



**The nature of cancel culture,
portrayed in tweets and online
articles: Exploring the cases of
journalists Alexi McCammond,
Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers
Morgan**



Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree **Master of Philosophy in Arts** at The Independent Institute of Education, IIE/MSA.

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ABSTRACT

Cancel culture inflicts both public disparagement and financial or social loss upon its targets in response to actual and alleged wrongdoings and has been the cause of many journalists' sudden unemployment. There is a gap in available literature and recent research on the phenomenon of cancel culture with regards to journalists and their contribution to their cancellation, with existing information being both minimal and contradictory. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of cancel culture on Twitter as well as journalists' involvement as the targets or victims of cancel culture. Three theories, namely the theory of confirmation bias, social identity theory, and social contagion theory, were used to understand the elements of cancel culture. The fundamental elements of cancel culture consist of social media, specifically Twitter, wokeness or wokeism, decontextualisation, cancellation and call-out. Three exemplar cancellation cases (in which journalists were the targets of cancel culture), involving American journalist Alexi McCammond, South-African journalist Lindsay Dentlinger, and British journalist Piers Morgan, were examined. Using a case study design, a basic- and exploratory qualitative research approach was taken, and the interpretivist paradigm was used. Qualitative content analysis was used in a directed and summative manner to collect 45 newspaper- and magazine articles, as well as over 300 tweets. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis with the help of abductive coding, line-by-line coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Wokeness was determined to be the core of cancel culture and Twitter call-outs involving journalists. Other identified sub-elements of the process include inciting incidents, decontextualisation, call-outs, cancellation, public support, and recovery. Some of these sub-elements could occur iteratively or simultaneously with others. The main finding was that cancel culture, as it starts on Twitter and involves journalists, is a semi-linear process that generates clear beginnings but unclear ends. The research was limited by the fact that only outputs of communication were collected and analysed. It is thus recommended that further studies conduct interviews, along with the collection of tweets, to understand the thought processes behind users' Twitter call-outs.

Keywords: Cancel culture, call-outs, wokeness, Twitter, journalists, Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, Piers Morgan

DECLARATION

I, Teliza van Eeden Vorster, student number ST10085923, declare that:

- (i) The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
- (ii) This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

“All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others.” (Orwell, 1946: 68). These are the words of livestock characters in a George Orwell (1946) novella that showcase how some members of society proclaim a false sense of equalness by enforcing rules and enacting penance onto others without applying those rules to themselves. Much like these characters, enforcers of cancel culture have punished people for actual and alleged offences (Trottier, 2020), by engaging in behaviour that they claim to abhor (Chiou, 2020). Such punishment, however, tends to be reserved for public figures (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Palomares, Dumlaog, Cabacungan, Acera, Ancheta, Gelacio, Martin, Abordo, Aglugub & Balmaceda, 2022), with journalists and news publications having been targeted as part of digital criticism in the last few years (Cheruiyot, 2022).

The study will research the nature and process of cancel culture by assessing three exemplar cancellation cases involving journalists Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan. It will examine how the cancel culture process operates on Twitter, how it progresses, and how each journalist was cancelled. Specifically, the study aims to better comprehend the nature and process of cancel culture on Twitter and in online articles, as well as journalists’ involvement in it.

The purpose and background of the study, the relevance of the topic and its relationship to the discipline of communication, conceptualisation efforts, and the philosophical underpinnings of the interpretivist paradigm are addressed in this chapter. The research problem and research questions, that are rooted in a qualitative research approach, along with the methodology and the feasibility of the study are also provided.

1.2 Context of the study

The Latin origin of the term ‘context’ refers to linking things or bringing them together (Shehadeh, 2020), and the contextualisation of a research study refers to the act of linking annotations to existing knowledge to produce theories that form a larger whole (Rousseau & Fried, 2001). The context will be explored in terms of the purpose and background of the study, and the relevance of the topic and its relationship to specific disciplines.

1.2.1 Purpose of the study

Purpose statements convey the intent of a research study (Creswell, 2009) and reiterate that a study is conducted to either explore a new issue, describe a phenomenon, or explain

why something transpires (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Cancel culture is a relatively new phenomenon with little empirical research to detail it (Cook, Patel, Guisihan & Wohn, 2021), and is thus a new issue to be explored and described. The purpose of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of contemporary cancel culture that mostly operates on Twitter along with the cancellation of a selection of journalists and how their actions and reporting relate to the phenomenon. An objective of the study is to explore the various elements of cancel culture, as it uses Twitter as a conduit, and the cancellation of journalists, through the analysis of three cancellation processes involving journalists from different countries.

1.2.2 Background of the study

While phenomena involving public humiliation and online shaming are not new (Saint-Louis, 2021; Velasco, 2020), empirical research and literature conducted on the nature of contemporary cancel culture, which coerces public shaming (Norris, 2020a), seem to be both minimal and contradictory (Cook et al., 2021) as many deny the existence of the culture (Douthat, 2020; Greenspan, 2020; Norris, 2021). Hagi (2019, cited in Cook et al., 2021) claims that it exists but is merely a cultural shift in society that ensures people of power are held accountable for their actions. Even news outlets seem to have conflicting statements about the phenomenon, as seen in the following examples.

An article published by the Cable News Network (CNN) claims that cancel culture is not real, and that demanding accountability for someone's wrongdoings is an old phenomenon (Willingham, 2021). The article also details examples of people whose careers have recovered after they were 'cancelled' as proof that no one can really be cancelled (Willingham, 2021). However, an article in The Justice suggests that cancel culture is a serious issue that, ironically, needs to be cancelled (Nakkab, 2020). Public figures such as Elon Musk have also commented on the phenomenon, saying that it needs to end, with nearly 500 000 Twitter users agreeing with him, as depicted below.

Cancel Cancel Culture! [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter:
<https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1262783922708058113?lang=en> [Accessed 4
August 2022].

Figure 1.1 – Elon Musk tweet (Musk, 2020)

Given the contradictory nature of available research on cancel culture, the study aims to research the culture, based on the premise that it is a real and serious phenomenon. The

research study will examine how public figures, specifically journalists, are affected by it, and can contribute to the minimal and contradictory body of knowledge on modern-day cancel culture.

Notwithstanding the contradicting opinions about the existence, severity, and significance of the phenomenon, incidents of cancellation and public shaming have always existed (Mishan, 2020) and have evolved and increased over the last few years because of the ever-growing influence of social media (Sossi, 2021). This is especially due to the social media platform Twitter that primarily drives cancel culture (Bouvier & Machin, 2021).

Specifically, the study will explore the call-outs and cancellations surrounding journalists Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan. McCammond was targeted by cancel culture and called out on Twitter for tweets that she had posted a decade ago (Ritschel, 2021). Dentlinger experienced Twitter call-outs after conducting interviews that people deemed as controversial surrounding the wearing of masks during the Covid-19 pandemic (Pijoos, 2021), and Piers Morgan was called out for disbelieving public claims made by the Duchess of Sussex (Fuster, 2021).

1.2.3 Relevance of the topic

Research findings can affect people's daily lives as it is used to raise children, reduce crime, improve health, and understand many aspects of life (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Social research is conducted to gain new knowledge about phenomena in the social world (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Despite the phenomenon of cancel culture being abundantly present on social media platforms and there being many opinions on the topic, there is limited academic research (Cook et al., 2021), with existing literature debating whether the culture is a myth or a reality (Norris, 2021). A survey, involving almost 2500 scholars from 100 countries, found that researchers are less likely to publicise their views if those views do not fit in with mainstream beliefs (Norris, 2020b). This may be the case with cancel culture as researchers might be reluctant to investigate the phenomenon in fear of getting cancelled themselves (Velasco, 2020). Others believe that the term 'cancel culture' has become too associated with biased perspectives and that it is a waste of time to research (Norris, 2021). However, social scientists have a moral obligation to investigate and conceptualise terms to explain social phenomena (Norris, 2021), making cancel culture a topic worth studying.

As mentioned before, cancel culture is largely driven by Twitter activity and has been used to cancel journalists. Cancel culture is thus worth studying considering the prolific

availability of online methods of communication. i.e., social media platforms like Twitter, and the involvement of journalists. The study is important as it will add to the body of knowledge on the nature of and journalists' involvement in cancel culture.

1.2.4 Relationship of the topic to the discipline of study

Cancelling individuals begins and is largely executed on the major digital communication platform, the social media application Twitter (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). The topic is thus relevant to the discipline of communication as it pertains to how people in the cancel culture society communicate their concerns and demands through tweets, comments, shares, and retweets on Twitter.

Cancel culture can also negatively impact an individual's reputation (Harper, 2020, cited in Palomares et al., 2022). According to Gibson, Gonzales and Castanon (2006: 15), reputations are an important criterion for success and are linked to public relations as they "fundamentally concern public perceptions." The research study thus relates to the subdiscipline of public relations, as well, because it will examine how journalists' reputations or public personas can be affected by cancel culture. The study is also relevant to the field of journalism, as it will analyse three cancellation cases where journalists were the targets of cancel culture. It will look at how each journalist contributed to their own cancellation, what actions were taken against the journalists, and how each one responded to their situations.

1.3 Conceptualisation of key terms

Conceptualisation in qualitative research involves creating clear, succinct definitions of the key concepts of a study that might be amended based on the data that is collected (DeCarlo, 2018). People have different perspectives on what certain words mean (Babbie, 2008, 2021), so conceptualisation, and its resulting concepts, can reduce ambiguity in research studies (Onen, 2016) by clearly communicating how relevant terms are defined in the research (Babbie, 2008, 2021). The definitions for certain concepts from previous research can be analysed to decide whether those definitions should be challenged or used as is (DeCarlo, 2018). The key terms conceptualised for this study include cancel culture and the sub-elements that accompany it, such as cancellation and call-outs, social media and Twitter, wokeness, decontextualisation, the mainstream media and journalists.

1.3.1 Cancel Culture

Cancel culture refers to a person suffering consequences for something that they have

said, done, or posted that has been deemed offensive or derogatory; they essentially get ‘cancelled’ (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Sossi, 2021). Cancellation tends to relate to topics of social justice, mainly racism, sexism, prejudice against sexuality, bullying and other related concepts (Ng, 2020). People can also get cancelled for real or supposed pejorative acts (Trottier 2020).

Cancellation consists of two main parts, the first of which is the withdrawal of support (Brito, 2021; Chiou, 2020; Nakkab, 2020; Ng, 2020), whether it be financial or social (Brito, 2021; Ng, 2020), which can also include ostracism (Norris, 2020a, 2021; Sage, 2022). Support can also be withdrawn in a public manner, which informs and influences others to also withdraw support from the supposed wrongdoer (Brito, 2021). The second part of cancellation involves being silenced or censored in some way (Brito, 2021; Tufekci 2018, cited in Cook et al., 2021).

However, before cancellation occurs, individuals get ‘called-out’ on social media for their actions. These call-outs involve creating public awareness of a person and their so-called offences (Ahmad, 2015) and telling them that they have done something wrong (Matei, 2019). Twitter users do this in the form of tweets, as seen with journalist Lindsay Dentlinger who was called out on Twitter for alleged controversial behaviour (Pijoos, 2021).

In this study, the definition of cancel culture will incorporate all the above-mentioned aspects. It will thus be regarded as call-outs posted on Twitter; of real or perceived offensive acts involving topics of racism, sexism, sexuality, bullying, and other related topics, which lead to supposed wrongdoers experiencing censorship or a loss of support.

1.3.2 Social media

Social media refers to online social platforms that allow for worldwide interactive communication (Manning, 2014) through user-generated content (Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2018). These platforms are media of choice when it comes to enacting elements of the cancel culture process (Zille, 2021a). Instances of cancellation will be examined with an emphasis on one particular social media platform: Twitter.

Twitter is a social networking site that lets users make short posts, known as ‘tweets’ (Malik, Heyman-Schrum & Johri, 2019), and has been involved in both the origin and quickening of the cancel culture phenomenon (Brito, 2021; Semíramis 2019, cited in Cook et al., 2021). The study will utilise the definitions of social media and Twitter as it has been expressed above.

1.3.3 Wokeness

Wokeness lies at the root of cancel culture (Beiner, 2020, cited in Velasco, 2020). Wokeness has been referred to as people's cognisance of social issues or injustices around them in the pursuit of social change (Sobande, Kanai & Zeng, 2022; Whiteout, 2018). Nowadays, however, wokeness is referred to as inauthentic forms of activism on social media (Sobande et al., 2022) against the oppression of different identities (Sage, 2022) based on the belief that reality is built through social means (Beiner, 2020, cited in Velasco, 2020). For this research study, wokeness will be seen as the foundation of cancel culture that considers reality to be socially constructed and leads to inauthentic or performative forms of social media activism against supposed oppression of different identities.

1.3.4 Decontextualisation

According to South African politician, Helen Zille, decontextualisation is a part of the cancel culture process (Zille, 2021b). It involves evaluating something out of its original context (American Psychological Association, 2021; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), either deliberately or subconsciously (American Psychological Association, 2021). A study on East Asian cultural interactions, states that such contextual edits can cause new meanings to be applied to ideas, beliefs, or texts (Chun-chieh, 2013). The study will utilise the above explanations to define decontextualisation, i.e., taking or interpreting something out of context, either deliberately or subconsciously, and adding new meaning to it.

1.3.5 Mainstream media

Traditionally, mainstream news media referred to outlets with employees who work to distribute information and news stories, whether it be via newspaper, magazine, television, or radio (Salaudeen & Onyechi, 2020). Journalist Mark Deuze (2019) originally thought of journalists as people who embody journalistic values – such as serving the public by breaking the news and investigating claims to uncover truths – but has since learned that journalism is not such a seamlessly organised process of values, due to the introduction and advancement of information technology and social media. The journalism community has also gained new genres and expanded to where even ordinary citizens take on the role of journalists to contribute to news coverage (Zeng, Jain, Nguyen & Allan, 2019). Social media allows non-journalists to disseminate news to the public in the form of citizen journalism (Simons, 2016).

In this study, the description of 'mainstream media' will concur with Salaudeen and

Onyechi's (2020) definition, claiming that it consists of news organisations whose employees disseminate news through newspapers, magazines, television, or radio. The definition of 'journalist' will coincide with Deuze's (2019) original perception of it being people who exemplify the journalistic principles of uncovering truths and distributing news stories. Now that the study's main concepts have been conceptualised, the type of study will be addressed, by discussing the interpretivist paradigm, the qualitative research approach, and the research design.

1.4 Paradigm

A research paradigm is a set of beliefs that guide the gaining of knowledge and interpretation of a phenomenon (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014, 2021; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) by organising the impressions gained and reasoning made by researchers (Babbie, 2008, 2021). It is essential to define the paradigm which underpins a research study as it will help to gain a better understanding of the relevance of the research and deeply explore conclusions reached by similar studies that utilised other paradigms (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). But, first, a brief overview of three major paradigms will be provided, namely positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory, as Rehman and Alharthi (2016) claim that ignorance of the different types of approaches makes researchers ill-equipped to evaluate research studies thoroughly.

Positivism asserts that there is one single apprehensible reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Tracy, 2020) that consists of objective and verifiable facts (Dasgupta, 2015; Neuman, 2007, 2014), whereas interpretivism claims that reality is subjective and socially constructed or experienced (Dasgupta, 2015; Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Tracy, 2020), and critical theory argues that reality is affected by several interacting factors, such as politics, culture, and gender (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). However, some researchers surmise that there is a fourth paradigm; the pragmatic paradigm that is a combination of the previous three (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Maree, 2020). This research study is embedded in the interpretivist paradigm and as explained below, aims to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of Twitter's cancel culture as related to selected journalists.

1.4.1 Interpretivist paradigm

Interpretivism is a worldview that considers reality to be shaped by beliefs or perspectives (Maree, 2020; Tracy, 2020). Interpretivists reject the notion that reality is permanent or universal (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and asserts that reality is based, not in objective facts,

but in people's perceptions of that reality (Neuman, 2007, 2014; Tracy, 2020). In cancel culture, individuals can be punished for, not only acts that are objectively deplorable, but acts that cancel culture enforcers believe to be deplorable (Trottier, 2020). The study will thus examine how perceived realities could lead to instances of cancellation.

Interpretivists employ a variety of strategies and techniques to help gain an understanding of the reasons behind people's actions (Whitley, 1984, cited in Chowdhury, 2014; Maree, 2020). The interpretivist paradigm will be used to study why Twitter users decided to call-out three specific journalists and subject them to the cancel culture process. Interpretivism also emphasises people's involvement in certain social environments and that their realities are created through social life (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Tracy, 2020). The paradigm will be used to explore how people in the cancel culture community utilise social spaces such as social media to enact potential cancellation, but the focus will be narrowed to the social platform of Twitter. The interpretivist paradigm has three main philosophical pillars, namely epistemology, ontology, and axiology (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014, 2021).

