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It's Me, Hi, I'm the Fandom, It's Me: How Swifties Helped Build The Eras Tour

Pravina Manoharan
Music Department, School of The Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: pravina@usm.my

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Swifties helped build and sustain Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour through fan practices before, during, and after the live event. Drawing on Henry Jenkins' framework of participatory culture, the study analyses how fan activity took the form of Affiliation, Expression, Collaborative Problem-Solving, and Circulation across both concert spaces and digital platforms. Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative, triangulated approach combining on-site observations and 32 brief in-situ interviews conducted at Wembley Stadium, London, on 17 August 2024, with a purposive sample of 25 publicly accessible social media posts from Instagram, TikTok, X, and Facebook, alongside secondary sources. The analysis shows that Swiftie participation extended beyond expressive fandom into infrastructural labour, as fans organised tour knowledge, coordinated access, and documented experiences, ensuring the tour's afterlife online. At the same time, these practices were unevenly structured by regional location, mobility, affordability, and platform visibility, complicating celebratory accounts of participatory culture. Although Jenkins is useful for understanding the participatory dimensions of Swiftie activity, scholarship on fan labour, relational labour, and digital cultural memory shows that mega-tours are sustained not by performance alone but by fan work that is affective, organisational, and commercially viable. Empirically, the article contributes to fandom and popular music studies by using first-hand concert-ground data to show how participatory culture operates across the full life cycle of a global tour as infrastructural labour whose cultural meaning and economic value are co-produced by fans but unevenly captured by platforms and the live music industry.

Keywords: *Taylor Swift, fandom, The Eras Tour, participatory culture, Swifties*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of stadium "mega concerts" has become one of the defining features of today's live music performances, and Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour sits at the centre of this shift. Within its first eight months, the tour was reported to have crossed the US$1 billion mark, an unprecedented achievement for a single tour in that timeframe (Barnes 2024). During its entire run, the tour broke numerous records, most notably becoming the highest-grossing concert tour of all time, breaking the attendance record in stadiums worldwide and reported to have the highest-attended concert by A female artist in the US (Dunn 2024). When the tour took its final bow in Vancouver, Canada, in December 2024, Swift had performed a total of 149 shows across five continents for over 10 million fans worldwide, generating over $2 billion in ticket sales (Barnes 2024).

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However, while the tour's economic and global success has been extensively documented in both academic publications (Carroll 2023; Garcia-Borbón 2024; Hoff et al. 2025) and popular media (Chan and Dailey 2025; Dunn 2024; Litjens 2024), this success cannot be explained by production values alone. A key, publicly recognised dimension of the tour's impact is the organising labour of fans (Swifties). What remains under-examined is not whether fans participate, but how their participation helps sustain a mega-tour together across its different phases, and under what unequal conditions that work becomes visible, valuable, or even possible. This article addresses that gap by using The Eras Tour as a case study to show how coordination, documentation, and circulation help transform fan participation into cultural capital throughout the course of a global tour. At the same time, it draws attention to the unequal conditions under which participation becomes possible, particularly the role of platform amplification, the value generated through fan-run accounts, and the regional and economic barriers that shape access to mega-tours.

This article treats Swiftie practices as infrastructural labour: unpaid work that organises and archives tour knowledge and sustains fan-run resources that benefit the tour's wider commercial ecosystem (De Kosnik 2021; Stanfill 2019). While the term "Swiftie" appears in Dictionary.com (2023) to refer to Taylor Swift's dedicated fanbase, in this article, "Swiftie" is used as both a self-identified community label and a practice-based identity made visible through shared, live and online communal participation. In other words, "Swifties" in this study is not treated as a single group, but as a community shaped by live and online participation.

Guided by Henry Jenkins' (2012) framework of participatory culture that includes Affiliation, Expression, Collaborative Problem-Solving and Circulation, this qualitative study examines Swiftie participation before, during, and after the tour to show how fan practices (from outfit themes, bracelet exchanges, and travel planning) shaped both the tour's lived experience and its wider cultural visibility. The analysis triangulates data from first-hand interviews with fans and concert attendees at The Eras Tour in London on 17 August 2024, observations of fan interactions during the concert, social media content analysis across TikTok, X, Instagram, and Facebook, and secondary sources (media articles and academic literature) to provide an in-depth analysis of the role fans play in shaping and propelling their artist's global success throughout the span of a global tour. A key contribution of this article is the concert-ground data captured in real time, allowing participatory practices to be analysed as lived labour and coordination under the conditions of a mega-tour, rather than relying solely on retrospective media or online discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate the analysis, the next four sections review scholarship on mega-tours and live music economies, participatory fandom and platformed fan labour that shape access and participation in global touring.

Mega-tours and Live Music Economies

The evolution of live music events has led to an era where performances at massive stadiums drawing unparalleled audiences have become standard among top-tier touring musicians. In 2022, at the start of their Music of the Spheres World Tour, Coldplay had a 10-night run in Buenos Aires, and in September 2025, they broke Swift's Eras Tour record at London Wembley Stadium by performing another 10 concerts (Siwak 2024). Then, in August 2024, Adele commissioned the construction of a custom-built stadium in Munich reportedly costing $100 million for just 10 shows; and as part of the finale for her Celebration tour, Madonna performed a free concert for 1.6 million fans on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro (Shah 2024). More

recently, in 2025, Billboard Boxscore's year-end reports ranked Coldplay's Music of the Spheres World Tour as the highest-grossing tour of 2025 with $464.9 million, followed by Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter Tour garnering $407.6 million from 1.6 million ticket sales (Frankenberg 2025).

