Campaign Problems: How Fans React to Taylor Swift’s Controversial Political Awakening

Simone Driessen

Abstract
This study examines how the fandom of pop star Taylor Swift negotiates her ‘political’ awakening, after politically coming-out via Instagram in 2018. When Swift announced her vote for two Democratic senators, (international) media and her fandom considered it controversial. Swift, unlike many other pop-singers, had never publicly expressed her political views, until 2018. Yet, doing so put her on the map as a potential celebrity politician (CP): a celebrity who is fighting for a particular interest or certain political outcome, while holding a certain political influence over an audience. By scrutinizing how her fandom, the “Swifties,” deal with their idol’s political revelations, this study offers a granular insight into the intersection between celebrity, fandom, and political culture. Drawing on a content analysis of fan-interviews and online comments, this study illustrates how fans negotiate Swift’s transition from popstar to CP. It demonstrates how fans consider Swift’s political coming-out: On the one hand, they think it is a potential career-strategy of Swift, to lift her persona from singer to strategic “business” woman. On the other hand, the fans consider it a “must” for pop stars in today’s political climate to express where they stand politically. This discussion highlights that the how of Swift’s message, and not just the what or why, are of importance in understanding her position as a CP. Therewith, this study illustrates how fans make sense of today’s politics through the celebrity persona—potentially putting an even greater burden on the shoulders of today’s stars.

1Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Corresponding Author:
Simone Driessen, Erasmus University Rotterdam, P.O. Box 1738, 3000 DR. Rotterdam, The Netherlands.
Email: driessen@eshcc.eur.nl
The Political Awakening of Taylor Swift

Leading up to the 2020 US presidential elections, Taylor Swift openly expressed her support for Democrat nominee Joe Biden. Her revelation included a photo of herself on Twitter and Instagram holding a tray of “Biden/Harris 2020”-cookies, referring to running duo Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Also, she authorized her song Only the Young to be used for a political spot to support Biden’s campaign. Although celebrity endorsements for politicians are not a new phenomenon (cf. Kellner, 2009; Street, 2004), think about Beyoncé’s support for Barack Obama or Lady Gaga’s endorsement for Hillary Clinton, Swift’s music and fandom were devoid of politics. Swift never spoke about her political views, nor endorsed a candidate, until she “came out” via a lengthy Instagram post detailing who she would vote for in the mid-term elections in 2018 (cf. Driessen, 2020; Nisbett & Schartel Dunn, 2019; Swift, 2018).

Despite Swift being active in the music-industry since 2006, her fans never learned about her political preferences. Due to this absent narrative, the “alt-right” movement once entitled her their “Aryan pop princess” due to her all-white, heterosexual, girl-next-door image (McNutt, 2020; Sunderland, 2016). Plus, in 2013, a young Pinterest-user created Taydolf Swiftler-memes: quotes of Adolf Hitler pinned to images of Swift (Prins, 2020). However, in October 2018, Taylor Swift declared, via Instagram, her support for two male senators in the US mid-term elections. She explained how she was “reluctant to publicly voice my political opinions, but due to several events in my life and in the world in the past 2 years, I feel very differently about that now” (Swift, 2018).1 Making this information public via her social media offered Swift control over the narrative of her political orientation (McNutt, 2020).

Swift finally breaking her political silence was quickly picked up by (inter)national media who framed this as groundbreaking, controversial news. For example, The Washington Post captioned how Swift’s endorsement was ‘‘A betrayal beyond words’’ for the far-right,2 while Salon reported on “conservatives having a meltdown on Twitter.”3 In the United Kingdom, the Guardian wrote how Swift just “ended her career”4 with this endorsement, while Dutch media stated Swift “shocked America,”5 and French media declared that the Republicans had “…lost their idol.”6 Even former US president Donald Trump commented publicly he liked Swift’s music “25% less now.”7 Although such headlines fuel the outrage economy by “generating clicks, likes and shares,” they rarely have an impact on actual politics (Phipps, 2020, p. 83). Yet, this news might have an impact on Swift’s fandom: some media reported on anti-fannish (Gray, 2019) behavior8: allegedly, fans were burning her CDs and posters9 and selling off her merchandise.

Considering these radical responses to a celebrity’s political endorsement, this article aims to ask the following research question: ‘How do fans negotiate Taylor
Swift’s political revelations since 2018 in relation to her celebrity persona? It does so through analyzing online comments on international platform Reddit.com (about her 2018 Instagram post) and in-depth interviews with a group of international fans.