1.4.1.1 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the study of cognition (Novikov & Novikov, 2012), along with the nature between a knower and what knowledge can be gained (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Krauss, 2005). The epistemology of interpretivism has to do with the gaining of knowledge and asking of questions about how much knowledge people possess and how they know how much knowledge they possess (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Krauss, 2005). From an epistemological standpoint, interpretivists investigate the meanings and motives behind people's actions and perceptions, their behaviours, and interactions with others (Whitley, 1984, cited in Chowdhury, 2014), without manipulating or getting involved in the real-world happenings as they view it within its context (Krauss, 2005) and watch it unfold in its natural way (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Twitter users' calls for the cancellation of three journalists will be explored for elements and aspects such as wokeness, decontextualisation, social identity, social contagion, and confirmation bias. The researcher will not engage or communicate with Twitter users since the aim is merely to seek understanding of the nature of the subjective expressions of users as sources of valuable information, by collecting and analysing tweets relevant to three journalists.

1.4.1.2 Ontology

Ontology asks questions about reality (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014, 2021; Guba & Lincoln,

1994; Krauss, 2005) to define or comprehend that reality (Aliyu, Singhry, Adamu & Abubakar, 2015; Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Hathaway, 1995). From an ontological standpoint, interpretivists assert that reality is subjectively formed by social surroundings and social connections (Lincoln & Guba, 2011) and that social reality is experienced by multiple people who interpret it in their own way (Krauss, 2005; Mack, 2010). How users' social connections, in social circles on Twitter, influence their beliefs on which members of society deserve to be cancelled will be explored. Theories pertaining to social identity and social contagion will be applied to understand the subjective realities of Twitter users' calls for the cancellation of three journalists.

The subjective nature of an ontological view is a limitation of the interpretivist paradigm (Mack, 2010), because it could lead to biased findings due to the researcher's subjective interpretations and beliefs (Krauss, 2005; Mack, 2010). Several steps will be followed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, such as using theories and literature to guide the research process and utilising different methods of guaranteeing trustworthiness.

1.4.1.3 Axiology

According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), axiology is concerned with the study of value, and should be a part of the basic dimensions of paradigms. Axiology clarifies that research is valuable when it benefits society (Biedenbach, 2016). This research study is beneficial as it will elaborate how cancel culture operates on a major worldwide communication platform, i.e., Twitter. The study will also be beneficial by looking at another major element of information and communication: mainstream media journalists. The mainstream media is an important and influential part of society (Ghanta, 2021; Mbindwane, 2015), despite the presence of citizen journalists. Existing research involving German citizens between the ages of 15 and 53 found that younger generations consider journalism to be a dependable source of information, especially for fact-checking or learning about recent events (Wunderlich, Hölig & Hasebrink, 2022). The nature of cancel culture on Twitter, involving three journalists will be explored. The study will thus be valuable by examining how two major elements of societal communication, i.e., Twitter and journalists, are involved in the cancel culture phenomenon.

1.5 Research approach: Qualitative research

For most people, social reality is largely based on ever-changing perceptions that are embedded in many aspects of civilisation (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Interpretivists tend to use qualitative data, because they believe that it can more accurately represent flexible

and unique realities (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Qualitative researchers suggest that reality is socially constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which makes Twitter the ideal social environment to gather information from as it helps like-minded people to communicate and connect with one another due to its lack of geographical limitations (Crosset, Tanner & Campana, 2019).

For a better understanding of a research issue, a qualitative research approach can be adopted, which entails gathering qualitative data that consists of soft data like words, photos, and symbols (Neuman, 2007, 2014), i.e., non-numerical information (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Qualitative research is utilised to better understand people's experiences (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021) and the meanings that people ascribe to experiences (Creswell, 2009; Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021). It will be used to explore the cancel culture experiences of three journalists. A qualitative researcher is also referred to as a bricoleur who explores data that represents real-world experiences to construct one big picture – or bricolage – of those experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, 2018). The concepts of bricoleur and bricolage are elaborated on in Chapter 4 (page 83).

Tracy (2020) provides three core concepts of qualitative research, namely reflexivity, thick descriptions, and contexts, which are discussed throughout this section. Reflexivity occurs when researchers consider how their subjective experiences could influence their research (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Rogers, 2012; Tracy, 2020), and will, however, be elaborated on in Chapter 4 (page 165).

A qualitative research approach allows for thick descriptions to be made, which are detailed elaborations or the textualizing of social discourse, that allow researchers to interpret individual experiences to ultimately understand a specific phenomenon (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). The researcher derives meaning from the experiences or behaviours of participants or by describing and reflecting on the meaning of artefacts unobtrusively, hence, without intervening or engaging in those contexts themselves (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020, cited in Subedi, 2021; Tracy, 2020). Tweets and online news articles will be collected without any direct communicating taking place between the researcher and the Twitter users generating the tweets.

Qualitative researchers also focus on the meaning of social contexts, for example, instead of counting the votes of an election cycle, researchers will ask what voting means in specific contexts (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Another example is exploring how a specific movie was perceived, experienced, and what meanings were attached to it, instead of just exploring how many people watched the movie (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021). Despite

not removing aspects of cases out of their original social contexts, a disadvantage of a qualitative research approach is that certain circumstantial factors can be overlooked when qualitative scholars tend to focus more on meanings and experiences rather than specific contextual factors (Silverman, 2010). The researcher will focus on both the similar and dissimilar contextual factors of the cancel culture process of the three specific cases, instead of just assuming that all aspects of the nature of cancel culture are present in all three cases.

Qualitative research allows researchers to study phenomena that are new with limited current research findings available (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Some individuals claim that contemporary cancel culture is not real (Douthat, 2020; Norris, 2021), while others assert that cancellation has been present for a long time in the form of people merely demanding accountability from others (Hagi, 2019, cited Cook et al., 2021; Willingham, 2021). However, cancel culture – by means of social media – is a relatively new spectacle with little scholarly research to elaborate on it (Cook et al., 2021). There thus appears to be little concrete information available on the nature of cancel culture on Twitter. As a result, a qualitative research approach is required to study this nascent social media phenomenon.

1.6 Research design: A case study design

Qualitative studies tend to examine data by looking at the natural settings of participants, as well as contexts and cases, to ultimately discern themes in the data (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, Hanson, Clarke & Morales, 2007; Neuman, 2007, 2014). To explore such settings and contexts, a case study design will be used. A case study design is a widely used qualitative design that helps develop an in-depth understanding about a specific phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007; Tumele, 2016) by exploring different cases related to that phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007) as well as exploring the phenomenon within its real-world contexts (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021; Yin, 2003, 2014). Case studies are useful when exploring complex phenomena of which there is insufficient knowledge available (Dasgupta, 2015). Cancel culture, being a newly talked about issue, as mentioned before, can thus be explored using a case study design.

A collective or multiple-case study design, in which researchers explore a specific phenomenon by selecting multiple cases that depict that phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Creswell et al., 2007), will be used in this study. This design strengthens research findings by not causing direct replications of findings such as with single-case designs (Yin, 2003, 2014). It allows for the exploration of similarities and differences between cases, which is necessary for developing categories, and useful in future research

and the development of theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Dasgupta, 2015).

Case studies tend to include the exploration of an issue through cases that share a similar setting or similar contexts (Creswell et al., 2007). Impressions can be made regarding the ways in which behaviours naturally unfold without the researcher intervening or removing any aspect of the sample from the social setting or context in which it appears (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Neuman, 2007, 2014), to avoid the distortion of social meaning ascribed to contexts (Neuman, 2007, 2014). The focus of a case study is thus not primarily on the individuals in cases, but also on the contextual conditions surrounding the cases (Yin, 2003, 2014). Tweets and online news articles will be collected and analysed to determine the contextual factors of the three cancellation cases.

Field research, in which researchers conduct their work in the field or in a setting experienced by participants, can be used when researchers want to understand how people operate in their natural environments (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021). Field research for case studies include focus groups, field notes, interviews, participant observation, and unobtrusive study (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021). This study will not include participants, and it has already been mentioned that an unobtrusive approach will be taken during the study, as tweets and online news articles will be collected in a non-reactive manner.

Three exemplar cases involving journalists Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan, will be explored. The ‘natural’ environment or setting for this study is the social media platform Twitter which, according to Basham (2020), has been used to cancel journalists and used by journalists themselves to cancel others. The behaviour being studied will be the call-outs and criticism that occurred on Twitter regarding the three journalists, as well as the real-world consequences that might have followed because of that online condemnation. The journalists’ own behaviours that led to the call-outs, as well as their responses to the call-outs, will also be explored.

One, critique of case study research, however, is that it is too subjective (Gog, 2016), but possible subjective bias from this is reduced when a researcher is aware of being biased and avoids letting their own beliefs affect the study’s findings (Yin, 2003, 2014). This will be done through reflexivity, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

1.7 Type of study

The study will be a basic and exploratory study. A basic research approach is used when a study is meant to increase the existing knowledge of a particular social topic or problem

(Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014, 2021; Neuman, 2007, 2014; Patel & Patel, 2019) but does not offer any solutions to that problem (Patel & Patel, 2019). Although basic research tends to lack a practical long-term application of data, it can still provide knowledge that can be used to develop further understanding of similar issues in future studies (Neuman, 2007, 2014).

An exploratory study aims to learn more about a topic that is not yet well-defined or has not thoroughly been studied before (Cook et al., 2021; Kumar, 2011, 2019). Exploratory case studies meticulously describe cases, within their contexts, to understand the nature of a phenomenon (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021). As previously mentioned, cancel culture is in its preliminary stages with many still debating its existence and is therefore not a clearly defined phenomenon, but the perfect topic for a basic and exploratory study. Exploratory studies are also used to determine whether further inquiry into a topic is feasible (Kumar, 2011, 2019). This study can thus be used to determine if future studies are necessary or achievable regarding this topic.

1.8 Formulation of the research problem

In this section, the research problem and questions are provided. Since research is problem-driven, an important aspect to determine is the research problem which is the primary issue that a researcher intends to address (Kumar, 2011, 2019). It is vital to identify the problem as it lays the foundation of a research study (Creswell, 2009; Kumar, 2011, 2019). Cancel culture can be seen as a force for good (Sossi, 2021), but the problem is that it also has a negative side to it; a side of digital criticism that has affected public figures like journalists (Cheruiyot, 2022).

1.8.1 Research problem

Cancel culture has been linked to campaigns for positive social change such as #MeToo (Greenspan, 2020) – a worldwide campaign against sexual misconduct and similar transgressions (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2018). The culture has been known to broaden the scope of awareness about such social issues, increasing the pressure to hold people accountable for their crimes (Bouvier & Cheng, 2019). These efforts are driven by wokeness or wokeism which asserts that reality is created by social interactions (Beiner, 2020, cited in Velasco, 2020).

However, the culture has also been criticised and regarded as a negative social media phenomenon that perpetuates hasty judgement and severe consequences (Greenspan, 2020) and is used to silence people whose views oppose those of the cancel culture brigade

(Velasco, 2020). The culture can be described as a movement that promotes and enforces public shaming (Norris, 2021) and economic suffering or financial encumbering as its targets can become unemployed as a result (Chotiner, 2020).

Eugene Gu, a renowned internet CEO, notes that, depending on the situation, there is a difference between cancelling behaviours that are collectively perceived as wrong and cancelling someone with no forethought whatsoever (Kato, 2021). Cancel culture does not seem to distinguish between the two; there is no obvious parameter that illustrates what behaviour warrants cancellation (Velasco, 2020).

Contemporary cancel culture accelerated on the social media platform Twitter where individuals get called out for their actions (Brito, 2021; Bouvier & Machin, 2021). Social media makes it easier for people to partake in the cancellation process as online platforms, such as Twitter, are used absentmindedly while partaking in other tasks (Ott, 2017). Users might thus not think twice before posting their opinions and shaming others online, inadvertently adding to the cancel culture trend.

Not only do those in positions of power, as well as ordinary denizens, get affected by cancellation efforts (Mishan, 2020), but the budding power of cancel culture is affecting journalists and putting their careers at risk, as the culture has been named as the cause for some journalists getting demoted or losing their jobs (Norris, 2021). Such digital criticism poses risks to journalism on an individual-, organisational-, and institutional level, as journalists, along with news organisations, and the media as a collective, can suffer from it (Cheruiyot, 2022). It also endangers the safety and privacy of journalists (Cheruiyot, 2022).

However, journalists' own reporting, Twitter activity, and biases may play a role in certain elements of cancel culture, as journalists have even been known to cancel other people, including other journalists (Basham, 2020). Journalists, and others in the mainstream media, have always been an influential part of society (Ghanta, 2021; Mbindwane, 2015), that is now being affected by the cancel culture phenomenon.

The main research problem is thus the increasing modern-day cancellation and the involvement of journalists in the cancel culture trend that mainly operates on social media platforms, such as Twitter. Journalists' victimhood, as well as the mainstream media's general contribution to the nature of cancel culture, will be explored.

1.8.2 Research questions

All research begins with a topic that must be used to formulate a research question (Neuman, 2007, 2014); therefore, a research question can only be formulated once a research problem has been identified (Majid, 2017). A research question is the query for which answers are being sought after to understand or explain a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Mackey & Gass, 2005). A good research question details and narrows down the scope of focus of the research problem, guides the methodology, and sets the context of the study (Ratan, Anand & Ratan, 2019). Since the study aims to understand the nature of cancel culture, as it primarily operates on Twitter, and the involvement journalists, the following primary question will be answered:

What is the nature of cancel culture, as portrayed in Twitter tweets and online articles regarding journalists Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan?

Sub-questions, along with primary questions, can be used to narrow the focus of a study (Creswell, 2009). Considering that cancel culture is influenced by wokeness, as mentioned in the research problem section, and that journalists' can be more than just victims of the culture, as mentioned before, secondary questions include:

What role did wokeness or wokeism play in the cancellation of Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan?

How was Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan cancelled as a result of Twitter call-outs?

How did Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan contribute to their own cancellation?

1.9 Research methodology

Methodology is the analysis of methods that are used in a field of study, but research methodology examines how research is conducted – how the research process works – and provides necessary steps to address a research problem (Patel & Patel, 2019; Sileyew, 2019). In this section, research methodological aspects and elements, such unit of analysis, population, sampling, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations, will be discussed briefly. These aspects will be addressed in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

1.9.1 Unit of analysis

A unit of analysis is the smallest set of data that will be the focal point of a study (Casteel & Bridier, 2021; DeCarlo, 2018), and in this study will be a social artefact. Social artifacts are objects, depictions, or bits of information that individuals use to express themselves or to perceive the world around them (IGI Global Dictionary, 2017, cited in Kumar, 2018) and can include newspapers and online sites (Kumar, 2018). In this study, the social artefacts will be text from tweets and newspaper articles.

1.9.2 Population

A population is a large pool of cases from which a sample is drawn (Neuman, 2007, 2014); it is the group about which a researcher wants to know more about (Babbie, 2008, 2021). However, qualitative researchers tend not to generalise research findings to populations (Creswell et al., 2007; Omona, 2013), but rather focus on gaining new insights into phenomena (Omona, 2013) and linking those insights to theories and constructs (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, Washburn, 2000).

The target population is more precise and consists of the specific cases that a researcher wants to explore (Neuman, 2007, 2014). This population will consist of all the cases in which journalists were called out on Twitter and cancelled or nearly cancelled by, not just strangers or ordinary citizens, but other journalists or individuals in the mainstream media.

The accessible population is the group of participants from the target population that a researcher has access to (Fetzer, 2020). Population parameters describe the variables in populations (Babbie, 2008; 2021). A parameter considered in this study, is that the subjects in the cancellation cases must be journalists, since the study aims to explore the nature of cancel culture involving journalists. Trottier (2020) also claims that people can be targeted by cancel culture for alleged or actual wrongdoings. Another parameter consists of the call-outs and cancellations occurring regardless of when a journalist's actual or perceived mistakes occurred, as in the case of Alexi McCammond, which is elaborated on in other chapters. The accessible population thus consists of all the cases in which journalists have been justly or unjustly scorned on Twitter for their actual or alleged actions and have been cancelled or nearly cancelled as a result by, not only strangers or ordinary people, but also their own fellow journalists and others in news distribution – regardless of when they committed the transgressions that incited the Twitter call-outs.

1.9.3 Sampling

A sample refers to a small group that is subtracted from the population (Neuman, 2007, 2014; Taherdoost, 2016; Vehovar et al., 2016). Two non-probability sampling methods will be used in the study, namely purposive and theoretical. Non-probability sampling involves selecting samples in a subjective manner instead of randomly (Bigsby, 2017; Casteel & Bridier, 2021), and purposive sampling includes selecting participants or text based on characteristics that the researcher is interested in (Casteel & Bridier, 2021; Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016; Mauldin, 2020). Theoretical sampling involves the developing, comparing, and integrating of concepts or categories within a developing theory or argument (Gentles et al., 2015).

A maximum variation sampling design will be used to select cancellation cases that seem to vary from one another. A two-phased approach will be followed by first identifying three cases of attempted or succeeded cancellation of journalists through justified or unjustified Twitter call-outs for supposed or actual wrongdoing. The three cases will be selected purposively and involve journalists Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan, whose cases – on a surface level – seemed to have started in February and March of 2021. Text samples of 45 to 60 news articles and 300 to 450 tweets will then be sampled through purposive non-probability sampling. The three cases are sampled first to represent the population, while text is sampled after to have data to analyse and explore the nature of cancel culture in the cases. More information on the sampling methods and the sample sizes is provided in Chapter 3 (pages 68 and 72).

