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Girl-Next-Door to Girlboss: Taylor Swift's Online Evolution from Puerile Pop Star to Poignant Political Influence

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Girl-Next-Door to Girlboss:

Taylor Swift's Online Evolution from Puerile Pop Star to Poignant Political Influence

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27 April 2022

acknowledgments

To my wonderful family and dear friends:

Thank you for supporting me in this process and in every area of my life. Mom and Dad, I love you.

To my classmates:

We did it! Yay!

To Meghan Foley, Logan Marsh, and Devan Maxstadt:

My best friends— I have no clue where I'd be had I not met you three. I love you all!

To my incredible English department professors:

The real Rhode Island set, I'll be forever grateful for the guidance, expertise, and compassion you showed me throughout my time at Salve. You've made my experience here one of a kind.

To Amanda Valentine:

I'm so honored I get to call you a co-editor and a confidante. You're an ingenue. Thank you for being there for me, dear friend.

To Emilee Angell:

Thank you for your friendship, your reassurance, and all the rides home from class. You're truly one of the coolest people I know. Can't wait to see your name on the big screen someday.

To Alix Hughes, Darren Christie, & Maggie Johnston:

I couldn't have fathomed writing this without the incredible advice and assistance I received from each of you amazing Salve graduates.

And finally,

to taylor swift:

***there's no way to feasibly sum up what you and your songs and your everything-in-between mean to
me,
so i'll just say this. all along, there was some invisible string tying you to me.***

Abstract

Of all society's public figures, the social-media-savvy celebrity is arguably the most powerful. Singer-songwriter Taylor Swift has amassed one of the largest followings on the internet. In recent years, she has inspired fans to act upon sociopolitical issues via voter registration, letter-writing campaigns, and music. Her digital footprint is not without contention from a slow arrival to politics to white feminist attributes present in her messaging. Through close reading across four social media platforms, I found a shift in Swift's social media activity. In her transition from a young pop star to a global influence, I concluded that "Swifties" will follow her lead and create real change.

Introduction

Taylor Swift has been a household name for over a decade and isn't showing any signs of slowing down. That said, her humble beginnings of writing poems and songs as a bullied, lovelorn high schooler in Nashville became the basis for her first two albums, *Taylor Swift* (2006) and *Fearless* (2008). As a 3-time Album of the Year winner, 34-time American Music Award winner Taylor Swift's influence on contemporary music is undeniable. Taylor Swift has a uniquely intimate relationship with her fans for such a well-known act, her personal lyrics and teen experiences create a bond between herself and millions of young people worldwide. Since the dawn of the digital age, Swift has used social media sites to interact with fans directly from her own accounts. As her career skyrocketed, so did her influence. She has made multiple political statements and encouraged her fans of all ages to act on their beliefs. Swift's social media interaction with these superfans results in increased loyalty, further solidifying the strong community that surrounds her and her music. This loyalty causes Swift's fans to take her

opinions and beliefs into consideration. For example, Swift encouraged her followers to visit vote.org ahead of the 2018 midterm elections and spurred a chain reaction, causing an unforeseen spike in user traffic and voter registrations.

Literature Review

Swift's Image

Young women across the country saw themselves in Swift's songs and took to them, country fans or not. "In My Rearview Mirror" by Tara Chittenden examines the relationship between Taylor Swift's music and how young women respond to first love and heartbreak through an analysis of fans' online chatter surrounding Swift's songs. Tara Chittenden states that "in December 2011, the official Taylor Swift web forum comprised a total of 21,734 threads, with a combined total of 998,849 posts." Most of these posts, Chittenden found, consisted of young girls lamenting about future nostalgia based on the lyrics a young Swift wrote in "White Horse" of Prince Charming sweeping the narrator off her feet, and how she regains her confidence after the fall of that relationship. Chittenden cites research on Disney films, music, and psychology, alongside quotes from Swift herself, to unpack how this song and many others of Swift's affect the way young girls think and feel about romance.

The Taylor Swift brand of a relatable young woman perseveres with time, despite any lost innocence or aging. To introduce Swift as the symbol of celebrity reach, and as further evidence of this carefully crafted brand of Taylor Swift, the commodity, music researcher Paul Theberge stresses, in short, that Swift's majority-female fan base is so loyal primarily because she has grown up alongside them. Therefore, she writes what they know, like life as a little girl, with

childhood crushes pulling them by their ponytails. As Swift and her devotees age, her music shifts to the quintessential twenties experience of moving out to the big city and testing the dating waters, only to find that the pool is just as small, if not smaller, than the farm town you left to get there.

Celebrity Social Media Use

Overall, Swift interacting with her fans online is not entirely unique. In the digital age, social media presence is often required of musicians, whether they like it or not. But in the early days of Twitter, many celebrities were exposed to digital parasocial interactions for the first time. In their article “How does a celebrity make fans happy? Interaction between celebrities and fans in the social media context” Minseong Kim and Jihye Kim expand upon the concept of parasociality. Kim and Kim pull upon their prior research about the psychological effects of fan and celebrity interaction and other research surrounding the topic to explain that in order to keep fans loyal, 1) celebrities must partake in some form of social media, and 2) occasionally notice specific fans through likes, comments, etc.