This approach makes an important contribution to existing studies on fandom and politics (cf. Brough & Shresthova, 2012; Dean, 2017; Hinck, 2019; Van Zoonen, 2004) by offering a granular case study exploring the nuances of a political celebrity through the lens of Swift’s global fanbase. Moreover, this article expands the academic conversation about the role of fandom and celebrity in political discourse by particularly focusing on the affective nature of fandom in this context. Though international fans may not be formally involved in US-politics—for example, as a registered voter or campaigner—the US elections, but also its (popular) culture at large, receive(d) extensive media coverage through the world and are able to have a worldwide impact (see Kooijman, 2013; Marling, 2015). Especially for fans of the Millennial- and Z-Generation, social media and Internet are imperative, and make politics elsewhere more engaging (Özkan & Solmaz, 2017). The dominant position of the US in global popular culture and its influence in local cultures and practices (Kooijman, 2013; Marling, 2015; Woodward et al., 2008) might expose how Swift’s political expressions resonate with her fandom who recognizes themselves in her (now public) liberal, progressive attitude.10

So, looking at fans who are not voters, but more disconnected to US-politics helps understand the influence and nuance of celebrity politics in this globalized, digital age. This work presents fans’ discursive negotiations between Swift as a hard-working mainstream pop-musician (McNutt, 2020; Wilkinson, 2019) and as a celebrity politician (CP) (Street, 2004). The remainder of this article brings together the complex relationship between (celebrity) politics and fandom, followed by an explanation of this study’s methodological approach. Then, an analysis of comments and interviews follows. This illustrates how fans consider Swift’s revelation a necessity in today’s world, but also a strategic move. Therewith, this study offers a focused and insightful perspective on celebrity politics, as it—through this case study—exposes the discursive negotiation necessary between politics and Swift’s persona (or brand).

**Understanding the Intersection of Pop, Fandom, and Politics**

Music and politics are no strangers to each other. Politics can be audible through propaganda songs, or in lyrics and sounds express resistance or opposition (Street, 2003). Think about hip-hop or punk challenging society’s status quo. Street stated that “songs and sounds are more powerful weapons [in politics] because of the way music works directly on our emotions” (2003, p. 114). Still, when Swift transitioned into pop from country (McNutt, 2020), her music refrained from politics, until the album Lover (2019) came out.

Despite not discussing her political preference publicly, Swift was involved in everyday politics: She regularly spoke up against or for fellow musicians, NGOs, or
companies (see McNutt, 2020). For example, by publicly contesting the earnings of her music through Spotify in 2014, and openly supporting fellow artist Kesha in her lawsuit against Dr. Luke in 2016. In 2019, Swift called out music manager Scooter Braun, who upon purchasing the label she was signed to in the past, now also owned the rights to her music without presenting a good opportunity to re-purchase that catalog. Such music-related politics, however, is not per se telling of Swift’s Political preferences—political in the sense of voting behavior, what kind of political issues or civil rights she considers important (e.g., climate change, or LGBTQ-rights). However, with the release of Lover (2019), Swift included politics in her music: her video You Need to Calm Down contained clear references to American NGO GLAAD (the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, ‘rewriting the script for LGBTQ acceptance’) and included a myriad of famous LGBTQ-celebrities. Also, Only the Young featured in a political spot for the 2020 Democratic campaign, turning it into a protest song encouraging young electorates to vote.

Through these more public and mediated endorsements, Swift’s pop transitioned into a space to express political views, civic engagement, or even address civil rights (cf. Bennett, 2014; Edgar & Toone, 2019; Jang & Lee, 2014; Olutola, 2019). Celebrities expressing their political views and using their celebrity status to attract attention for political causes can be highly influential (Partzsch, 2015). Moreover, this development leads to an intensification between celebrity and politics, blurring the lines between political information and entertainment (Kellner, 2009). This type of politics, or “politicians,” is defined as a CP (Street, 2004), which can exist in two forms: an actual elected politician (CP1) turned into a celebrity (e.g. former president Barack Obama, see Kellner, 2009); or a non-elected “politician” (CP2), a celebrity persona—like Swift—who speaks out on “specific causes and for particular interests with a view to influencing political outcomes” (Street, 2004, p. 438).