1.9.4 Data collection

Data collection refers to the accumulation of information (Kabir, 2016). Qualitative content analysis is an unobtrusive research approach (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021), that consists of the collecting and eventual categorisation of data into identified codes or themes (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Mayring, 2014; Prasad, 2019; Shava, Hleza, Tlou, Shonhiwa & Mathonsi, 2021). This method will be used to collect data, but data collection will be conducted iteratively with data analysis and interpretation. Qualitative content analysis will also be conducted in a directed and summative manner, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 (page 76).

1.9.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis constitutes the examining of collected data (Ibrahim, 2015), to assign significant meaning to that data through interpretation (Creswell, 2009; Neuman, 2007,

2014). The study will utilise six predetermined steps of thematic analysis to analyse the data. Thematic analysis involves identifying reoccurring patterns or themes that are present in collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Scharp & Sanders, 2018). Five types of coding will also be used to thematically analyse the data, namely deductive and inductive coding as part of abductive coding, line-by-line open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These coding methods are elaborated on in Chapter 3.

1.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness begs the question: Are a study's findings trustworthy? (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The four common dimensions of trustworthiness will be considered, namely dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 (page 162).

1.11 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations in this study consist of a sympathetic approach, consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Methods of bias reduction, and the study's setting will also carefully be considered. Ethical clearance was also provided by the Independent Institute of Education to allow for the collecting, analysing, and interpreting of data for the study. Further elaborations on ethics will be provided in Chapter 4 (page 166).

1.12 Feasibility of the study

Barlösius and Blem (2021), conducted a study on how researchers determine the feasibility, or achievability, of their own studies, and found three main aspects that are used to improve the scientific standard of a study, as described below.

1.12.1 Range of scientific skills

Detailed descriptions of the necessary methods and competency of techniques need to be present (Barlösius & Blem, 2021). The researcher will detail the various methods of data collection, data analysis and sampling, and will explain why each method is suitable for the study and how each was applied in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis. Qualitative researchers are the qualitative research instruments in studies, which is why it is vital to consider the background and traits of a researcher (Tracy, 2020). Reflexivity will be used to determine the researcher's perceptions and how it might contribute to bias in the study, and the researcher's status as a novice and inexperienced researcher will be elaborated on in Chapters 3 and 4.

1.12.2 Different assets

Barlösius and Blem (2021) claim that feasibility is increased through the discussion of technical equipment needed and used for a study. The researcher has several electronic devices that are readily accessible for data collection and analysis and will explain how the needed ones were used during those processes. The usage of free public platforms, such as Twitter and Google, will also be elaborated on during data collection.

1.12.3 Stylistic techniques

This aspect of feasibility includes stating whether a study had unfolded as predicted, and determining possible difficulties and their solutions, (Barlösius & Blem, 2021). The researcher will discuss difficulties and their solutions in the Limitations section in the final chapter of the study.

1.13 Conclusion

Modern-day cancel culture is a new phenomenon that has affected journalists from around the globe. This research problem has led to the determination of one primary and three secondary research questions that need to be answered to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of cancel culture and how journalists are involved in it through instigation or unfounded victimisation.

In previous years, researchers have been reluctant to study the phenomenon for fear of repercussions, but social scientists have an obligation to find the truth, no matter how uncomfortable they are with the possible outcomes. Investigating the topic will also contribute knowledge to the discipline of communication, as well as public relations and journalism. The key terms conceptualised for this study include cancel culture and the sub-elements that accompany it, such as cancellation and call-outs, social media and Twitter, wokeness, decontextualisation, the mainstream media and journalists.

The research will be investigated from an interpretivist point of view to study the motivations, perceptions, and social environments of those in the cancel culture community. A qualitative research approach, and research types which includes basic and exploratory approaches, will be used to understand the experiences, behaviours, socially constructed realities, and natural environments of those involved in the cancel culture phenomenon. A case study design will be used to explore three exemplar cases of journalistic cancellation.

A sample of text from Twitter and online newspaper articles will be collected through

qualitative content analysis and analysed using thematic analysis to represent the chosen population. Ways to ensure trustworthiness and employ ethics will be implemented. The feasibility of the study will be assured using three aspects that will be discussed or applied in other chapters of the study.

1.14 Exposition of the study

Chapter 1 discussed the context of the study which included the purpose and background of the study, the relevance of the topic and its relation to the discipline of communication, as well as the subdisciplines of public relations and journalism. Conceptualisation of key concepts, such as cancel culture, wokeness, decontextualisation, social media, Twitter, mainstream media, and journalists, was provided. The interpretivist paradigm, qualitative research approach, research types, and research design were elaborated on. The research problem and questions were addressed. The research methodology was also discussed, which included the unit of analysis, population, sampling, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Finally, the feasibility of the study was explained by detailing three main feasibility aspects.

Chapter 2 elaborates on three theories and four literature themes that will be used as guidelines during the study, and how the literature is linked to not only the topic of cancel culture, but the cancellation process involving journalists as well.

Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology of the study, mainly the unit of analysis, population, sample, data collection, data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 4 discusses how the methods in Chapter 3 were used and applied to the topic being studied, along with methods of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5 provides the findings of the study based on the data collected, analysed, and interpreted in Chapter 4. It also details recommendations for future research studies and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Theoretical information and previous research on a topic provide researchers with a foundation to work from when studying a specific phenomenon (Adom, Hussein & Adu-Agyem, 2018). The gathering and assessing of existing knowledge about a particular topic can provide an overview of the research problem, help determine the areas in which more knowledge is needed, and address the research question (Snyder, 2019).

For this study, three main theories – the theory of confirmation bias, social identity theory, and social contagion theory – are discussed to explain the cancel culture process. The core elements of cancel culture, such as social media, wokeness, decontextualisation, cancellation, and call-outs are elaborated on through the examining of existing literature.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Theories and theoretical frameworks provide researchers with a basic platform for the topic of their study that can help with credibility of the findings (Adom et al., 2018). Theories act as a guide to most steps in the research process, including determining the research problem, literature themes, research design, the data analysis method, and writing the discussion and conclusion (Adom et al., 2018). From the abundance of theories that exist in the academic world, three deemed pertinent to the topic of cancel culture for this study, namely the theories of confirmation bias, social identity, and social contagion.

2.2.1 Theory of confirmation bias

The theory of confirmation bias, or myside bias (Michel & Peters, 2021; Peters, 2022; Wang & Jeon, 2020), was postulated by psychologist Peter Cathcart Wason in the mid-1900s when he examined how people process positive and negative information and confirm or disconfirm information (Wason, 1960). While conducting several experiments, Wason (1960) discovered that individuals tend to look for information that supports their pre-conceived notions. The theory of confirmation bias seems to have two main assumptions: i); People tend to understand or remember information in a way that verifies existing opinions, and, ii); people disregard or alter contradicting evidence (Dibbets & Meesters, 2022; Nickerson, 1998; Wang & Jeon, 2020).

This type of bias affects the selection, preservation, and assessment of evidence, and can also be linked to ‘wishful thinking’ that leads people to make conclusions that are

preferable to them (Hahn & Harris, 2014). Four types of cognitive phenomena regarding confirmation bias and wishful thinking have been summarised by Hahn and Harris (2014), namely i); Searching for and interpreting data based on a hypothesis or a pre-existing hunch, ii); Neglecting to adopt a falsification technique in conditional reasoning situations, iii); Being reluctant to changing beliefs or opinions, and, iv); Having excessive confidence or a delusion of knowledge when it comes to those beliefs or opinions.

With the first and second cognitions, it is not necessarily about suppressing certain information, but about the approach one takes to find information, such as deciding where to look for information that could emphasise the accuracy of one's beliefs (Hahn & Harris, 2014). Hahn and Harris (2014) surmise that the third cognition could include the phenomenon of inertia, which occurs when people resist change (Alós-Ferrer, Hügelschäfer & Li, 2016; Bourdieu, 1985), as well as biased assimilation, which is the tendency to biasedly accept or interpret information in a way that makes it confirm pre-established beliefs (Dandekar, Goel & Lee, 2013; Greitemeyer, 2014).

Since such cognitions of confirmation bias only calcify already existing beliefs or opinions (Hahn & Harris, 2014), it stands to reason that those opinions or beliefs must first exist before they can be reinforced. Opinions or beliefs thus need to exist prior to confirmation attempts. The novel idea of confirmation bias, as expressed by Wason (1960), emphasise that existing beliefs are reinforced, but fail to account for how existing beliefs might come to be in the first place.

2.2.1.1 Shaping beliefs

Since confirmation bias confirms existing beliefs and opinions (Workman, 2018), individuals must first have such pre-existing beliefs or opinions for confirmation bias to be possible. In this instance, the cause of belief formation will be explored in terms of exposure to mainstream media and social media.

The mainstream media affects society as it can dictate the topics discussed around the dinner table and other social events (Ghanta, 2021; Mbindwane, 2015). The news media affects the way that people think and how they perceive the world (Elejalde, Ferres & Herder, 2018; Mbindwane, 2015). It is only logical then to incorporate the mainstream media in the theories discussed for this study, not only because the media influences society, but also because the study focuses on cancel culture with regards to a specific group of people in the mainstream media, i.e., journalists.

The mainstream media finds news or public opinions on social media (Dubois, Gruzd &

Jacobson, 2018; Hernández-Fuentes & Monnier, 2020) and redeploys it back to the public through their reporting (Dubois et al., 2018; Tandoc & Johnson, 2016), creating an endless loop of recycled opinions, which can in turn affect people's views (Dubois et al., 2018). This notion could be applied to the study to see how journalists shaped or influenced their audiences' beliefs on cancel culture and how those beliefs might have influenced the journalists' own cancellations.

However, Workman (2018) finds that social media is more responsible for the confirming of beliefs rather than the shaping of beliefs or opinions, but that it also depends on factors such as the topics being discussed and the characteristics of the users. There is currently a mass velocity of information that is dispersed on social media at unparalleled speeds on the internet in real-time, dubbed "big and broad" social data (Housley, Procter, Edwards, Burnap, Williams, Sloan, Rana, Morgan, Voss & Greenhill, 2014: 1) and this information overload also requires changes to the practice of gatekeeping (Pałka-Suchojad, 2021). It is problematic for the gatekeeping responsibilities of those in the mainstream news industry as people can directly distribute false information to others through social media (Tsfati, Boomgaarden, Strömbäck, Vliegenthart, Damstra & Lindgren, 2020). People do not have the capacity to process such a surplus of material that platforms like the internet and social media provide (Eliyana, Ajija, Sridadi, Setyawati & Emur, 2020; Kolbert, 2017). Social media users – and journalists – thus struggle to verify all the information that they receive and can form their beliefs accordingly.

2.2.1.2 Confirming beliefs

Nickerson (1998) claims that there are two main ways to evaluate information, mainly by i); Objectively evaluating something and looking at all possible evidence surrounding it and letting the evidence guide you to a conclusion or ii); Selectively collecting evidence that supports a preconceived notion whilst neglecting contradicting information i.e., confirmation bias. The two main types of information or evidence involved in this kind of bias that Wason (1960) looked at, includes confirming info and disconfirming info. Confirmation bias can also be explained through reinforcement seeking which is the desire to confirm that one's beliefs are accurate, and challenge avoidance which occurs because people are reluctant to discover the inaccuracy of their beliefs (Festinger, 1957, cited in Brugnoli, Cinelli, Quattrocioni & Scala, 2019).

2.2.1.2.1 Reinforcement seeking

People tend to focus solely on confirming evidence or information, that corroborates their

pre-existing beliefs or opinions (Dibbets & Meesters, 2022; Neuman, 2007, 2014; Nickerson, 1998; Wang & Jeon, 2020). Confirmation bias reinforces beliefs that people already possess (Workman, 2018), which can cause someone to develop high levels of confidence when their biases are confirmed (Mercier 2016, cited in Peters, 2022; Mercier & Sperber, 2011).

As mentioned before, possessing extreme confidence in one's own beliefs is the fourth type of cognition present in confirmation bias, as stated by Hahn and Harris (2014). Studies using magnetoencephalography have found that levels of confidence affect confirmation bias and the way people process information (Rollwage & Fleming, 2021) as people who are highly confident in their beliefs display a higher level of confirmation bias than those who are less confident, as they are more resistant to contradicting information (Rollwage, Loosen, Hauser, Moran, Dolan & Fleming, 2020).

A possible reason for an overload of confirming information can be because of social media echo chambers which are built or broadened due to confirmation bias (Bessi, 2016). Echo chambers are spaces that consist of like-minded users (Bessi, 2016; Cinelli, Morales, Galeazzi, Quattrociocchi & Starnini, 2021; Terren & Borge, 2021), where people receive content that aligns with their pre-existing views (Bessi, 2016; Cinelli et al., 2021; Garrett, 2009; Terren & Borge, 2021); users essentially hear their own voice (Bessi, 2016; Brugnoli et al., 2019; Sunstein, 2006, cited in Jacobson, 2016).

Multiple studies have discovered that social media users tend to seek out content that aligns with their beliefs and ignores content that contradicts their views (Modgil, Singh, Gupta & Dennehy, 2021). Users tend to ally themselves with feeds or users that provide content that they themselves prefer seeing (Bessi, 2016; Ling, 2020), which means that kindred users will follow one another and increase their exposure to information that is akin to their own opinions as a result (Tsfati et al., 2020). Individuals thus struggle to determine the accuracy of information that is provided to them through social media echo chambers and tend to believe posts that confirm their preconceived notions of certain concepts, whilst being less exposed to disconfirming information.

A study on confirmation bias and the sharing of supply chain information surrounding a global pandemic found that there is a sympatico give-and-take relationship between echo chambers and confirmation bias when it comes to polarisation on social media (Modgil et al., 2021). The study claims that the findings can be applied to different contexts involving international events that affect society (Modgil et al., 2021). The concept of echo chambers and confirmation bias can thus be applied to the internationally influencing

phenomenon of cancel culture.

2.2.1.2.2 Challenge avoidance

Whilst paying attention to confirming evidence, people tend to ignore or avoid disconfirming information that refutes their beliefs and/or opinions (Dibbets & Meesters, 2022; Nickerson, 1998; Wang & Jeon, 2020). Decontextualisation, which includes formulating conclusions about something by taking it out of context (American Psychological Association, 2021; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), either deliberately or subconsciously (American Psychological Association, 2021), could also cause ignorance of disconfirming facts. In this way, people can tweak evidence in their minds (Zille, 2021a) until they cannot see any obvious disconfirming information in the evidence anymore. The phenomenon of decontextualisation is discussed in more detail in the literature review of the study.

People believe what they see rather than what evidentiary factors have been discovered (Neuman, 2007, 2014). The repetition of a statement increases the likelihood that someone will believe the statement to be true, as people struggle to distinguish between familiarity and truth (Dechêne, Stahl, Hansen & Wänke 2010). Users thus tend to trust information that they are repeatedly exposed to or that is provided by people that they are familiar with. Users on social media platforms can also believe information to be accurate as they do not always have the time or resources to sift through the influx of information that they daily receive (Hodas & Lerman, 2012).

Ignorance of disconfirming evidence can also occur using social media platforms as people's social media feeds tend to direct them toward content that they are familiar with, based on their prior activity (Matamoros-Fernández, 2017). Twitter feeds can display insularity (KhosraviNik, 2017), especially with regards to social justice discussions as users may experience a lack of exposure to contradictory knowledge which leads to confirmation of their beliefs (Bouvier, 2020) as they are thus exposed to familiar narratives and opinions that they ascribe to (Bouvier, 2020; Bouvier & Machin, 2021).

An abundance of disconfirming information can also result in high levels of confidence, as seen with phenomena such as the Dunning Kruger effect, which illustrates that people who lack knowledge or expertise surrounding a specific topic are unaware of their deficit of knowledge (Dunning, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999), but display how ignorance begets confidence (Fritz, 2019; Dunning, 2011). By focusing on only confirming evidence, one does not consume a variety of knowledge on a topic, thus leading to

ignorance and high levels of confidence despite one's own lack of knowledge.

However, it is surmised that beliefs and opinions can change over time if one is exposed to disconfirming information, but the specific circumstances needed for such changes are not well-defined (Ling, 2020). In a research study, 63 children were provided with images of a sweet-looking animal (a quokka) and a treacherous-looking animal (an aye aye) and were given information that contradicts the perceived sweetness of the quokka and the dangerousness of the aye aye (Dibbets & Meesters, 2022). The children's attitudes toward the two animals changed after being given information that disconfirmed their original assessment of each animal (Dibbets & Meesters, 2022), proving that disconfirming knowledge can alter preconceptions.