The authors expand upon the theory of parasocial interaction, which is when a fan feels as though they have a close friendship with their favorite celebrity, due to the celebrity’s frequency to interact with them on social media. They proceeded to conduct a study with questions like “My favorite celebrity uses a similar communication style (language, phrases, terms, etc.) with me on the social networking pages.”, “How often do you share the messages posted by your favorite celebrity on the social networking pages?”, “My favorite celebrity is quite open about his/herself to followers on the social networking pages.”, and more. The survey was given to

multiple demographics and scored using a scale of ‘disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’ for an accurate depiction of how celebrity parasocial attachment has permeated the recent online landscape. This study, and Kim & Kim’s paper overall, provide specific data on a concept that is most often analyzed through anecdotal evidence.

With fans hoping to become recognized through frequent appearances on celebrity feeds, they communicated through direct mentions and replies to tweets by their favorite artists (Stever & Lawson). Josh Groban, for example, admitted that he does read fan interactions and often remembers fans by their usernames or content. Stever & Lawson also expand on the feelings of betrayal or abandonment felt when celebrities straddle both sides of Twitter’s advantages: communication and promotion. “He will Tweet to us as if we are real friends..” said one frustrated Groban fan, “Next day he goes all celebrity on us.”

Fanbases As A Business

Affectionately known as “Swifties,” Taylor Swift’s most dedicated fans are rewarded through typical online interaction such as likes and comments, but are also given above and beyond experiences like “Swiftmas,” where Swift will send personalized holiday gifts to her fans; or Secret Sessions, where fans are invited to one of Taylor’s homes to meet her, get to know other fans, and listen to her latest album before its release. Meet and greet opportunities are not available to the general public or for purchase, a fan must be selected for their loyalty by Taylor Nation, Swift herself, or her mother, Andrea (Taylor Swift Wiki). “As a pop icon,” Theberge writes, “Taylor Swift is a lot of things to an awful lot of people: for her tens of millions of fans and social media followers she is an artist, a celebrity, and, perhaps most importantly, she is one

of them—someone who has grown up with them, and someone whose most personal reflections in song seem to reflect their own lives” (Theberge 2021). In his article, Theberge uses Swift as an example to examine the concept of the opportunities and limitations of a celebrity’s “power” within the various structures that make up the music industry.

The people behind the Taylor Swift brand, known as 13 Management or Taylor Nation, depending on the audience, consisting of Swift and a small group of confidants, family, and advisors. While Scott, her father, invested in her original record label, Big Machine; Andrea, her mother, is heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of the business that is her daughter; Swift herself is at the forefront of the innovative business decisions made in recent years. In 2018, Swift piloted Ticketmaster’s Verified Fan program for the Reputation Stadium Tour, to ensure that true fans can purchase tickets at accessible prices. Fans wagered social media interactions and general knowledge in this early-access presale to gain a better place in the virtual line, which made them more likely to have the opportunity to purchase better seats for Swift’s concerts (Ticketmaster). Swift’s generosity with her fans, while objectively “small in value,” Theberge wrote, “...garner an inordinate amount of notice on social media and in the mainstream press: a tuition fund donation of approximately \$6000 CAD to a fan in Ontario in 2019, for example.” This act of charity created media buzz for Swift and ensured her good-girl image, all while receiving acclaim and interaction from longtime fans. Not only is Swift’s close online relationship with her supporters genuine, but it is a business strategy. Some fans, like Groban’s, may have their frustrations, but when done well, social fan relationships can boost ticket sales and other revenue for celebrities.

Celebrity Political Outreach

In today's world of multi-hyphenate celebrities, tenured politicians, and those who decide to be both—a key example being Swift's best-known frenemies rapper Kanye West and socialite Kim Kardashian—filtering the information provided by either of these seemingly trustworthy sources proves increasingly difficult, even for generations of digital natives. These segments of public figures use social media to engage a younger audience, and occasionally cross paths while doing so. Three researchers—Loader, et al.—from The University of York in the United Kingdom, The University of Sydney in Australia, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison in the United States surveyed 3691 people ages 16 to 29, across the three respective nations. The surveyed participants used online discussion boards to express their thoughts about the presence of various celebrities and career politicians on social media. The participants were then sorted into groups based on socioeconomic status and reported levels of political action. Each subject was asked three questions. Most survey takers responded positively when asked “What do you think of politicians' using Facebook and Twitter?”, with one Australian male stating that if politicians aren't online, they may be unable to connect with the youth at all.

Mixed opinions were raised with the question “What do you think of politicians mixing with celebrities online?” Some British youth appeared turned off by this attempt at hybridizing the two areas of culture, expressing that politicians' posts rubbing elbows with celebrities makes them seem inauthentic and obviously catering to a certain demographic. Conversely, another subject stated that as a fan of certain celebrities (such as in a photo showing Will Smith interacting with Boris Johnson), a post like this would be more likely to grab their attention. Also, politicians interacting with celebrities look more down-to-earth than when they are

engaged in heated debates or important speeches, according to some survey-takers, but others still see it as pandering. The final question, “What do you think of celebrities who use social media to talk about social issues?” brought a more unified response. While celebrities may not be as educated as politicians on such issues, the subjects agreed, that they are able to be more honest about their feelings. This open line of communication, an asset that is not often available when dealing with lawmakers, makes celebrities more trustworthy to youth. According to the survey-takers, utilizing this trust in the rich and famous can be useful in promoting (or lambasting) proposed legislation. The survey-takers also had a change of heart from the preceding question, saying that endorsements of certain candidates or policies can authentically connect followers to political action.

