanding of the Taylor Swift Eras Tour Phenomenon, as a Catalyst for Tourism Dynamics

The Taylor Swift Eras Tour is a global cultural phenomenon with socio-cultural impacts, but also and above all economic ones, on a regional and national scale. In various parts of the world, it has proven to be capable of boosting local economies in the order of millions, driving tourist flows in the order of thousands, capturing different market segments and serving to affirm the notoriety of a country on a global scale. By being able to fit into Event Tourism, in this case cultural-musical events, it has proven to be a powerful revitalizer of dynamics of particular interest to the countries or cities that are part of this itinerary. It is even understandable that, aware of this phenomenon, some countries, such as Singapore, pay to be the only ones to be part of the tour itinerary in a certain part of the world. On the other hand, young audiences who are fans of this artist often end up coming accompanied by others of the same age group, or in the case of minors, by family members who further favor the volume of human capital flow involved in this phenomenon, and the venues and spending volumes, that is, this tourist rarely comes alone. It is in this context that we intend to carry out an exploratory study that aims to assess how in Portugal, and in particular in Lisbon, the supply and demand for tourism were affected by this phenomenon. The aim is to better understand whether the economic dynamics were significant and in which sectors they were concentrated, whether there were other dynamics caused by this event in these territories, and which ones. In particular, Lisbon as a brand in the context of Event Tourism. The recent position of Turismo de Portugal, as the official and institutional entity responsible for the promotion and image of the country's tourism, on musical events is well known. In 2025, this entity has just launched a campaign "Portugal Music Festivals Headliners", making this form of tourism one of the country's communication flagships, aimed at affirming it as an excellent recipient of these initiatives, recognizing their strategic interest in affirming the national identity and notoriety but also from an economic point of view and in attracting tourist flows at different times throughout the year, potentially contributing to the reduction of seasonality. This exploratory study, using mixed methodologies, analyses mainly quantitative secondary sources to understand the results and volumes of what this event meant in the case of Lisbon, namely its direct effect on occupancy rates, tariffs, tourist volumes, accommodation, transport and restaurant services, among other indicators that help to understand the quantification of the phenomenon and that are considered relevant in this process. In a second phase of the study, we intend to integrate some surveys by interview, namely with privileged observers, including Turismo de Portugal or the Entity responsible for Lisbon's Tourism or even the CCDR-LVT, or any others that the preparation of the study reveals to be relevant, which may in some way strengthen and enrich what is intended to be learned with the study in question, mainly the brand acknowledgment. We hope to provide greater knowledge about the phenomenon and its impacts on the city of Lisbon, the destination that was chosen in national terms to hold the event.

Author's Bio (Universidade Católica Portuguesa)

Ana Isabel Inácio has a PhD in Geography from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Lisbon since 2009. She has a Master's degree in Communication, Culture and Information Technology from ISCTE and a Degree in Social and Cultural Communication - Tourism Variant from the Universidade Católica Portuguesa (1997). She also has a Bachelor degree in Tour Operator Management from ESHTe. She has been an Assistant Professor since 2009, teaching in higher education in the areas of Tourism, Communication and Heritage for over 25 years, in institutions where she held various Coordination, Direction and Management positions. It belongs to the Center for Geographic Studies at the University of Lisbon. He collaborates on Master's and Doctorate courses, having supervised both national and foreign theses. She participated in several funded research projects and other consultancy projects. She is the author of several scientific articles in national and international research journals, books, book chapters either individually or in co-authorship in the areas of Tourism, Wine Tourism, Tourism Communication and Marketing, Ethics and Social Responsibility and Health and Well-being Tourism



02 Clara Neumann

Between Love Stories and Activism: Pathos and Storytelling and Connection in the Communication of Taylor Swift's Instagram Through Music

A glamorous superstar who is taking the world by storm and an ancient Greek scholar who has been dead for centuries. These are not necessarily two people which would be mentioned together in the same paper. And yet this is exactly what this dissertation does. The ancient Greek scholar Aristotle and his famous rhetoric including the three rhetorical means of logos, ethos and pathos (Aristotle & Gernot Krapinger, 2018) are looked at from a modern way through the glittering and sparkling lens of Taylor Swift with a special focus on the art of pathos. The dissertation uses a qualitative research design with a content analysis as well as semi-structured interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021 and Christou, 2022) to understand the

communication strategy of artist Taylor Swift. The research focuses on the concept of storytelling in connection with an emotional communication approach related to the pathos theory of Greek scholar Aristotle in order to connect the ancient scholar with the modern popstar and understand how pathos can be found in modern communication. It assesses how Swift uses pathos in storytelling (Aimé, 2021; Houghton, 2021 and Tsai, 2020) to create an emotional connection with her fans. The dissertation considers the impact of the music of artist Taylor Swift and looks at Instagram to understand the communication strategy connected to social media. Swift is seen not only as a singer/songwriter but as the mastermind behind her very own communication strategy which ranges from songs and diary entries up to social media

communication and strategic insights into her life (Glasenapp, 2024 and Théberge, 2021). Understanding the connection which Swift built with the help of her music as well as the importance of her social media interaction and how social media is used by the artist (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Knape, 2018 and Vero, 2021). It is looking at storytelling and the use of pathos from both the musical perspective of her lyrics as well as the communicative perspective of her social media appearance. The interviews and the content analysis underline how successful Swift manages to interact with her fans and how emotional her communication strategy is. They offer an insight on how the artist's communication strategy is received. It shows how promoting engagement is one of her main ways of creating a successful, emotion-based communication strategy.

Author's Bio (Universidade Católica Portuguesa)

After finishing high school education in Germany, **Clara Neumann** started a Bachelor's degree at the University of Tübingen, Germany. Her studies there consisted of Rhetoric as a major and English as a minor. She finished her degree in 2022 with a bachelor thesis about protest on Instagram with the example of the Black Lives Matter movement. In September 2022 she started a Master's degree at Universidade Católica Portuguesa in the specialisation Marketing, Communication and Advertising. Having defended her dissertation about Taylor Swift in February 2025, Clara is now awaiting official graduation in October while having started working in a marketing position in a German company.



03 Eric Smialek

Elegies for Family - Three Songs of Bereavement by Taylor Swift.

