

ANALYSIS OF THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN COSTUMES AND MUSIC IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S TEN ERA: A CORRELATION STUDY

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ANÁLISE DA INTERSEÇÃO ENTRE FIGURINOS E MÚSICA NAS DEZ ERAS DE TAYLOR SWIFT: UM ESTUDO DE CORRELAÇÃO

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Recebido em: 30/04/2024. Aprovado em: 09/09/2024. Publicado em: 07/11/2024.

ABSTRACT

Fashion and music have always shared a close relationship, serving as complementary forms of expression. Fashion often reflects and identifies with various musical styles, and this connection has deepened with the rise of the internet in the 2000s, making artists' fashion choices more visible and influential. Taylor Swift, who debuted in 2006, set records with her first album, remaining on the Billboard 200 longer than any other album of the 2000s. Initially starting in country music, she has since explored various genres, including Country-pop, Pop, Electronic, Rap, Folk, and Alternative, showcasing exceptional versatility in her music. Given this versatility, Swift has had to clearly define the significance of each era through her fashion choices, aligning her style with her evolving musical identity. This research aims to investigate the interplay between music and fashion throughout Taylor Swift's career, focusing on how her costumes reflect her musical evolution and influences public perception. To achieve these objectives, the study employs a basic research methodology with a qualitative approach, including bibliographical research and a case study of Taylor Swift. **Keywords:** fashion; music; Taylor Swift.

RESUMO

A moda e a música sempre compartilharam uma relação estreita, servindo como formas complementares de expressão. A moda frequentemente reflete e se identifica com vários estilos musicais, e essa conexão se aprofundou com o crescimento da internet nos anos 2000, tornando as escolhas de moda dos artistas mais visíveis e influentes. Taylor Swift, que fez sua estreia em 2006, quebrou recordes com seu primeiro álbum, permanecendo na Billboard 200 por mais tempo do que qualquer outro álbum dos anos 2000. Inicialmente



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começando na música country, ela desde então explorou vários gêneros, incluindo Country-pop, Pop, Eletrônico, Rap, Folk e Alternativo, demonstrando uma versatilidade excepcional em sua música. Dada essa versatilidade, Swift precisou definir claramente o significado de cada era por meio de suas escolhas de vestuário, alinhando seu estilo com sua identidade musical em evolução. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo investigar a interação entre música e moda ao longo da carreira de Taylor Swift, com foco em como seu figurino reflete sua evolução musical e influencia a percepção do público. Para alcançar esses objetivos, o estudo utiliza uma metodologia de pesquisa básica com abordagem qualitativa, incluindo pesquisa bibliográfica e um estudo de caso sobre Taylor Swift. **Palavras-chave:** moda; música; Taylor Swift.

1 INTRODUCTION

Historically, fashion and music have developed as two forms of human expression. Music has ancient roots, dating back to observing the sounds of nature, as evidenced by the discovery of a bone flute that is over 60,000 years old. Instruments such as lyres and harps date back to around 3,000 years ago in Mesopotamia. On the other hand, clothing emerged as a basic need to protect against adverse weather conditions and to mark the hierarchical differences between prehistoric tribes.

Both fashion and music have undergone significant transformations over the years. The first began to gain great importance in civilizations from the Middle Ages onwards, with different clothes following a hierarchical pattern that increased according to social class - there were even laws that restricted some fabrics and colors exclusively to nobles. The second gained great visibility in Ancient Greece, where music and poetry were considered forms of artistic expression. Although they were in evidence at different times, their strong combination only occurred in later centuries.

Fashion and music have a close relation, as both are forms of expression. However, it was only in the 20th century that they connected more intensely, with the emergence of new musical trends. Thus, there was a division of musical genres, such as country, folk, rock, pop, classical, rap, alternative, samba, among others. As a result, fashion became even more important to the music industry, being used as a form of identification for each of these groups.

From the 2000s onwards, with the growth of many types of media and especially the internet, the connection between fashion and music intensified even further. With the musical styles already consolidated, the way each artist dressed became even more visible, which led to each rhythm adopting its own unique style. This made it even more evident that fashion and music have become intrinsically linked forms of expression.