If a CP2 aims to influence political outcomes, those most persuaded might be the most invested followers: the fans (Nisbett & Schartel Dunn, 2019). Fans are not just mere consumers of music; they are active citizens who are emotionally involved in a particular “text” and offer active interpretations of such a text in their everyday life (cf. Jenkins, 1992; Sandvoss, 2005). According to Dean (2017), fandom is a proven aspect of politics that might help us to understand issues like political polarization or societal controversies. Likewise, Van Zoonen (2004) argues that fans can be considered a blueprint of and for society in terms of their activities and behavior: many of the practices fans commit to resonate with what happens with and in “real” politics. Alike having a favorite artist, people can have a favorite politician whom they would vote for; just as becoming involved in a fandom might resemble becoming a member of a political party.

However, such committed levels (and promises) of participation need to be nuanced. Brough and Shresthova argue that fan activism in a neoliberal society is not solely about understanding fan-driven efforts, but about “how particular actors construct, use, and circulate their voices through the production or reproduction of cultural content” (2012, p. 4.9) and who consumes this content. Looking at Swift’s social media posts, this
implies she has the power to potentially (re-)produce a political viewpoint her fans feel inspired by. Yet, this might not always be met on a positive note. Some fans might not respond progressively to this, but rather ‘reactionary’ (Stanfill, 2019), resulting in anti-fannish or toxic fan behavior (Sandvoss, 2019). Because their “doxas” (long-held beliefs, see Hills, 2018) about Swift’s politics might be false.

Although her political commentaries and endorsements via social media are personal insights, they simultaneously position Swift as a CP (Driessen, 2020). Click et al. (2013) assert in their study on Lady Gaga’s social media exchanges with her fans that “The heightened sense of closeness and familiarity created by two-way interaction and celebrities’ online disclosure of personal information has blurred the boundaries that once separated ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ (parasocial) relationships in traditional media” (p. 367). This observation implies that the fans might not always evaluate a social media message as a moment of expression of the “persona” (the musician, the singer) Swift, but rather perceive it to be personal and meant for them. Nisbett and Schartel Dunn’s (2019) study on fan reactions on Swift’s 2018 Instagram post revealed that for young voters what Swift said mattered and was persuasive because they considered her a friend.

Redmond (2008), in his research on Reality TV, defines such personal disclosures as “carnal confessions” (p. 154), further explained “[a] self-reflexive performance, often stage-managed and manipulative, and therefore designed to raise, redeem or resurrect a profile” (p. 149). Hearing such a confession presents a feeling of pureness and authenticity for the celebrity, which contradicts their manufactured image (Wilkinson, 2019). So, Swift’s politically tinted posts render visible what usually remains private (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Consequently, the audience can follow Swift, as popstar, transitioning and navigating her “brand” into the realm of celebrity politics. This resonates with Wilkinson’s findings (2019, p. 441), who studied Swift’s multi-faceted profile: a “hapless pop princess and an autonomous and savvy industry professional,” which helps to craft and promote an authentic and zany image of Swift. This potential “political” power of Swift then invites to examine how her carefully constructed persona relates to her CP-status.

**Evaluating Fans’ Discursive Negotiations Through a Thematic Content Analysis**

To understand how fans negotiate Swift’s political expressions since 2018, I analyzed online comments about the Instagram post and conducted interviews with international fans. In Reddit’s r/TaylorSwift-community, 188 comments discussed Swift’s Instagram post of October 8, 2018. r/TaylorSwift is openly accessible (leaving a response requires an account) and a space devoted to Swift. I did not copy pseudonyms, user names, or identity markers of the message-posters, but I did copy their exact responses to record their unique self-presentations (Gerrard, 2020). Some self-disclosure markers help to get to know the fans a bit more, like “fan since childhood,” or a “member of the LGBTQ-community.” Platform Reddit itself is not a Swift-exclusive space, yet offers a
community where fans of different countries, ages, gender, political and sexual orientation can exchange information. It is expected that those participating hold an interest in Swift and care “enough” to comment.

Additionally, I conducted nine in-depth interviews with a group of international, self-identified Swifties. These participants were recruited via snowball sampling. They all identified as female and were between 18 and 32 years old. They hailed from and lived in different countries: Argentina (1), the United Kingdom (1), France (1), Ireland, (1) and the Netherlands (5). In their fandom, they explicitly had a global, more than a national approach. They all consider themselves active in Swift’s online global fandom by participating in various global social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram). This testifies to how they globally feel connected to each other and Swift, but also how this US-star holds a prominent position in global pop culture (cf. Kooijman, 2013).