In 2019–2020, Taylor Swift recorded grief songs about family. “Soon You’ll Get Better” (2019) grieves her mother’s ongoing battle with cancer while the others memorialize her grandparents within separate, emotional contexts. A dramatization of her grandfather’s 1942 beach landing forms half of “epiphany” (2020), sharing lyrical dialogue with pandemic nurses in the other half who battle similar traumas. By contrast, Swift’s regrets about not appreciating her grandmother are voiced directly to her in “marjorie” (2020), using a second-person address comparable to her song for her mother. This presentation compares distinct approaches to grief in each song, examining Swift’s songwriting strategies for three narratives on bereavement: fear of abandonment, empathy with sacrifices of service, and apologetic regrets to a role model. Beginning with “Soon You’ll Get Better,” I reveal how its intertextual connections with Swift’s earlier works function like a time machine, situating her emotionally in youthful stages of parental care and vulnerability. Musically, these include close vocal harmonies with The [Dixie] Chicks, alongside banjos and fiddles, that recall Swift’s childhood emergence as a country artist. Lyrically, they allude to Swift’s childhood memories in “The Best Day” ([2008] 2021), an earlier song of gratitude for her mother. With “epiphany,” I turn to how Swift arranges separate historical contexts within verse-chorus form, weaving both around American mythologies of sacrificial service. The co-existing storylines have implications for her more controversial songs with plural narratives (Smialek 2021). Finally, I examine harmony in “marjorie” to show how minimal changes to a single chord progression create mood shifts throughout the narrative. In particular, it creates feelings of lift for a pivotal pre-chorus where Swift’s grandmother’s presence is strongest felt. By examining how grief is variously dramatized in Swift’s recent songs, my presentation contributes music-analytical insights into how a seasoned singer-songwriter processes bereavement in song.

Author's Bio (Universidade Católica Portuguesa)

Eric Smialek is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Huddersfield where he researches expression, technique, and cultural meaning in extreme metal vocals. He recently published an article on metal genre-taxonomies in the journal *Volume!* and chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to Metal Music*, *Heavy Metal Music and Disability*. His further specialization on Taylor Swift includes an article on LGBTQ allyship in *Contemporary Music Review*, co-founding the European Taylor Swift Research Network, and co-organization of the 2024 Taylor Swift Unconference in Amsterdam. He serves on the editorial advisory board for the journal *Metal Music Studies* and as Assistant Editor for *IASPM Journal*.

05 Gabrielle Fortier

Then Came Out, Alive: Autoethnographic Vignettes of Becoming Lesbian in The Taylor Swift Fandom

Writing about the Swift phenomenon in 2025 is relevant in more ways than one. Since the start of her career in 2006, a variety of attachments have been materialized through the staging of her public persona (Marshall, 2015). Thus, for many academics, thinking with— and through—Swift enables us to retrace the construction of a hegemonic white femininity (Brown, 2012; Pollock, 2014; Cullen, 2016; Prins, 2020) at the heart of “racial melodramas” in the United States (Williams, 2002). In a similar vein, some authors have highlighted elements of the current conjuncture in which a fascist rise is taking shape (Diamond, 1995; Kruse, 2015; Foertsch and Pieper, 2023) through the prism of the creation, reception and circulation of Swift’s 2020 album entitled *folklore* (McGrath, 2023). In addition, a growing number of people from 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are gathering at events where the queer resonances of the Swift phenomenon are interpreted through interdisciplinary work in literature, communication, sociology and history, to name only those few fields (De la Cretaz, 2023). Insofar as the Swift phenomenon is a vehicle through which a plethora of attachments are formed, it seems crucial to interrogate these “traces” (Secret and Wilhelmi, 2012), to understand how they shape and orient the life trajectories of her queer fans. As part of this call for papers, I propose to explore, through autoethnographic vignettes, salient moments in my trajectory as a lesbian fan in the Taylor Swift fandom. Having been a Swift fan since the late 2000s, these writings will make tangible queer attachments to Taylor Swift, a phenomenon embodied by a person whose queer identification cannot be postulated a priori. Here, I borrow from Hennion (2017) the notion of attachment, which designates what we hold dear and experience, feel and put to the test, contingently, through various distributed actions (Latour, 2000) that constitute our personal histories and orient (Ahmed, 2006) our present actions. In this respect, I seek to interrogate the generative potential of these writings as material traces of attachments to the Swift phenomenon that can contribute to the creation of future queer trajectories (“queer worldmaking”) (Floegel, 2020). I borrow from Ahmed (2006) the notion of queer as disorientations (through practices and desires) of the heteronormative order. As such, my proposal will aim to expose the links between fan practices, at times considered marginal, and potential queer (Muñoz, 2009) “becomings” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972).

Author’s Bio (Université de Montréal)

Gabrielle P. Fortier is a doctoral student in communication at the Université de Montréal. She is interested in fandoms, queer utopian potentialities and creative writings that weave (counter)imaginaries to resist the end of the world. Her master’s thesis examined the types of queer relationality woven in the pit during popular music concerts. Her doctoral thesis will interrogate the political and cultural implications of fanfiction that queers the persona of Taylor Swift.



06 Hilario Martínez-Blanco & Cristóbal Fernández-Muñoz

Social Media Consistency as a Strategic Tool: Taylor Swift's Approach to Fostering Audience Engagement

Taylor Swift epitomises the strategic value of sustained and direct audience engagement in contemporary music marketing. Her album and re-recording campaigns have evolved into cultural events that dominate discourse across digital platforms (Sancho, 2024). From the outset of her career, Swift has demonstrated a personalised approach to digital marketing, beginning with the promotion of her debut album via MySpace, offering exclusive content unavailable elsewhere. As the music industry historically employed a broad range of promotional strategies—from televised appearances to in-store signings—the advent of social media introduced transformative tools that offered greater artist autonomy and direct audience interaction (Wert, 2021). Over the past two decades, social media has become a central instrument within the marketing strategies of music celebrities. The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI, 2024) reports that Swift was the most consumed artist globally in 2023, underlining the relevance of examining her communication strategies. The present study investigates the evolution of her audience engagement methods through an exploratory, data-driven case study approach, which allows for deeper contextual understanding (Yacuzzi, 2005). The research framework consists of two pillars: (1) an overview of Swift's career trajectory and the progression of her marketing strategies; and (2) an analysis of her recent campaigns, particularly her social media presence. Data collection employed secondary research methods, including open-access websites, artist compilation pages, and online repositories. The PRISMA statement guidelines (Rodríguez-Izquierdo & García-Bayón, 2024) were adapted to suit the subject matter and data type. The initial sample of 192 items was refined to a final corpus of 170 items for career trajectory analysis. For the social media content analysis, 318 posts were examined: 137 from X (formerly Twitter), 137 from Instagram, and 44 from TikTok, covering the period from 1 January 2022 to 27 September 2024. A timeline of Swift's releases and corresponding social media activity illustrates her adaptability to emerging platforms. She joined X in 2008, Instagram in 2011, and TikTok in 2021. Notably, her TikTok debut promoted the vinyl edition of her re-recorded Red album. Since the Reputation era, Swift's marketing strategy has integrated narrative-driven promotional techniques, most prominently through the use of 'easter eggs'—hidden clues that foreshadow future projects. These elements, which have attracted substantial media attention (e.g., Rolling Stone), exemplify how cultural products double as marketing tools. Swift exhibits consistently high engagement across platforms, regularly interacting with fan content and other celebrities. Music promotion dominates her social media activity, while concert announcements are primarily concentrated on X and Instagram. Lifestyle-related content is infrequent but appears more regularly on TikTok. Across all platforms, promotional posts frequently include clear calls-to-action and offer exclusive merchandise from her official store. Furthermore, Swift utilises newsletters disseminated through Taylor Nation—a fan-led organisation collaborating with her team—as an additional promotional vehicle, often embedding clues and exclusive product information. This study highlights how Swift's evolving use of digital platforms exemplifies a sophisticated, integrative marketing approach that capitalises on both narrative strategies and audience interaction within contemporary music promotion.