Method

For my research method, first, I read sources from entertainment and music industry trades like *Variety*, *Billboard Magazine*, and *Rolling Stone* among other media outlets to gain a sense of Taylor Swift’s influence on pop culture, her original image of the ‘girl-next-door’, and her transition to a more autonomous and outspoken figure. I then accessed online posts from the singer that represent her change over time through MySpace narratives, off-hand tweets, and Instagram snapshots of her life onstage and offstage. She also engaged in personalized fan interaction on Tumblr. I used Random.org’s random date generator to choose dates throughout Swift’s 15-year career and select one post per platform per day. If a specific date did not contain relevant content, I chose the next closest date within two days.

Content from Swift's official accounts is unavailable before August 2017 due to a marketing decision wherein she deleted and silenced her online presence to increase the conversation around her then-soon-to-be-released album *Reputation*. (SOURCE) Due to this discrepancy, some dedicated fans have taken it upon themselves to create archive accounts of Swift's previous posts on MySpace, Instagram, and Twitter. The accounts I relied on for this information are as follows: TSwiftMySpace on Tumblr, @taylor.swift.insta.archive on Instagram, and @ts_old_tweets on Twitter. I used the Wayback Machine to source old Tumblr posts. Wayback Machine is a website that provides access to archived versions of web pages. I also took into account the events that spurred the change from Taylor Swift's original image to the person she is today, such as the ongoing conflict between herself and Kanye West and the 2016 presidential election. From there, I sourced Swift's responses to past relevant events using the Wayback Machine and the fan archive accounts. Finally, I watched Swift's 2020 Netflix documentary *Miss Americana* which chronicles her political evolution and the challenges she faced leading up to the decision to speak out on her beliefs. Directed by Lana Wilson, this film provides direct insight into Swift's thought process and life in the months leading up to her November 2018 social media posts that detailed her dedication to equality and human rights.

With these sources in hand, I created a spreadsheet consisting of three tabs for organization and ease of access. On the first tab, I included the platform of origin, the Random.org proposed date, the actual date, and a link to the post (Fig. 24). This tab served as a home base for the Random.org posts, no matter their relevancy. Next, on the second tab, I included important dates in Swift's career and the corresponding social media posts on or close to the specific date (Fig.

25). Finally, on the third tab, I made a list of Swift's political social media posts with the year, platform, and a link to each post (Fig. 26).

Analysis

My analysis reveals that Swift's social media content can be segmented into three categories by date: Early (2005-2011), Later (2011-2016), and Current (2016-2022). Each category is characterized differently as Swift experiences shifts that separate each era from one another.

Early Social Media Use (2005-2011)

“A nice girl doesn't force their opinions on people; A nice girl smiles and waves and says thank you. I became the person everyone wanted me to be.”

- Taylor Swift, *Miss Americana* (2020)

What I would classify as Taylor Swift's “early” years of social media span from approximately 2005 to 2011. Her primary platforms in this period were MySpace and Twitter. At the end of this era, she joined Instagram. Swift released three full-length albums and went on multiple tours over these five to six years. Like most high schoolers of the early 2000s, Taylor Swift took to MySpace.com eager to share her every thought with friends. Or in her case, friends and a cluster of fans she had garnered well before graduation day. This steadily growing group pored over lengthy blog entries about her life on the road. In what seemed to be a parallel universe to apprehensively awaiting the echoing clang of the school day's final bell, Swift would mix detailed yet familiar narratives of her normal teenage life with chronicles of her unconventional career. Her inaugural MySpace post (See Fig. 1), dated November 4, 2005, began, “So this is

technically my first blog. So I think I'll make it about what's been going on lately." "Lately" consisted of meeting with record executives and sound engineers, which isn't part of a typical teenager's twenty-four hours. Any other teen would consider a stressful week of meetings and work commitments close to the seventh circle of hell. Conversely, in another post from 2007 (See Fig. 20) she describes how she and her best friend, Abigail Anderson, spent Christmas pulling an all-nighter, prank calling friends, and imitating popular film characters like Napoleon Dynamite. Sleepovers complete with silly late-night activities are a cornerstone of adolescence, and Swift made sure to chronicle every detail of this experience online. Slumber parties provide invaluable bonding for young girls, and Swift's online diary also offered the opportunity for herself and her fans to bond through the intimate retellings of her life experiences. Back in 2005, Swift made her own fun by blogging about her Los Angeles adventures, videotaping the recording process, and bugging the people around her. Her parents "made the mistake of giving [her] a video camera to take in and "document" things...". ("tswiftmyspace — Recording") She went on to write, "So basically I got to harrass [sic] everyone nonstop for 12 hours." In speaking like her adolescent peers through using terms like "basically" and "awesome" and making spelling errors like harrass instead of harass, her vernacular matched that of the precocious girl behind the screen. Much of online relatability is based in language, especially in the 21st century. Through her digital native lexicon and casual writing style, Taylor Swift's presence on MySpace reflects that relatability through a language-first lens. Towards the end of her time on MySpace, Swift's star power began to solidify. In 2008, she was honored at country music's biggest night, the Academy of Country Music Awards. After winning the award for Best Female Vocalist, she penned a mySpace entry to thank her fans for their confidence in her and their appreciation of her theatrical performance at the awards. "I've wanted to tell you guys all the little surprises we

had planned for the performance for so long! I've dreampt [sic] about that performance since I was in middle school. I've always wanted to perform an angry song and have water rain down from the ceiling and have a little freakout onstage" ("tswiftmyspace— "Always"). Her contagious childlike excitement breaks through the screen and translates to readers.