Country music is one of the most popular styles in the United States, created in 1940, with fun, loving and intimate songs. In addition to the rhythm, singers in this genre have a very



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peculiar style, including western-style leather boots, cowboy hats, long printed dresses, tight pants and lots of plaid. In 2006, a new star emerged in the American country industry: Taylor Swift.

Swift broke several records with her first album release, one of which was staying on the Billboard 200 for longer than any other album of the 2000s. Her third single, "Our Song", made her the youngest singer-songwriter to reach number one on the Billboard Hot Country Songs, the most important country music chart in the world. Taylor Swift showed up with original and intimate songs, as well as a typical country girl style, with long floral dresses, western-style leather boots, belts, hats, guitar, tight jeans and striking curly hair.

The singer conquered the country genre in a short time, becoming America's favorite. In addition to her first album titled "Taylor Swift", she released nine more albums that, in the future, would be divided into eras, currently totaling 10. Although she began her career in country, over the years, Taylor has moved through different musical genres such as Country-pop, Pop, Electronic, Rap, Folk and Alternative, demonstrating remarkable versatility in her compositions. In 2023, Swift was chosen as the most popular artist by Billboard.

Throughout her seventeen-year career, Taylor Swift needed to reinvent herself many times and adapt to the aesthetics of each one of her albums. Due to this versatility occurring in a time of strong communication, the singer had to make the meaning of each era increasingly explicit, always seeking a relationship with fashion and what her clothing would represent at each stage of her career.

The world of fashion is vast and full of information, just like the music industry, so balancing the two terms and making them work together is not simple. Finding and adapting to a style is something desired, transitioning and fitting in between several is even more so, especially when you are a world-renowned singer. The risk of getting lost and falling into oblivion is something that can happen, since creating and consolidating an image is a complex task. When this image is constantly modified, everything becomes even more challenging.

This study contributes to explaining that the singer's visual is essential for the music industry and that fashion plays a crucial role in the construction of this image. Therefore, the question to be answered is: how costumes and music relate in the construction of the 10 eras of Taylor Swift? As such, the general objective of this research is to investigate the relationship between music and costumes in Taylor Swift's career, in order to understand how the artist's choices in style are reflected in her career and her relationship with the public. To achieve these objectives, the methodology of this study is basic and qualitative research, with technical procedures of a bibliographic nature, with



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the main source of research being books, articles, websites and magazines, in addition, it is a case study as it is based on the singer's trajectory.



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2 FASHION, COSTUMES, PERFORMANCE AND MUSIC

Fashion and music are deeply intertwined, sharing common ground in areas such as performance, semiotics, expressiveness, emotion, identity, and consumption. What unites them most profoundly is their ability to communicate through movement. According to Norogrando and Benetti (2016), fashion conveys meaning through images, shapes, and colors, while music does so through sounds. Both rely on signals, signs, and symbols to communicate - forms of expression that carry meaning. Once these forms are presented, it is up to the individual to interpret them. Two key factors that influence this interpretation are costumes and performance.

Throughout history, humanity has never been content with its natural appearance. From body paint to adornments, people have always sought ways to modify and enhance their image. This desire gave rise to the creation of costumes, allowing individuals to express themselves through their clothing, whether in rituals, theater, film, television, fashion, or music. In this sense, costumes emerged from the fundamental human need for self-expression (Leite, 2002 *apud* Mateus, 2022).

The first recorded use of costumes in performance dates back to ancient Greek theater. At that time, the plots were often based on Greek mythology, with performances commonly held in honor of gods, demigods, and mythical creatures. Over time, the depiction of everyday Greek life became more prevalent, with stories told through lyrical songs and events from daily life, divided into two genres: tragedy and comedy. These plays were staged in amphitheaters, where attention was given not only to costumes but also to elaborate sets - elements that would later be recognized as part of the broader concept of performance (Costa, 2010).