These mega-scale performances are a testament to the fact that large-scale record-breaking concerts have become a hallmark of global music tours. Accordingly, The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the number of performances hosted at the world's top 10 highest-grossing stadiums grew by more than 70% between 2019 and 2023 (Shah 2024). Industry reporting points in the same direction. In 2025, Live Nation, which owns Ticketmaster, reported Q2 revenue of US$7 billion (up 16%), with attendance rising 14% to 44 million fans, and stadium attendance tripling (Live Nation Newsroom 2025), underscoring how live performance has become a central engine of the contemporary music economy.

Yet the scale and record-breaking outcomes of these tours are not merely driven by the artist and promotional teams alone. Scholars have long argued that fans do not simply consume live events, but instead help organise participation, generate meaning, and circulate cultural value through shared offline and online practices (Carroll 2023; De Kosnik 2021; Jenkins 2009). Within a live tour context, this is visible in the growing demand for live concerts by fans who seek more personal engagement with their favourite artists through live performances (Carroll 2023). What remains under-specified, however, is how these concert-ground practices connect with platform activity over a tour's full run to produce scalable public traction and cultural capital, especially when fan coordination and documentation continue to shape the tour's "afterlife" beyond the final show. The Eras Tour presents a fitting case study to address that gap by analysing how fan coordination, documentation, and circulation function as the infrastructure that sustains mega-tours.

Participatory Fandom

The academic study of fan communities increasingly recognises fans as active agents who shape cultural meaning and industry outcomes, rather than mere passive audiences. Early fan studies frame fandom as participatory practice, where meaning is produced through shared interpretation and community activity (Jenkins 2009). More recent participatory culture work further clarifies that participation is sustained through social connection and a sense that contributions matter, even when those contributions happen in informal, fan-run spaces rather than official channels (Jenkins et al. 2013). Within the music context, this shift is especially visible because live events and artist narratives now travel through digital channels as much as through the stage itself, and fan activity often becomes the bridge between communal solidarity, publicity, and economic mobility, shaping what circulates and how it is interpreted beyond the venue (Carroll 2023; Riddick 2022).

At the same time, participatory fandom is often described in the language of empowerment, suggesting that fans gain voice and agency through shared practices. In her doctoral thesis on commodified fandoms, Georgia Carroll (2023) notes that fan spending is not merely transactional but deeply tied to emotional intimacy and community formation within fandom spaces. This agency, however, can take both economic forms (spending, gifting, collecting) and social forms (mobilisation and advocacy). For example, in 2008, Britney Spears' fans mobilised #FreeBritney on social media, rallying for justice in relation to her conservatorship and generating widespread attention. Even after the case ended in November 2021, the hashtag continues to be treated as a social movement with wider impact. (Riddick 2022). Similarly, BTS's ARMY has demonstrated their capacity to coordinate online campaigns, including raising funds within 24 hours to help people in India affected by the second wave of COVID-19 (Kanozia and Ganghariya 2021), showing how networked mobilisation can produce tangible social outcomes.

Alongside activism and fundraising, fandom is also shaped through recognition and access. Carroll (2023) describes how being noticed by an artist, either through a repost, comment, or other forms of acknowledgement, can operate as attention capital, raising fan status within the community, which further motivates participation (Carroll 2023, 139). Click et al's (2017) interview with 45 Lady Gaga Little Monsters shows how fans read social media engagement as relational connection rather than mere promotion. Likewise, artists like BTS have also been known to actively engage with their fans and express love for them by coining terms such as "I purple you" (an expression for everlasting trust and never-ending love) by BTS member V, and it has since become a symbolic expression of love between BTS and their fans, ARMY (Kanozia and Ganghariya 2021).

These recognition dynamics are also relevant to the Swiftie fandom. Carroll (2023) notes that Swift has built her career around her fans and has always portrayed "herself as a figure upon whom her fans can project their own experiences," and these shared experiences with her fans increase the connection they feel with Swift (128). Reports of Swift's direct engagement through online acknowledgement and fan-facing events such as "secret sessions" extend this sense of access and reinforce loyalty (McMahon 2024), which has been reported to directly impact an artist's commercial outcomes such as album sales, streaming numbers, and sold-out tours (Click et al. 2017). Scholars such as Baym (2018) describe this ongoing artist–audience exchange as relational labour, highlighting the sustained emotional work that helps maintain connection and continuity across time and platforms.

Baym's earlier work helps extend this point from artist–fan exchange to fan community maintenance. In Tune In, Log On, she shows how online fan communities sustain long-term bonds, norms, and shared knowledge through routine interaction, which is useful for understanding how tour participation becomes organised and maintained across platforms over time (Baym 2000). However, these forms of curated engagement are rarely neutral, as they are often shaped by the platforms and, more importantly, the industries that shape who get to participate, and on what terms. They can also generate more exclusionary and antagonistic dynamics, particularly when strong affective attachment to the artist turns participation into boundary-policing, defensive loyalty, or hostility toward perceived critics. In this sense, participatory fandom is not always experienced as supportive or empowering, as it can also involve parasocial intensity and, at times, coordinated harassment directed at journalists, critics, or other fans whose views are treated as threatening to the artist or the community (Proctor and Kies 2018).