Once her sophomore album, *Fearless*, was released in November, it shot to number one on the Billboard Hot 200 chart, then spending eleven non-consecutive weeks there from 2008 to 2009. (Billboard) With this sudden chart success, Swift's community was growing faster and faster by the day. As MySpace's descent into obscurity began in 2008, Twitter became the new frontier for Swift. Her tweets in this time are largely characterized as playful quips to reach out and relate to users on this new social networking site. Her first tweet (See Fig. 2) is a quick account of an interaction with her favorite animal, her family's cat. In subsequent posts, she espoused her unabashed love of felines and including them in her everyday life. In a 2010 tweet (See Fig. 3) Swift posted a formal photo of herself at the Met Gala, but used an iPhone app to adorn it with two cats flanking her either side. Photo editing in such a style would later become commonplace, with many social media platforms integrating stickers into their applications. Swift participated in the trend early and used these stickers to engage her followers in a special interest, an interest that has the possibility to be shared by many fans and create an opportunity for authentic engagement.

Later Social Media Use (2011-2016)

“This is all fueled by not feeling like I belonged there, I’m only here because I work hard and I’m nice to people.”

- Taylor Swift, *Miss Americana* (2020)

Upon joining Instagram in 2011, Taylor Swift’s posts set out to combine both her career and her personal life, which provide opportunity for maximum engagement. This period that I’ve defined as her “Later” social media use and was largely spent on Instagram by Swift herself. Her Twitter presence was mostly via Taylor Nation. She keeps within her trademark sweetness in this era, while also maximizing the endless opportunities for promotion with her now millions of followers. Whether they simply enjoy her music or feel a parasocial relationship towards the singer, different segments of casual followers and Swifties are targeted by such posts. She posted accounts of her progress while learning to bake (See Fig. 21) which eventually led to a friendship with celebrity chef Ina Garten. (See Fig. 22), copious cat photos (See Fig. 4), and promotion for the RED and 1989 albums and tours. (See Fig. 6, 9)

Taylor Swift’s strong friendships eventually became a cornerstone of her brand. In celebration of her London stop on the 1989 World Tour, where she began her tradition of bringing out special guests for each show, Swift shared a Polaroid photo of herself and fellow starlet and close friend Ellie Goulding in 2014. (See Fig. 5) These guests consisted of friends, collaborators, or stars of whom Swift herself admired. In one 2015 post, she expressed her gratitude for fellow singer-songwriter Lorde’s appearance, writing, “When your friend flies across the world to surprise your crowd... because she’s a wondrous angel” ([taylor.swift.insta.archive](http://taylor.swift insta.archive)) Often, the

guests were a combination of friend, celebrity, and idol. The posts were also a combination of sharing her personal life while also providing promotion for her tour, thus creating goodwill among fans and the general public. Some of the most liked, commented, and shared posts of this era were those featuring Swift's friends and special guests, with her core group making headlines for their theme parties and summer celebrations for years to come. (See Fig. 8) The group, which earned the moniker "Girl Squad" from the media, was seen as an authentic, positive representation of female connection that consisted of a rotation of famous and civilian friends of Swift's. Members of this group included supermodel Karlie Kloss, actress Blake Lively, and other celebrities who have been lauded as ideal feminine figures and have a generally positive reputation among the public. This idealized and seemingly perfect inner circle provided significant good press for Swift outside of her work, thanks to her idyllic photos and captions gushing about her confidants, and did the same for the other members through their association with Swift. For example, Live 95.5 Radio, among other outlets, produced an article publicizing actress Cazzie David's 2019 entry into the squad based on social media activity by David and Swift, respectively. ("Meet The Latest Member Of Taylor Swift's Squad") Overall, Swift's Instagram activity in this era expressed her gratitude for her friends and for her success. These friendships are a normal facet of any young woman's life, but in Swift's case, they promote crossover opportunities as her friends are often famous or influential and can gain traction and notoriety from this association. Also, the friends of hers who are entertainers can gain new fans through their association with a superstar like Swift, for example, singer-songwriter Lorde, family band HAIM, and producer Jack Antonoff.