Costumes, as a form of expression and art, were essential in ancient Greek theater and remain crucial in any artistic performance today. They have become vital in shows and performances, as artists frequently use striking costumes to captivate and draw attention to themselves. This is true not only in theaters, films, and television but also on stages during musical and dance performances (Costa, 2018), as they serve as tools for visual storytelling and enhance the overall impact of the artist's presentation. More than mere clothing, costumes help convey the thematic essence of a performance, aligning with the music's message, mood, and narrative. They allow artists to embody different personas, elevate their stage presence, and create a cohesive aesthetic that resonates with the audience. Iconic performers like David Bowie, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga have used costumes to blur the lines between fashion and art, making their visual identity inseparable from their musical expression. In live performances, costumes can amplify emotions, add drama, and transform the stage into a theatrical experience, turning concerts into immersive



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spectacles. Through this visual language, costumes become an extension of the music, deepening the connection between the artist and the audience.

Performance gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, following the rise of pop art, minimalism, and conceptual art. Like costumes, performance intersects with the artistic world, blending elements of theater, visual arts, and music. During this period, artists used performance as a means to express and communicate their emotions to the public, especially considering that expression in the 1960s and 1970s was often confined to live exhibitions. In essence, the movement that began over six decades ago continues to provide artists with a platform to share their art with audiences today (Artref, 2020).

Fashion and music come together to create a kind of performative entity. Within performance, the two merge, allowing signals, signs, or symbols to be conveyed through the combination of sound and visual imagery. This convergence illustrates how clothing enhances the expressive power of music, amplifying the artist's intended message (Norogrando; Benetti, 2016).

It is important to note, however, that the interpretation of the message conveyed through costume and performance is subjective, varying according to each individual's perspective. Audiences are free to interpret the presentation based on their own views, enriching and diversifying the experience. Fashion and pop culture, as forms of expression, invite multiple readings and interpretations, reflecting societal and cultural trends that are constantly evolving (Norogrando; Benetti, 2016).

3 TAYLOR SWIFT

Taylor Swift was born in Reading, Pennsylvania. Her mother named her after James Taylor, a prominent figure in country music, and chose the name for its gender-neutral quality. Taylor spent her early years on a Christmas tree farm in Cumru Township, Pennsylvania. She began her education at Alvernia Montessori School, run by nuns, before transferring to the Wyndcroft School. On March 11, 1992, her brother Austin Swift was born (Purcino, 2013).

Music was always a part of Taylor's family life, with her maternal grandmother, Marjorie Finlay, being an opera singer who performed in productions such as *The Barber of Seville* and *West Side Story*. However, it wasn't until Taylor was nine that she started showing signs of pursuing music herself. During family trips to their beach house, she would sing while walking along the shore, performing for anyone who would listen. At this age, she developed an interest in musical theater and even received her first guitar, though she initially struggled to play due to her small fingers.



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Focused on acting, Taylor performed in productions of *Grease*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, and *The Sound of Music* with the Berks Youth Theater Academy. She also traveled to Broadway for acting and singing lessons, but after two years, without landing any major roles, her interests shifted (Parker, 2016).

At the age of eleven, Taylor became passionate about country music. She won a local talent contest by performing LeAnn Rimes' song "Big Deal," which led to an invitation to open for Charlie Daniels' show. At twelve, while continuing to perform locally, Taylor had a life-changing moment when a computer technician noticed a guitar in her home and asked if she could play. When she said no, he offered to teach her a few chords. Taylor immediately accepted and became dedicated to her new passion for singing and songwriting, never putting the guitar down again (Parker, 2016).

As a teenager, Taylor began working with RCA Records and met songwriter Liz Rose. Every Tuesday after school, they spent two hours writing songs that were deeply personal, often inspired by Taylor's experiences at school. Shortly after, she was introduced to producer Nathan Chapman, with whom she recorded demos. However, RCA had no intention of launching her career until she turned eighteen. At fifteen, Taylor made the bold decision to leave the label, explaining, "*I* wanted to capture these years of my life on an album while I still represented what I was going through" (Purcino, 2013).

