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The Big Business of Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce

Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce's high-powered relationship hasn't just dominated headlines: It's had an enormous impact across commerce, social media, audience shares and more

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Taylor Swift's latest love story was always going to make headlines. She could've begun dating a tech tycoon, a movie star or a teacher. But something happened earlier this fall when the pop star was spotted with Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. Worlds collided. Swifties became football fans, football fans became Swifties, and those who already inhabited both demographics rejoiced. A viral TikTok trend even emerged in which women jokingly told their incredulous husbands, brothers and dads that Swift "put Travis Kelce on the map."

Kelce is and already was, of course, a star in his own right. The tight end — who was drafted by the Chiefs in 2013 and has two Super Bowl wins and eight Pro Bowl appearances to his name — was already building out his brand pre-Swift with his own podcast, an *SNL* hosting gig, a one-season reality dating show and several commercial endeavors. But the Taylor Swift Effect has only broadened his reach. And the sheer force of the power couple as a unit has in turn fueled Swift's ongoing pop-culture domination.

In the process of finding love, the pair have also expanded their fan bases, their projects have been cross-promoted and the businesses of those in their inner circles got a boost.

Part of their magic, according to one analyst, is that Kelce and Swift can both sell out stadiums, but they shine in different arenas. "There's no ego competition. Travis is a star on the football field," Neil Schwartz, president of sports market

analytics firm SBRnet, told The Messenger. "This relationship seems so well-compartmentalized."

Here's a detailed look at the ripple effect of their relationship across commerce, social media, audience share and more.

Kelce and Swift in New York in October. Photo: Johnny Nunez/WireImage. Johnny Nunez/WireImage

New audiences and no competition

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Everything Travis Kelce Has Said About Taylor Swift

Swift dating an athlete produces a different, more dynamic kind of synergy, compared to her past romances within the entertainment industry. The relationship is clearly a strong emotional match — in her recent *Time* Person of the Year cover story, Taylor Swift spoke about how the two are "proud of each other" and happy to be "showing up for each other" in front of the world. Yet considering the couple strictly from a business perspective, Schwartz believes dating a sports star is "the best thing she ever could've done," as Swift and Kelce can empower one another to thrive in their own realms without either feeling overshadowed. Both are at the top of their fields, and their successes are playing out alongside, rather than as a result of, their budding relationship. Kelce's Chiefs have won eight of 12 games so far this season, while Swift recently had her biggest sales week ever with her *1989* re-recording release.

They're also expanding and diversifying each other's audiences. More Swifties are watching Chiefs games, hoping to catch a glimpse of their favorite singer cheering in the stands. During the team's Oct. 1 game, viewership by girls aged 12-17 spiked 53% compared with the three prior weeks for *Sunday Night Football*. The audience of women aged 18-24 jumped 24%, and those over age 35 increased 34%. Meanwhile, Swift is reaching new demographics.

"From a demographic perspective, Taylor doesn't need much help," Ed Tiryakian, an associate professor of corporate finance and business economics at Duke University, told *The Messenger*. But, illustrating the potential signal boost of Swift's new exposure in the NFL sphere, he cites a 2023 survey that showed that more than 70% of African Americans self-identify as either avid or casual football fans while also pointing to a different survey conducted this year, which found that just 13% of Swifties are African American.

The NFL accounted for 82 of the 100 most-watched U.S. TV broadcasts in 2022. Given that statistic, an early-October Chiefs game was an ideal place to air some Eras Tour movie trailers.

"The most popular singer in the world with the most popular sport in the world has to be a promotional dream come true and from a fan/customer acquisition

strategy, sounds like an ideal Harvard Business [School] case," Tiryakian added.

Photo: Jeff Bottari/Getty Images. Jeff Bottari/Getty Images

More than a football player

While Swift's business acumen has been well-documented for years, Kelce's own commercial savvy has only more recently come to focus. Since joining the NFL in 2013, the tight end has never just been a professional football player. He's a fashion icon, an influencer, an entertainer and a businessman.

In October, *The Wall Street Journal* interviewed Kelce about his personal style and "bedroom-sized" closet, which houses more than 300 sneakers alone. Kelce is

a self-described "impulse shopper," always browsing e-tailers for new looks. "Money gave me access to certain designers and just certain fabrics that I absolutely love now," the football player said about his sartorial evolution. Kelce is also a budding fashion designer himself. In 2019, he launched his own clothing line, Tru Kolors. "The city I grew up in was a very multicultural place," he said at the time, describing his hometown of Cleveland Heights, OH. "It has a lot of different social classes, so I got quite a bit of a melting pot to grow up in and to understand everyone else's differences in this world and appreciate that because they're all my friends still to this day. I created Tru Kolors so there could be a connection between me and not only my fans, but people that are interested in what Tru Kolors' meaning really is."

In November, ahead of the Chiefs' Monday Night Football matchup against the Philadelphia Eagles, Tru Kolors unveiled a new official collaboration with Kelce's team, another smart move.

The new merch drop comes after sales of Kelce's official team merch surged 400% in the wake of Swift's first appearance at a Chiefs game, according to sportswear and fan-merchandise company Fanatics. (His brother, Philadelphia Eagles center Jason Kelce, is no merch slouch either, often topping the list for being the number one female jersey seller.) Meanwhile, Tru Kolors' "Klassic Hoodies" have all sold out.