This was most apparent in Asia, where The Eras Tour's expansion into the region shows how supposedly "universal" participation is constrained by geopolitical and economic gatekeeping. In 2024, the exclusivity agreement between the Singapore Tourism Board and AEG Presents resulted in Swift performing in only one Southeast Asian country, underscoring how state-led subsidies can dictate the boundaries of fan access (Guardian staff and agencies 2024). In such cases, participation becomes less a matter of willingness and more a matter of access and means, because fans who can travel benefit from experiencing the tour first-hand, while others are pushed toward online forms of engagement. This example in Singapore does not exclude participation; instead, it shows how participation is structured by uneven access. However, shifting engagement online does not resolve exclusion. It merely relocates participation into platform spaces where visibility and value are unevenly distributed, raising the question of how fan-generated content is captured and who ultimately gains from it.

Platform Fan Labour

If platforms become the primary site of engagement when live access is uneven, then the central question is not only what fans do, but how platform and industry structures shape what fan activity becomes. Critical fan studies caution that "participation" is often shaped by industry and platform interests that determine whose voices are amplified, whose labour is recognised and how fan activity is channelled into visibility and value (De Kosnik 2021; Stanfill 2019). Stanfill (2019) posits that industry invitations to "participate" do not mean increased fan power; instead, they are a form of managed engagement, because while fans create and share content, ownership and decision-making remain with the companies and social networking sites. Similarly, Scott (2019) contends that in today's mainstream media, fan engagement is vital and incorporated into official promotional strategies, but under conditions that define legitimate participation and constrain critique, often reflecting wider hierarchies, including gender and race.

De Kosnik's (2021) notion of "rogue archives" extends this critique by showing how fans' unpaid work of collecting, tagging, preserving, and circulating media effectively builds parallel archives that often go unrecognised. Yet their role in preserving cultural and social memory of an artist or event is crucial because they function as sites where contemporary digital cultural memory is produced and preserved (De Kosnik 2021). Terranova's (2012) account of "free labour" helps explain the political economy that underpins these dynamics. She notes that online cultural production is sustained by work that is voluntarily given, and can occasionally be exploited, as it becomes economically productive for networked industries. In this sense, fan practices which involve creating and sharing tour content, maintaining archives and coordinating concert attendance, function not only as community engagement but as value-producing labour that various online platforms can capture through metrics, advertising, and data extraction (De Kosnik's 2021; Stanfill 2019; Terranova 2012). Taken together, these studies reframe participatory culture as double-edged, because on one hand it enables connection, creativity, and collective meaning-making (Jenkins 2012) while on the other, it also produces unpaid labour and attention that others can extract value from (Stanfill 2019; Terranova 2012).

Within a live touring context, these platform engagements become operational, shaping how music fandom functions and is understood. Accordingly, The Eras Tour offers a clear case of how participation extends well beyond the concert itself, involving months of fan-led logistical and infrastructural work, like sharing guides, coordinating travel, predicting set lists, and circulating fan-made media that builds momentum long before the artist takes the stage. This article considers Swiftie participation as infrastructural labour, a practice that is both meaning-making for the fans themselves and value-generating within touring economies. According to Jenkin's, these practices exemplify participatory culture through collective engagement as fans collaborate to produce content and circulate cultural material (Jenkins 2012; Jenkins et al. 2013). However, when read alongside Stanfill (2019), De Kosnik (2021) and Terranova (2012), the same practices can also be understood as value-producing labour and unpaid marketing captured through online platform metrics and commercial ecosystems. The next subsection sets out the conceptual framework used to trace these participatory practices across the tour lifecycle, and to account for how they generate both shared meaning and uneven value.

Conceptual Framework

To clarify how the literature reviewed above guides the analysis, this subsection outlines the analytical framework used to interpret Swiftie practices across The Eras Tour. Rather than treating participation as either fan agency or institutional control, this article argues that Swiftie participation is infrastructural, as they do both at once. Jenkins' four categories of Affiliation, Expression, Collaborative Problem-Solving, and Circulation provide the primary framework

for tracing recurring forms of fan activity across the tour lifecycle, from pre-tour planning to concert ground rituals and post-show documentation. Jenkins (2012) posits that fans are not passive consumers, but rather active producers and participants who contribute significantly to their idol's success through various forms of creative engagement, including fan fiction, fan art, and fan communities.

At the same time, the article treats participatory culture as relational rather than one-directional. This is because, while participation creates social connection and shared meaning, it also generates resources, attention, documentation, and community coordination that can be converted into economic value within the wider tour and platform ecosystem. Participatory practices, therefore, do not only "belong" to fans, as they travel through systems that are governed by promoters, brands, media, and platforms, where visibility hierarchies and commercial incentives shape what circulates, what is rewarded, and who benefits most (Stanfill 2019; Scott 2019; De Kosnik 2021). In this article, Jenkins' participatory culture framework provides the theoretical grounding, while the accompanying scholarship is used to account for how these same practices can simultaneously operate as collective meaning-making and as infrastructural labour that sustains and scales the tour's public traction.

