

# Swift/Kelce Star Power Effect? Engagement created a 96% increase in NFL discussion online with 82% of social media posts expressing “joy” about the couple

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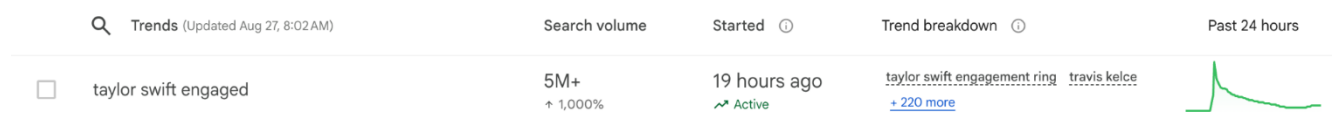
## **ABSTRACT**

*On August 27, 2025, Grammy winning singer Taylor Swift and football champion Travis Kelce announced their engagement. Celebrity couples inspire popular reactions with commercial implications. A research study from the Joetta Di Bella and Fred C. Sautter III Center for Strategic Communication in the College of Communication and Media at Montclair State University analyzed online reaction in the period immediately after the power couple’s engagement was announced. Results suggest overwhelming interest, positivity, and potential benefits to major brands, such as the National Football League. Findings include a 96% increase in brand references for the NFL and Kansas Chiefs on social media (mere days before the season’s start), 82% of social media posts about the couple’s engagement expressed “joy”(13,265% increase in joy related posts from the previous period analyzed), 10 million Instagram likes and 153K social media discussions generated (a 7222% increase), and a spike in interest for other brands associated with the stars’ engagement including fashion/apparel (63% increase) and 520K views for a post from the city of Cleveland.*

Romantic relationships among celebrities serve an invitational and voyeuristic function for modern audiences. Such relationships invite widespread public evaluation on topics ranging from their fit as a couple to aesthetic assessments of their romance. Additionally, such connections allow the public a feeling of intimacy with the celebrities that feels more personal than mere consumption of the celebrity's professional activities. Rankin (2017) noted this creates a feeling that celebrity couples “‘belong to us.’ They are in our lives and we all feel like we truly know them, as if they were our own friends and family” (Rankin, 2017). Despite consumption of material related to celebrity coupling offering feelings of mutuality, such instances are, in reality, “one-sided relationships with media figures” (Scherer et al., 2022, p. 128) that sociologists and psychologists have called parasocial relationships.

When celebrity relationships escalate to engagement and potential matrimony, these feelings become more acute and more robust fodder for public discourse, particularly in the online space. The novelty in such cases is that they serve to present a narrative of private moments becoming spectacles of public consumption (Choi and Shahin, 2025). As Widholm and Becker (2015) note, “rituals that take place in public become collective events” (2015, p. 10). The presentation of celebrity intimacy as a public interest, however, projects power onto these notable figures (Dekavalla, 2012). That “star-power” offers an opportunity for branding, visibility, and greater connection to the fandoms the celebrity has cultivated (Choi and Lewis, 2017). In the case of engagement and marriage among notable figures, research has consistently found that there are economic implications related to consumer behavior (Raad et al., 2022).

On August 27, 2025, Grammy winning singer Taylor Swift and Tight End Travis Kelce of the Kansas City Chiefs announced their engagement. Significant research has considered the economic and social media impact of this coupling (Choi et al., 2024; Rovell, n.d.; Yi Luo, Montclair State University et al., 2023). With their engagement made public, there was a 1,000% increase in search volume on Google searches on “Taylor Swift engaged,” totaling over 5 million searches in the span of 19 hours.