As mentioned before, the theory of confirmation bias defines the phenomenon as the tendency to concentrate on information that reinforces pre-existing views (Dibbets & Meesters, 2022; Nickerson, 1998; Wang & Jeon, 2020), but another study, conducted by Suzuki and Yamamoto (2021), shows that it is not that simple. The study provided participants with prior information on health topics before letting them sift through web search results about the topics (Suzuki & Yamamoto, 2021). The results yielded that the participants who lacked health knowledge and had negative beliefs regarding the topics beforehand, neglected to examine the entire list of web search results and biasedly selected results that confirmed their beliefs, while the participants with lots of knowledge on health and negative opinions regarding the health topic tended to examine the web search results more thoroughly and even browsed the results that presented disconfirming information (Suzuki & Yamamoto, 2021). This shows that the theory of confirmation bias is lacking as such bias can also be affected by the amount of prior knowledge one has about a particular topic, and not just the beliefs that one possesses regarding that topic.

The theory has also been criticised with some psychologists and researchers claiming that bias is a part of human reasoning (Haidt 2012, cited in Peters, 2022), and that confirmation bias is less common than might be assumed (Mercier 2016, cited in Peters, 2022). According to the argumentative theory of reasoning, confirmation bias is the product of reasoning as the main purpose of reason is to convince others of the accuracy of our beliefs (Mercier & Sperber 2011). The degree of bias, however, can also be influenced by many factors including loyalty to beliefs, how reversible those beliefs are, and how recently beliefs were shaped or reinforced (Hart, Albarracín, Eagly, Brechan, Lindberg & Merrill, 2009).

2.2.1.3 Relevance of the theory: Confirming characteristics

Confirmation bias can cause the possession of inaccurate beliefs, which could in turn lead to calamitous consequences (Michel & Peters, 2021). In cancel culture, individuals get cancelled for offending a person or persons that belong to specific groups regarding immutable characteristics such as race, gender, and ethnicity (Chiou, 2020). People thus pay more attention to the characteristics of those involved than the potential circumstantial evidence surrounding an incident. This is known as trait ascription, which affects confirmation bias (Peters, 2022). However, evaluating people's traits has always been a natural human activity as being aware of others' traits can help explain and predict someone's behaviour which helps us know how to behave around them (Tausch, Kenworthy & Hewstone, 2007).

In terms of trait-based confirmation bias, a simple example can be of a child falsely believing he is intelligent, which causes him to read more books and pay attention to academic topics, which in turn increases his intelligence, confirming the initial belief he had of himself (Peters, 2022). This could be classified as trait ascription bias, which occurs when individuals view their own traits as flexible and deriving from external influences but believe others' behaviours to be unchangeable and deriving from inherent personality traits (Parvini, 2015). Someone's bias about another person is thus established and confirmed before all the relevant evidence has been examined purely because of the personal traits possessed by the other person. Personal characteristics are thus the supporting evidence that confirm someone's bias about a concept as it links to their pre-existing opinions of specific people.

A study on behavioural confirmation examined the behaviour between 'targets' and 'perceivers' and found that when a perceiver expected or believed a target to be hostile for example, then their social interaction caused the target to internalise the perceiver's perception of them and eventually display hostile behaviour and considered themselves as hostile, providing the behavioural evidence to confirm the initial beliefs of the perceiver (Snyder & Swann, 1978). A related notion is expressed in The Thomas theorem that proclaims: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." (Thomas & Thomas, 1928: 572). Hence, confirmed biases cause people to form a social reality based on their preconceived beliefs (Darley & Gross, 1983). In cancel culture, people can get cancelled for being real or perceived wrongdoers (Trottier 2020). So, even when it is just believed, and not proven, that someone has committed a grievance, then that person can suffer real-life consequences as a result.

In terms of cancel culture, the ‘cancellors’ could be considered as perceivers and the cancelled as targets. In the culture, certain people are seen as victims, having been wronged or offended in some way, while others are seen as the wrongdoers (Kaufmann, 2020), and people in this culture can deliberately classify themselves as victims (Zille, 2021a). The study will determine how journalists can be seen as wrongdoers who have supposedly victimised others, either through their actions on the job or during their leisure.

Negative impressions are more difficult to disconfirm than to reinforce (Beaumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer & Vohs, 2001; Rothbart & Park, 1986) and cancellors tend to solely focus on words or actions that are deemed offensive or derogatory (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Sossi, 2021), making it easier to find people who are believed to be worthy of cancellation. The victims and cancellors then make the wrongdoers aware of their wrongdoings and demand that they apologise (Mueller, 2021). When the so-called wrongdoers apologise, they thus ‘admit’ to doing something unconscionable, confirming the cancellors original perception of them. Targets can also highlight their new self-perception (brought about by the perception that the perceiver had of them) in contexts with other perceivers beyond the original perceiver (Snyder & Swann, 1978).

One example involves a defamation trial, surrounding allegations of domestic abuse, of actor Johnny Depp and his ex-wife Amber Heard, and actress Drew Barrymore who commented on the trial and called it “insanity” and “crazy” on her talk show (Garvey, 2022: 1). After being called out on her statements, the actress posted a video on social media, in which she apologised to anyone who might have been offended by her making light of the defamation trial and said that she can be “a more thoughtful and better person moving forward” and thanked people for speaking out and providing her with such a “teachable moment” (Garvey, 2022: 1). However, nowhere in her apology does she apologise to the people directly involved in the defamation case.

Another example includes Twitch streamer Khoi Dao, who issued an apology after calls for his cancellation were made due to a joke he had posted (Nambiar, 2021). Dao posted: “I went from looking like a woman to looking like a lesbian,” in reference to his feminine features and hairstyle changes (Nambiar, 2021: 1). At first, when he responded to the criticism that his post had caused, he tweeted: “To those going so far as to call it harmful: no, I didn’t express a viewpoint negatively connotated or otherwise, about ‘what a lesbian should look like.’” (Nambiar, 2021: 1). But his later tweets convey that he thought he had

made a mistake with his original joke, as depicted in the figure below.

Guys, I fucked up. I hear you, I see you, I've thought about it and I want to say I'm really sorry to those that I've hurt with my comments. In trying to explain my intentions and perspective I missed the mark. [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/khoidao00/status/1423726805093994498?lang=ga> [Accessed 15 July 2022].

Figure 2.1 – Khoi Dao tweet (Dao, 2021)

Dao (2021) thus seems to have altered his previous belief of himself that he was not at fault (or at least made it seem as if he had changed it), and his new belief confirmed what the cancellors had claimed about him from the start. And, just like Barrymore, he did not apologise to the people involved in his original tweet (women and lesbians), but instead apologised to anyone in the world who might have been harmed by his joke, placing his newfound self-perception onto the whole human race, and confirming what his critics thought of him.

2.2.2 Social identity theory (SIT)

The first aspects of intergroup conflict and social identity theory were highlighted and expanded on in the 1970s, mostly through the efforts of Henri Tajfel (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Trepte & Loy, 2017; Turner, 1975), who examined the connection of the cognitive division between individuals and social groups (Islam, 2014). Social identity theory examines how individuals' group-based identities affect intergroup relations (Islam, 2014).

The theory suggests that individuals have social identities and define themselves through the groups that they belong to (Islam, 2014; Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Social identity refers to an individual knowing that they belong to a specific social group (Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1972, cited in Turner, 1975). People gain their identity through their groups and work to ensure the safety and strength of that identity (Tajfel, 1978, cited in Rullo, Presaghi & Livi, 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The theory is based on two main assumptions, namely i); Social categorisation which highlights the similarities between group members and the dissimilarities between people of different groups (Demirden, 2021; Martiny & Rubin, 2016), and, ii); Social comparisons between groups that cause members to biasedly view their own groups more positively than other groups and increase their self-esteem (Martiny & Rubin, 2016; Stets

& Burke, 2014; Tajfel & Turner 1979; Trepte & Loy, 2017). The social identity process also focuses on two types of groups: ingroups and outgroups (Islam, 2014; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971; Trepte & Loy, 2017), with an ingroup referring to someone's own group that they identify with, while the outgroups are those that the individual is not a part of (Trepte & Loy, 2017).

2.2.2.1 The social identity formation process

According to Trepte and Loy (2017), the social identity process involves several psychological notions, namely i); Social categorisation transpires when people compartmentalise themselves into social groups, ii); These groups are at the forefront of an individual's mind and perceived as imperative in certain circumstances, iii); Social comparison happens when people compare their ingroups to outgroups, iv); Such comparison leads to positive distinctiveness where people favour and positively regard their ingroups whilst negatively regarding outgroups, v); Social identity and social status are determined, and can be positive or negative but individuals tend to strive for the positive, and, vi); Positive social identities lead to high self-esteem and comparisons are no longer required. There are thus several prominent stages involved in constructing a social identity and, for this study, the steps will be further categorised into groups labelled as social categorisation, and comparison, while the fifth and sixth notions will be classified into social identification since both have to do with social identity having been established.

2.2.2.1.1 *Social categorisation*

The first step involves individuals categorising themselves into specific groups based on a variety of aspects, for example, from people without children to people who love certain musical bands (Trepte & Loy, 2017). This stage includes the first and second psychological notions of the social identity process.

For group identities to be established, people partake in the categorisation of ingroups and outgroups (Islam, 2014). In terms of wokeness and cancel culture, people tend to be grouped and judged based on archetypal innate personal traits such as gender, race, and sexual orientation and are further divided into categories of 'victims' and 'oppressors' (Kaufmann, 2020) or 'victims' and 'villains' (Zille, 2021a) based on these personal attributes as part of a social hierarchy (Kaufmann, 2020). The cancel culture enforcers can be perceived as the protectors of the victim ingroups or a part of the group themselves, whilst others are a part of the oppressing outgroups that are seen as worthy of cancellation and classified as, for example, racist and sexist (Zille, 2021a).

2.2.2.1.2 Social comparison

The second step consists of social comparisons or evaluations, as once people have been categorised and aligned their identities with that of a specific group that they belong to, they tend to compare their group to others (Trepte & Loy, 2017; Turner, 1975) to try and determine the value of their group (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Social evaluation thus entails people assessing their own groups as well as groups they do not belong to (Trepte & Loy, 2017). This involves the third and fourth psychological notions of identity construction: comparison and positive distinctiveness.

Comparisons allow individuals to see themselves as an ‘us’ when observing their similarities with their group members, whilst classifying those who are dissimilar, and who they are excluded from, as a ‘them’ (Stets & Burke, 2014; Tajfel et al., 1971). People’s identities are linked to their respective groups, which causes people to view themselves and their ingroup positively whilst viewing other outgroups negatively (Islam, 2014), as people have a desire for positive self-esteem (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). This is called positive distinctiveness (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Sharing similarities with ingroup members causes individuals to experience positive feelings, whilst dissimilarity, like that experienced between an individual and an outgroup, can arouse feelings of negativity (Smith, 2000). In cancel culture, the victim ingroups can thus be regarded positively by the cancellors whilst the supposed oppressor groups are regarded negatively (Zille, 2021a). This theory can help determine which groups of people are the ‘victims’ that journalists have supposedly wronged.

2.2.2.1.3 Social identification

Social identification is the final step of the social identity process and involves psychological notions five (social identity and status) and six (self-esteem). Social identities and identity standards, consisting of meanings attributed to group membership, derive from – and are verified by – social comparisons (Stets & Burke, 2014). Individuals’ identities are defined by the group they belong to, which in turn influences their self-identity (Tajfel, 1978, cited in Islam, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as having similarities to others can yield identification (Stets & Burke, 2014). Although people have different identities from depicting themselves in different ways, the meanings that define someone as part of a group comes from the meanings that are shared between group members and the culture in which that group resides (Stets & Burke, 2014).

People’s groups also affect their self-esteem as the group becomes such an integral part

of their identity, leading to individuals trying to create and/ or maintain a positive image or distinctiveness associated with their group i.e., with themselves (Martiny & Rubin, 2016) that was established during social comparison. The self-esteem notion means that ingroup favouritism leads to intergroup discrimination and increased self-esteem (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Positive social identities thus lead to high self-esteem of group members (Treppe & Loy, 2017). Conversely, positive group associations can also occur due to a rise in self-esteem that individuals experience when they identify with their specific group (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Concepts such as intergroup discrimination and self-esteem will be investigated during data analysis.

However, the notion of self-esteem in social identity theory only applies to those who identify with their group and see that group as vital to their identity (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). One critique of SIT is thus that its stance on self-esteem development excludes those who do not identify with the groups that they are automatically categorised in (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Social identity can be either acquired, where it is attained through one's own actions such as career choice or marital status, or it can be ascribed, where one is labelled based on immutable characteristics such as race and ethnicity (Taylor, 1989, cited in Demirden, 2021). People who disregard their group identification or its effect on their self-esteem will thus tend not to adhere to the ideas of the self-esteem hypothesis (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). In terms of cancel culture, there might be individuals who are categorised into groups due to personal attributes or societal standards but do not view those attributes or groups as central to their identities or agree with the groups' beliefs.

Social media is the ultimate platform for cancel culture groups to pursue their activities and form their identities (Karrim, 2020; Zille, 2021a). Twitter, as a social media application, provides its users with short biographies in their profile that represent their online identity (Crosset, et al., 2019). A study involving millions of American Twitter profiles over a four-year period found that people are increasingly adding political labels to their social media self-identities (Rogers & Jones, 2021).



Figure 2.2 – Twitter profile (Ngô, 2022)

The above screenshot displays the Twitter profile of Andy Ngô, a journalist with over one million followers. The rainbow-coloured flag next to his name symbolises his sexuality and allegiance to the LGBTQ community. In terms of cancel culture and wokeness, such labels in users' profiles might make it easier to socially categorise people based on characteristics such as race, gender, and sexuality. SIT can thus be applied to the topic of cancel culture and journalists, as it can be used to explore how journalists socially categorise themselves or how they are categorised by cancellors and how those social identities are portrayed on social media and how it potentially affects their cancellation.

2.2.2.2 Relevance of the theory: Battle of groups

As mentioned before, people tend to biasedly attribute positive aspects to their own group and negative aspects to those they share dissimilarities with (Martiny & Rubin, 2016; Stets & Burke, 2014; Tajfel & Turner 1979; Treppe & Loy, 2017). People view outgroups as threats to themselves, not just to their group (Smith, 1999), because a threat to a group is essentially a threat to the self as the effects of identification are strengthened when someone in their group is threatened (Islam, 2014). And the more someone's identity is

linked to their group, the more positive favouritism they will portray toward their group (Tajfel et al., 1971).

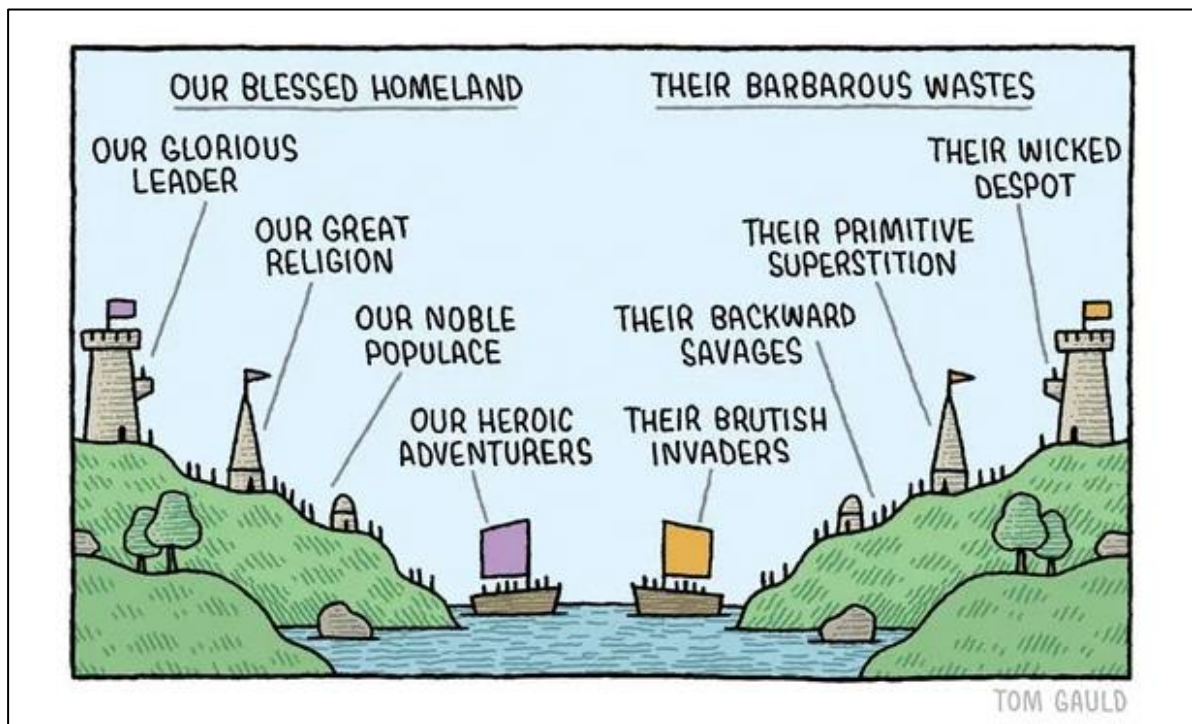


Figure 2.3 – Cartoon drawing (Gauld, 2017)

Trepte and Loy (2017) claim that people do not desire to witness the similarities between their ingroup and other outgroups. The above drawing, by cartoonist Tom Gauld, depicts how ingroups typically view outgroups. The left side of the drawing illustrates how an ingroup sees itself, while the right side shows what the left ingroup thinks about the outgroup on the right. The ingroup (on the left) sees their own religion as 'great,' but describes the religion of the outgroup kingdom (on the right) as 'primitive superstitions.' They describe their own citizens as 'noble,' but perceive the other territory's people as 'backward savages.' Even though both kingdoms are nearly identical, the left ingroup still denigrates the other kingdom and is blind to the hypocrisy of its description of that right outgroup. This depiction will be used to explain certain aspects of cancel culture.