Continuing to perform in Nashville, Taylor was eventually discovered by producer Scott Borchetta while performing at a coffee shop. Borchetta, who was with DreamWorks Records at the time, was impressed by her performance and offered her a deal with a new label he was starting, promising that she could write her own songs. Trusting Borchetta's vision, Taylor signed with Big Machine Records as one of its first artists (Parker, 2016).

Throughout her career, Taylor's musical and visual styles have evolved, with her outfits reflecting changes in her personality and performance style. Between 2006 and 2010, she released her debut album *Taylor Swift* (2006) and the follow-up *Fearless* (2008). Early in her career, she sported delicate blonde curls, projecting an image of sweetness and femininity. Given her youth, her outfits were typically more conservative, with dresses often falling to knee-length or below. Light, cool tones dominated her wardrobe, with black making rare appearances. During this period, her country music began to gain widespread popularity.

During the *Fearless* era, one of the most memorable moments of Taylor's career occurred at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards. While accepting the award for Best Female Video, Kanye West interrupted her speech, declaring that Beyoncé should have won instead. Despite the



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disruption, the *Fearless* album achieved massive success, with Taylor adopting a more vibrant and bold aesthetic during this time. Yellow became a prominent color in her wardrobe, along with brighter tones, shorter hemlines, and added sparkle, reflecting her growing confidence.

A second iconic moment from that night came when Beyoncé invited Taylor back on stage to finish her speech, showing solidarity after the interruption. In contrast to her earlier outfit, Taylor returned in a striking red dress, symbolizing her regained composure and channeling both her anger and newfound power. This moment not only highlighted her resilience but also marked a shift in her image, representing strength and empowerment. Figure 1 summarizes some of her fashion choices during this period.



Figure 1 - Taylor from 2006 to 2009

Source: Getty Images, 2023.



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Between 2010 and 2013, Taylor released Speak Now (2010) and Red (2012), marking significant shifts in both her music and fashion style. During the Speak Now era, her outfits took on a more whimsical, princess-like aesthetic, with elegant dresses and more sophisticated hairstyles, often featuring her hair tied up and with softer waves replacing her signature curls (Figure 2). This change signaled a move away from the innocent, country-girl image she had cultivated, as her music began to incorporate more pop elements.

With the release of *Red* in 2012, the transition from country to pop became even more apparent, and the color red became a central theme in her fashion choices, including bold red lipstick and outfits that embraced the fiery hue. Her wardrobe took a more daring turn, with plunging necklines, shorter hemlines, and slits that reflected her growing maturity and confidence. Taylor's hair also underwent a transformation, becoming sleek and straight, further distancing her from the curly-haired image of her early career. This period marked her official entry into the pop music world, solidifying her as a pop star.



Figure 2 - Taylor from 2010 to 2013



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Source: Getty Images, 2023.

Between 2014 and 2018, Taylor released *1989* (2014) and *Reputation* (2017), marking two distinct phases in her career. With *1989*, Taylor fully embraced a vibrant and sensual pop image, leaving behind her country roots. Her wardrobe featured bold colors, cropped tops, and plunging necklines (Figure 3), reflecting her confidence and maturity. She also debuted a short, straight hairstyle, in sharp contrast to the curls that once defined her look, further symbolizing her evolution as an artist.

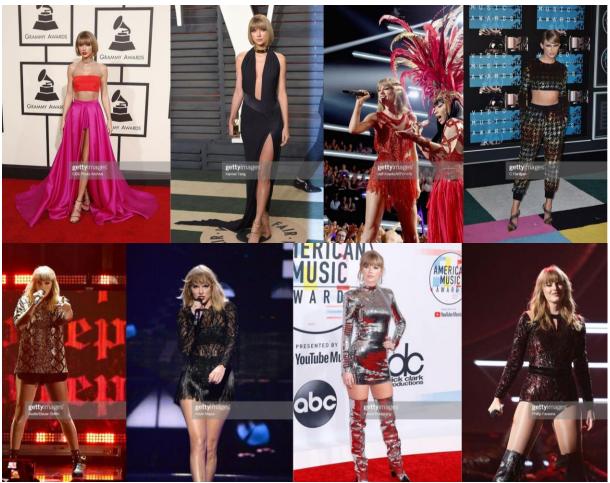
Reputation, released in 2017, took on a darker, more defiant tone. The album reflected a response to the public scrutiny and personal attacks Taylor had faced in the media. Black became a dominant color in her wardrobe, symbolizing rebellion and power. Sensual outfits, metallic elements, and the recurring snake imagery - used as a symbol of empowerment after being vilified - became central to her visual identity during this era. The album cover, designed to look like a newspaper, referenced the sensational headlines that often surrounded her, signaling her reclaiming of the narrative.