In terms of direct promotion, Swift notably tweeted about her starring role in the 2012 animated film *The Lorax*, saying, “I spent all day at The Lorax premiere- that movie is filled with adorable-ness. So lucky to have gotten to be a part of it.” (ts_old_tweets) Like her MySpace days, she uses colloquialisms and casual, cheery language to convey her endorsement of the film, in hopes that her attachment increases ticket sales from Swifties. Conversely, her involvement in something outside of music exposes filmgoers to Swift’s existence. Crossover projects in other businesses (rather than within friendships) encourage the public to listen to her music, possibly for the first time and add to her fanbase. Other mutually beneficial projects of this period, like the live-action film *Valentine’s Day*, and appearances in popular television shows were promoted on Swift’s social channels as well. Towards the end of this era, Swift continued to post about her hobbies and friendships, and exciting career developments like her 2016 *Vogue* cover in the Met Gala issue (See Fig. 10) as her A-list status in Hollywood and music solidified. Later, the 2016 presidential election was rapidly gaining traction in the public consciousness. Her first politically inclined Instagram post was published on June 17, 2016, in honor of the victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting that occurred the week prior (See Fig 23). This venue primarily served as a safe place of camaraderie for LGBTQ+ and Latinx communities, and as such, the brutal attack has since been classified as a hate crime. As November approached closer and closer, Taylor Swift made the decision that would change the course of her career forever.

Current Social Media Use (2017-2022)

“I want to wear pink and tell you how I feel about politics. And I don’t think that those things have to cancel each other out.”

- Taylor Swift, *Miss Americana* (2020)

The last five years have marked a major shift in Swift’s personal beliefs and her social media practices. A poignant scene in 2020’s *Miss Americana* chronicles an impassioned argument between Swift, her management team, and her father. The argument surrounded one of two 2018 Instagram posts where she supported Tennessee Democratic senatorial candidate Phil Bredesen and lambasted his opponent, Republican Marsha Blackburn (See Fig. 14, 15, 16). Swift pushes for the clearance to publish the post, wherein she made a number of statements that directly addressed her political beliefs. For example, she wrote that she “cannot vote for someone who will not be willing to fight for dignity for ALL Americans, no matter their skin color, gender or who they love” (Swift, “I’m writing”) .

Her team isn’t convinced. They reiterate that they have made the decision to avoid topics such as politics and religion in order to protect Swift’s reputation and image. After reading her statement championing Bredesen, Scott Swift, Taylor’s father, was “terrified” for the safety of his only daughter and urged her to reconsider. He reminded Taylor that due to prior threats on her life, he had purchased both armored cars and top-of-the-line security services for the family (Wilson). Taylor later echoed this sentiment in 2019, that she, too, fears for her own safety, especially after fellow musician’s events were targeted that year in Manchester and Las Vegas. Aside from constant protection by trained security personnel, she also carries a medical kit on her person at

all times that includes Quik-Clot, a military-grade bandage designed for gunshot and stab wounds (Swift, “30 Things”).

Despite this fear of violence and the insistence of the people closest to her against such a change, Swift pushes on. The star reminds them that she longs to be on the “right side of history,” and verbalizes her regret for not having spoken out sooner. At this point in her career, she has officially shed her meek, shy teen image for one of a woman who speaks out on issues she believes in. Eventually, her father and team gave in, and the post went live on October 7, 2018 (See Fig. 14). Regardless of the fact that Swift turned off the comment feature, this post became one of her most engaged posts of all time, with an engagement rate of 1.07% as of April 2022. At the end of a lengthy sentiment on her personal views, Swift included a plea for her followers to educate themselves on the candidates of the 2018 election cycle by visiting voter advocacy website vote.org (See Fig. 16). According to CNN, Swift’s endorsement of the site motivated 65,000 Americans to register to vote that day, setting a record for the organization. To compare, in all of August of the same year, fewer than 60,000 people registered with vote.org (Respers). Another outreach campaign by Swift, #LetterToMySenator, encouraged hundreds of thousands of fans to write to their local legislators and sign a petition supporting the Equality Act, a law that ensures protections for members of the LGBTQ+ community (See Fig. 12, 13). The attached petition has garnered almost 840,000 signatures to date. This campaign was aligned with Swift’s 2019 single “You Need To Calm Down”, the lyrics of which presented a message of direct support for the LGBTQ+ community.

In addressing these social issues, Swift is still bubbly and kind, littering her captions with emojis and excessive exclamation points. In conjunction with the current album promotion cycle for the bubble-gum pop *Lover*, Swift posts photos with a rainbow aesthetic, and continues to post photos featuring her family and friends. One of the lead singles from this album was, as mentioned, “You Need To Calm Down”, a gay rights anthem. The song’s music video featured prominent members of the community and allies like the cast of *Queer Eye*, RuPaul (and a number of other drag queens), singer Katy Perry, entertainer Todrick Hall, and of course, Swift herself, in a rainbow wonderland (“Taylor Swift - You Need To Calm Down”). Subsequently, stills and clips from the brightly-colored, almost saccharine video made their way onto the feeds of Swift’s social channels (See Fig. 27).