During her Bachelor's, she completed a dissertation comparing the Scottish and Portuguese Governments' social marketing techniques in their Covid-19 awareness campaigns. Currently, she is finishing her Master's dissertation on Body Positivity Influencers and their impact on brand equity. Alongside her studies, she works full-time as a marketing associate at a consultancy firm in the pharmaceutical industry, where she views each challenge as a valuable learning opportunity.



08 Ralf von Appen And Jonas Kastenhube

Song Structures in Taylor Swift's 'pandemic albums' Folklore and Evermore

Taylor Swift's folklore and evermore (both 2020), her so-called "pandemic albums," mark a significant departure from her previous pop-focused works, embracing an indie folk aesthetic. This study explores how Swift and her co-writers adapted their songwriting—especially the chorus sections—to an era of restricted social interactions while also exploring how these adaptations resonate with broader stylistic differences between mainstream pop and indie music. Using Trevor de Clercq's prototype-based framework for song section analysis, we identified and evaluated key chorus characteristics in folklore and evermore. Comparative analyses with earlier albums (Fearless and Lover) highlight a striking shift: the choruses on folklore and evermore are often almost hidden, recognizable only after repeated listenings. These songs subvert conventional pop norms by minimizing title prominence, introducing lyrical variations, and eschewing clear dynamic or instrumental contrasts. Their harmonically unstable structures further erode the singalong, communal function typically associated with pop choruses. Instead, the focus shifts to introspection and subtlety, rewarding listeners with layered details that unfold over time. Swift's decision to undermine the hit qualities of her music seems deliberate, responding to the pandemic's disruption of collective musical experiences. The absence of "stadium-ready" choruses reorients her music toward solitary listening. This stylistic evolution also aligns her music with indie traditions, where understated choruses and complexity take precedence over mainstream catchiness.

Authors' Bio (University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna)

Jonas Kastenhube studies piano and keyboard instruments at the Department of Popular Music of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, where he is also employed as a research assistant and is responsible for the institute's media library. Outside of his occupations at the university he is also active as a pianist, keyboardist and composer for various musical projects including the piano trio Eledone and the Jazz-Rock-Collective Goidinger-Matheis-Collective.

Taylor Swift and the Power of Community: Girlhood, Sisterhood, and Emotion on The Eras Tour

This paper investigates the contemporary phenomenon of Taylor Swift as a cultural figure whose influence extends beyond the realm of music. The central focus is on the social and affective dimensions of participation in The Eras Tour concerts and the way Swift constructs spaces of collective experience and emotional identification. A key context here is the swifties fan community, where the concepts of “girlhood” and “sisterhood” from second and third wave of feminism serve as frameworks for shared, lived experience. These affective categories are presented not merely as pop-cultural tropes but as meaningful identity constructs through which mostly young women (but not only women, just swifties) find space for authentic emotional expression and mutual support. The analysis is grounded in a qualitative research methodology, combining feminist cultural studies with critical discourse analysis. The paper draws on fan-generated content collected from social media platforms (focusing on TikTok), with a particular emphasis on fans’ statements, video reactions, and storytelling. This empirical material allows for an exploration of affective dynamics within the fandom and highlights how emotion functions as a mode of agency, especially within female-dominated cultural spaces. From a feminist perspective, the study foregrounds the significance of emotional labor, communal storytelling, and practices of care as subversive responses to patriarchal cultural norms. Furthermore, Swift’s concerts are examined as modern rituals – events with quasi-transcendental qualities, where participation entails a sense of belonging and emotional purification. Practices such as exchanging friendship bracelets, singing along to lyrics, and sharing stories across social media platforms foster a community rooted in affect, storytelling, and collective intimacy. In this light, Swift emerges as a narrator of emotion, crafting stories in which fans recognize their own biographies, traumas, and desires.

The author deliberately avoids traditional musicological analysis or controversies surrounding Swift’s career, focusing instead on the sociocultural mechanisms of meaning-making within the fandom. Finally, Swift is portrayed as a unifying figure—not only a pop star, but also a symbol of emotional agency and communal belonging. Her impact lies not only in her musical output but in her capacity to forge deep connections with her audience through the language of emotion, narrative, and shared experience. This emotional architecture becomes a foundation for community-building and a redefinition of fan-artist relationships.

Author’s Bio (AGH University of Krakow)

Karolina Majcherek has a MA in Comparative Literature from the Jagiellonian University and BA in Applied Linguistics French and Spanish from Nicolaus Copernicus University. Currently studying Cultural Studies at AGH University in Krakow. Her research interests include fantasy, speculative fiction, popculture phenomena (especially franchises and fandoms, both cinematic—such as Marvel—and musical—such as Taylor Swift), non-Europocentric literature, myth and fairy tale retellings, deconstruction, feminism, and Afrofuturism.