Figure 3 - Taylor from 2014 to 2018



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Source: Getty Images, 2023.

Between 2019 and 2021, Taylor released *Lover* (2019), *Folklore* (2020), and *Evermore* (2020), with the latter two albums embracing a more alternative and folk sound. During the *Lover* era, Taylor shifted away from the darker, rebellious themes of *Reputation* and embraced a softer, more romantic aesthetic. Pastel tones, such as pink, blue, and gold, dominated her visuals, creating a whimsical and light atmosphere. One standout element in her wardrobe was the frequent use of blazers, symbolizing empowerment, particularly in reference to her song "The Man," which critiques gender inequality.

This era also marked a pivotal moment in Taylor's career, as she went through a legal battle over the rights to her earlier works. In response, she began re-recording her albums as *Taylor's Version*, reclaiming ownership of her music. Figure 4 highlights the various outfits she sported during this transformative period, showcasing a range of styles that reflected her evolving artistic identity.

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Figure 4 - Taylor from 2019 to 2021



Source: Getty Images, 2023.

During the *Folklore* and *Evermore* era, Taylor adopted a more subdued and introspective style, influenced by the global pandemic, which led to the absence of a tour and fewer public appearances. Her wardrobe during this time reflected a sense of coziness and simplicity, with her arms often covered and minimal skin exposure to evoke warmth and comfort. Her hair was typically tied up, adding to the themes of innocence and simplicity, while her outfits featured gray and earthy tones, prints, and elements that created a magical, wintry atmosphere, mirroring the themes of the albums.

In 2022, with the release of *Midnights*, Taylor returned to a pop-focused sound and embraced a 70s-inspired retro aesthetic. Glitter became a prominent element in her wardrobe, symbolizing stars and the night, with many of her outfits featuring sparkling details and night-party styles that reflected the album's themes of introspection and late-night thoughts (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Taylor from 2022 to 2023



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Source: Getty Images, 2023.

Taylor Swift's current world tour, *The Eras Tour*, is a celebration of her diverse musical journey, featuring a three-hour show that traverses her entire career with a total of 44 songs. The tour begins with *Lover*, where Taylor performs in a vibrant, colorful bodysuit that reflects the passion of the album. For her rendition of "The Man," she dons a sharp suit, a direct nod to the song's themes of gender roles and empowerment.

The next segment, representing *Fearless*, showcases Taylor in a flowing dress that captures the essence of the era with its movement and color. As she transitions to *Evermore*, she appears in a dress adorned with a cape, embodying the album's magical and warm atmosphere. The *Reputation* segment is marked by a striking black jumpsuit featuring red snakes, symbolizing the shedding of skin and the resilience associated with the album's themes. The snake imagery pays homage to the symbolism used in the *Reputation* era. Figure 6 illustrates a compilation of the costumes Taylor has worn throughout *The Eras Tour*, each reflecting the unique character and aesthetic of her different musical phases.



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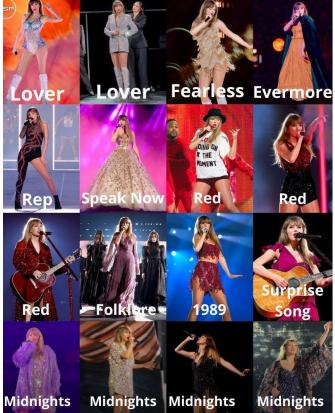


Figure 6 - Taylor Swift outfits in The Eras Tour

Source: Compiled by the authors (2023).