The Eras Tour

On 1 November 2022, less than two weeks after the release of her *Midnights* album, Taylor Swift took to her personal Instagram page to announce the dates for the first leg of The Eras Tour, describing it as "a journey through the musical eras of my career (past and present!)" (Swift 2022). Running from 17 March 2023 in Glendale, Arizona to 8 December 2024 in Vancouver, Canada, the tour was structured as a career-spanning retrospective, with sets organised around albums including *Lover*, *Fearless*, *Speak Now*, *Red*, *Reputation*, 1989, *Folklore*, *Evermore*, and *Midnights*, alongside acoustic "surprise songs" and, later, material from *The Tortured Poets Department*. This "eras" structure matters analytically because it produces a recognisable format that fans can anticipate, document, compare, and circulate across the tour's run. While the immense success of the tour, with its record-breaking attendance and revenue, undoubtedly reflects the astute marketing strategies of Swift and her team (Sidebottom 2024), this study treats the Swiftie fan base as a key organising force that helps sustain the tour's momentum and public conversation across time and platforms, a role Swift herself repeatedly acknowledged during the course of the tour (Chan and Dailey 2025).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative, triangulated approach to examine how Swifties contributed to the cultural visibility and lived experience of The Eras Tour through practices that align with Jenkins' (2012) participatory culture framework (Affiliation, Expression, Collaborative Problem-Solving, and Circulation). The analysis draws on four data sources: (1) concert-based observations at Wembley Stadium, London; (2) brief in-situ interviews and informal conversations with concert attendees; (3) purposively sampled social media content posted during the tour's lifecycle; and (4) secondary sources (news coverage and academic literature) used for contextualisation and corroboration.

In fan studies, research positionality matters, as it influences interpretation and opinions. In Wembley, I focused on Swiftie practices as coordinated work that informed how they organise, document, and circulate tour activity. To reduce celebratory bias, I treated interviews, fan accounts and platform material as evidence to be analysed rather than affirmed and triangulated them with academic publications.

Fieldwork and Interviews

On 17 August 2024, I conducted on-site observations at the concert grounds of Wembley Stadium, London. Observations were structured around recurring practices of Affiliation and Expression (e.g., bracelet exchanges, outfit theming, fan-to-fan interactions), noting where and how these practices were reflected across the concert grounds. Data were logged as field notes, capturing time, setting, and brief descriptions of interactions and practices. Given that interviews took place in an informal concert setting, interactions were brief and conversational, typically lasting 5 to 10 minutes. Due to the fast-paced and informal concert environment, written consent was not feasible; instead, verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants whose reflections are included. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and how their responses would be used, and anonymity was assured throughout. Consent was documented in field notes (time, context, and agreement). In this study, an "interview" refers to a brief semi-structured exchange (typically 5 to 10 minutes) guided by a small set of prompts on fandom identification, concert preparation (e.g., outfits/bracelets), the role of social media in planning and participation, and reflections on key fan practices.

Participants

In this study, I used purposive and convenience sampling and identified a total of 32 participants who were actively engaging in visible fan labour, such as those wearing elaborate era-specific costumes or actively trading friendship bracelets. This approach was chosen to specifically target fans who best exemplify Jenkins' categories of Expression and Affiliation. Additionally, this combined approach is practical in settings such as large live events, where participation depends on who is accessible and willing to engage at the time, while purposive selection helps ensure the data remain relevant to the research focus (Palinkas et al. 2015). Where consent was given, conversations were audio-recorded; otherwise, responses were documented through field notes. Verbal informed consent was obtained, and identifying details were anonymised in reporting.

Social Media Selection Criteria

Social media data were collected from The Eras Tour announcement (1 November 2022) through to the final show (8 December 2024) across TikTok, X (Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook to capture pre-tour posting, in-tour documentation, and post-show reflection. I conducted an initial purposive sweep using seed hashtags (e.g., #ErasTour, #Swiftie) followed by selective snowballing through comment threads and linked fan hubs to capture interconnected participatory practices (Omena et al. 2020). Materials identified through the sweep were screened against the eligibility criteria before they were archived and coded. To ensure relevance to the research focus and analytic alignment with Jenkins' framework, posts were included only when they met five eligibility criteria: (1) referenced The Eras Tour directly; (2) aligned with at least one of Jenkins' (2012) participatory categories; (3) were publicly accessible; (4) fell within the stated timeframe; and (5) could be reliably documented (stable URL and/or time-stamped metadata).

Following Kozinets' (2019) netnographic practice of searching, selecting, and saving online material, each sampled post was logged with contextual metadata (platform, date, handle, format, brief description, and category/categories) and archived as screenshots to support transparent coding. Each post served as the unit of analysis; comments were not analysed unless directly relevant to the practice under discussion. The final analysed dataset comprised 25 posts drawn from 22 public accounts across Instagram (n = 6), X (n = 6), TikTok (n = 5), and Facebook

(n = 5). Finally, posts were coded against Jenkins' four participatory categories and grouped into recurring patterns to develop higher-level themes (Braun and Clarke 2006; Miles et al. 2014).