10 Kate Galloway

What “Taylor’s Up To Now”: Star Persona World-Building, Branding Media, and Constructing the Self

AT&T’s ad spot “Taylor’s Up To Now” (2016) follows Taylor Swift through her daily routine of seemingly ordinary activities and making music, while promoting the telecommunications company multi-year co-branding deal featuring exclusive Swift content, including Video On Demand videos, performances, and behind-the-scenes footage from Swift’s personal archives and media production. Swift’s self-branding, self-crafting, and popular music merchandising (Vesey 2023), for example, reclaim the “cat mom,” and “girl next door” personae and transforms these into “cool girl” identities. These same social media posts and ad spots depict her performing mundane ubiquitous daily activities (e.g., scrolling through animal photos on her phone or eating a kale rice bowl), but also writing and recording music at home and in the studio, granting fan access to intimate autobiographic content just like she does in her social media accounts and songwriting. This personal branding strategy that combines the shaping of her star image with autobiographical references that maintain a strong sense of fan-artist intimacy becomes apparent across Swift’s co-branding partnerships. Swift unfailingly combines her star image, identity as a songwriter, lifestyle, and curated autobiographical content across her multimedia, including her advertising campaigns, leveraging her star image aesthetic in co-branding partnerships that strategically sells the Swift brand – her music, ideas, and lifestyle – in hypervisible ways. Commercials, like televised performances, music videos, music documentaries, and other audiovisual media, reinforce her star image and Swift uses advertising media, including commercials, released as a part of her co-branding partnerships as tool in her life writing to curate the version of Taylor Swift, the self, she wants both fans and critics to consume and brands benefit by aligning themselves with Swift and what she represents. Swift is a lucrative franchise as much as she is a person and this is in part due to the spreadability of her star image and, as Paul Th  berge (2021) argues in her work as a celebrity businesswoman and advocate, her ability “move product,” including products from her brand and those of the brands she’s attached to. Swift, like other pop icons including Harry Styles, Billie Eilish, Olivia Rodrigo, and even going back to David Bowie, is a multimedia artist who is building a brand that fuses her music, star image, and autobiographic content that is a lifestyle and life performed and in part lived on screen, in interviews, and on stage, in addition to the music she releases. Analyzing a range of advertisements spanning her career (and eras), including her “Taylor’s Up To Now” AT&T spot, Capitol One’s “All Eras” and “I think I’ll go with a cardigan” (“cardigan” off *folklore*), and Diet Coke’s “Stay Extraordinary” (“22” off *Red*) and “Kittens” (“How You Get the Girl” off 1989), I argue that Swift harnesses the intimacy of self-portraiture and the power of self-curated autobiography for the purposes of promotion, media branding the star persona, and fandom outreach as she draws on and departs from a range of music industry co-branding strategies and aesthetics (Love, 2019).

Author’s Bio (Assistant Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute)

Kate Galloway is Assistant Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Her research addresses how and why contemporary artists remix and recycle sounds, music, and texts encoded with environmental knowledge and the creative and social phenomena of internet music communities and practices of listening to the internet. She is co-editor of *Music and Sonic Environments in Video Games: Listening to and Performing Ludic Soundscapes* (Routledge) with Elizabeth Hambleton and with Paula Harper and Christa Bentley, she co-edited the collection *Taylor Swift: The Star, The Songs, The Fans* (Routledge).

11 Leonor Proença de Carvalho

Taylor Made Worlds: Analyzing Fan-Created Transmedia Storytelling inspired by Taylor Swift

This paper explores how Taylor Swift's narrative-rich body of work has inspired transmedia storytelling within fan communities, focusing on the user-generated transmedia project by @AlefVernonArt. Drawing from Renira Gambarato's "Transmedia Project Design: Theoretical and Analytical Considerations" (2013) this paper examines how independent creators interpret and extend Swift's mythos into original storyworlds through character design, fictional universes, and cross-platform engagement. Alef Vernon, a Brazilian illustrator, designer and storyteller, has created an expansive visual-narrative project rooted in Swift's album eras, songs, and thematic aesthetics. This project, shared via Instagram, TikTok, and online archives, transforms songs into character arcs and visuals into speculative worldbuilding, constructing an unofficial "Swiftian" fantasy realm -Tayrealm. Using Gambarato's principles in system logic, purpose, and interactivity, the paper analyzes how this fan-created project mirrors professional transmedia structure while also forging new creative ground. The research argues that Swift's layered, referential art acts as a narrative toolkit, allowing fans like Alef Vernon to build alternate universes that retain emotional resonance while departing from canon. These projects blur the lines between homage and authorship, highlighting the role of fans not just as interpreters but as designers of new transmedia experiences. This case study illuminates how fandom operates as a narrative ecosystem, with Swift's work providing both the blueprint and emotional anchor for collaborative storytelling. By centering a user-generated case, the paper also aims to elevate fan labor as a legitimate site of transmedia innovation, contributing to broader conversations about authorship, participation, and artistic influence in digital culture.

Author's Bio (Universidade Católica Portuguesa)

Leonor Proença is a Luso-Brazilian researcher, Assistant Director, and Producer currently based in Lisbon, Portugal, where she works primarily in international advertising productions. She is also an M.A. candidate in Media & Entertainment: Communication Studies at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, where she previously completed her undergraduate degree in Communication in 2019. Her academic path is interdisciplinary and international in nature. After attending international schools in Portugal and Angola, she graduated from Oeiras International School (Class of 2014) and went on to study Law and Business Administration at the University of Kent, UK. Although she returned to Portugal before completing that degree, the experience significantly shaped her global perspective and continues to inform her academic and professional approach. She is currently completing an advanced training program in Transmedia and Digital Storytelling, a field that now anchors her academic research. Her master's thesis focuses on Taylor Swift as a case study in transmedia storytelling within contemporary pop music, examining how narrative coherence, platform logic, and participatory culture intersect in her body of work. One of the abstracts she is submitting for this conference draws directly from this research, while the other explores a user-generated transmedia project inspired by Swift, discovered during the course of her thesis. Broadly, her research interests lie in the co-creation of narrative universes between artists and audiences, and the ways transmedia storytelling practices expand our understanding of authorship, fandom, and cultural production. She is particularly interested in how popular music functions not only as art but as an evolving, multi-platform storyworld. She looks forward to contributing to this exciting and emerging field of academic inquiry.