Cancel culture is a sort of mob mentality phenomenon (Beard, 2020) that is associated with identity (Cook et al., 2021) as it is an outcome of contemporary identity politics (Furedi, 2020), which refers to any political intercession that is aimed at groups characterised by innate attributes like race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Younge, 2019). A cancel culture group tends to label outgroup members' actions negatively based on characteristics involving identity politics that both the ingroup and outgroup possesses (Zille, 2021a).

According to TED speaker Betty Hart (2020), there are two basic premises to cancellation, namely i); The cancellors believe their views to be correct with no chance of them being wrong and that the views of their targets are misguided, and ii); That their targets lack the capacity for change or growth. This connects to trait ascription bias, as mentioned earlier, as the cancellors see the flaws of supposed wrongdoers as fixed.

Members of a community with shared affects and emotions believe that there is an evil 'other' that must be dealt with (Suler, 2004). Discussions on Twitter also tend to centre around simple narratives that yield easily distinguishable polarities of good and bad (Papacharissi, 2015). Thus, just like in Gauld's depiction in Figure 2.3, there is always an 'us versus them' in cancel culture. Research has shown that members who have a good collective self-esteem regard their group highly and are more likely to vilify an outgroup if there is a potential threat to their identity (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). When an individual, usually a public figure, says or does something that can be seen as pejorative toward a specific group, defined by, for example, gender, race, and disability, then that group calls for the individual's cancellation (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021). The concept of positive ingroup distinctiveness can be applied to cancel culture. As mentioned before, cancellors regard victim ingroups positively and view the outgroups negatively (Zille, 2021a).

This type of ingroup bias can improve the positive image of an ingroup and the social identity accompanying it (Martiny & Rubin, 2016), and any actions can, in theory, be used to preserve the group's positive image so long as the members of the group view the behaviour as beneficial or valuable to society (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). Cancel culture enforcers engage in immoral acts that they deem to be justifiable (Kaufmann, 2020). Retaliation is seen as justifiable when defending one's own honour or the honour of one's societal group (Glick, Sakallı-Uğurlu, Akbaş, Orta & Ceylan, 2016). Members of the cancel mob, or people who partake in such "digital vigilantism" (Cook et al., 2021: 5), consider their cancelling actions to be morally correct even when they contain hateful, angry, or fear-inducing messages directed at the supposed wrongdoers (Chiou 2020). Cancellors may thus see themselves as morally superior to an outgroup even when their response to individuals of an outgroup can be observed as immoral.

To justify the cruelty and arbitrariness of cancel culture's actions and logic, the cancel mob cannot identify with those they deplore since they must believe that the wrongdoers deserve punishment (Mishan, 2020). What is ironic, is that the cancel culture mob accuses people of despicable actions but partakes in such actions themselves by, for example, sending death- and rape threats to the people they want to cancel (Lampen, 2020; Nakkab,

2020), all in the name of moral righteousness (Chiou, 2020).

Cancel culture enforcers desire a complete consensus amongst the general population (Beard, 2020) and believe that they have the moral right and obligation to regulate the words and actions of others (Chiou, 2020) and shame or ostracise those who do not conform to their beliefs (Norris, 2020a, 2021; Sage, 2022). The acceptance of cancellation depends on who the cancellors are and who the cancelled are (Cook et al., 2021). For example, if an in-group cancels someone from an outgroup, the cancellation is deemed justifiable, but if someone from that outgroup cancels anyone, those from the ingroup will most likely be against the act of cancelling (Cook et al., 2021).

There is a similar phenomenon called the black sheep effect where people unreservedly agree with or positively evaluate someone in their ingroup if their beliefs align with one another but negatively evaluate that individual – sometimes more harshly than they judge individuals from outgroups – when their beliefs are different and deviate from that individual to protect the rest of the ingroup's identity from any negative associations (Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Steain, Stanton & Stevens, 2019). When a member strays from the group, the group can also wheedle or threaten that member to fall back in line (Ling, 2020). However, the black sheep effect is only activated when social identity is at risk, not when a group members' behaviour fails to affect the social identity of others in the group (Rullo et al., 2015).

Along with such social identities, individuals could also possess role identities, which consist of the meanings that are ascribed to people when partaking in a certain role, for example a student might be described as academic, and a parent could be described as nurturing and compassionate (Stets & Burke, 2014). Some revere the work of cancellors as activism that strives to undermine societal injustices and hold people accountable for their transgressions (Chiou, 2020). The role identities that cancellors have thus consist of being protectors who defend those they view as victims and enforcers or activists who enforce punishment or cancellation onto those they see as offenders.

One critique of SIT, however, is that the theory focuses more on the concept of positive ingroup favouritism or bias but neglects to pay as much attention to the other side of the coin: the deliberate evading of negative ingroup perceptions (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Another limitation is that the theory assumes that identity is an all or nothing experience, and that the strength of identities never fluctuate depending on circumstances (Demirden, 2021).

2.2.3 Social contagion theory

The word contagion has been used for centuries to describe a variety of behaviours that people have exhibited (Burgess, Riddell, Fancourt & Murayama, 2018), but social contagion describes the contagious affect in which attitudes or behaviours spread from one individual to another (Levy & Nail, 1993). The theory has one primary author with the premise of social contagion first introduced and popularised by Gustave Le Bon in the late 1800s in his book called 'The crowd: A study of the popular mind' (Le Bon, 1895); a reading about crowd-induced panics and the social spread of information through groups of people (Benson & Gresham, 2007; Le Bon, 1895).

Based on Le Bon's (1895) study of crowds, it seems that social contagion theory has two main assumptions: i); Individuals can be under the contagious influence of crowds, ii); Which results in irrational behaviour, as individuals lose themselves in crowds of like-minded people, and those crowds tend to think illogically, express exaggerated emotions, and act without forethought. A more recent study, involving over 800 school children, found that students' engagement behaviour is contagious as the children tended to emulate each other's engagement in school (Mendoza & King, 2020). The results thus suggest that attitudes and ideas can spread among people to elicit similar behaviours among them (Mendoza & King, 2020). The study thus shows that Le Bon's 'following the crowd' concept is still applicable in modern times.

The spreading of information is caused by the receiving and processing of information that is regarded as a disease that spreads from one informed person to another naïve individual that becomes 'infected' (Hodas & Lerman, 2014). Granted, the theory was postulated in the late 19th century (Le Bon, 1895), but its basic premise can still be applied to modern-day social interactions and influences with regards to cancel culture, as Colin Wright, an evolutionary biologist, tweeted: "Cancel culture is a social contagion." (Wright, 2020: 1).

2.2.3.1 Social media

Social media is the ideal environment for social contagion to occur, because of its easy access to information and users' lack of time and resources to verify information, which increases the chances of posts going viral which increases contagion (Hodas & Lerman, 2012). And users tend to disregard the possible consequences of posting online due to their physical distance from other users and thus confidently post information on a whim that reaches others (Anderson-Lopez, Lambert & Budaj, 2021).

However, despite the phenomenon of social contagion being compared to an undesired infectious disease, contagion on social media occurs because users deliberately look for information and decide to spread it; it is not passive like the spread caused by traditional news networks (Hodas & Lerman, 2014). Users tend to share posts when they find the content of a post to be interesting or helpful and when they want to gain useful knowledge (Berger & Milkman, 2013; Kim, 2015), or want to enrich their identity by seeming well-informed (Berger & Milkman, 2013).

2.2.3.1.1 Exposure

Models on social contagion presume that contagion is propelled by exposure (Piedrahita, Borge-Holthoefer, Moreno & González-Bailón, 2018), and to be infected by information, people first need to be exposed to that information. Hodas and Lerman (2014) conducted an experiment involving two social media platforms, one of which was Twitter, to determine the connection between social contagion and the amount of exposure to information. The researchers found that an increased exposure to information leads to an increased possibility of contagion and likelihood of afflicted individuals continuing the spread of that information (Hodas & Lerman, 2014).

Exposure and contagion will also be looked at in terms of virality. Virality occurs when a post is increasingly ‘liked,’ copied, and shared to users in people’s followers list, who then spread the post to users on their followers list, eventually leading to the post being spread beyond the original group of cohorts (Williams, 2013). It is thus the swift and extensive spread of social media messages (Ahmed, Fenton, Hardey & Das, 2022; Oxford English Dictionary, 2017, cited in Al-Rawi, 2017). Hashtags can also help digital information go viral (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021; Piedrahita et al., 2018). The more a post is shared, the more people are thus exposed to it.

Content tends to go more viral if it conjures strong feelings of “activation or arousal” like anger, anxiety, or wonder (Berger & Milkman, 2013: 21), but content that possesses positive sentiments tends to have higher virality rates than negative content (Berger & Milkman, 2011; 2013; Kim, 2015). While negative or unpleasant emotions have a strong effect on virality, anger and anxiety have a stronger effect than sadness (Berger & Milkman, 2011; 2013). Negative emotions, such as anxiety and anger, cause provocation (Berger & Milkman, 2011; 2013). The car brand BMW, for example, found that distributing an advertisement depicting a car chase and words such as “hostage” and “ambush” increased their popularity and overall success (Berger & Milkman, 2013: 22).

The cancel culture community disparages words or actions seen as offensive (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Sossi, 2021), so they advocate against things with negative connotations or that evoke negative emotions. People tend to be interested in taboo or offensive topics (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021) that evoke strong emotions, and in cancel culture, social media users deliberately look for posts that anger them (Karrim, 2020). Thus, as mentioned before, virality increases when content evokes emotions like anger, so content that angers cancellors could go viral, increasing its exposure and contributing to social contagion.

2.2.3.1.2 Echo chambers

A social network consists of various nodes and ties, with each individual person being a node while the people they interact with are the ties which sometimes gives the illusion of them having a friendship (Burgess et al., 2018). Social contagion suggests that such ties increase the likelihood of a spread of infection, because people are more likely to imitate the behaviour and attitude of those they are ‘tied’ to and thus act as part of a collective behaviour (Burgess et al., 2018) or collective consciousness (Velasco, 2020). Studies have shown that there is a connection between echo chambers and contagion (Cinelli et al., 2021). Echo chambers refer to environments where people with similar beliefs and opinions interact with one another and have those beliefs and opinions reinforced through their consistent interactions with one another and with information that aligns with their perspectives (Bessi, 2016; Cinelli et al., 2021; Terren & Borge, 2021).

Research combining and analysing studies on echo chambers, found that such chambers exist on social media as people tend to connect with like-minded users and are introduced to information that is like their own opinions (Terren & Borge, 2021). It was also determined that less than 10 percent of the studies discovered no evidence of echo chambers, while others found that echo chambers mostly circulated around political and controversial topics, disagreement existed on social media platforms despite people paying more attention to their echo chamber content, and users’ exposure to like-minded content was limited to some extent (Terren & Borge, 2021).

Social media echo chambers are partly built by algorithms that expose users to content like that of their previously viewed content and search history, which limits the range of different viewpoints that users could potentially be exposed to (Terren & Borge, 2021). Those in echo chambers thus mostly hear what they want to hear and tend to not follow users that do not align with their beliefs (Velasco, 2020). As previously discussed in the theory of confirmation bias, individuals tend to believe information that reinforces their

own views (Workman, 2018). Being part of echo chambers increases users' exposure to the same kind of information, which increases the likelihood that they will believe the material to be true as the constant exposure familiarises them with the data (Dechêne et al., 2010). Users thus tend to believe the information that is provided by their 'ties' and spread that information to others.

Cancel culture is enhanced on social media by echo chambers that distribute reinforcing content and ignores opposing opinions (Antin, 2020, cited in Cook et al., 2021; Nakkab, 2020). Discourse is not tolerated in such chambers as those who see things from a different perspective are ignored or exiled from the space (Nakkab, 2020), as discussed in terms of the black sheep effect under the social identity theory. There is also believed to be a link between echo chambers and the outsourcing of misinformation, since such chambers seem to provide rumours and false information to ensure that beliefs are consistently confirmed (Törnberg, 2018).

Not only is there an informational exchange between people, but an emotional exchange can also take place. Emotional contagion refers to the synchronicity that occurs between individuals on an emotive level, as people's feelings are somewhat contagious, resulting in people aligning their emotional states with one another and exhibiting similar expressions and behaviours (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1994, cited in Herrando & Constantinides, 2021; McDougall, 1920). A specific emotion in an individual can be brought to the surface when they witness that same emotion being displayed by another (Levy & Nail, 1993), as part of an instinctual sympathetic human reaction (McDougall, 1920). Anger is an emotion associated with the cancel culture mob, as people become enraged and direct that anger toward depreciating individuals whom they believe to have committed grievous offences (Cook et al., 2021).

Emotional contagion can occur across physical distances, such as on social media (Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014). People can also encounter emotional contagion by simply witnessing the experiences of others (Kramer et al., 2014; Levy & Nail, 1993) and such observations made on social media has been proven to cause an emotional spread amongst users (Herrando & Constantinides, 2021). A study on electronic word of mouth regarding brand experiences and customer reviews found that social media users experienced increased feelings of anxiety when reading negative comments (Wakefield & Wakefield, 2018). Emotions can thus also be transmittable when nonverbal cues are absent (Herrando & Constantinides, 2021). Cancellors thus cancel people on behalf of those who might have been offended or hurt (Zille, 2021a) as they might feel an emotional

connection to them.

2.2.3.2 Relevance of the theory: A hybrid media

In the process of social contagion on Twitter, journalists and ordinary users directly post information to those who follow them or who they are socially linked to (Hodas & Lerman, 2014) and thus spread information deliberately and directly to members of their social ties. Information on social media platforms can be accessed instantly at any given time (Milas, Panagiotidis & Dergiades, 2021). Social media also allows news to spread quicker and wider compared to any other time in history (Milas et al., 2021).

Social media's popularity amongst mainstream media people has become an integral part of the news industry (Newman, Dutton & Blank, 2012). A 'hybrid media' now exists where the mainstream media and social media are connected, and news from traditional outlets is spread on social media, while information on social media also affects the news disseminated by traditional media (Chadwick 2013, cited in Milas et al., 2021). Social media makes it easier for journalists and others in the mainstream media all over the globe to promote their work or the organizations that they work for (Molyneux & Holton, 2014). Journalists and news networks tend to post about breaking news stories on Twitter to let their followers know what stories will soon be on their network's sites (Milas et al., 2021). Journalists also use social media to their advantage in spreading information as they post stories or opinions on such sites (Hamborg, Donnay & Gipp, 2019).

Bill Burr on cancel culture: "You can't take one incident or one quote and say, 'That's who you are.' It took me 50 years to figure out who I am and I've been with me for 50 f---ing years. How are you gonna figure out who I am in a joke?" [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thr/status/1519687934743560192?lang=en> [Accessed 25 July 2022].

Figure 2.4 – Newspaper tweet about cancel culture (The Hollywood Reporter, 2022)

The above figure shows a tweet posted by a newspaper, The Hollywood Reporter (2022), about a comedian commenting on cancel culture. The tweet also gives users a link, directing them to that news story on the network's site, and the post was also retweeted over 60 times. The newspaper thus spread information on cancel culture to its followers and the broader public, raising awareness on the phenomenon and broadening the culture's reach. The news organisation's ties also spread the information further as seen by the presence of retweets. The theory of social contagion can thus be applied to this study as mainstream media entities can expose their ties to information about the cancel culture

phenomenon, and those ties can accelerate contagion through retweets or shares. It will be determined if the hybrid media was involved in the three cancellation cases that will be analysed.

When it comes to the virality of news stories posted on social media, a study on viral news looked at the top 50 stories of four newspapers' YouTube channels and Twitter accounts and found that users preferred to share positive news content, but that users were also enticed by viral stories rooted in social importance and surprising information (Al-Rawi, 2017). Users influence and actively participate in online news by clicking on and reading posted news articles and the rate increases when stories involve public affairs like politics (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Walter, 2012). A study, conducted by Kim (2015), found that news articles on social media were clicked on and spread more when it contained controversial topics or evoked strong emotionally responses. Cancellors digitally chastise those who are accused of saying or doing something controversial (Brito, 2021) or are involved in situations that revolve around controversial topics such as race and gender (Chiou, 2020).