Limitations

Fieldwork was conducted at a single tour location and date (Wembley Stadium, London, 17 August 2024), and therefore does not claim to represent Swiftie practices across all tour legs or regions. The social media corpus is purposive and limited in scale (25 posts), shaped by public accessibility and platform visibility, which is intended to support qualitative interpretation rather than to map fan labour online.

PRE-TOUR: BUILDING THE ERAS TOUR TOGETHER

In the months leading up to The Eras Tour, Swiftie participation took shape as an organised set of fan practices rather than a spontaneous reaction that occurred only on show day. This is consistent with participatory culture theory that treats fandom as collective activity, where meaning and momentum are produced through shared interpretation, collaboration, and circulation across fan-run spaces (Jenkins 2009; Jenkins et al. 2013). In touring contexts, this participation becomes especially visible because the concert is only one moment within a longer cycle of planning, documentation, and coordination that fans sustain across platforms and time. Therefore, rather than treating The Eras Tour as a contained concert event, this article analyses it as a tour lifecycle sustained through fan participation before, during, and after show day. Using Jenkins' participatory culture categories as an analytic map, I trace how these practices cluster around Affiliation, Expression, Collaborative Problem-Solving, and Circulation.

After the tour announcement in November 2022, fan activity across Tumblr, X, Facebook, and Instagram functioned less as background excitement than as an infrastructure of coordination, where fans shared information, compared interpretations, and organised plans months before Swift's first show on 17 March 2023. Jenkins' Affiliation was evident in the formation of Instagram accounts like @swiftiesforeternity, @taylorerastour and @swifttitude, which served as communal hubs and resource platforms for fans by providing regular updates and helpful tips regarding the tour (Levin n.d.; The Eras Tour n.d.; Julieann n.d.). With a large following (recorded at the time of capture) including some of Taylor's backup dancers, @taylorerastour (The Eras Tour n.d.) was among the most prominent accounts posting daily updates, surprise songs and venue advice from dress code ideas to how to trade friendship bracelets safely at the venues. Rather than simply reflecting pre-existing enthusiasm, these accounts helped organise participation by turning fan-run spaces into practical sites of tour preparation and knowledge exchange. Read through participatory culture, these hubs show how fandom is organised through shared knowledge-making and coordination across fan-run spaces (Jenkins et al. 2013).

Expression came alive through the wave of creative content generated by fans during this period. Yet these posts did more than showcase creativity. They helped standardise the visual and interpretive codes through which participation in the tour became recognisable online. Hashtags such as #ErasTourOutfits, #taylorswifterastour, #surprisesong and #erastour gained significant traction, with accounts like @ErasTourOutfits and @erastourfashion amassing thousands of likes for content showcasing themed looks ranging from 1989 rhinestones to Folklore-inspired outfits (Eras Tour Fashion n.d.; Eras Tour Outfits n.d.). There are also accounts like @erastourfashion and @eras_tour_outfits dedicated solely to cataloguing Taylor's wardrobe, while also analysing and suggesting suitable outfit themes from the different eras for fans to choose from (Eras Tour Fashion n.d.). A more data-driven strand of this pre-tour production appears in the verified Instagram page @headfirstfearless by Kayla Wong (n.d.), where charts,

predictions, and spreadsheet-based tracking invite ongoing comment-thread corrections and collective forecasting, revealing how tour knowledge is collectively produced rather than simply consumed. On platforms like this, comment threads often function as informal peer review, where followers add missing dates, dispute assumptions, and refine predictions, reinforcing Jenkins' (2009) Collaborative Problem-Solving as tour knowledge is publicly corrected, refined, and recirculated rather than passively received. Additionally, these sites also operate as infrastructures of labour, where fan-led activities of maintaining updates, answering questions, and managing resources require sustained, unpaid work that helps retain engagement and drive circulation across the platforms (Baym 2000; De Kosnik 2021; Terranova 2012). This in turn produces value that can be captured by platforms and the wider tour management rather than only by the fandom itself.

Swiftie participation also translated into offline affiliation through platformed encounters that produced real-world support and meeting points. What matters here is not simply that fans interacted online, but that digital affiliation could be converted into material assistance, mobility, and durable social ties. One example circulated by British artist Chris Lloyd (@chrislloydart) began with a post (25 May 2023) where he offered to trade his artwork for Eras Tour tickets. Weeks later, a fan from Miami contacted him privately and wrote: "Hey Chris! I'v just seen your page and your art is so beautiful... It's a long ways away but if you're free on August 16, 2024 and in London, do you wanna come with me to Wembley??" The exchange matters here because it shows how affiliation can translate a platform encounter into practical support and access. A similar story of fan engagement was posted on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on 14 June 2024 about Lauren Stephenson from Manchester and Brinda Selvamanoharan from Toronto, whose long-term online friendship eventually culminated in meeting at Anfield Stadium in Liverpool in June 2024 (Sherlock 2024). Taken together, these examples show that Affiliation in Swiftie culture is not merely symbolic, but can produce concrete forms of support and connection that move beyond the platform itself.