12 Melissa Avdeeff

From Hashtags to Headlines: The Journalistic Use of Tweets in Framing Response to Taylor Swift's 'You Need to Calm Down'

This paper explores the journalistic practice of using tweets to represent public opinion, focusing on the discourse surrounding Taylor Swift's music video "You Need to Calm Down" (YNTCD). Released in 2019, YNTCD marked Swift's significant shift in overt political engagement, with LGBTQ+ rights and queer allyship. The video generated extensive discourse on social media, particularly Twitter, and was interpreted diversely by the mainstream press. This research explores how journalists utilized tweets to frame public opinion and support agenda-setting narratives about Swift's activism, often emphasizing themes of queerbaiting, pinkwashing, and rainbow capitalism. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study combines digital ethnography, social media discourse analysis, and mainstream press content analysis. A dataset of over 20,000 tweets using the #YouNeedToCalmDown hashtag was analysed alongside 88 online articles, 14 of which were tweet-dominant. Results suggest a problematic practice of using tweets as representative opinions, in ways that centre controversy and critique of Swift's activist aims, rather than the mainly neutral response seen in the social media discourse. The findings highlight a disparity between Twitter's public discourse and its representation in the press. While Twitter responses to YNTCD were largely positive or neutral, journalistic accounts frequently amplified negative sentiments, framing them as dominant public opinion. This misrepresentation can manufacture controversy and highlight ideological clashes, which are not reflective of the broader public sentiment. This paper also addresses the broader implications of these practices within the context of ambient journalism, where tweets are used as both news sources and content. This trend challenges traditional journalistic authority and raises questions about the representation of public opinion and the agenda-setting role of the press. By embedding tweets, journalists may inadvertently legitimize extreme views, influencing public perception and potentially fostering a binary approach to cultural analysis. This paper emphasizes the need for accurate representation of public discourse to avoid perpetuating extremist views and to better reflect the diverse voices within digital publics. This study sets the stage for further exploration into tweet-dominant reporting styles within music criticism and entertainment report, and their impact on cultural criticism and public opinion formation.

Author's Bio (University of Stirling)

Melissa Avdeeff is a Lecturer in Digital Media at the University of Stirling. Her research uses multimodal approaches in the examination of popular culture texts and digital/emerging technologies exploring areas such as: social media and discourse analysis; AI and computational creativity; critical approaches to digital media and technology.



13 Mikias Sissay

Aphorisms in the Age of AI: Balancing Innovation and Cultural Integrity

Aphorisms, a deep-rooted oral tradition in which people appreciate, criticize, or preserve philosophy, are one of the cornerstones of the oral tradition. With the advent of the proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI), aphorisms saw a fresh presentation – unsophisticated machine generated imagery. Social media content creation now days involved interpretation of oral traditions with AI generated imagery. Although creative and timely, the AI generated images are criticized of being binary and unnuanced lacking the intricacy of the beauty of oral tradition story telling. With this digital technology, orality seems to be affected-for one thing, its evolution diminishes, for another, it stays static. This research, focusing on Amharic Aphorisms from Ethiopia, investigates the opportunities and challenges of using artificial intelligence, critically examining selected AI imagery circulated over social media. Amharic Aphorisms are layered expressions with metaphor, moral wisdom, and cultural identity passed down through generations. AI-generated images present a powerful opportunity to preserve and share these aphorisms with global audiences and younger generations. However, the risks involved are cultural misrepresentation, algorithmic bias, and oversimplification. We must approach this technology with caution and a critical eye. Through a qualitative analysis of AI-generated art and Ethiopian cultural symbolism, this study emphasizes the necessity of training AI models on culturally relevant datasets and actively involving artists, storytellers, and cultural experts in the creative process. The results confirm that AI-generated imagery is a powerful tool for cultural preservation, however, education grounded in cultural authenticity, ethical representation, and community engagement is necessary to ensure the preservation of cultural integrity. Otherwise, it does more harm than help. The research ultimately calls for a balanced approach that leverages technological innovation while safeguarding the integrity and depth of the Amharic proverb tradition.

Author's Bio (Temple University)

Mikias Sissay is a Ph.D. student at Temple University and an emerging scholar researching the role of Media and Communication in Oral Traditions. He brings a wealth of professional experience in diplomacy and communication. He earned his bachelor's degree in Language and Literature and a master's in communication and journalism from Addis Ababa University. Later, he obtained an Executive Master's in Peace and Security in Africa from the Institute of Peace and Security Studies. His experience spans communication, diplomacy, freedom of expression, peace and security, rule of law, elections, governance, human rights, and support for vulnerable communities. In 2019, the African Union Commission's Communications Week magazine recognized his outstanding contributions and listed Mikias as one of the top 50 African Region Communication Leaders. Mikias spearheaded several international initiatives in multilateral organizations, including the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations World Health Organization, UNWOMEN, the African Union Commission, and the World Bank Group before pursuing his Ph.D. in 2023. His contributions included strategic planning, mediation, diplomacy, lobbying, external relations, and public information.



14 Milena Merhoutová

Beyond the Broken Heart: Navigating Loss and Finding Strength

This research addresses the critical need to understand the psychological mechanisms underpinning resilience following romantic relationship dissolution, a prevalent experience with significant implications for individual well-being. Specifically, it investigates how self-perception, pre-existing beliefs, and the reconstruction of self-narratives facilitate the pursuit of meaning in the aftermath of heartbreak among millennial women, a generation navigating unique relational dynamics. The study posits that the process of meaning-making is influenced by engagement with narrative, drawing conceptual parallels with the self-reflective and cathartic storytelling found in popular culture, such as the music of Taylor Swift, which provides relatable frameworks for emotional processing. Theoretically grounded in Existential Positive Psychology (EPP) and the principles of logotherapy, the research emphasizes the fundamental human drive for meaning as a cornerstone of resilience in the face of loss. To explore this phenomenon, a qualitative, phenomenological approach was employed, utilizing semiotically informed Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to access the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes of the participants. A purposive sample of six millennial women, each with direct experience of a significant romantic relationship breakup, was recruited. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured online interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, allowing for rich, detailed accounts of their experiences. The online format facilitated access and comfort for participants. IPA was chosen for its capacity to elucidate how individuals interpret and make sense of significant life events within their unique experiential worlds. The analysis of interview transcripts revealed several key findings. Participants actively employed diverse coping strategies, encompassing internal cognitive reframing and the utilization of external social support networks. The breakup experience often served as a catalyst for enhanced self-awareness, particularly regarding personal boundary setting, and prompted significant shifts in self-perception and the re-evaluation of relational dynamics. Furthermore, the crucial role of social support in facilitating healing and fostering a growing sense of self-reliance emerged as a central theme in their recovery journeys. These findings suggest that the process of constructing new self-narratives and finding meaning following relationship loss is deeply intertwined with existing beliefs and self-perception, and can be significantly influenced by engagement with relatable narratives found in popular culture. This study expands upon existing research on coping mechanisms by highlighting the potential of popular culture as a readily accessible resource for meaning-making and emotional processing during challenging life transitions. The implications of this research lie in offering a more nuanced understanding of resilience in the context of relationship loss, informing (self)therapeutic practices and support systems by underscoring the importance of narrative construction and the potential of leveraging relatable stories to facilitate healing and personal growth among individuals navigating similar experiences.