News posts or any posts relevant to the cancel culture process of the three cases will thus be investigated, to determine if contagion had occurred. However, simply being tied to someone does not mean that contagion is certain to occur (Burgess et al., 2018). The social contagion theory thus fails to account for how people are influenced by those they are not tied to or even by environmental factors.

Another factor that can thus be considered is homophily, which is the tendency for people to spend more time with those they deem to be similar to themselves than those who are dissimilar (Ling, 2020). Contagion and homophily may act simultaneously (Burgess et al., 2018). Social contagion suggests that the ties between people are what lead to similar beliefs or opinions (ties drive contagion), while homophily implies that like-minded individuals are drawn to one another and thus share similar beliefs without having been infected by one another (people's similarities thus tie them together) before or after being tied together (Burgess et al., 2018; Ling, 2020). Social contagion theory can thus neglect to explain how homophily influences people's stances on who they deem worthy of being cancelled. If applied to the concept of cancel culture, social contagion would make it appear that cancellors cancel people because they have influenced each other to do so, but homophily could suggest that people have similar beliefs on what actions should lead to cancellation and thus call for cancellation without necessarily having influenced one another's opinions or actions.

2.3 Literature review

One of the most integral and preliminary parts of a study is reading the existing body of knowledge on a topic (Kumar, 2011, 2019). Reading literature helps narrow down the topic of a study, provides the researcher with the key concepts that surround that topic (Neuman, 2007, 2014), and helps the researcher integrate their findings with the existing information on the topic (Kumar, 2011, 2019).

Brito (2021) and Sailofsky (2021) both agree that while the term ‘cancel culture’ is new, the act of publicly beseeching others for supposed and tangible misconducts is not. However, cancel culture has reached the point where journalists have befallen its wrath (Norris, 2021). The core elements of cancel culture will be reviewed and compared to journalistic practices as well as the cancellation of mainstream media personalities to determine how the practice of cancel culture has been embedded in journalism.

2.3.1 The phenomenon of cancel culture

Cancel culture refers to the criticism, and successive consequences, regarding the words and deeds of a person, business, or ideology that are seen as offensive or immoral (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Sossi, 2021). Cancel culture can however have a positive impact when helping social movements, such as campaigns denouncing racism (Sossi, 2021). For this study, however, focus will be placed on the general progression of cancel culture rather than its positive aspects.

Criticising and ‘cancelling’ someone is not a new phenomenon. According to criminology professor, Dr. Jill McCorkel (cited in Kato, 2021), cancel culture is just an evolution of human habits and instances of punishment for not adhering to professed social norms that can be seen throughout human history. For example, during the 1600’s in Salem, angry mobs accused approximately two hundred individuals of practicing witchcraft which led to the execution of many innocents (Carol & Karlsen, 1998, cited in Thomson, 2021).

Forms of historical cancellation have even made its way into literary works. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, portrays a woman in the 1600s being forced to endure public humiliation by wearing the letter ‘A’ on her clothes to showcase her crimes of adultery (Norris, 2021). However, in contemporary times, such public condemnations are mostly reserved for public figures (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Palomares et al., 2022), including journalists (Cheruiyot, 2022; Norris, 2021). Such modern and historical examples of cancellation convey that punishment or cancellation can be enforced on both average netizens and public figures, but that it is always done in

a public manner.

Although today's methods of cancellation do not necessarily lead to the death penalty, people are still exposed to different forms of punishment and public criticism as the modern-day cancel culture process starts and ends, not with ancient pitchforks or nooses, but with social media platforms. Social media users preach about someone's cancellation and tend to use the hashtag #Cancelled for emphasis (Semíramis 2019, cited in Cook et al., 2021), or the hashtag #Cancel can be attached to the target's name, like #CancelColbert for example, that was used regarding an American television figure (Mishan, 2020). They also hashtag the name of the accused in high profile cases, such as #AaronMSchlossberg and #KellyPocha (Bouvier, 2020).

Cancellation efforts are implemented regardless of whether someone has committed an actual wrong or not. Such instances of digital vigilantism, where people are "naming and shaming" others (Favarel-Garrigues, Tanner & Trottier, 2020: 190), target people based on both actual wrongdoings and perceived offences (Trottier 2020). Once someone is considered culpable, it becomes difficult to assure others of their innocence, as "once guilty in the court of public opinion, there is no appeal" (Sossi, 2021: 1). This is also made difficult by the fact that the very core of cancel culture requires it to take place amongst borderless online groups in a public space (Sossi, 2021), like social media.

2.3.1.1 Social media as a conduit of cancel culture

Social media refers to online platforms that allow individuals to communicate with one another (Manning, 2014) primarily through user-generated content (Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2018). It allows users to have continuous communication despite geographical restrictions (Velasco, 2020). Helen Zille, a South African politician who has been persecuted by cancel culture before (Lincoln, 2021), claims that social media is the ultimate intermediary for people who want to seek out forms of potential offences (Karrim, 2020; Zille, 2021a). Potential cancellors can thus go onto social media sites to find potential offences that are deemed worthy of potential cancellation without being restricted by geographical elements.

Social media users can publicly voice their concerns in ways that they never could before (Castells, 2015; KhosraviNik, 2017), as social media provides easy ways for people to express themselves (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021). This can structure well-intentioned activist movements that can lead to the justifiable cancellation of reprobates. Cancel culture has also been likened to the concept of activism (Chiou, 2020). Social media sites,

such as Twitter, have been used to embody activism or post about activist movements (Bosch, 2015; Papacharissi, 2015).

2.3.1.1.1 Twitter as the ultimate conduit

Social media, and the increased activism involving cancel culture, has caused many instances of call-outs and cancellations involving people and businesses (Nguyen, 2020). Twitter is used to promote or enforce such activism (Bosch, 2015; Papacharissi, 2015), as those on the platform feel like they are activists fighting social injustices (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). Twitter allows users to initiate conversations on a worldwide basis (Crosset et al., 2019) – as the internet is a ‘borderless space’ due to its easy accessibility around the world (Velasco, 2020) – by sending and receiving posts known as ‘tweets’ with a certain number of characteristics (Crosset et al., 2019; Malik et al., 2019) since 2006 (Jackson, 2012; Sinnenberg, Buttenheim, Padrez, Mancheno, Ungar & Merchant, 2017). The app also allows users to comment on others’ tweets, or retweet which is the copying and pasting of another user’s post (Crosset et al., 2019).

Twitter predominantly drives cancel culture (Bouvier & Machin, 2021) and while people initially used the word ‘cancelled’ jokingly on the app, the term gained popularity and became a new online cultural phenomenon (Brito, 2021). Anderson-Lopez et al. (2021) elaborates on Velasco’s (2020) concept of a ‘borderless space’ by claiming that social media’s lack of borders creates physical distances between people which causes users to be more comfortable with digitally criticising others.

Despite such physical distances, digital platforms allow for direct communication between those that send messages and their targeted audience (Choi, 2015), such as journalists and their audiences. Dubois et al. (2018) and Hernández-Fuentes & Monnier (2020) agree that journalists use Twitter to determine newsworthy topics, but Hernández-Fuentes & Monnier (2020) claim that journalists view the app as an unworthy source of credible information.

Activist campaigns on social media, like ones fighting racism, get noticed and reported on by the mainstream media (Bouvier, 2020). However, there are limits to journalists’ engagement with social media audiences, as journalists tend to not engage in public debates on Twitter as it is difficult to report on topics if they have publicly expressed their opinions on it (Daniels, 2016). Not only do journalists use social media for their jobs, but social media platforms are also used to cancel journalists, as seen in the next examples.

Journalists have fallen victim to cancel culture at the hands of average netizens on Twitter.

For example, alt-weekly journalist, Katie Herzog, was targeted on Twitter by one reader, and eventually by a whole slew of users, for her opinion that the original reader disagreed with (Cook et al., 2021). Existing posts, like old tweets, can also be uncovered by Twitter users which can lead to a call for someone's cancellation. For example, journalist Alexi McCammond from the United States of America, resigned from her new position as editor of Teen Vogue due to decade-old tweets that resurfaced (Rutz, 2021).

Social media users can use their platforms to demand accountability from public figures who have allegedly or unequivocally done something wrong (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021), such as journalists (Norris, 2021). Supporters of cancel culture state that they are changing the status quo of society, by making public figures, or people in power, liable for their actions (Brito, 2021). So, despite the outrageousness that cancel culture is capable of, the voices of the mundane are thus being heard through digital platforms. The power hierarchy of society is thus changing, with social media users becoming citizen journalists and enforcers of justice, while actual journalists are being punished in some ways.

2.3.2 Wokeness

"Cancel culture is the manifestation of 'wokeism,'" which refers to the belief that reality is "socially constructed" and influenced by the group that one belongs to (Beiner, 2020, cited in Velasco, 2020: 2). At its root, the concept of wokeism, or wokeness, was conjured up to ultimately improve society. Wokeism's original purpose was to enlighten people to keep their eyes open for any unfairness in their areas that could be dealt with (Whiteout, 2018).

Woke ideologies can also unintentionally bring people together. Three female university students (Ashlee, Zamora & Karikari, 2017) wrote a paper on how wokeism has changed their lives for the better and emphasised how it had helped cultivate a feeling of sisterhood and belonging among them (Ashlee et al., 2017). Their experience thus proves that people can find harmony and friendship in their collective beliefs of woke narratives.

The word 'woke' used to be seen in a positive manner as it was described as the awareness of injustices but has since been used disparagingly to describe pretentiousness and insincerity over how much people claim to care about certain issues (Van Heerden, 2021) as part of inauthentic forms of social media activism (Sobande et al., 2022) against the perceived oppression of certain social identities (Sage, 2022). Despite its initial altruistic intents, wokeness has become an ideology enforced by morality seekers who judge and categorise others all in the name of supposed morals (Kaufmann, 2020).

Woke capitalism, for example, occurs when brands or companies part ways with employees – who have received outrage from social media users – to show their moral allegiance to those who criticised the employees or felt victimised (Lewis, 2020). They also do this as part of risk mitigation to keep their reputations intact (Saint-Louis, 2021). Companies also adopt and advertise woke ideals to seem better than their non-woke adversaries (Erving, 2021; Kaufmann, 2020). Such companies also do so to feel morally good (Ditum, 2014, cited in Bouvier, 2020) and look progressive, while they, in actuality, do not care about the reforming of supposed offences and use wokeism as a marketing strategy to ensure that they prosper (Lewis, 2020).

One example includes Pride Month, which is the month of June that is dedicated to celebrating members of the LGBTQ community in certain countries, when woke corporations include the rainbow-coloured LGBTQ flag to their logos to try and improve their reputation or increase their profit margins (Polumbo, 2022). Companies thus make gestures that imply that they are woke (not used as a pejorative word in this instance) and progressive when they are neither woke nor progressive.

2.3.2.1 Orwell's Animal Farm

The phenomena of wokeness and cancel culture share similarities with George Orwell's Animal Farm philosophy (Zille, 2021a). Orwell's novella, *Animal Farm*, is a political satire aimed at the Russian Revolution that tells the tale of farm animals fighting against supposed human tyranny (Hasan, Muhammad & Bahasin, 2020; Pelpuo, Bakuuro & Tuurosang, 2018).

The pigs on the farm persuade the other animals to revolt against their human masters, causing them to chase the people away (Orwell, 1946). The pigs become the new leaders of the land (Senn, 2015) and establish seven commandments (that all the animals must abide by), criminalising supposed abhorrent human behaviour, one of which decrees that no animals shall drink alcohol (Fajrina, Hanifa & Sari, 2019; Orwell, 1946; Pelpuo et al., 2018). A new philosophy of "four legs good, two legs bad" becomes popular (Orwell, 1946: 17), explaining that he who walks on four legs is a friend, and he who walks on two legs – like a human – is an enemy (Fajrina et al., 2019; Pelpuo et al., 2018). The pigs in the story convince all the other farm animals that they are victims because they do not live by the same customs that their humans do (Orwell, 1946), basically classifying the animals as victims and the humans as oppressors.

The ruling class of pigs eventually start breaking the rules, resulting in them changing the

vernacular of the commandments to rectify their hypocrisy (Orwell, 1946). For example, “No animal shall drink alcohol” is edited to “No animal shall drink alcohol to excess” after the pigs got drunk one day (Orwell, 1946: 55). At one point, a pig is even seen walking on two legs like a human, chanting “Four legs good, two legs better!” (Orwell, 1946: 67). The seven commandments are essentially reduced to one, namely that “All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others.” (Orwell, 1946: 68). Figure 2.5 depicts the pigs’ hypocrisy in how they break their own rules and suffer no consequences for it.

The end of the story consists of the pigs arguing whilst playing a game of cards inside the house with a human farmer from the neighbouring land (Orwell, 1946; Pelpuo et al., 2018). All the other animals watch them through the window but struggle to distinguish the pigs from the humans (Orwell, 1946; Pelpuo et al., 2018). It can thus be concluded that the mannerisms of the pigs and the humans have become one and the same; the pigs have become the very things they used to protest.

Like the pigs, woke ideologies categorise people in terms of personal identity traits. Attributes such as race, gender, sexual orientation, etcetera, are used to categorise individuals and further divide them into groups of ‘victims’ and ‘villains,’ and people tend to support the victims whilst shaming the so-called villains (Zille, 2021a). Cancel culture is used to express being a victim or being victimised (Rogers, 2020) and those who are seen as victims are not seen as such because of their supposed disadvantages, but rather because of their politico-symbolic potential (Kaufmann, 2020). This asserts that, much like the animals in the story, cancel culture categorises people into groups of victims and villains based on immutable personal characteristics.



Figure 2.5 – “Welcome to the farm” (Senn, 2015: 153)

In real life, as stated before, people are classified as victims or villains based on personal attributes (Zille, 2021a). In some cases, people deliberately award themselves with the ‘victim’ status whilst attributing an ‘oppressor’ status onto others (Zille, 2021a). In the story, the animals are seen as the victims whilst humans are seen as the villains, and one can tell which is which based on the way they walk for example, as animals typically walk on four legs and humans walk on two (Pelpuo et al., 2018). However, birds walk on two legs as well, so the pigs explain that wings are vastly different from human arms and are eerily like legs which is why birds are not classified as humans, because they essentially have ‘four’ legs (Orwell, 1946). The pigs thus change the very definition of bipedalism to assert that birds are victims as well. This method is used to determine who the so-called prey is to feed the victim narrative in cancel culture. This is evident in one of the main features of cancel culture and wokeness that involves twisting information until one is offended by it, so that one can play the role of the victim (Zille, 2021a).

Those enforcing wokeness and cancel culture also seem to care more about certain ‘victim’ groups than others. For example, more attention is given to groups pertaining to race and gender, rather than groups living with disabilities or in impoverished circumstances (Kaufmann, 2020). In wokeism’s social hierarchy of victims and oppressors there are specific human races at the top who are classified as victims, followed

by women and sexual minorities who are also seen as victims (Kaufmann, 2020). Along with breaking their own rules, the novella's pigs also indulge in human luxuries while they make the other animals perform hard labour, even though they used to condemn the idea of forcing animals to partake in such physical work (Orwell, 1946). They even had the farm dogs, who the pigs treated well, act as guards to ensure that the other animals did not step out of line (Orwell, 1946). Wang and Jeon (2020) claim that people in modern times notice the flaws in others but fail to see the flaws in themselves. Much like the pigs that violate the commandments that they decreed themselves, members of the cancel culture community have, ironically, treated people immorally and have engaged in behaviours that they claim to be against. Chiou (2020) claims that such hypocritical acts are done in the name of moral righteousness.

For example, social media users have participated in digital hate against an alleged wrongdoer, with some posts including threats of violence (Leetaru, 2018) like death- and rape threats (Lampen, 2020; Nakkab, 2020). Those who cancel have also engaged in hate speech (Leetaru 2018), which consists of deliberately made public statements that disparage a specific individual or group of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 1995, cited in Paz, Montero-Díaz & Moreno-Delgado, 2020), against people who said or did something that they themselves found deplorable or problematic (Ng, 2020). Threats can also contain elements of, for example, racism, sexism, homophobia, and heterosexism (Semler, 2020, cited in Cook et al., 2021). These statements suggest that, just like Orwell's (1946) pigs, cancellors essentially engage in behaviour that they claim to abrogate.

2.3.2.2 Mainstream media bias

Unsuspecting news consumers believe the mainstream media to be impartial (Mbindwane, 2015), but media bias seems to be a worldwide phenomenon with increasing evidence claiming that it is caused by political and socio-economic beliefs (Elejalde et al., 2018). Mainstream media outlets portray themselves as being unbiased (Elejalde et al., 2018; Mbindwane, 2015) but neglect to provide the public with fair, objective stories, and instead emphasise their own predispositions in their reporting (Mbindwane, 2015). However, the level of partiality that news outlets possess vary and is projected in different ways, with bias either explicitly stated or completely ignored, deliberately spread, or unintentionally distributed (Herman & Chomsky, 2008). These claims suggest that mainstream media bias is present in today's society, but that the bias is portrayed in different ways and intensities.