Pre-tour participation also intensified when access systems failed, making collaborative problem-solving both more visible and contested. In 2022, the overwhelming demand for The Eras Tour tickets caused the ticketing platform to malfunction, leaving many fans frustrated and unable to purchase tickets (Ticketmaster Business 2022). Instead of functioning solely as a space for venting frustration, social media became a site for Collaborative Problem-Solving. Fans shared strategies for navigating queues, exchanging codes, and avoiding scams, while accounts such as @erastourresell emerged to broker resales between buyers and sellers (Eras Tour Resell n.d.). While this episode echoes Jenkins' emphasis on how communities converge to solve shared problems (Jenkins et al. 2013), it also revealed the more contentious side of platformed fandom. News about the malfunction, mistakes and misinformation were amplified just as rapidly, and some exchanges shifted from support to blame and hostility in the comment threads. This is consistent with evidence that social feedback reinforces outrage expression, and the same infrastructures that enable coordination can also intensify affect and escalate conflict when access is scarce, and stakes are high (Brady et al. 2021).

Taken together, these pre-tour practices show that Swiftie participation was not simply expressive, but organisational. Rather than merely illustrating Jenkins' (2012) participatory culture framework, they also support Baym's (2000) argument that online fandom is sustained through long-term community work rather than momentary responses. However, what appears "new" in pre-tour spaces can be better understood as a familiar pattern of participatory infrastructure, where fans build and maintain the social and informational scaffolding that makes large-scale participation possible (Baym 2000; Jenkins et al. 2013). This matters for the article's contribution because it helps show how participation is simultaneously meaning-making for fans and revenue-generating for platformed touring economies (Stanfill 2019), revealing the uneven value capture across the tour lifecycle.

DURING THE TOUR: SWIFTIE RITUALS AND COLLECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

During the tour, participation was not confined to fan engagement inside the stadium alone, but unfolded as recurring practices that reflected how the concert was experienced, documented, and circulated across the tour's run. What becomes visible in the venue is therefore an extension of what happens on platforms before and after each show, rather than separate from it. Read through Jenkins' participatory culture framework, these practices can be traced across Affiliation, Expression, Collaborative Problem-Solving, and Circulation, but the analytic focus here is the mechanism of how these practices convert concert attendance into scalable public traction and tour continuity, and how the resulting visibility can be captured as value (Jenkins 2009; Jenkins et al. 2013).

Much of this online and on-the-ground activity is driven by the tour's structure itself. The Eras format, organised around Swift's 10 studio albums and the nightly surprise song segment, creates built-in cues for anticipation and comparison across dates platforms. This encourages fans to track differences, predict outcomes, and document moments that can be circulated as tour knowledge beyond the concert night. One example is the fan-created mobile app Swift Alert, which formalises tour tracking into a notification interface. Developed by 34-year-old product manager Kyle Mumma and two other friends, the app alerts fans to key moments of each concert in real time, while allowing them to predict surprise songs and Swift's outfit changes for each era. (McMahon 2024). According to Jenkins (2009), this is Collaborative Problem-Solving and Circulation organised through an interface. However, when viewed through fan labour, this app is also a fan-built tool that helps sustain attention and engagement that platforms can monetise through metrics and advertising (Terranova 2012; Stanfill 2019). These mechanisms help explain why participation is scaled unevenly, because while the tour invites constant documentation, the means to track, post, and circulate at volume is shaped by resources and platform visibility.

This unevenness was especially apparent in Southeast Asia. The concentration of the tour in Singapore as its only Southeast Asian stop made visible the exclusions built into seemingly communal fan participation. For Malaysian Swifties and other Southeast Asian fans, the tour was geographically near, yet materially out of reach, as travel costs, ticket scarcity, and cross-border logistics often shifted participation into platform-based rather than venue-based forms. Therefore, apparent regional closeness also exposed the unequal conditions through which participatory culture was experienced. Although communal at the level of fandom, this participation was, in practice, structured by inequalities of access and mobility.

These uneven conditions also structured what happened inside the stadium. In-stadium participation also took visible forms, particularly through outfit theming. At Wembley, fans described era-specific outfits not only as homage but as narrative self-placement within Swift's discography. For example, on 17 August 2024, one Swiftie noted that she chose a *Speak Now*-inspired look because the album "got me through high school," framing the outfit as a way of carrying a personal history into a shared public setting. Within participatory culture, this outfit choice embodies what Jenkins identifies as Expression and Circulation, where fans not only consume cultural products, but actively produce and share meaning through visible creative work. At the same time, once digitally captured and circulated, these looks also operate as unpaid promotional labour. Fans supply the images, narratives, and attention that keep the tour present between shows, while platforms and touring agencies capture the resulting visibility and metrics for their benefit (Stanfill 2019; Terranova 2012). This points to an imbalance in participation, because the creative labour and expense of era theming sit largely with fans, yet what travels furthest is filtered through platform logics and status hierarchies. In turn, as De Kosnik (2021) and Stanfill (2019) suggest, the benefits of circulation are not shared equally.