Author's Bio (Charles University, Prague)

Milena Merhoutova is a PhD Candidate in Semiotics and Philosophy of Communication at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague. Her research explores the profound influence of meaning-making narratives related to intergenerational trauma on the development of resilience. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, her ongoing exploration bridges the theoretical and practical applications of existential positive psychology, logotherapy, Stoicism, and semiotics.

16 Patrícia Dias, Dhemy de Brito, and José Gabriel Andrade

Beyond Taylor Swift: TikTok and the Diversification of Youth Music Cultures

This study explores how TikTok is reshaping music consumption among adolescents by amplifying the visibility of artists from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Departing from the figure of Taylor Swift as a symbol of Anglo-American pop stardom and industry power, the study proposes a critical decentring of the global pop music canon. While Swift embodies a lineage of English-speaking pop megastars – from Madonna to Britney Spears, Beyoncé, and Lady Gaga – TikTok has increasingly disrupted this trajectory by enabling the viral success of artists from non-Anglophone and underrepresented contexts. Focusing on two prominent examples in Portugal – the Brazilian artist Anitta and the Puerto Rican artist Bad Bunny – this study examines how TikTok’s algorithmic culture and participatory dynamics contribute to the emergence of new global music icons that challenge the traditional music industry (while becoming part of it). Both artists have built strong transnational fan bases, not despite but because of their cultural specificity, linguistic diversity, and engagement with regional music styles such as funk and reggaetón. Their popularity in Portugal exemplifies how digital platforms foster cultural flows that are less dependent on Anglophone media gatekeepers. Our methodological approach is qualitative, which is appropriate for an exploratory study. The empirical work consists of semi-structured interviews with Portuguese teenagers (aged between 15 and 18 years old) to explore their music consumption and discovery habits, TikTok use practices, and perceptions of authenticity and cultural diversity. The aim is to understand how TikTok influences what music young people consume, how they relate to global artists, how cultural proximity or difference plays into their preferences and, as a consequence, how they (re)build their own childhood cultures. By examining these dynamics, this study seeks to explore the role that TikTok currently plays in the music industry and children’s and youth cultures, exploring if and how it contributes to the paradoxical dynamics of cultural diversification within the scope of the music industry and fandom and, at the same time, of homogenous replication of strategies that lead to the construction of a music icon. In this sense, Taylor Swift serves not only as a figure of continued industry centrality but also as a useful contrast against which new forms of stardom can be understood. Ultimately, this contribution highlights the role of youth-driven digital practices in challenging cultural hierarchies and expanding the horizons of popular music, as well as the understanding of the autonomous cultural production that children and young people develop with media and among peers. It offers a timely intervention into discussions about celebrity, fandom, and globalization in the platform era, calling for a more plural and decentred understanding of the “Taylor Swift phenomenon”.

Authors’ Bio (Universidade Católica Portuguesa/University of Minho)

Patrícia Dias is PhD in Communication Sciences by Universidade Católica Portuguesa, where she currently works as Assistant Professor and researcher. She coordinates the post-graduate courses Social Brands - Communication and Marketing in a Digital Environment and Communication and Content Marketing. Researcher at CECC and CRC-W, her main research interests are the use of digital media by children and also within organizational communication, marketing and branding. She is author of several publications about the social impact of digital media and the use of smartphones.

Dhemy de Brito is PhD in Child Studies from the University of Minho, where he currently works as an Assistant Professor. He is a member of the Research Center for Child Studies - CIEC and of the research group *mei - music, education, and childhood*, at the State University of Santa Catarina, Brazil. His interests focus on the problematization of children's right to a voice, their recognition as critical and competent social authors, and on the concept of polyphony, which materializes policies of the right to culture, autonomy, and recognition of children's voices. He is the author of several publications on childhood and culture.

José Gabriel Andrade is a researcher and professor on media, marketing and communication at the University of Minho. José holds a European PhD in Communication Sciences from the Portuguese Catholic University with the support of the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and a Master in Communication Sciences: Communication, Organization and New Technologies from the Portuguese Catholic University - UCP, with the support of the European Union High Level Scholarship Program for Latin America (Alban). He coordinated the Master in Digital Communication and integrated the structure responsible for quality management, internships, communication and interface with the University community, actively participating in the professional and personal development of students. He is the director of the Casa do Conhecimento Cultural Unit of the University of Minho.



17 Rafaela Boita

The Role of Nostalgia in Strengthening the Bond between Artists and Fans: The Case of Taylor Swift

This study investigates consumers' perceptions of the role of nostalgia as a mechanism for reinforcing brand attachment, focusing on the musical artist Taylor Swift. Nostalgia has been present since the start of the 21st century and the use of this emotion, connecting past to present and strengthening affective bonds, has increased gradually (Juhl et al., 2021; Sedikides et al., 2016). Applied to celebrities, nostalgia can intensify the emotional connection between consumer and brand—in this case, an artist treated as a brand (Lindridge & Eagar, 2015; Park et al., 2010; Saldanha et al., 2020). Taylor Swift has embraced nostalgic strategies, from re-releasing her earlier albums as Taylor's Versions to lyrics that evoke adolescence and childhood, and a tour revisiting more than a decade of her career (Hu & Bradford, 2024; Rossman, 2022). These elements function as emotional bridges between fans and artist, calling up personal memories and fostering a deeper bond. The research follows an exploratory qualitative approach, with in-depth interviews to ten fans from the Portuguese WhatsApp community and a thematic analysis of a Taylor Swift Reddit forum content during The Eras Tour, given its global impact. The aim is to understand how memories are evoked, re-interpreted and integrated into consumption of the Taylor Swift brand. Findings reveal nostalgia's pervasive presence among the singer's fans, a recurrent topic especially in forums. Most respondents cite an emotional link created by identifying with lyrics that reflect significant past moments. Many long-time followers describe the re-recordings as catalysts of memory, so much so that their emotional bond makes them prefer the original versions for the memories they embody and the reflection of who they were at the time. This extended emotional attachment contributes to a strong parasocial relationship. Swift is often seen as a long-standing friend whose lyrics accompany fans through various life stages.

Moreover, nostalgic elements have proved effective in attracting listeners already familiar with the artist, who quickly form an emotional bond by reliving childhood songs or being drawn in by the experience of The Eras Tour. Such bonding leads to active engagement and consumption of products linked to the singer. In terms of new fans, nostalgia has not that big of an impact but the success and impact of the Taylor's versions and The Eras Tour drawn interest to them to get to know the artists work better and even become a swiftie. In conclusion, nostalgia plays a central role in building and strengthening brand attachment in the context of celebrity marketing, mainly if the artist has been around for a long time. This study enhances understanding of emotion's impact on marketing strategies and suggests that deliberately harnessing nostalgia can be highly effective in creating enduring relationships between artist and audience.