Selection bias is an example of such non-objectivity. It occurs when news outlets mostly

report on specific types of stories out of a population of news stories that they tend to deliberately seek out, while excluding other stories from that population (Groeling, 2013). A form of selection bias is the reporting of woke happenings by news outlets to remain relevant and keep up with the demands of the global market (Van Heerden, 2021). For instance, most of the American mainstream media reported on Netflix employees protesting alleged transphobic jokes that an American comedian, Dave Chapelle, made in a newly aired Netflix special, but neglected to cover John Deere and Kellogg's workers who protested around the same time to get higher wages, improved working conditions, increased benefits, and other aspects to improve the economic conditions of their lives (Lynch, 2021). The news thus covered woke labour activism over another type of labour activism in this example. It paid more attention to activism involving gender rather than other topics, reiterating Kaufmann's (2020) information about society's hierarchy.

The spreading of bias can however also be done unintentionally (Herman & Chomsky, 2008), which can be done by reporting on fake news. One of the reasons journalists report on fake news or false information is because it is a journalist's duty to verify the truth and expose what is untrue, to give people accurate information to make informed decisions (Tsfati et al., 2020). As mentioned before, people struggle to distinguish between what is true and what is familiar and tend to believe familiar concepts or ideologies as being true (Dechêne et al., 2010). So, even when the mainstream media repeatedly reports on fake news with an emphasis on why the information is false, the fake information is still indirectly getting coverage and repeated representation, adding to its familiarity and ultimate believability (Tsfati et al., 2020), as it is more challenging to disprove lies when they are repeated (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz & Cook, 2012).

2.3.2.2.1 Journalists and social media

Journalists have come to utilise social media to do their jobs. Research comparing the journalism culture between United States and Germany depicts that journalists from North America and Western Europe tend to use social media platforms to their advantage (Revers, 2016) as many ideas for stories are procured by analysing social media posts (Dubois, et al., 2018). Journalists tend to utilize social media platforms to identify which topics the public is interested in and what opinions the public has on specific topics (Dubois et al., 2018).

The mainstream media and social media sites, like Twitter, affect each other. Both have bound together to create a sort of hybrid media, where each uses the other to its advantage (Chadwick, 2013, cited in Milas et al., 2021). Tweets are used as a way of getting the

news media's attention on activist movements (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021). Dubois et al. (2018) and Tandoc and Johnson (2016) agree that journalists find information on Twitter and distribute short and fast pieces of news to Twitter audiences.

Journalists tend to immediately tweet about a news story, to direct users to their news sites (Milas et al., 2021). A study involving college students found that young adults tend to see breaking news on Twitter first before anywhere else, and that those breaking news tweets direct them to websites of traditional news media networks, but the results also depended on the frequency of the participants' Twitter use (Tandoc & Johnson, 2016). The study however neglected to look at the influence of echo chambers in such cases. Social media users tend to isolate themselves in echo chambers on social platforms where they are exposed to news that feeds their prejudices (Hamborg et al., 2019). Digital algorithms help with this by providing users with content that they prefer (Matamoros-Fernández, 2017). These users are thus exposed to news on social media that affirms their own biases or opinions, due to echo chambers.

Although Twitter and traditional news media have a reciprocal relationship, a study involving reports on Greece's potential exit from the European Union found that the impact that Twitter has on the mainstream media is stronger than the effect that the mainstream media has on the Twittersphere (Milas et al., 2021). Twitter has, in some circumstances, become the agenda-setting source for news (Milas et al., 2021). This study suggests that although a hybrid form incorporates both social media and the mainstream media, the two media do not affect one another equally.

Despite the presence of a hybrid media, reality is not always properly portrayed. News organisations make the mistake of thinking that Twitter represents the public at large (Basson, 2020) and newspaper articles do not always depict a realistic view of the world as news distributors could lack time and information when writing a news piece (Neuman, 2007, 2014). The Independent newspaper, for example, lost thousands of readers after distributing woke content, but other newspapers who have avoided woke stories in favour of a more traditional approach have not seen such a decrease in readership (Zille, 2021a).

Despite a prevalent hybrid media, an article by Basham (2020) conveys that journalists essentially have two roles regarding cancel culture on Twitter: they either become targets of the culture, or they enforce the ethos themselves. Journalists sometimes attack other journalists even if they work at the same news outlet. The article claims that an opinion writer for The New York Times has experienced such an attack first-hand (Basham, 2020). The opinion writer, James Bennet, wrote an article about an issue that more than half of

America's voters agreed with (Basham, 2020). The news outlet's staff protested about their colleague's article on Twitter, leading to Bennet's eventual loss of his tenure, even though the words in his article resonated with most citizens (Basham, 2020).

Similarly, with Alexi McCammond, more than 20 of her colleagues at Teen Vogue compiled their complaints against her in a letter (Rutz, 2021) and posted it on Twitter (Cinone, 2021), because they were furious over the content of her old, resurfaced tweets (Sossi, 2021), which they deemed to be racist and homophobic (Breuninger, 2021). Another example includes an editor at The Philadelphia Inquirer who had to issue an apology after his co-workers accused him of wrongdoing for including a quote from an interviewee in an article he wrote (Basham, 2020). The quote did not come from him, but he was scolded for including that quote from the person he had interviewed (Basham, 2020). This example proves that journalists could get called out or cancelled for words that they themselves did not even utter. Journalists also try to get non-journalists cancelled. An example is journalist George Eaton of the New Statesman magazine, who posted a photo of himself on social media, that showed him drinking champagne to celebrate how he succeeded in cancelling philosopher Roger Scruton (Kaufmann, 2020).

2.3.3 Decontextualisation

Helen Zille, the South African politician who launched a book on wokeness and cancel culture (Zille, 2021a), once tweeted that decontextualization seems to be the first rule of cancel culture (Zille, 2021b). The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines decontextualisation as an act of interpreting words, actions, or events out of context (American Psychology Association, 2021; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), either consciously or subconsciously (American Psychology Association, 2021), with the main element being the act of taking something out of context.

2.3.3.1 Context and confirmation

Critics of cancel culture have claimed that it is an act of mob rule where people hastily make a collective judgement, essentially jumping to conclusions and possibly misinterpreting situations (Brooks, 2020). The rapid distribution of information online has been linked to people making rash conclusions when judging a post or comment, as conclusions are reached without investigating the situation in any way (Tucker, 2018). This information suggests that rash judgement is linked to exposure to quickly distributed and possibly unverified information on social media.

One such example involves the South African journalist, Lindsay Dentlinger, who was

called racist due to her actions on the job (Lekabe, 2021; Pijoos, 2021; Times Live, 2021). Her case is one of the three cancellation incidents that will be analysed in the study. A video was posted of her conducting interviews outside of a parliament building following a national budget speech in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, in which she was seen interviewing a white politician who was sans a mandated mask, and then interviewing two black politicians whom she instructed to keep their masks on (Pijoos, 2021).

Dentlinger is a reporter for eNCA, and the news outlet firmly claimed that the racism allegations against the journalist were “maliciously misleading” (Baloyi, 2021: 1). When watching the video (see Politicsweb, 2021), however, it is evident that the non-white interviewees were already wearing masks or visibly in possession of masks when the reporter asked them to keep their masks on, but no mask was visible in the hands or around the neck of the white politician. Was the white politician in possession of a mask during the interview that was just simply not in view of the camera? Was it tucked away in one of his pockets? Or were people decontextualising the situation and jumping to conclusions? Either way, Twitter users seemed to have called for Dentlinger’s cancellation before considering such questions.

The interpretation of events, as seen in the Dentlinger case, can thus affect people’s judgement. Interpretation can be subjective, as two people, who are given the same information, might construe the information differently from one another (Schoth & Lioffi, 2017). Things are also interpreted differently based on the lenses that they are perceived through. For example, dolphins could perceive Michael Phelps as a poor swimmer and cheetahs could perceive Usain Bolt as a slow runner (Domeier, Sachse & Schäfer, 2018), while us humans might perceive those two athletes’ abilities as outstanding.

Interpretation bias refers to the consistent analysis of obtruse situations, usually in a negative light as a form of negative interpretation bias (Hirsch, Meeten, Krahé & Reeder, 2016). Those who are woke, for example, deliberately look for things on social media that they can misinterpret, distort, or decontextualise which tends to cause them to be outraged (Karrim, 2020). This outrage causes users to ignore the circumstantial evidence surrounding situations, as Bouvier (2019) and Papacharissi (2015) claim that people tend to focus more on the affect and emotion attached to social media posts instead of the actual words in the post. Affect is not an event; it is merely a layer of an event that takes place, it is how users feel about something that has happened, and the narrative structure of Twitter helps lend form to affect (Papacharissi, 2015). This information suggests that

social media users deliberately or inadvertently misinterpret information which causes them to become outraged which in turn makes them neglect doing any factchecking.

Bias or subjectivity can account for the personal experiences of individuals but does not bode well as evidence for objective debates (Albert, Mylopoulos & Laberge, 2019), such as the debated cancellation of someone you have never met. Meaning can also be subjective (Edwards, Bybee, Frost, Harvey & Navarro, 2017), which is why one person's opinion, regardless of how clear it is communicated, can still be misinterpreted by another (Edwards et al., 2017). So, is it plausible that people decontextualise words or actions because they rationalise differently from others?

Another reason for the lack of logic could be the transient nature of tweeting, when people post their thoughts without thinking it through or contemplating the possible consequences that might follow (Ott, 2017). Supposed wrongdoers might thus tweet on a whim, without clearly articulating what they mean in the post, and can get cancelled for it, or cancellors might see tweets about someone's potential cancellation and participate without knowing more about the situation first. Tweeting imbues impulsiveness as it requires little effort or forethought (Ott, 2017) and can be done on a whim, causing users to not consider the weight that their posts might carry or how it might be misinterpreted (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). Twitter also allows each tweet to have only a certain number of characteristics (Tandoc & Johnson, 2016), which could also lead to decontextualisation, as people might only get a fraction of what a user meant in one tweet. One South African public figure for example, posted a slew of tweets about something, but users tended to read only the first tweet and not the explanations in the tweets that followed, and called for that person's punishment (Zille, 2021a).

Rationalisation might occur after tweets are sent and transpires when people take measures and subsequently adjust their views to justify their behaviour and make their actions seem rational (Cushman, 2020). Those who cancel others might thus try and rationalise their demands for cancellation, which were expressed through tweets, by convincing themselves that their tweets are justified, and that the target is worthy of cancellation.

2.3.3.2 Fake outrage or justifiable outrage?

Cancel culture has been used synonymously with the term 'outrage-culture' (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021). Helen Zille (cited in Karrim, 2020) states that outrage follows decontextualisation whenever someone does not adhere to the rules of wokeism and

identity politics. Put simply: when a tweet or real-world action seems to defy the ideologies of wokeness, the action or tweet is taken out of context and outrage from the cancel culture mob soon ensues. However, cancel culture enforcers show signs of unjustified outrage or fake outrage, which Zille calls ‘fauxrage’ (pronounced ‘forage’), and which she claims is a common occurrence in woke culture (Karrim, 2020: 1). The word’s underlying meaning includes people “sniffing around” to find things on social media that might anger them and then spread that outrage to others (Karrim, 2020: 1). This entails that users seek information that will allow them to either rightly or falsely be outraged.

Twitter feeds tend to consist of floods of affect and emotion rather than rational thought, surrounding narratives that depict a division between good and evil, which is afflicted by collective outrage and agreement amongst certain users (Bouvier, 2019; Papacharissi, 2015). When cancel culture enforcers see, read, or hear something that they deem to be offensive, they call for justice (Clark 2020). Digital echo chambers provide users with information that confirm their biases and make them believe that their anger and rage is universal (Antin, 2020, cited in Cook et al., 2021). It can be concluded that people can thus call for cancellations even when others do not think that such calls are justified.

Social media posts that garner controversy and strong emotional responses from users tend to drive user participation (Myers, 2010, cited in Bouvier, 2020), as people are drawn to taboo things (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021). Posts containing strong or controversial opinions that are deliberately constructed with the goal of gaining strong emotional responses are difficult for users to ignore. The vehicle company BMW, for example, launched short online clips displaying car chases with negative titles such as “hostage” and “ambush,” which went viral and contributed to the company’s success during that time (Berger & Milkman, 2013: 22). The people who watched the clips experienced anxiety which brings about arousal (Berger & Milkman, 2013). A study, researching how arousal and valence affect video-sharing, found that high levels of arousal emotions, like anger, are the backbone of video-sharing (Nelson-Field, Riebe & Newstead, 2013). Emotions like anger can thus increase the sharing of posts, contributing to a post’s eventual virality.

Woke notions have emotional connotations attached to them, which also cause reflexes or emotions to rule over logic (Kaufmann, 2020). Those who already have a negative perception about something and is given new information on it – that also shines it in a negative light – is more likely to believe that information as being accurate (Tsfati et al.,

2020). The brain also focuses on the keywords of sentences, while glossing over or forgetting the rest. For example, if the news has been reporting on rumours surrounding a well-known politician and a possible paedophile ring, and the title of the story reads: 'Politician is not connected to paedophile ring,' the brain would organise it as 'Politician, paedophile – not' (Tsfati et al., 2020), emphasising the words 'politician' and 'paedophile.'

The mainstream media also contributes to people's outrage as they make money from content that enrages people, like specific social media content (Lobell, 2021). The media profits from the polarization that topics surrounding wokeness and identity cause amongst the general population; the media causes moral panic amongst the population to profit from it (Lobell, 2021). A study that analysed over 2500 tweets showed that mainstream news outlets tend to circulate more trust-reducing messages than trust-enhancing messages and redistribute such argumentative content to compete with other markets (Christensen, Lovett & Curiel, 2021). The study however neglected to say whether the outlets' intentions were solely based on financial motivation.

The following example of cancel culture outrage is another incident that will be analysed in the study. Journalist Piers Morgan resigned from the Good Morning Britain show after he gave his opinions on the Meghan Markle and Prince Harry interview with Oprah Winfrey that was released on the 7th of March 2021 where Markle made claims of racism against members of the British royal family (Kilkenny, 2021). Piers Morgan said that many of Markle's claims were fabricated and likened believing her to trusting Pinocchio, a character from a children's story whose wooden nose lengthened every time he lied (Creitz, 2021). He also posted his opinions about the royal couple on Twitter (Hendricks, 2021). He was soon criticised by users on social media for his comments about Markle (Fuster, 2021), and was deemed racist for disbelieving Markle's claims (Day, 2021).

Morgan's friend Sharon Osbourne defended him on social media and on a televised talk show called The Talk (Kilkenny, 2021). To be clear; she did not defend what he had said but defended his right to say it (Pineda, 2021), but it seems that people had decontextualised her words and her intentions. Osbourne was soon called a racist for defending someone who was viewed as a racist and issued a public apology but ended up losing her job as a co-host on The Talk anyway (Kilkenny, 2021; Pineda, 2021). So, as seen with this example, it is apparent that not just journalists, but their supporters and people in their personal lives can be persecuted due to the cancel culture mob's decontextualisation and subsequent outrage.

2.3.4 Cancellation and call-out

As mentioned before, the act of cancelling someone is not a new phenomenon (Brito, 2021; Kato, 2021; Sailofsky, 2021). There are examples throughout human history of people being punished for not following perceived social norms (Kato, 2021). In the old days they used to chase someone with pitchforks, but nowadays they chase people with digital pitchforks through the planes of the social media landscape. Contemporary cancel culture seems to have originated on Twitter as a way of fighting perceived social injustices (Semíramis 2019, cited in Cook et al., 2021).

People can now get cancelled for actual or supposed offences (Trottier 2020), even though cancel culture's initial intentions were fair and prosocial. There are two prominent steps to cancel culture interventions: i); First is the receiving of backlash on social media, i.e., getting called out, after doing or saying something that could be seen as controversial (Brito, 2021), and ii); Second involves getting cancelled in various ways (Cook et al., 2021).

2.3.4.1 Call-outs

The term 'cancel culture' is also used synonymously with 'call-out culture' as people call for a supposed offender's cancellation (Cook et al., 2021; Matei, 2019). Social media call-outs involve the public condemnation of a person or persons for behaviour that is deemed problematic (Semíramis 2019, cited in Cook et al., 2021). People get called out on instances regarding race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and any possible examples of bigotry (Zille, 2021a), and can get called out if they say or do anything considered offensive to a specific group of people, like a specific racial and gender group (Chiou, 2020). Cancel culture tends to involve topics such as racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and sexual crimes (Norris, 2021). Long ago, during old call-out culture people screamed and called someone a 'witch,' as seen with the Salem witch trials (Carol & Karlsen, 1998, cited in Thomson, 2021), but nowadays people get called racist, sexist, or bigoted (Zille, 2021a). It can be concluded that the labelling of supposed wrongdoers has thus always been a part of public cancellation efforts.

The voices and concerns of ordinary denizens have been amplified over the years due to social media's easy method of communication that allows people to effortlessly share information and give their opinions (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021). As seen in examples such as the Dentlinger case where people communicated on Twitter about the journalist's controversy (Pijoos, 2021), it is apparent that modern-day call-outs have thus become

easier to enact with the mere click of a button.