Where outfit theming renders participation immediately apparent, friendship bracelet exchanges extend it through portable, repeatable acts of exchange. Rather than treating them as sentiment, I read these exchanges as an infrastructure of Expression and Circulation. What began as a reference to the lyric "Make the friendship bracelets…" from the song "You're on Your Own, Kid" has become a shared practice that enables quick interactions between strangers and generates content that can be easily photographed and circulated. Bracelets therefore operate as a multifunctional artefact, fostering social bonds through exchange, functioning as travelling platform objects and driving demand for bracelet-making materials. By the time The Eras Tour reached Australia, friendship bracelet exchange had expanded beyond symbolic gestures into a small but visible market phenomenon, as news coverage documented bare bead shelves, repeated online sellouts, and substantial increases in bracelet-related sales (Litjens 2024). While this does not diminish the practice's social meaning, it does show that participation is also materially and economically influenced.

This unevenness became clear to me at Wembley. Before the show, I made over 50 bracelets to exchange, an effort that felt substantial until I arrived at the venue and realised how large-scale and routinised the practice had become. One fan I met had made over 500 bracelets, illustrating how participation varied not only in enthusiasm but also in capacity. Yet the exchange itself still carried strong social meaning. As we spoke, she selected one that read "LONDON" and said, "This is for you," turning the bracelet into a small marker of place, memory, and encounter. Another fan from Dublin said, "I came here alone, but every time I exchange a bracelet, I make a new friend," illustrating Jenkins' Affiliation, where strangers become friends simply through a shared ritual. At the same time, my Wembley encounters made clear that this affiliative practice was unevenly distributed, as not all fans could afford the time, materials, or labour required to participate at scale. The bracelet ritual may foster a sense of community, but its benefits are still shaped by access and resources, an inequality that becomes sharper when tour attendance itself is uneven.

If themed outfits and bracelets operate as portable, platform-ready objects that turn Affiliation into Circulation, fan-built digital systems extend this infrastructure further. *Billboard* reported that fans like Aamir Shah and TikTok user Tess Bohne have become key figures in livestreaming The Eras Tour, curating high-quality feeds across platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram for international fans who are unable to attend the tour due to geographic or economic reasons (McMahon 2024). These fan-led efforts exemplify real-time Collaborative Problem-Solving and Circulation, as fans organise access, coordinate information, and sustain participation beyond the stadium itself. For Malaysian Swifties and other Southeast Asian fans who could not access the tour in person, such mediated practices became a crucial, if unequal, way of participating in the communal experience of The Eras Tour. However, while the motivation behind these livestreams is to help fellow Swifties, they also constitute a form of unpaid labour that produces measurable platform value. As Stanfill (2019) notes, such participation is often made "useful" to commercial systems, even as the infrastructural and cultural labour fans build is unevenly recognised and rewarded.

Taken together, these during-the-tour practices reveal participatory culture as both lived practice and infrastructural labour. The concert becomes a site where fan rituals are enacted and felt in real time, but their wider effects depend on how they are documented, formatted, and circulated through platform systems. This section therefore analysed Swiftie practices not as a celebratory catalogue of fandom, but as mechanisms through which touring culture is organised, producing collective meaning while also generating attention and value under conditions of uneven access and platform control. However, what is produced during the show does not end there, as it becomes the archive, evidence, and circulating material through which the tour acquires an afterlife online and across fan communities.

POST-TOUR: REMINISCING THE TOUR TOGETHER

Fan-led participation does not end when the concert itself is over. Rather, it moves into a post-tour phase in which Swifties continue to generate meaning, visibility, and connection through digital acts of remembrance, recirculation, and reinterpretation. What was lived in the stadium is reformatted online as memory-work: recap threads, visual tour diaries, reaction posts, and commemorative uploads that keep The Eras Tour alive within public discourse long after each show ends. These recap threads, visual tour diaries, and commemorative posts can be understood as forms of mediated memory and fan archiving, through which past experience is reformatted for ongoing circulation (De Kosnik 2021). They sustain attention, produce fresh engagement, and extend the commercial and cultural afterlife of the tour across platforms that profit from ongoing interaction. Even the discourse around "post-Eras Tour depression" (McMahon 2024) can be understood in these terms, because rather than withdrawing from fandom, fans channel post-concert affects into communal memory-making, thereby converting emotional attachment into renewed content production and circulation.

One example of this post-tour afterlife appeared on 24 June 2025, when Taylor Swift made a surprise appearance in Nashville alongside Kane Brown to perform "Shake It Off" at an event connected to Travis Kelce's Tight End University programme. Although this appearance was not officially linked to The Eras Tour, Swifties interpreted the surprise as an extension of memories created during the tour. Clips of the duet circulated rapidly over platforms like TikTok and X, and fan responses repeatedly framed the moment through the affective language of Eras-era participation and the emotional charge of watching Swift perform live again (McMahon 2024). In this sense, Swifties are not simply reacting to the event but performing interpretive labour that sustains the tour's life cycle within public discourse. Additionally, given that such recirculation also generates visibility and engagement, it simultaneously operates as unpaid fan labour, even when it is experienced by participants as care, excitement, or generosity. Comments like "I miss the daily livestreams" (Taylor Swift's Vault) and "CANNOT BELIEVE I JUST WATCHED MY FIRST LIVE OF TAYLOR SINGING SINCE ERAS" (@tessdear) show how an otherwise separate performance was immediately tied back into the emotional and participatory experience of The Eras Tour (Newport n.d.; Bohne n.d.). Post-tour circulation therefore not only preserves memory, but also draws new events into the tour's collective emotional framework.