When the topic of then-Republican nominee for president, Donald Trump, arose in *Miss Americana* footage from 2020, Swift’s tune changed. She said, “If I get bad press for saying don’t put a homophobic racist in office, then I get bad press”. (Wilson) She echoed this sentiment when deciding to directly criticize Trump in a 2020 tweet that read: “After Stoking the Fires of White Supremacy and Racism Your Entire Presidency, You Have the Nerve to Feign Moral Superiority before Threatening Violence? 'When the Looting Starts the Shooting Starts'??? We Will Vote You out in November. @Realdonaldtrump.” (See Fig.16). Swift lambasted Trump for his response to the Black Lives Matter movement and the protests following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She wrote that he “stoked the fires of White supremacy” and quoted a racially charged statement he made after a violent protest. She concluded her thoughts with a call to action, writing, “We will vote you out in November.” (Swift). For Taylor Swift to take direct aim at the leader of the free world is likely something her

sixteen-year-old self would have never imagined, and nor, apparently, did Trump. When the former president was made aware of this tweet at a White House press conference, he responded saying that he “likes her music 25% less now” (Aniftos). Clearly, Swift did not wish to cut any corners in her political outreach, not even excluding the former President of the United States, setting an example for her fans that politicians are at will of the people, and can and should be criticized as such.

Criticism

Swift’s former identity as an innocent, fragile country girl proved complicated when she later became lauded as a feminist icon who takes no prisoners. Recently, Swift has been dormant on social media, especially Instagram. Similar to 2017’s Reputation era silence, Swift did not post one photo on feed between December 2021 and March 2022, and as of late April, has yet to post again. The former waifish identity was an issue in and of itself, and later, once Swift made the changes to shed it, this seemingly sudden transition proved jarring to many fans of the “old Taylor”. In what she has shared in the last few years, she has transitioned her social posting aesthetic into a autumnal, woodsy, almost nymphlike aesthetic that aligns with her four albums released since 2020. Despite the changes she has made publicly, her actions, like most public figures, aren’t free of critiques.

“Stick To Music”

The “Stick To Music” criticism is one oft experienced by creative or influential figures. Members of the public argue online and in person that the target figure should stay within their industry scope and avoid speaking on possibly divisive topics like politics. Once Swift began

posting more frequently about political and social issues in 2016 and subsequent years, she received increased vitriol online. Throngs of online trolls like “Monica” claimed Swift not only sold out on her music by switching to pop, but should avoid politics to restore her former glory (See Fig. 14). Another, Nick Adams, has a verified account and describes himself as the founder of conservative affinity group 1FLAG. Adams apparently does not know or care whether Swift is the songwriter she says she is, but because she is a “pro-abortion Democrat who has donated HUNDREDS of thousands of dollars to radical left-wing causes”, he urges her to stick to music, and adds in some sage advice: practice more (See Fig. 19). As stated earlier, Donald Trump also echoed this sentiment after Swift took aim at him on Twitter in 2020. Swift’s original branding makes her political action hard to swallow for many people of the demographics she once catered to, causing them to react in this way.

What Makes An American Girl?

Grappling with Pollock’s “normal girl” claim, Adriane Brown, a professor of Gender Studies at SUNY Oneonta, argued that “Swift’s positioning as an ‘authentic’ American girl subject is wholly tied to her status as a white, middle class, heterosexual, normatively feminine girl” (Brown). Pollock compared Swift to other pop darlings of the 2010s, saying that she is the picture of a “normal girl” who “sings about heartbreak and friendships” rather than rampant drug use, reckless partying, or other “mature” activities (Pollock). Brown’s claim is valid, as it is less likely that Taylor Swift would have achieved this level of success, stardom, and influence without the advantages of these privileges. Had her family not had the means to do so—such means afforded more easily through the generational privileges of race and status— Swift would never have been able to convince her parents to move to Nashville to pursue her music career, let

alone at the young age of fourteen. She wouldn't have become a multimillionaire before becoming an adult, and she definitely wouldn't have become one of the most recognizable names in music. While other artists were viewed as commodities, Brown wrote, Swift was viewed as a friend. This positioning can also be tied to the defining moment of Swift's nascent career, and one that carries into her future, as well: the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards.

I'mma Let You Finish But—

In a speech heard round the world, rapper Kanye West interrupted Swift's acceptance of the award for Best Female Video. When a then-nineteen-year-old Taylor Swift began her speech, West took the microphone out of her hand and said, "Yo, Taylor, I'm really happy for you, I'mma let you finish. But Beyoncé had one of the best videos of all time! One of the best videos of all time!" (Kaufman) According to BuzzFeed News' Ellie Woodward, society's "dominant reaction [to the interruption was] the 'threat' of an 'angry' black man [terrorizing] the 'innocent' white woman". (Woodward) Like Brown's observation, Woodward's also has merit. To the general public, Swift's image is largely that of a good-natured, palatable young musician. This image was intensified and her popularity boosted from this interaction due to outdated stereotypes surrounding Black men expressing emotion. While West could have taken this argument up at another time, or avoided dragging out this so-called feud for over a decade, Woodward's argument still stands. Swift does attempt to break the mold, later singing, "The old Taylor can't come to the phone right now. Why? Oh, 'cause she's dead!" on 2017's "Look What You Made Me Do".

While Swift's public image, music, and advocacy have been the target of criticisms both valid and invalid, her efforts to mobilize millions cannot go unnoticed. Regardless of qualms about her appearance, lyrics, or beliefs, a global superstar of Swift's caliber holds the key to creating lasting change- influence, honesty, and loyalty.

