

Abstract

This thesis examines how Taylor Swift's musical activities generate extraordinary economic value beyond conventional explanations rooted in emotional attachment or rational consumer behavior. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard's theory of the political economy of sign, this study argues that Taylor Swift functions not merely as an entertainment commodity, but as a sign value centered on girlhood. This sign value is produced through her discography, amplified through media narratives and marketing strategies, and consumed by fans through concerts and merchandise. Using qualitative digital ethnography across social media platforms, this thesis analyzes how Swifties consume and perform girlhood as a cultural sign. The Eras Tour is examined as a large-scale simulation in which pre-existing sign value culminates, intensifies, and becomes materially consumable. Fans' willingness to engage in excessive spending, such as traveling internationally, attending multiple concerts, and purchasing low-utility merchandise, demonstrates a form of sign-driven consumption that exceeds basic economic logic. Beyond fandom, this consumption produces macroeconomic and political effects. The thesis shows how sign value translates into state-level outcomes, including tourism revenue, national branding strategies, and policy decisions, as evidenced by state competition to host Taylor Swift's concerts. At the same time, girlhood operates as a contested cultural sign that challenges dominant norms privileging emotional restraint and seriousness. By embracing vulnerability and "cringe," Swifties enact a form of everyday resistance that generates cultural recognition and internal fan hierarchies. This research contributes to International Relations and political economy by demonstrating that sign value can operate as a macroeconomic force, reshaping markets, cultural power, and state behavior in the contemporary global economy.

Keywords

Political Economy of Sign; Taylor Swift; Girlhood; Swiftie; Sign Value; Media; Profit Generator; Macroeconomics; Digital Ethnography