Author's Bio (Universidade Católica Portuguesa)

Rafaela Boita is a Master's student in Communication Sciences at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, in Lisbon. Her current research focuses on emotional marketing within streaming platforms, particularly exploring consumers' perceived effects of nostalgia-based content strategies, with Disney+ as a case study. Her academic interests include the role of nostalgia in fostering emotional bonds that influence brand consumption. She is also deeply interested in music as a form of artistic expression, which has led her to get interested about the conference and the idea of making articles about how nostalgia can strengthen the connection between audiences and musical artists, specifically Taylor Swift.



18 Rita Alves

Culture, Identity, and Fandom: Who Are the Portuguese Swifties?

Chosen as Time Magazine's "Person of the Year" in 2023, Taylor Swift has emerged as a central figure in contemporary global culture, whose influence extends beyond the music industry to encompass political, economic, and social domains. The extensive global impact of The Eras Tour—recognized as a major catalyst for tourism, the revitalization of local economies, and the surge in digital engagement (Hoff, Gersh & Ogbeide, 2025)—has further solidified Swift's role as a transformative figure. Within this context, the emergence of Swift Studies as a burgeoning interdisciplinary field reflects academic interest in understanding the complexities of her celebrity persona and the sociocultural processes mobilized. This field integrates theoretical contributions from celebrity studies (Bentley, Galloway & Harper, 2024; Morris, 2024) but also: communication studies, cultural studies, digital sociology; issues of affect, identity, media participation, and symbolic power. Central to these inquiries is the constitutive role of fandom in the negotiation of cultural meaning, the formation of collective identities, and the articulation of sociopolitical discourse (Jenkins, 1992; Duffett, 2013). In digital environments, fan communities operate as "affective publics" (Marwick & Boyd, 2011), wherein emotional investment circulates as a form of capital (Zafina & Sinha, 2024), enabling social cohesion, political mobilization, and the co-construction of celebrity narratives across national borders. These affective economies demonstrate how contemporary fandom is not only a space of consumption but also one of agency, negotiation, and meaning-making.

This abstract introduces an ongoing PhD research project that explores the Portuguese Swiftie community as a distinct case study. It aims to answer the central question: Who are the Portuguese Swifties, and how is their engagement with the fan community shaped? To explore these three key areas of focus are proposed: (1) the sociodemographic profile of Swift's Portuguese fanbase, (2) the behaviours and practices exhibited by Portuguese fans within the fandom, and (3) the motivations behind their engagement with both the artist and the broader fan community. As a preliminary phase, a pilot study will be conducted, consisting of up to seven semi-structured interviews with Portuguese fans of Taylor Swift. This exploratory approach seeks to generate initial empirical insights that will inform the refinement of the main research design. Participants will be recruited through Taylor Swift's fandom networks in Portugal, leveraging the connectivity and accessibility of these fan-driven digital spaces. The interviews will be conducted via Zoom, allowing for broader participation and facilitating data collection from geographically dispersed individuals. The data collected will be analyzed through thematic analysis, a qualitative methodological framework that facilitates the identification of recurring themes, narrative patterns, and meaning structures within participant discourse. By investigating the Portuguese Swiftie community through this lens, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of fandom as a site of cultural production, identity negotiation, and emotional labour within a localized context, while also engaging with broader debates on digital participation and transnational cultural flows.

Author's Bio (University Institute of Lisbon)

Rita Alves graduated in Journalism and Communication from the University of Coimbra (2017) and obtained a Master's degree in Journalism from the Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon (2019). Currently, she is a PhD candidate in Communication at Iscte – University Institute of Lisbon, focusing her research on fandom practices, particularly within the Swiftie Portuguese community. Her broader academic interests include digital communication, cultural mediation, and the sociocultural dynamics of contemporary media interaction. In 2023, Rita completed a Content Writing course at Lisbon Digital School, improving her digital communication skills. Since 2022, Rita has been part of the Communication and Planning Office at the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES- Iscte), where she contributes to institutional communication and the dissemination of scientific activities.



19 Rita Curvelo

"This Is Our Era": the Portuguese Audience Experience of 2024's Taylor Swifts Concerts

Since the onset of her career, Taylor Swift has evolved beyond her role as a singer-songwriter to become a cultural icon and impactful figure in contemporary popular culture (Théberge, 2021). Rising from a country music artist to a multifaceted celebrity vocalist and lyrics author, Swift's career is a testament to her strategic artistry and profound audience's connection, as Swifties are one of the most active and emotionally invested fan communities (Caroll, 2025). Launched in 2023, with the aim of celebrating the different phases or "eras" of Swift's musical career, The Eras Tour was one of the most popular concert tours in recent memory.

Amongst the ultra-conservative audience vehemently against this corruption of morals was Marcelo Caetano, a student who would later become Salazar's replacement as head of Estado Novo, and who in 1926 writes to the pro-fascist magazine *Ordem Nova* condemning the writers, in particular the "shameless" (desavergonhada) Judith Teixeira, the only one of the writers worthy of appellation. Iterations of this episode show us that "shameless" can be taken as an umbrella term every time women do not conform to normative expectations and defy gender-traditional roles, and that "shameless" women are in no way a thing of the past – just March this year, a Portuguese female politician was dismissed by a far-right MP from the party *Chega* because "she doesn't even have children" (não tem filhos sequer) . Taylor Swift would know all about criticism levelled at women due to perceived non-conformity – after all, and in her own words, she "goes on too many dates" but she "can't make them stay". Childless and unmarried, and despite her tremendous artistic and financial success, Taylor Swift has been disparaged as a bad example in a controversial *Newsweek* article due to her "revolving door of relationships" with high-profile men whilst glamorising "romantic promiscuity" . This shows that misogynistic discourse disparaging "shameless" women is enduring, transnational and transhistorical. This preliminary study aims to connect what are seemingly disconnected misogynistic discourses under the umbrella term "shameless women", which is triggered every time women (such as Taylor Swift) defy normative expectations of traditional gender roles. Although Swift's "feminist stance" has been questioned to an extent, her "political coming out" (evident in songs such as *The Man*) now leaves little room to doubt her feminist commitment (Tong 2024). The relevance of Swift's feminist political engagement is all the more significant in a context of 'post-feminism' and what Angela McRobbie (2004, 2009) calls 'double entanglement' – the idea that feminist progress and liberalisation have been achieved and are no longer necessary, whilst creating fertile ground for the re-inscription of neo-conservative, normative gender roles (of which, we would add, the 'tradwife' movement and associated discourses are inescapable examples). By positing Taylor Swift as the embodiment of the modern "shameless" woman actively resisting such discourses, as Judith Teixeira and so many others did in their time and within their means whilst paying a hefty price, this study aims to shed a light on pervasive discursive neo-misogyny and the counter-discourses that try to undermine it.