While most interviewees identified as white, one of the interviewees identified as a Latina, and indicated in her interview how this influenced her fandom (cf. Pande, 2018). All interviewees had finished high-school; some currently study at university (4 at undergraduate level and 1 PhD student), and others held jobs in various sectors (assistant shop manager, production line worker, financial controller, and software engineer). When asked about their own political preference they considered themselves to be “democrats,” “liberal,” or “green.” They also indicated they would vote for the Democratic Party in the US system. However, none of them were currently members of a political party.

To examine how the Swifties negotiate Swift’s political revelations and what this reveals about her star-text, I conducted a thematic content analysis (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006) on the Reddit-comments and interview-transcriptions. As Schreier (2014) explains, a content analysis helps to grasp how different elements of the analyzed material contrast or connect with each other, while making certain content more abstract also results in a loss of information. To overcome such a loss, I meticulously coded the data. Certain patterns kept recurring in the data, and through these patterns larger themes could be identified that helped unfold latent topics in the data and thereby responded to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For the scope of this article, I mainly draw on the narratives of the interviewees, and where emblematic some Reddit-comments are added for further illustration. The larger themes identified, to grasp how fans negotiate Swift’s political expressions, and consequently her influence as a CP2, are discussed next.

**Negotiating Swift’s Politics**

Fans’ reactions to Swift’s political coming-out and subsequent political expressions are twofold: On the one hand, the fans consider it a “must” for popstars in today’s political climate, particularly in the United States, to express where they stand politically. On the other hand, fans negotiate how this controversial step might be a potential strategy of Swift to further her career. Consequently, fans are also critical of Swift’s politics:
are aware that this might lead to schisms in the fandom and think Swift should maintain her CP role more actively across time, not just the 2020-presidential elections. To illustrate these larger themes, I present examples of these different meanings in the next sections.

**Considering the (Late) Political Reveal of Swift as a “Must”**

Most fans, drawing on both the comments on Reddit and the interviews, found it brave, admirable, and courageous that Swift finally took a public, political stance. The response of 18-year-old student Laura is emblematic, she indicated she really “admire[d] her becoming more vocal about politics, she was criticized for a long time because she simply did not express her opinion.” Likewise, interviewee Isa (21, student) expresses to have a lot of “respect for doing that, speaking up politically via social media.” Similarly, Lucy (25, PhD student) considers it an act of “bravery,” to “voice her opinions.” Lucy also mentions how Swift makes her feel empowered: as a UK-citizen currently witnessing the political development of the “Brexit” (the United Kingdom breaking apart from the European Union), Lucy finds help and inspiration in Swift’s revelations for ways in which she can also make herself heard. For the interviewees, the decision of the singer to speak out politically fits Taylor Swift’s persona, which they think of as “honest, humble, relatable, and involved” (see Wilkinson, 2019). Moreover, it offers a further insight into how their parasocial relationship with Swift is constructed and how they give meaning to her “being a friend,” a persuasive factor in celebrity endorsements (Nisbett & Schartel Dunn, 2019).

For some fans—in both interviews and online, Taylor Swift’s “carnal confession” (Redmond, 2008) comes as a relief. Interviewee Maryse (31, software engineer) ties this relief to her sexual orientation. Identifying as bisexual, she is glad “Taylor is on ‘our side,’” referring to her support of an organization like GLAAD and openly including this in the video of *You Need to Calm Down*. For another interview-respondent, Lia (28, student), it was also a relief to know Taylor was not on the Republican, particularly on Trump’s, side. A feeling that was also shared by interviewees Lotte (22, student) and Marieke (30, controller), who both consider it important to also politically be on the same page as their idol as this represents what values they find important in their lives.

That sentiment of relief was also expressed online by the fans on Reddit. One of them, in a discussion-thread related to the 2018 Instagram post that kicked off Swift’s political revelations, mentioned “This is such great news and pleasant relief for all Taylor fans. It is perfectly written and such an encouraging sign of our girl using her platform. I’m glad she finally feels free enough to start using her voice.” The notions of Swift “using her platform” (to be interpreted presumably as her “voice” and “impact” as a celebrity), or “finally feels free enough,” and using “her own voice” imply that for this fan Swift’s political exposé indeed comes with a claim that “their girl” has politically woken up. Moreover, the consistency in using “her voice” as “person” as well as in her
role as CP could be understood as Taylor Swift sounding sincere (McNutt, 2020; Redmond, 2008) after this confession.