Also, back in February, Kelce invested in Casa Azul Tequila Soda, and the canned cocktail saw a 200% increase in Google searches from late September to October. (Notably, Swift was spotted with the Kelce-backed beverage at a recent Chiefs game.)

His existing big-name sponsors include Nike, Pfizer and State Farm. And his podcast, *New Heights With Jason and Travis Kelce*, is currently the No. 2 show on Apple Podcasts.

The Chiefs star's net worth is currently projected at around \$40 million. In 2016, he signed a five-year extension for \$45 million, including \$22 million guaranteed and an annual salary of around \$14 million. Kelce told *Vanity Fair* earlier this year, "My managers and agents love to tell me how underpaid I am." Of course, he still gets paid plenty. Beyond all of the above, Kelce is also a bona fide influencer with a combined 7 million followers on Instagram and TikTok. Says Tiryakian: "He could well get \$1 million per post."

Photos: [PortlandApparels/Etsy](#); [CoastalLouiseCompany/Etsy](#); [BrookhavenCollective/Etsy](#). [PortlandApparels/Etsy](#); [CoastalLouiseCompany/Etsy](#); [BrookhavenCollective/Etsy](#)

Social media's main characters

You can't scroll online for more than 10 seconds without seeing a headline or social-media post about Kelce and Swift. They're about as viral as it gets, the biggest pop-culture story of the year. Every public moment of the relationship has been carefully documented, from Kelce vying for Swift's attention with a friendship bracelet to Swift singing "Karma is a guy on the Chiefs" and running into his arms after a show, and everything in between. Fans and media sites posted about Kelce's exact hand placement on her waist when they step out together. A picture of Swift seated next to a plate of chicken fingers, ketchup and "seemingly ranch" at a Chiefs postgame function became a meme and inspired a limited-edition Heinz condiment line. Everything they do is news, no matter how mundane. People have even made custom Travis-Taylor fan accounts and quick-turnaround merch.

Kelce gained 1.6 million Instagram followers since going public with Swift, now

counting around 5 million. "Kind of amazing for a non-quarterback," said Tiryakian, who noted Swift's 276 million followers. "I think we'll call it social-media osmosis." (For context, Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers has 2.3 million followers, while Steelers linebacker and top NFL player TJ Watt has 1 million.) The attention, of course, has its ups and downs. "If you're going to be in my life, I feel like there's a certain amount that comes with it that I can't stop from happening. I can't stop from you getting a call in the morning saying the tabloids are writing this today. I can't help it if there's a guy with a long lens camera two miles away with a telescope lens taking pictures of you. I can't stop those things from happening," Swift said in 2020, explaining the meaning behind her song "Peace."

But Kelce seems to share with Swift an ability to maintain a strong center amid the media whirlwind. "Everybody knows I'm a family guy," he told *The Wall Street Journal* in a recent profile. "Her team is her family. Her family does a lot of stuff in terms of the tour, the marketing, being around, so I think she has a lot of those values as well, which is right up my alley."

Taylor Swift, Brittany Mahomes, Blake Lively, Ryan Reynolds, and Hugh Jackman watch the Chiefs play the Jets in October. Photo: Kevin Sabitus/Getty Images. Kevin Sabitus/Getty Images

Powering their orbit

Meanwhile, some in the couple's inner circle are benefiting from the constant coverage that surrounds them.

Kelce and Swift's union potentially connects influential people in different spheres who otherwise may not have met (see: Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes' wife Brittany and Swift's friend Ryan Reynolds potentially bonding over owning soccer teams).

They're also boosting friends' brands.

Fox sportscaster Erin Andrews helped plant the seed for the pair's relationship when she interviewed Kelce in August, and the new couple seems determined to return the favor. "Please, try our friend Travis. He is fantastic," Andrews pleaded on her podcast. "Take us up on this. Go on a date with this guy." Two months later, Swift wore a jacket from Andrews' WEAR clothing line to a Chiefs game — and it sold out the next day.

Andrews sees the relationship as beneficial not just to her own brand but to football culture as a whole. "I've met Taylor once before and I was blown away with how sweet she was and just how great she is with her fans and how she is having fun with this," Andrews told *The Messenger* in early November. "I think it's so cool. I think it's great for our sport."

And in October, former Browns quarterback Bernie Kosar posted a picture with Swift and plugged his wellness brand U Matter in the caption, leading to a spike in searches for the player, per Google Trends.

More eyes on Kelce and Swift also means more eyes on the NFL. Among Swift fans, 76% are 40 and younger, with more than half of them being female. The NFL, with a fan base that's more than 60% male and 50-years-old on average, could use those new viewers. Food for thought: the NFL has 153 million fans 13 years and older, according to Schwartz and SBRnet's data. Taylor Swift has 276 million followers on Instagram. "If [the NFL] could nudge the percentage of female fans from 33% up to 35%, that's a big jump," Schwartz said. "Maybe Taylor Swift is able to help them sell more tickets and get more women into the stadium."

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell seems to be thinking along similar lines.

"They seem to be enjoying their relationship, that's great in and of itself," he told *CBS Mornings* of the couple in a recent interview. "But it has connected more fans of Taylor's and more fans of the NFL in some way to see that now they have a connection to our game."

He added, "Taylor, she's an unbelievable artist, obviously Travis is an unbelievable player. I think it's great for the league to have that kind of attention. We welcome it."

Swift at a Chiefs game in September. Photo: David Eulitt/Getty Images. David Eulitt/Getty Images

TRAVIS KELCE TAYLOR SWIFT

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