With the online world's frenzy to learn more about the power couple's engagement, further scrutiny of the online impact of Kelce/Swift social media discourse is merited. As noted previously, celebrity couples invite scrutiny and judgment from the public, which is heightened when an engagement is formalized. Additionally, the effects of social media on branding and marketing through the visibility of the engagement similarly calls for consideration. With that in mind, this report will consider the following research questions:

**RQ1: What was social media sentiment in posts made about the Kelce/Swift engagement?**

**RQ2: What impact did the engagement announcement have on brand related messaging and visibility?**

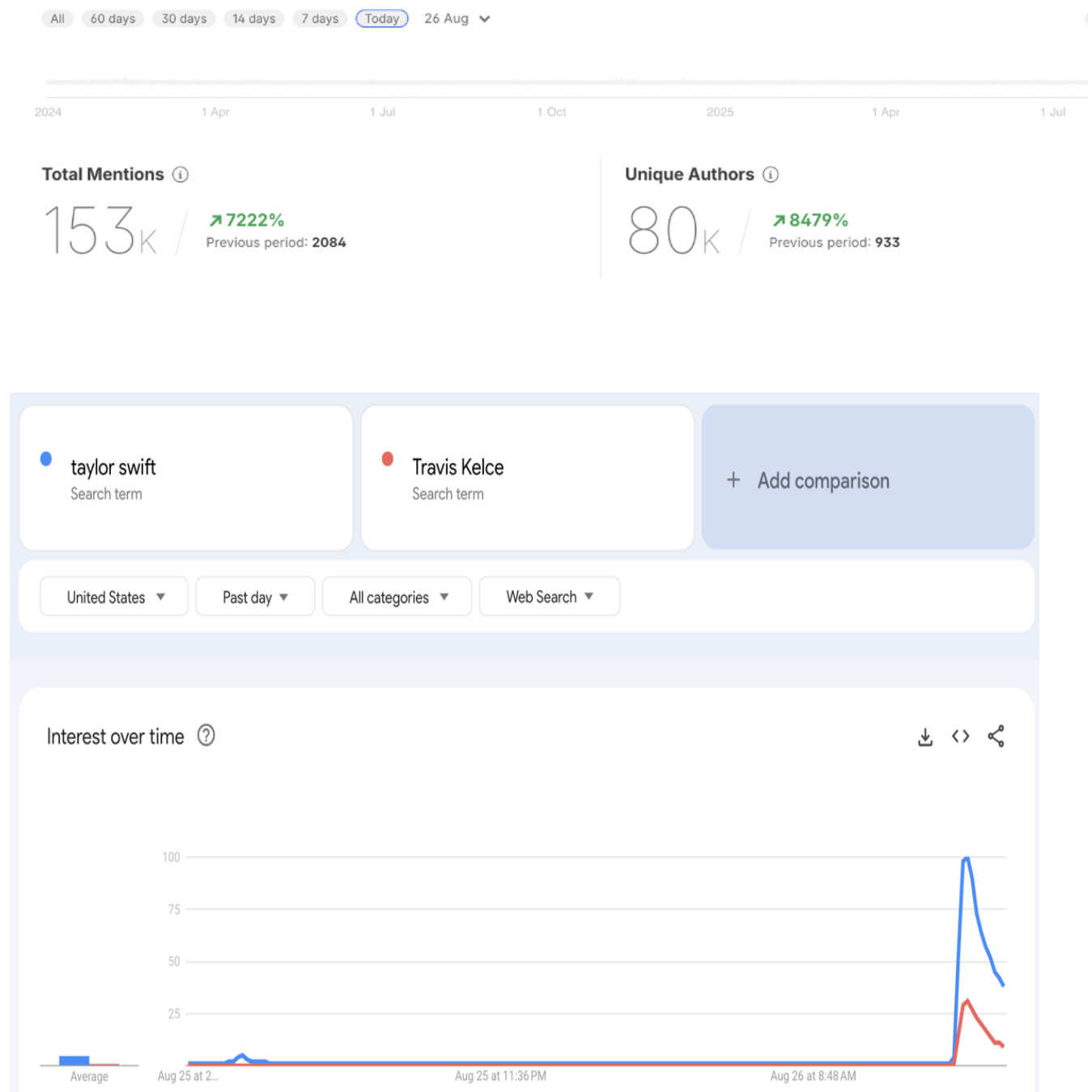
## **METHOD**

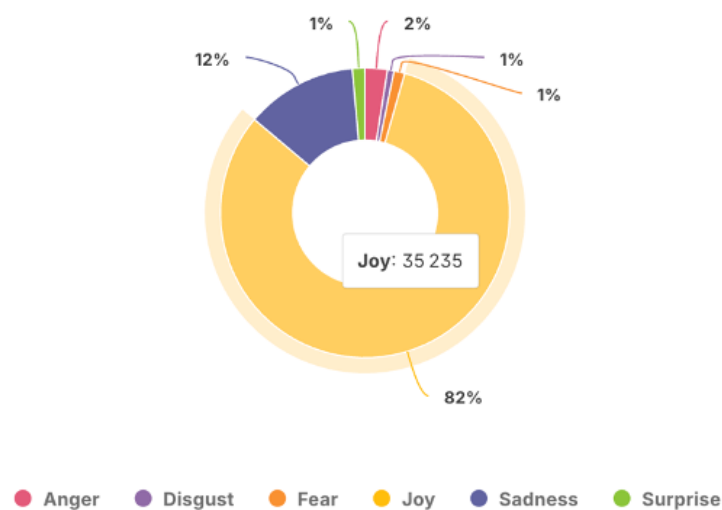
To answer these questions and examine the social media frenzies surrounding Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce's engagement news, this study used the artificial intelligence (AI)-driven social media analytics tool, *Brandwatch*, to harvest and analyze social conversations. A specific search query was created on *Brandwatch* for data collection. Particularly, to collect social reactions towards the mega celebrity couple's engagement news, a combination of key words such as "Taylor Swift's engagement," "Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce engaged," "Swift and Kelce love story," and others were used. Given the enormous number of social chats surrounding this engagement news and our purpose of examining the real-time online responses, this study only focused on August 26, 2025, the day their engagement news was announced. Interestingly, *Brandwatch* collected 87% of posts from X (formerly known as Twitter). The dominant role of X as a content source is not surprising as this platform is preferred for discussing breaking news (Alkhodair et al., 2020).

## **FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The engagement news of Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce has overshadowed other significant national and even global news. Their social media announcement on Instagram broke records on the platform, garnering over 10 million likes within the first hour. After the engagement announcement at 1 p.m., social media discussions reached 153K with a stunning 7,222% increase. The majority of social conversations occurred between 1-2 p.m. accounting for over 52% of the total volume. Impressively, the Internet search for the couple as well with 100% surge in Google search for Taylor swift as shown in Google Trends.