These findings emphasize how important it is for the fans that Swift remains her own person while making these statements and claims, and that she does this in her own humble, yet brave communicative style. This illustrates that “how” the message was communicated, fitting Swift’s brand, is convincing for the fans: it reveals she is reluctant, but also acknowledges her potential power-role in the controversial US political climate.

Some fans mention how Swift did not have to make her (private) politics public. Like Lotte, who is happy about Swift speaking up, but says it “not her job technically speaking, but it is good that she does it.” Contradicting, this Redditor thinks she does have a responsibility towards her fans: “[…] with current events and her having a huge platform it would have been vastly irresponsible for her not to do so if she truly believes in the causes she’s talking about.” Likewise, interviewee Laura states:

[…] she realized through people putting pressure on her, but also herself, that politics is a question of human rights and it is extremely important to speak up about it, so it is quite brave of her to be open about the fact that it was finally time for her to speak up.

Although Laura brings in the idea that others might have pressured Swift into the revelations, in “Miss Americana” (Wilson, 2020) viewers are led to believe that the singer takes this decision herself (albeit in close consultation with her parents and team). Building on this idea of bravery, Sanne (25, assistant manager) considers it vital for “the greater good” that Swift is open about her viewpoints. These observations of fans resonate with the role of and how a CP (Street, 2004) can influence their fans.

Moreover, what the fans truly laud about the situation is that Swift in her political posts clarifies why she takes this stand (cf. Swift, 2018), like this Redditor explains:

What a wonderful Instagram post! I loved how she told us not only her opinion but WHY she has that opinion and what exactly is wrong with the candidate she’s voting against. In addition, the “vote for your values” part is very important. Expressing full throttle support for the Democratic Party and everything Democrat is not being an informed voter. There are shit Democrats and some very rare good Republicans.

Interviewee Marieke explains similarly how “it is good that she emphasizes fans need to do a bit of research, and not just vote for what Taylor is voting for.”

What these responses illustrate, and what seems to guide fans through her political posts, is revealed in what they appreciate: Swift keeping her ‘sincere, humble, authentic voice’ and demonstrating her own (re-)search into her political decision.
Discussing the “Political Coming-out” as a Carefully Constructed Image or Career Move

Despite fans appreciating learning about Swift’s political stance and considering it key of her to “finally” express this, her CP role is also met with criticism by the fans. The following Reddit comment implies Taylor Swift’s opinion is important but could (even should) have come sooner:

… I think people do care about her opinions. That is exactly why people have hated her for being silent for so long. If they didn’t they would’ve brushed off her silence and this statement all together as just another news. […]

This fan is quite vigilant about Swift’s silence for so long, reminding her fellow fans on Reddit that this is what people condemned the musician for too. Additionally, by stating people do care about Swift’s opinions, she acknowledges the potential influence as CP. The interviewees also discuss how the silence before 2018’s revelations might have actually been even more controversial than her actual political coming-out (see McNutt, 2020). Lotte, for example, argues, “if you’ve been silent for so long, people will fill in the story for you.” With that remark, Lotte also points to Swift being claimed by the so-called “alt-right.”

Contrariwise, Marieke feels very different about that silence, “precisely because of that silence I thought she was on a different track, if she had been pro-Republican in that scene… than there was no need to remain silent.” An online commentator also refers to this: “Given her country roots, I guess you could see how it would be easy to think she wasn’t liberal. However, if you look at her actions over the past several years, it’s pretty obvious where she stands politically […].” Although both interviewees and Redditors heavily draw on (and demonstrate) their fannish cultural capital as long-term Swifties, this personal information (the donations) might not be very well known to the public or media. Swift has not presented herself publicly as an active LGBTQ-supporter before October 2018.