A second major post-tour moment came on 30 May 2025, when Swift announced that she had regained ownership of her original masters, including her first six albums (Chan and Dailey 2025). Swifties responded not simply with celebration, but with coordinated amplification, using their own platforms to frame the announcement as the culmination of a long collective struggle over ownership, loyalty, and artistic justice. Jenkins' (2012) framework is especially useful here because it positions fans not as passive consumers but as active participants. Their ticket purchases, digital amplification, and long-term loyalty formed part of the commercial and affective conditions within which Swift was able to regain ownership of her masters. Swift herself acknowledged this in her letter to fans, when she wrote, "The passionate support you showed those albums and the success story you turned The Eras Tour into is why I was able to buy back my music" (Swift 2025). In doing so, she frames the buy back not only as a personal or industrial victory, but as an outcome made possible through a sustained relationship between artist and audience, echoing Baym's (2018) concept of relational labour, where maintaining audience relationships becomes part of the work through which musical careers are sustained. Swift's letter therefore symbolically resituates fans as participants rather than observers, showing that Swifties were not simply celebrating an outcome, but were instrumental in helping her regain her music masters.

Post-tour participation is also sustained through commemorative platform practices. Instagram accounts like @taylorerastour, which was active during the pre-tour and during-tour phases, continue to repost anniversaries, milestone moments, and nostalgic reflections that reactivate fan memory and renew engagement. On 24 June 2025, the account posted a commemorative post marking one year since Travis Kelce joined Taylor Swift onstage during night three of The Eras Tour in London. While clearly nostalgic in content, the post is an important digital participatory act of collective memory-making as it invites fans to comment, repost, and relive the tour in ways that keep Swift visible across both fan platforms and mainstream media. In this sense, post-tour postings are not passive reflection but an ongoing participatory practice through which memory itself becomes platform content.

Taken together, the post-tour phase shows that participatory culture does not end with the live event, but shifts into an afterlife of archiving, recirculation, and renewed meaning-making. Swifties preserve The Eras Tour not simply by remembering it, but by continually remaking it through posts, clips, commemorations, and interpretive framing that keep the tour active in the public and platformed discourse. In Jenkins' terms, these practices extend Expression, Affiliation, and Circulation beyond the concert itself, while also demonstrating how fan participation remains central to the tour's ongoing cultural life. In this sense, the post-tour phase reveals how remembrance itself becomes labour, as fans continue to generate the visibility, engagement, and circulation through which the tour remains culturally and commercially alive.

CONCLUSION

Taken across the pre-tour, during-tour, and post-tour phases, The Eras Tour demonstrates that fandom is central to how the live music event is organised, experienced, and sustained over time. This article has argued that Swiftie participation is best understood as a form of participatory infrastructure that helped shape the cultural and commercial life of the tour. Through Jenkins' framework, Swiftie practices repeatedly took the form of Affiliation, Expression, Collaborative Problem-Solving, and Circulation. Yet the significance of these practices lies not only in their visibility as fan activity, but in the ways they generated continuity, attention, and value across platformed environments.

At the same time, the study has shown that these practices cannot be understood only as celebratory expressions of fandom. They also involve labour, as fans produced and circulated content, archived memories, amplified milestones, and maintained engagement in ways that generated attention and commercial value, even though the benefits of that labour were unevenly distributed and not equally recognised. The value of The Eras Tour as a case lies not in repeating the established claim that fans are central to cultural events (De Kosnik 2021; Jenkins 2012; Scott 2019; Stanfill 2019; Terranova 2012), but in showing how participatory fan practices operate as infrastructural labour across the pre-tour, during-tour, and post-tour phases of a major global tour. This article's contribution is further strengthened by first-hand data gathered at Wembley, where interviews and observations of fan practices move beyond digital traces alone and provide an empirical account of how participation is performed, negotiated, and unevenly distributed on the ground.

In this sense, The Eras Tour offers more than a high-profile example of fan enthusiasm. It provides a useful case through which to understand how contemporary live music increasingly depends on networked fan practices that are affective, creative, organisational, and platformed at once. Swifties did not simply respond to the tour as audiences. They helped format its meanings, sustain its momentum, and extend its afterlife through practices that blurred the boundaries between spectatorship, promotion, community-building, and labour. The tour's scale makes these processes unusually visible, but the dynamics it reveals are not unique

to Taylor Swift. Rather, they point to a wider transformation in which live music events are increasingly co-produced through audience participation that is both culturally generative and economically consequential.

This article therefore contributes to fandom studies and popular music studies by showing more precisely how fan participation operates across the full life cycle of a major tour, and by foregrounding the tension between participatory culture and unpaid fan labour within that process. If Jenkins helps explain how fans affiliate, express, circulate, and collaboratively solve problems, then Stanfill, Terranova, Baym, and De Kosnik help show how those same practices are captured, valued, and unevenly rewarded within commercial and platformed systems. What The Eras Tour ultimately makes clear is that contemporary touring is not sustained by performance alone, but by fan communities whose labour helps produce the event before, during, and long after the concert takes its final bow.

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