### ***Emotions***

Social media users expressed overwhelmingly joyful emotions toward the high-profile couple’s engagement news with 82% of social posts categorized as joy, a striking 13,265% increase of this particular emotion. Much of this joy was attributed to the playful caption of the announcement–“Your English teacher and gym teacher are getting married,” further fueling discussions about Swift’s popular song “So High School” dedicated to Kelce. This lighthearted approach resonated well with their fans who appreciated the couple’s playful approach to blending romance with humor, which further deepened fans’ emotional connection to the story. With Kelce being a star player in the NFL and Swift’s continued dominance in the pop music charts, this engagement signifies the merge of two influential worlds, making the couple more captivating to their fans. Apparently, Swift’s engagement ring became a topic of fascination. The ring features an 8-carat diamond of an Old Mine Brilliant cut designed by Kindred Lubeck of Artifex Fine Jewelry (Jackson, 2025), famous for

its vintage appeal (Mercuri, 2025). Social media users dissected the ring's features with excitement, gushing about its vintage-inspired aesthetic. Such design resonates with Swift's style, symbolizing their love and a new chapter in their love story.

The ardent public frenzy about the couple's romantic relationship reflects narrative transportation theory (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000) where individuals become fully immersed in a story that they temporarily place themselves into the world of the story. The strong emotional engagement expressed by social media users toward the couple's engagement demonstrates this deep immersion of their fans who became transported into Taylor and Kelce's world, experiencing it like a serialized romance. Each game appearance, date night, and engagement rumor act as a chapter in this narrative. Swifties have framed the couple's romance as a modern fairy tale with background music like "Love Story" or "Enchanted," hence investing emotionally in the celebrity couple's relationship as if it were part of their own lives.