Sam (21, production line worker) connects the political revelations to Swift breaking bonds with her record company, “She had to play the role of America’s sweetheart, but now she is no longer under the influence of that label so she can speak her own mind.” Consequently, Sanne considers Swift’s political endorsements a “power move” for her career: “whenever she has something important to share, she promises now to speak up about it.” Lia thinks that it can be a “marketing move,” if she does not uphold her political image: “like linking a song to a movement and not returning to that, like donating profits to GLAAD.” Conversely Laura claims that this generation, and thus her fans, “is much more aware and vocal about issues in the world […] Taylor speaking up would make us more involved.” Such remarks imply Swift carefully considered and constructed her message until she had the right audience (and label) at the right time. Laura seems to interpret Taylor as a spokesperson for her generation, which implies that Swift’s (political) influence reaches well beyond the United States (Kooijman, 2013;
Woodward et al., 2008). Yet for most fans, like Sam, her music still matters most: “In a country like the Netherlands the influence of celebrities is just less important.” Nevertheless, they still are heavily aware of (and laud) Swift’s political endorsements, which can be proof of how both the Political and political matter to these fans and might be (re)interpreted in their local context (see Kooijman, 2013; Van Zoonen, 2004).

Making her political expressions become part of her career has according to some fans led to disparities in the fandom. Laura for example indicates in her interview that she feels a “schism in the fandom,” with more conservative fans and more progressive fans. Marieke recognizes this: “a part of her fanbase will disagree with the things she now openly discusses,” which she also considers as risky for Swift’s career.

Such insights into how the fandom changed after Swift’s political disclosures reveal how fandom is not always progressive or beautiful (see Hills, 2018; Stanfill, 2019). However, publicizing these personal revelations demonstrates how Swift transitions from popstar to CP. This step makes her persona and music politicized: they can be contested, (re-) interpreted, and a topic of subjective discussion among fans. A situation reminiscent of what happened to fellow country-singers the Chicks (formerly known as the Dixie Chicks). As this Redditor explains, “[...] when you’re in the country scene you’re kinda stuck on that side [of conservative politics]. I’m just glad shes [sic] got a pop head audience to cushion the fallout so she doesn’t end up like the Dixie Chicks.” The Chicks were shunned by country-lovers after their overt statements against former president G.W. Bush’s (second) Iraq-invasion in 2003. Many fans (and partner- and sponsors-deals) boycotted their music and concerts as sign of disagreement with their viewpoint, a fate that also might have bestowed upon Swift had she talked politics sooner.

Critical Perspective on Swift as Celebrity Politician

Since 2018, fans had ample time to reflect on her previous political silence and her current political actions. Lia mentions how Swift’s silence and particularly not taking a stand against a (former) politician like Trump has been hurtful in the past: “It hurts me that people would think that she supported that [the Republicans], that she didn’t support her minority fans, that she was aligned with a whole side of politics that really neglects our lives.” She thinks Swift fell short in that: “I wish she had more moments of talking about the causes she agrees with and supports.”

Other interviewees also remark upon her silence surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, and her late reveal of supporting Biden as presidential nominee. So, Swift’s silence is also debated among fans as this comment by Laura elucidates:

… a lot of Swifties criticize Taylor for making a huge thing about politics, and how she would become more involved, but since the documentary [2020] she hasn’t spoken a lot or not enough about politics […] She will speak up about one thing, but completely ignore another.
Here, Swift’s CP status is interpreted as “performative,” which leads to questioning its genuineness for the fans. This interpretation invites for further reflection on Swift’s star-text, particularly following the commercial successes of Lover (2019), and the subsequent albums folklore (2020) and evermore (2020), which are again devoid of politics. This suggests her outspokenness (or her silence) did not present significant consequences to her career.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study asked the research question: “How do fans negotiate Taylor Swift’s political revelations since 2018 in relation to her celebrity persona?” To answer this question, I analyzed online fan comments and conducted interviews with Taylor Swift’s international fans. This exposed the nuances of the political celebrity: The study made insightful how Swift navigated from popstar to CP according to her fans, and how particularly her “persona” (or brand) and this political message need to be consistent with one another to be most influential and convincing. This discussion highlights that the how of Swift’s message, and not just the what or why, are of importance in understanding her position as a CP.

My analysis revealed how fans negotiate and appreciate Swift’s (sudden, unexpected) “carnal confession” (Redmond, 2008) as it fits her persona as a humble, sincere, and informed CP (cf. McNutt, 2020; Street, 2004; Wilkinson, 2019). This condemns her alleged stereotypical, conservative country-musician image. Swift is aware of her influence (Nisbett & Schartel Dunn, 2019), but does not impose this upon her fans: she encourages them to find their own voice in (everyday) politics.

Yet, the article’s analysis also showed how fans found the moment at which Swift’s revelations appeared to be strategic for (furthering) her career. Additionally, this made the fans reflect on and criticize her previous silence and her lateness to express her political views (cf. Driessen, 2020; McNutt, 2020). Despite demonstrating their fan capital to state they already knew about her politics through donations, the fans stress that Swift now needs to uphold her endorsements to not make her political engagement appear as merely performative.