Author's Bio (Universidade Católica Portuguesa)

Rita Faria is Assistant Professor at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, where she teaches a number of language and discourse-related BA and MA courses. She completed her PhD on linguistic politeness in English and in Portuguese in 2010 at Universidade Católica Portuguesa, the M.Phil in Linguistics in 2002 at the University of Cambridge and the BA in Portuguese and English Studies at the University of Lisbon, in 2001. She is a researcher at CECC - Research Centre for Communication and Culture and her research interests include: im/politeness; forms of address; im/politeness and fiction; language and gender; hate speech; verbal aggression; computer-mediated communication; sociolinguistics; corpus linguistics.



21 Romy Melen & Melanie Schiller

#SwiftiesforDemocracy? How Theories on Affective Polarisation Can Offer New Perspectives on Taylor Swift's Involvement in American Politics

Taylor Swift's fandom has become an important site for political discussions and expressions (Jackson, Nownes and Norton, 2025). This became clear in the latest United States Presidential election, when fans connected their fan identity to their political stance by using hashtags such as #swiftiesforharris and #swiftiesfortrump. Swift's own political engagement has been the subject of intense discussion among her fans, across media, and in academia (Driessen, 2022b). She has publicly endorsed Democratic candidates and taken political stances since 2018, and most recently endorsed Kamala Harris. Yet, as the hashtags exemplify, Swift remains able to appeal to fans with opposing political views. This paper offers a new perspective on Swift's political actions through the lens of affective polarisation, by paying attention to how she promotes democratic values, such as civic engagement and voting. In political science, affective polarisation refers to a process of polarisation in which citizens' political divisions stem less from ideological disagreement and more from their emotional attachments to parties (Iyengar et al., 2019). When someone internalises their affective relation to a political party, it becomes an important part of their social identity, which can cause feelings of in-group favouritism and an out-group animosity (West and Iyengar, 2022). In the United States, this development can be seen in the increasing distrust and hostility between Democrats and Republicans (Levendusky, 2018). In discussions of Swift's political involvements, her ability to affectively appeal to fans with different political preferences, even amid rising political polarisation, is often noted (Austin, 2023; Drinkwater, 2024). This ability is frequently attributed to strategic branding or market positioning (Driessen, 2022a). An effect of this, though, is that her political actions have been deemed insincere or too commercial, as can be seen in critiques of her LGBTQ+ advocacy as "rainbow capitalism" (Smialek, 2021; Prins, 2022). The framework of affective polarisation, however, offers an additional lens through which Swift's political actions can be contextualized, because her ability to appeal to a broad audience also has democratic, even depolarising, potential. When supporters of opposing parties can find shared interests in the fandom, this creates an opportunity to bond, which could lessen feelings of animosity caused by affective polarisation. This paper will further examine the affective and democratic dimensions of Swift's involvement in the 2024 elections by analysing her endorsement statement and her public affiliations during this period. In her statement, Swift uses inclusive language and appeals to fans' shared identity as "Swifties" rather than their political identity—even though her post supports Harris. Furthermore, affective polarisation can offer an additional perspective on Swift's public friendship with Brittany Mahomes, a Trump supporter, which drew much criticism. Here, affective polarisation can help to reframe the friendship as an alternative to the strong hostility between Democrats and Republicans. By bridging political science and cultural studies, this paper argues that Swift's role in the 2024 election illustrates how affective polarisation manifests—and is negotiated—within popular culture.

Author's Bio (University Nijmegen, Netherlands)

Romy Mennen graduated from the Research Master's Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies last year and currently works as a research and teaching assistant at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Mennen's Master's thesis examined the construction of authenticity in Rolling Stone magazine. She is also the author of "Posthumous Narratives: How Janis Joplin's Authority Can Be Recovered Through Inner Child Theory" (DiggIt Magazine, 2024), which investigates posthumous celebrity narratives and emotional framing.

23 Simi Tiwari

“She’s so Mid”: Taylor Swift and the Aesthetics of Hate in Pop Culture

While Taylor Swift has cultivated one of the most devoted fandoms in contemporary pop culture, she has also been the target of a persistent and often gendered cultural backlash. In certain demographics—particularly among straight cisgender men—expressing disdain for Swift’s music or persona operates as a kind of social currency, signaling both ironic detachment and “refined” taste. This paper explores what I call the aesthetics of hate in popular culture, using Taylor Swift as a case study in how anti-fandom functions as a performance of identity, taste, and belonging. Building on theories of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), gendered representation in pop music (McRobbie, 2009), and the sociology of anti-fandom (Gray, 2003; Click, 2019), this research investigates how rejecting Swift—and by extension, her fans—often reflects larger anxieties about femininity, affect, and authenticity in pop culture. Through a discourse analysis of online spaces (Reddit, Twitter/X, YouTube comments, and pop culture think pieces), I identify recurring patterns in anti-Swift rhetoric: the dismissal of her work as “basic” or overly commercial, the mockery of emotional expression in her lyrics, and the stigmatization of her predominantly young female fanbase. I argue that these discourses are not simply musical preferences but acts of boundary-drawing—efforts to distance oneself from feminized cultural products in favor of more “serious,” often male-coded genres. My research also considers how these attitudes reflect a broader discomfort with public vulnerability and self-narration—traits central to Swift’s songwriting—and how pop music by women is often held to different standards of authenticity. Rather than framing Swift as either victim or villain, this research situates her as a cultural flashpoint: an artist whose career invites us to interrogate how hate is aestheticized, rationalized, and circulated in popular discourse. In doing so, I aim to contribute to broader conversations about gender, power, and taste in contemporary music culture, and to highlight how the rejection of pop icons can be just as revealing as their celebration.

Author’s Bio (University of York, UK)

Simi Tiwari is a recent graduate of Masters in Film and Literature from the University of York, UK, where she delved into the art of storytelling across mediums. An avid reader with a background in English Literature from the University of Delhi, India, she is passionate about books, poetry, films, music (especially all things Taylor Swift), and aspires to pursue further research in these fields.

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