Conclusion

Swift's entire brand, from her lyrics to her online persona, was originally focused on relatability and the nuances of girlhood and young womanhood. After a series of unfortunate events of personal and political nature at the tail end of the 2010s, Swift was inspired to use her star power to speak up on political and social issues via Instagram. Through analysis of Swift's specific image, social media use by celebrities as a group, and evidence of how the combination of online media and celebrity can create a perfect storm of loyalty and political influence in youth, it's possible to ascertain an informed opinion of Taylor Swift as a ground-breaking artist, a lucrative brand, and a burgeoning political leader.

Her intimate-yet-universal lyricism and friendly-yet-promotional social media usage created a devout group of millions of fans willing to, by the time she chose to harness it, follow her every word. This brings up another avenue of research that, taking criticism of Swift into consideration could compare how white celebrities like Taylor Swift can influence millions with significantly less backlash and vitriol than other Black celebrities like Beyonce or Donald Glover. That said, her endorsements from 2015 on have led to tangible political change and inspired fans to speak up for themselves. Taylor Swift's social media has been more dormant than usual in the last year, and unrest has not ceased in the United States or the world as a whole. Her influence continues to

grow regardless of whether she is active on social media, so if she were to post about really any current event, whether it be a steadfast issue or a more recent conflict, she could encourage yet another wave of action. Swift's advocacy on social media may have come about later than many would have liked— and not without limitations— but the global pop sensation has proven that fans and stans are an invaluable community that can enact real change... especially Swifties.

Appendix

Fig. 1

[47 notes](#) | [Reblog](#) | [permalink](#)

Recording

Nov 4, 2005

So this is technically my first blog. So I think I'll make it about what's been going on lately. I've been in the studio everyday recording for the album. I've been working with a few producers. One being Byron Gallimore (he does all of Tim McGraw's stuff). The other is Robert Ellis Orrall.. I've been in the studio with him lately. We tracked all the songs (did the instrumentals) yesterday and we're doing vocals today and tomorrow. Sometime next week we'll do back ups. After three sessions yesterday, me and Scotty Emerick did a showcase for a bunch of people from the Universal office in LA. It was at Scott Borchetta's house and everything went great. This whole week has been awesome. Really hard work is fun to me. And plus my parents made the mistake of giving me a video camera to take in and "document" things.

So basically I got to harrass everyone nonstop for 12 hours. The musicians, the engineers, Rob, interns.. everyone. It was awesome.


And the drummer, Shannon, kept doing Napoleon Dynamite voices in between passes. Which was very good for me. I liked that a LOT. And there's lots of times in between takes because the engineers and everyone had like a thousand levels to set, so I had alot of extra time. Me and the intern, Richard, made all these photo copies of our hands and stapled them together. Because when I'm bored, I am SO productive.


All in all.. everything sounds amazing. I'm pretty excited.

-T-


<http://www.myspace.com/taylorswift/blog/58942560>

Fig. 2







Taylor Swift 

@taylorswift13



apologizing to a very needy cat for being gone so long.


 Reply
 Retweet
 Favorite
 More

3,907

RETWEETS

2,171

FAVORITES



2:15 AM - 6 Dec 08

Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Taylor Swift's old account
@ts_old_tweets



“I spent all day at The Lorax premiere- that movie is filled with adorable-ness. So lucky to have gotten to be a part of it.”
(Feb. 20, 2012)

Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

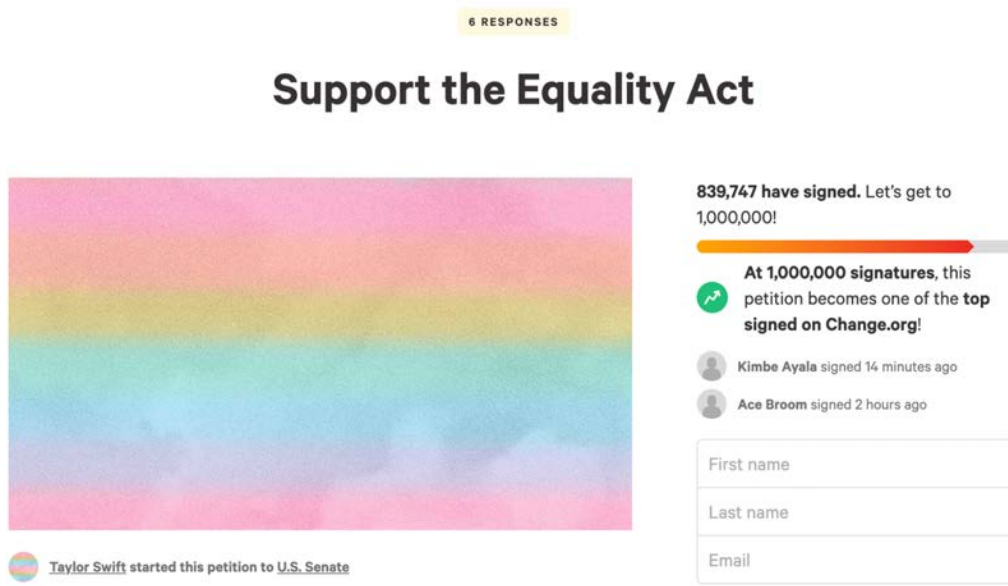


Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

I'm writing this post about the upcoming midterm elections on November 6th, in which I'll be voting in the state of Tennessee. In the past I've been reluctant to publicly voice my political opinions, but due to several events in my life and in the world in the past two years, I feel very differently about that now. I always have and always will cast my vote based on which candidate will protect and fight for the human rights I believe we all deserve in this country. I believe in the fight for LGBTQ rights, and that any form of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender is WRONG. I believe that the systemic racism we still see in this country towards people of color is terrifying, sickening and prevalent.