Overall, the interpretations by fans of Taylor Swift’s political revelations actively hand fans something to reflect upon, and a discourse to do so. Nevertheless, as some critical Swift-fans point out: it might be part of a marketing-strategy or a next career move. Yet, the fans value that Swift, in her role as a Celebrity Politician, now speaks publicly about her politics—even if it is done via a “personal” Instagram post, an interview, or a donation to an LGBTQ-organization. Returning to Van Zoonen’s (2004) argument that fans offer a blueprint for democracy, we might take from this international fandom that making sense of (global) politics can be done through and because of an affective investment in a celebrity persona.

This article presented a granular insight into the “political” fandom of Taylor Swift, offering a nuanced perspective on understanding (the limits) of a global CP. However, how fans negotiate Swift as a political phenomenon invites for further reflection and
examination of how young pop fans can be mobilized and invited into participating in political discussion. Also, by focusing on the affective dimension of this phenomenon, because of its focus on fan negotiations instead of analyzing Swift’s star-text in-depth, a future study could scrutinize how, for example, Swift herself or media portrayed this navigation process from popstar to CP. Additionally, it would be interesting to broaden this study’s global scope by conducting interviews with fans from different media- and political-systems, like China or Brazil, to better understand how Swift’s CP message and status sustain in such systems.

Furthermore, this study analyzed a fairly, seemingly progressive part of the fandom: what about those (anti-)fans who disagree with her revelation or quit the fandom after this political exposé? Especially, if we consider fandom as a blueprint for society, in a time in which societies are becoming more polarized. Also, because with *folklore* and *evermore* (2020) Swift turned to indie-folk, conversely ignoring politics again, and adding another level to be explored to her multi-faceted celebrity profile.

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**Notes**

1. This moment is also captured in a documentary about Swift’s life, “Miss Americana” (Wilson, 2020), see https://variety.com/2020/film/news/taylor-swift-politics-sundance-documentary-miss-americana-1203471910/ for an elaborate review of the documentary and this pinnacle moment, written by Chris Willman for *Variety*, January 21, 2020.
2. See https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/10/08/betrayal-beyond-words-farright-melts-down-over-taylor-swifts-endorsement-democrats/
3. See https://www.salon.com/2018/10/08/white-nationalists-melt-down-after-taylor-swift-endorsestennessee-democrat_partner/
4. See https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/oct/08/taylor-swift-instagram-post-endorsement-democrats-tennessee
5. See https://www.ad.nl/buitenland/de-politieke-coming-out-van-taylor-swift-schokt-amerika~ad0df0ba/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F
6. See https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/usa/presidentielle/donald-trump/ils-nous-l-ont-enlevee-comment-les-republicains-ont-perdu-leur-deesse-taylor-swift-durant-la-campagne-des-mid-terms_2982219.html
7. See https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45793352
8. See https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/10/taylor-swift-endorsed-a-democrat-for-senate-and-now-her-conservative-fans-are-very-sad/
9. Chris Morris wrote about this for *Fortune* on October 9, 2018, see https://fortune.com/2018/10/09/taylor-swift-burn-merchandise-instagram-protests/

10. Many European countries hold this political attitude. This also shows in the countries in which Swift tours (like the UK, France, or Germany), as one the reviewers for this article pointed out.

11. This study was conducted before the release of *folklore* (2020) and *evermore* (2020), which are again devoid of politics. Their record sales numbers demonstrate how Swift’s public politics have not (strongly) impacted her brand.

12. To clarify, I understand ‘politics’ in this paper in a twofold manner: ‘Political’ – which I consider as electoral behavior or an engagement with particular civic or civil rights (a fan forming his/her politics on the choice of what a celebrity does); and the ‘political’ – the everyday politics one encounters (decisions or moments related to one’s identity—e.g., pursuing veganism like one’s favorite artist).

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**Author biography**

**Simone Driessen** is a lecturer (with senior university teaching qualification) and researcher in Media and Communication at Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. She completed her PhD on popular music fandom in 2017. Her research interests lie in the domains of fan (dis)engagement, cancel culture, popular music and pop culture. She has published several book chapters and articles on popular culture and fandom, in amongst others *Participations, Celebrity Studies, and Popular Music and Society.*