Taylor Swift has adeptly merged performance and fashion, using each phase of her career as a canvas to create a cohesive and visually compelling narrative. By referencing her various works and connecting each phase with distinct looks and settings, she has crafted a performance that not only celebrates her evolution but also engages the audience with a rich, performative experience. Norogrando and Benetti (2016) highlight that fashion and music together create a spectacle designed to convey and present a narrative to the audience. Taylor's *The Eras Tour* exemplifies this concept, as it offers a performative and comprehensive showcase of her musical journey.

To summarize the costumes observed in each era, a table has been created to identify the era, genre, main color, and the message conveyed, as depicted in Figure 7. This analysis draws from the image compilations above, song lyrics from each album, and Eva Heller's research on color psychology (Heller, 2012) to provide a nuanced interpretation of the messages associated with each era.



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	riguic			,
ALBUM	YEAR	GENRE	MAIN COLOR	MESSAGE
Taylor Swift	2006	Country		Positivity Prosperity Hope Sweetness
Fearless	2008	Country		Ascension Joy Understandm ent Courage
Speak Now	2010	Country		Enchantment Pleasure Sentibility Power
Red	2012	Pop/ Country		Love Cosiness Courage
1989	2014	Рор		Harmony Change Growth Fidelity
Reputation	2017	Рор		Revenge Renaissance Elegance Power
Lover	2019	Рор		Love Maturity Sweetness Safety
Folklore	2020	Folk/ Alternative		Nostalgia Cosiness Fear Optimism
Evermore	2020	Folk/ Alternative		Magic Warmth Cosiness Simplicity
Midnights	2022	Рор		Accordance Party Glamour Hope

Figure 7 - Eras analysis

Source: Authors (2023).

Taylor Swift has expertly used her outfits as a powerful tool to carve out her space and build a devoted fan base within the music industry. By meticulously working with shapes, colors, visual language and performance, she has achieved a remarkable spot in her 17-year career -



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something that is particularly notable for a young woman in the music industry. Far from fading into obscurity, Taylor continues to rise, consistently innovating in her music, costumes and stage presentations while maintaining the essence of what originally brought her success: her ability to merge fashion style and music into a cohesive narrative. Her career exemplifies the dynamic interaction between fashion and music, and she truly lives up to the status achieved within the music industry. Taylor not only meets market demands but also inspires and motivates her audience, embodying the intersection of these two fields with grace and creativity.

3 CONCLUSION

Historically, fashion and music have evolved as integral forms of human expression. From their origins, both have been deeply intertwined with clothing and performance, as seen in the theaters of ancient Greece. These elements come together to create a form of expressive art where information, ideas, or concepts are conveyed, making them essential for meaningful representation. Fashion in the musical world not only helps to differentiate genres but also serves as a means of expression.

Musicians who shift genres and styles face the risk of losing their audience and relevance in a market that is both competitive and demanding. However, Taylor Swift has navigated these transitions masterfully. Rather than diluting her fan base, she has expanded it by seamlessly harmonizing with each era of her career, attracting new admirers while retaining her original followers.

This study aimed to explore the significance of costumes in music and how fashion communicates through images, shapes, and colors, complementing the auditory experience of music. Costumes are relevant in bridging these elements, particularly in public appearances and performances. They are crucial not only in theaters, cinemas, and television but also on the stages of musical and dance performances, where artists use extravagant costumes to capture attention and provoke response.

By analyzing Taylor Swift's career through each of her ten musical eras and her recent tour dedicated to these eras, this study has fulfilled its objectives. It has examined the interplay between fashion and music, demonstrating why Taylor Swift is considered a musical phenomenon. Her ability to transition between genres while maintaining a cohesive fashion and performance strategy highlights the synergy between fashion, music, and performance, creating a unique atmosphere for each of her works.

The research confirms that the relationship between fashion and music, when leveraged



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effectively, contributes to an artist's lasting impact in the industry. Taylor Swift's success exemplifies how this relationship can be used to achieve a prominent and enduring presence in one of the most demanding fields of entertainment.

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