I cannot vote for someone who will not be willing to fight for dignity for ALL Americans, no matter their skin color, gender or who they love. Running for Senate in the state of Tennessee is a woman named Marsha Blackburn. As much as I have in the past and would like to continue voting for women in office, I cannot support Marsha Blackburn. Her voting record in Congress appalls and terrifies me. She voted against equal pay for women. She voted against the Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which attempts to protect women from domestic violence, stalking, and date rape. She believes businesses have a right to refuse service to gay couples. She also believes they should not have the right to marry. These are not MY Tennessee values. I will be voting for Phil Bredesen for Senate and Jim Cooper for House of Representatives. Please, please educate yourself on the candidates running in your state and vote based on who most closely represents your values. For a lot of us, we may never find a candidate or party with whom we agree 100% on every issue, but we have to vote anyway.

So many intelligent, thoughtful, self-possessed people have turned 18 in the past two years and now have the right and privilege to make their vote count. But first you need to register, which is quick and easy to do. October 9th is the LAST DAY to register to vote in the state of TN. Go to vote.org and you can find all the info. Happy Voting! 🗳️😊🌈

Fig. 16



Taylor Swift ✓
@taylorswift13



After stoking the fires of white supremacy and racism your entire presidency, you have the nerve to feign moral superiority before threatening violence? 'When the looting starts the shooting starts'??? We will vote you out in November. [@realdonaldtrump](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump)

11:33 AM · May 29, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

12 notes | [Reblog](#) | [permalink](#)

Staying up painting.

Dec 23, 2007

I'm sitting here in my room with all the lights off and candles EVERYWHERE, and it's the most beautiful thing ever. You say "fire hazard", I say "poetic". It's so peaceful. I baked a cake tonight too. Abigail is over and we're listening to music and painting on canvases, and it's been a really wonderful Christmas break type of night. See, we've always hung out during Christmas break. Our freshmen year, we spent Christmas night staying up and prank calling all of our friends, talking in Napoleon Dynamite voices. And then, for the past two years we've watched Love Actually every single Christmas. Because it's the best Christmas movie (or overall movie) ever made, ever. It's one of those movies with an amazing ending that makes you want a boyfriend on Christmas. Because of that, I can only watch it once a year. Ha.

Updates.... I'm enjoying being 18. Nothing has changed at all. Which is good. For everything in my life that is constantly changing, its kinda cool to have a birthday and have things stay the same. I'm really excited for you guys to hear the new music!! We've got six songs recorded already, and they sound amazing. I've been in the studio with Nathan (my producer. Same guy who produced my first record! But this time we're co-producing) all month and it's been so much fun. We used all the same players in the studio as we used on the first record. We're not going to drastically change something that worked out well for us the first time. But HEY thank you to everyone who's been buying my album as Christmas presents for people, because we had our BEST EVER sales week last week!!! The album sold over 138,000 copies in one week and I can't even comprehend that. I LOVE YOU!!! You blow me away every time I look around at what's going on. I never thought I'd have this kind of life, and I appreciate it every single day. Thank you for everything, and have an amazing Christmas!

lovelovelove

-T-

<http://www.myspace.com/taylorswift/blog/340616607>

Fig. 21








332 likes

taylor.swift insta.archive "A by myself cupcake-making party!"

(25 February 2012)

Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

Random.org Date	2006-10-25	2007-12-28	2008-02-01	2008-06-16
posts are as close as possible				
MySpace/Blog (2005-2010 _{ish}) ✓	https://tswiftm	https://tswiftm	https://tswiftm	https://tswiftm
Twitter (2008) ✓	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Instagram (2011)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tumblr (2014)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

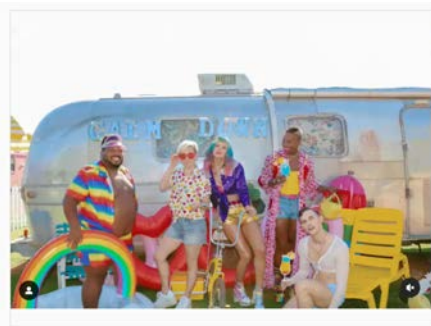
Fig. 25

Important Dates	2005-11-04	2006-10-24	2008-11-11	2008-12-10	2009-09-13
	first Myspace post	TS	FEARLESS	first tweet	VMAs
MySpace/Blog (2005-2010 _{ish})	https://tswiftmys	https://tswiftmys	https://tswiftmys	https://tswiftmys	
Twitter (2008)	n/a	n/a	n/a	https://web.archive.org	n/a
Instagram (2011)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	https://twitter.com
Tumblr (2014)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Fig. 26

Political posts	
Vote, IG, 2016	https://www.instagram.com
Pulse, IG, 2016	https://www.instagram.com
GLAAD Awards, IG, 2016	https://www.instagram.com
TIME POY #MeToo, IG, 2017	https://www.instagram.com

Fig. 27



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