### ***Impact on Brands***

The power couple's engagement news triggered unintended impact on various brands. City of Cleveland's congratulatory post for Kelce and Swift raked over 520K views, far exceeding the city's usual engagement levels on its official channel. A routine civic update just

transformed into a viral spotlight, indicating how even unrelated brands can achieve celebrity moments to amplify visibility by building cultural relevance through the power couple. Notably, immediately after the engagement news, Swift's chic Ralph Lauren striped dress that features a flattering silhouette was sold out within minutes of the announcement. The social mentions of Ralph Lauren spiked 63% instantly. Fans admired her classic fashion choice, which reflects her personal style. Unsurprisingly, Swift's personal milestone immediately turned into a fashion moment that sparked troves of

social chats on airy fabric and elegant design of her dress. Especially, as fans rushed to emulate her look, such commercial chain reaction has offered an undisputable testament to Swift's power on driving immediate consumer demand, reflecting an intersection of celebrity culture and fashion marketing. This engagement news evolved into a pop cultural moment, blending romance with commercial interests and fashion style.



Given Kelce's status as a star tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs, the NFL emerged as another major brand beneficiary of the engagement news with over 96% of increase in brand references for NFL and Kansas City Chiefs on social media. With the upcoming NFL



season, social media users expressed mixed reactions regarding how the couple's personal relationship intertwines with their professional careers. Supporters raved about how such a power union may diversify NFL's viewership and fan groups. Even the senior vice president of global brand and consumer marketing at the NFL credited Swift for attracting Swifties into the game (West, 2025). Swift's presence undoubtedly has increased ticket sales and viewership ratings. However, some fans complained that Swift has created huge distractions from the game. Furthermore, critics contended that the timing of this announcement came too close to the new NFL season's kickoff and the launch of Swift's new music album. This personal news seemed to be a meticulously orchestrated move to maximizing their media coverage and commercial interests. Social discussions from social media users exhibited a complex mixture of sports and celebrity culture.

Impressively, the force of Swift and Kelce has reached to seemingly non-related brands, such as Cracker Barrel. The restaurant chain has recently suffered an intensive online backlash over its rebranding. Particularly, the redesigned logo angered conservatives who framed the restaurant chain's logo change as a capitulation to "woke culture" (Placido, 2025). The launch of this divisive logo proved expensive, costing the brand almost \$100 million loss in stock market (Picchi, 2025). In the midst of this online outcry, the announcement of Swift and Kelce's engagement provided Cracker Barrel an unexpected relief. Social media users joked that the CEO of Cracker Barrel must be grateful for the celebrity couple as their headline-grabbing news momentarily created a distraction from the company's logo controversy. Some social media users even created funny memes that blended the power couple's engagement photos with references to Cracker Barrel. Such posts suggest that users simultaneously expressed excitement with Swift's engagement news while venting frustration over the brand's logo change. Such duality of blending joy over a cultural milestone with discontent over a corporate decision manifests the complexities of media consumption in today's digital media era.



Everyone's losing their minds over Taylor Swift's engagement 💍 and the new Cracker Barrel logo 🍷... so we decided it's only fair to drop a big reveal of our own.

Introducing the brand-new Berglund Center logo. You're welcome, Roanoke.



## RESEARCH OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

Cumulatively, these results confirm celebrity coupling as a space of moral voyeurism on the part of audiences, especially in the online space. Revisiting this report's research questions, discussion was expectedly widespread online with sentiment expressed about the engagement. Notable in this instance is that, despite some visible detractors, "joy" was overwhelmingly the most identified emotion in Swift/Kelce engagement posts.

In evaluating the branding impact of the engagement noted in the second research question, it appears that mentions for products associated with the engagement dramatically altered consumer behavior. Additionally, this report suggests that online activity associated with the engagement was particularly beneficial to the NFL, as the engagement created millions of NFL related media impressions mere days before the start of the 2025 season. In sum, this engagement reflects the public and commercial interest in celebrity relationships and marriage. Whether it is excitement about Kelce's next touchdown or the release of Swift's new album, the coalescing of these emotions around the narrative of their relationship has found cultural resonance. The effect of that resonance is varied and merits ongoing study by researchers.

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