Call-outs are used to not only condemn individuals, but also voice demands or requests. For example, accusers tend to demand an apology from the accused (Mueller, 2021). Due to such digital demands, Dentlinger, for example, released a public apology regarding her controversy (Seleka, 2021). A study on consumerism claims that negative consumer-generated content that evokes anger is more likely to be shared and that such cases should be rectified (Berger & Milkman, 2013). Those who were seen as doing something that causes public outrage might thus try to use an apology to rectify the situation and avoid punishment (Groenhart & Bardoel, 2011, cited in Cheruiyot, 2022). This asserts that, even when someone apologises as per the request of the cancel culture mob, their apology might not be sincere and consequences might follow.

Sometimes apologising is not enough though (Mishan, 2020) as cancellors reject apologies and see it as proof of a person's wrongdoing (Bouvier & Machin, 2021; Nkanjeni, 2021). Critics of cancel culture claim that those who cancel are only interested in satisfying their own self-interests by policing the behaviours of others and forcing their own beliefs and ideologies onto them (Roos, 2020, cited in Sailofsky, 2021). Tweets that garner high levels of emotion tend to get higher levels of exposure through an increase of 'likes' of tweets (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021), so a user's elicitation of emotional responses, from themselves or from others, can be driven by a desire to gain likes on their tweets (Rambukkana, 2015, cited in Bouvier, 2020). Posts are thus constructed with the goal of eliciting emotional responses and increasing engagement (Breazu & Machin, 2019). Continued call-outs surrounding controversial topics on Twitter might thus be an attempt from users to get people to feel strong emotions to gain more attention and attraction to their own tweets.

Call-outs can also be made against those acquainted with the accused. Screenshots were taken of some accused's personal social media profiles, along with photos of them with their friends, family, and colleagues, and spread on social media, subjecting the supposed wrongdoers and those they know to negative publicity (Bouvier, 2020). Another example is the situation involving Sharon Osbourne and Piers Morgan, where Osbourne was vilified for saying that Morgan is her friend and that she supports his right to free speech (Pineda, 2021).

Public shaming is also linked to being called out (Norris, 2021; Soupcoff, 2021). Allegations of journalist Andy Mills' past behaviour came out and the Twitter mob broke loose, attacking him on the social networking site (Soupcoff, 2021). According to Mills,

the public humiliation was “enough to cause his departure” from his job (Soupcoff, 2021: 1). Being called out on social media thus led to him being unemployed, which is one of the ultimate forms of cancellation that is discussed under loss of support.

Regardless of how people are called-out, the accused seems to always publicly respond to the call-outs. According to Groenhart and Bardoel (2011, cited in Cheruiyot, 2022), journalists tend to respond to such digital criticism in seven ways, namely i); Rejection: deny the claims of their accusers, ii); Refutation: more hardened denial, iii); Evasion: admit fault to shirk accountability, iv); Justification: explain away their mistakes, v); Mitigation: use genuine excuses to minimise their mistakes, vi); Confession: acknowledge their culpability, and vii); Alteration: correct their mistakes and offer remedies.

2.3.4.2 Cancellation

In January 2021, Merriam-Webster added a new meaning to the word ‘cancelled’ in their online dictionary as it now also means losing support after enacting or expressing “objectionable behaviour or opinions” (Merriam-Webster, 2021: 1). Cancellation typically involves two main things: losing support (Brito, 2021; Chiou, 2020; Nakkab, 2020; Ng, 2020) and being silenced or censored in some way (Brito, 2021; Tufekci 2018, cited in Cook et al., 2021).

2.3.4.2.1 *Loss of support*

Many sources agree that being cancelled typically leads to the accused losing support (Chiou, 2020; Nakkab, 2020; Ng, 2020) and that lost support can be, for example, financial or social (Brito, 2021; Ng, 2020), because people or businesses do not want to lose time and money by being associated with someone whose actions have been branded as offensive (Clark, 2020). It can also include losing viewership, sponsorships or endorsements, and social media followers (Ng, 2020) and being ostracised (Norris, 2020a, 2021; Sage, 2022). One can lose support from their place of work by getting terminated from their employment (Sailofsky, 2021).

When someone has become the target of cancel culture, social media users post the hashtag #RIP (Kato, 2021) or #Cancelled to signal someone’s completed or impending cancellation (Semíramis 2019, cited in Cook et al., 2021; Roos, 2020, cited in Sailofsky, 2021). However, the cancelled person could still face another form of cancellation through silencing or censorship.

2.3.4.2.2 *Censorship*

Censorship refers to the act of preventing someone from expressing themselves freely (Wiesand, 2016). Cancel culture is seen as a method of contemporary censorship (Tufekci 2018, cited in Cook et al., 2021) as social media platforms have been known to deplatform or ban users for posts that were deemed inappropriate or offensive (Rogers, 2020). One way of ensuring someone's censorship is through deplatforming, where they are prohibited from posting on their social media accounts (Rogers, 2020). Facebook, for example can temporarily ban users from using their accounts or can permanently ban them from the platform (Slutskiy, 2020). Social media sites prefer not to host posts seen as offensive for financial, ethical, and legal reasons (Chandrasekharan, Pavalanathan, Srinivasan, Glynn, Eisenstein & Gilbert, 2017). Deplatforming is thus a tactic that social media companies use to protect themselves.

Not only does cancel culture try to silence those that have used words seen as offensive or taboo, but it also strives to remove such words from society, essentially threatening freedom of speech (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021) and limiting that freedom (Sossi, 2021). Many critics claim that it hinders freedom of expression (Brito, 2021).

2.3.4.3 Accountability, morality, and activism

In some countries, throughout history, censorship was used to regulate morality amongst people (Wiesand, 2016). As mentioned before, wokeness and cancel culture at its heart want to eradicate social injustice and increase morality amongst the general population. One way to right a moral wrong or resolve conflict and receive forgiveness is by apologising (Matei, 2019; Roadevin, 2017). When people get called out, users tend to demand getting a public apology from the supposed perpetrator (Mueller, 2021). It can be asserted that, by calling for an apology, the public is essentially giving someone the opportunity to right their wrong and make amends to those involved.

As mentioned before, eNCA journalist, Lindsay Dentlinger, was called out on social media for allegations of racism (Pijoos, 2021). Her news outlet denied that racism is present in their workplace (Baloyi, 2021), saying that the journalist was in an “intense live broadcast environment” and had to contend with several factors, including listening to instructions given via the earpiece that she was using (Pijoos, 2021: 1). However, there have been previous instances of suspected racial bias from eNCA (Pijoos, 2021). So, if the outlet is indeed racially biased, is cancel culture not a good thing for calling out that bias?

Cancel culture is also seen as a good thing. It has been described as a way of merely making people liable for their wrongdoings (Chiou, 2020; Willingham, 2021). Supporters of cancel culture view it as a form of activism that raises awareness surrounding perceived injustices in society and holds people culpable for wrongdoings that would otherwise go unnoticed or unpunished (Chiou, 2020), with it even being dubbed an “Accountability Culture” (Mishan, 2020: 1). The culture is seen as a force for good when attacking social injustices, but also a way for people to feel morally good (Ditum, 2014, cited in Bouvier, 2020) by speaking for those who are seen as vulnerable (Bérubé, 2018). Social media allows people’s voices to be heard who formerly lacked any platforms to speak (Castells, 2015; KhosraviNik, 2017). There is a shift in power as cancellors can use social media platforms to enact surveillance on public and powerful figures and ensure that no serious offences experience impunity (Sailofsky, 2021) like potential racism in mainstream media, as in the Dentlinger case.

However, those who are woke and cancel others act as moral entrepreneurs and do immoral things in the name of morality (Kaufmann, 2020). Those who cancel also believe themselves to stand on a moral high ground, which means that they think their actions and methods of enforcing cancellation – even if objectively immoral – are justified (Chiou, 2020); they believe that the end justifies the means. They suppose that shaming people and affecting parts of their lives is a necessary evil because the people being cancelled are seen as deserving of that cancellation (Chiou, 2020). For example, as mentioned before, social media users have sometimes infused threats of violence into their call-outs (Leetaru, 2018).

A study on morality, examined the state of participants neural activity when exposed to violent socio-political demonstrations (Workman, Yoder & Decety, 2020). It was discovered that the body’s reward system was highly active when shown violent acts that were in accord with the participants’ own socio-political beliefs and moral convictions (Workman et al., 2020). Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that cancellors might view violent acts as excusable when it is done in congruence with their own political or moral stances. Such immoral acts involved in cancel culture can be excessive to the point where anyone is punished for holding opposite beliefs – especially political beliefs – to those of the cancel culture brigade (Chiou, 2020).

2.4 Conclusion

Three theories, namely confirmation bias, social identity, and social contagion, can be related to the phenomenon of cancel culture with regards to people’s beliefs about

themselves and beliefs about others and the spread of those views on social media. The first theory that was discussed – theory of confirmation bias – assumes that people are reluctant to change their beliefs and thus pay more attention to confirming information, whilst ignoring disconfirming information, which can increase their confidence levels regarding certain topics despite the ignorance that they possess. However, for this psychological phenomenon to occur, one must first possess beliefs or opinions, that are shaped with the help of the mainstream media or the echo chambers and velocity of information that is present on social media.

Reinforcement seeking can be accomplished through social media echo chambers or trait ascription, but the need to look for confirming info also depends on how knowledgeable someone is on a topic. Challenge avoidance can occur due to things like decontextualisation or the insularity of social media platforms such as Twitter. Familiarity to information also causes people to believe that information to be true, as mentioned before. However, it is possible for individuals' opinions to change when they are given disconfirming info.

Even if someone's opinion or perception on something is inaccurate, it can still lead to real-world consequences. Supposed wrongdoers also internalise others' perceptions of them and confirm those perceptions by apologising to everyone who was possibly harmed by their actions. In this study, it will be determined how journalists may have confirmed the perceptions of those in the cancel culture community, and how they aided in their own cancellation through their actions in real life or on social media.

The second theory, SIT, assumes that people socially define themselves through the groups that they belong to. The first step involves social categorisation where individuals categorise themselves into specific groups. In cancel culture, people are divided into victim ingroups, and oppressive outgroups based on immutable personal attributes. Social comparison occurs shortly after where individuals compare their groups to others and tend to view their own groups positively and other groups negatively.

After comparisons are made, individuals' social identities are formed based on the groups they identify with, which could lead to increased self-esteem and intergroup discrimination. Due to these identities, any behaviour can be seen as acceptable if it is used to defend or preserve a group's positive identity, even if that behaviour mirrors that which the cancel mob deems to be deplorable. However, individuals can be exiled from their ingroups, as part of the black sheep effect, if they do not adhere to a complete consensus of beliefs.

The last theory, social contagion theory, claims that behaviour among individuals can be contagious. Social media's easy spread of information can lead to social contagion that occurs actively, not passively, because users actively search for- and distribute information to others. One of the components of social contagion is exposure, as individuals first need to be exposed to something to be infected by it. Increased exposure leads to the increased possibility of contagion, and, for this study, such exposure will be looked at in terms of virality. Content tends to go viral if it evokes feelings of activation or arousal, or feelings that cause provocation. Cancel culture is seen as a social contagion, as cancellors focus on taboo or offensive behaviours that evoke strong negative emotions. Echo chambers, partly built by algorithms, on social media can also influence contagion.

The theory can also be used to explore the phenomenon of cancel culture with regards to news distribution because journalists help increase users' exposure to information on social media, as part of a hybrid media syndicate. It can be examined how the mainstream media might have exposed users to information on cancel culture through their reporting or the three cancellation cases.

The literature review discusses such cancel culture as being the online condemnation that leads to real-world consequences. The phenomenon starts and ends, with social media platforms, especially with Twitter. Journalists use social media apps, like Twitter, to find news, but such online platforms have also been used to cancel journalists.

Such cancellations are driven by concepts of wokeness, which is the belief that reality is a social construct that is determined by the social group that one belongs to. Despite wokeism's initial good intentions, it is used to justify immoral acts in the name of moral justice. Wokeness shares similarities with George Orwell's (1946) *Animal Farm* as woke enforcers and cancellors act like the pigs in the novella, as they divide people into groups of victims and villains based on innate personal attributes like race or gender and they fail to see their own hypocrisy when they commit actions that they consider to be wrong.

Members of the mainstream media also spread wokeness or woke biases either unintentionally or through selection bias. The hybrid media, which includes a combination of social media and the mainstream media where journalists use Twitter to find and distribute news and Twitter users tweet news stories, also contributes to the spread of bias or woke ideologies. When it comes to journalists and cancel culture on Twitter, journalists have two roles: they either participate in the culture or they are targeted by it.

Individuals being targeted by cancel culture is partly due to decontextualisation which can

occur through confirmation bias attained through echo chambers, people seeing things out of context, people interpreting or rationalising things in their own unique ways, people focusing more on the affect and emotion that a post causes rather than the content of the post, or the ephemeral nature of tweeting. Outrage, whether real or unjustified, follows after decontextualisation, and happens because Twitter feeds can consist of affect and emotion, and posts tend to go viral if it evokes strong emotions from users.

After initial decontextualisation and its adjacent anger, call-outs can occur when social media users name and shame individuals through posts, typically about words or actions involving topics of identity politics, such as race, gender, and sexuality. During call-outs, there tends to be demands for an apology from the alleged wrongdoer. However, some users could be engaging in call-outs for their own personal gain, such as to increase the popularity of their posts. The call-outs lead to people getting cancelled, either through a loss of support – financial or social losses, or ostracism – or through censorship in the form of permanent social media deplatforming or temporary bans.

Based on the literature review, it can be asserted that journalists and Twitter are intertwined in news production and cancel culture efforts. Such efforts share similarities to Orwell's (1946) story and are influenced by woke notions (specifically pertaining to certain personal traits) and biases that are spread by the mainstream media. People decontextualise and neglect to factcheck information that enrages them, which causes them to call out the supposed wrongdoers and demand apologies, which leads to the implementation of cancellation.

The next chapter discusses the study's research design and methodology, which includes the population, non-probability sampling methods, unit of analysis, qualitative content analysis as a data collection method, textual analysis, thematic analysis, the coding process, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

A research design is a structured plan to bind the research together to show how all the parts of a study interconnect (Asenahabi, 2019), while the research methodology provides the framework that guides the researcher to help complete their research study (Patel & Patel, 2019; Sileyew, 2019). Both the design and methodology aid in explaining how a study's outcome will align with the purpose or objectives of the study (Sileyew, 2019). The research design and methodology identified for this study are explained in more detail in the sections that follow below.

3.2 Research design

The design of the study will be an unobtrusive case study design. An unobtrusive study, according to Majid (2018), comprises of conducting research without the researcher trying to manipulate the data. This is done by the researcher experiencing empirical evidence, through the senses, i.e., through seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Hine (2011: 1) claims that unobtrusive research conducted using data from social media sites provides more authentic data and “offers social researchers unrivalled access to the minutiae of daily life” of users. In some cases, it outperforms using face-to-face in-depth interviews because it ensures ‘authentic’ responses as opposed to the need of participants to provide answers that are socially acceptable (Hine, 2011).

The study will consist of a case study design which is a research design that aids in acquiring an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007; Tumele, 2016), within its real-world contexts (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021; Yin, 2003, 2014), by exploring cases related to that phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007). The study will use a multiple-case study design, which, according to Creswell et al. (2007), consists of exploring numerous cases that represent the phenomenon being studied.

3.2.1 Unit of analysis

A unit of analysis refers to the smallest entity that a researcher collects data from and constitutes the fundamental focus of a study (Casteel & Bridier, 2021; DeCarlo, 2018). There are five common types of such units in social science, namely: individuals, groups, organisations, social interactions, and social artefacts (Babbie, 2008, 2021; Kumar, 2018). The unit of analysis for this study is a social artefact that consists of the text in tweets and news articles about the three cancellation incidents that are being studied.

Social artefacts are physical objects, representations, or pieces of information, that people use to express or interpret something (IGI Global Dictionary, 2017, cited in Kumar, 2018), and can include, for example, newspapers, technologies, websites (Kumar, 2018), and tweets from Twitter (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021). In this case, tweets are the artefacts that Twitter users post to express their feelings and opinions of a cancel culture target. The other social artefacts, i.e., newspaper articles, will be collected to explore and interpret the users' emotions and intentions behind their tweets and cancellation behaviours. Wartofsky (1979), classified artefacts into three categories, namely primary, secondary, and tertiary. The primary artefacts are used in production, such as cameras, secondary artefacts are related to the primary artefacts, such as a user-manual explaining how to use a camera, and tertiary artefacts represent secondary artefacts like a sculpture representing a camera's user-manual. Both tweets and online news articles are secondary artefacts.

3.2.2 Population

A population is a large group that is narrowed down to form the sample (Neuman, 2007, 2014), which is studied so that the research findings can be generalised to related theories and constructs (Curtis et al., 2000) and new insights can be gained regarding the phenomenon being studied (Omona, 2013).

According to Majid (2018), defining a study's population is achieved by establishing eligibility criteria, consisting of inclusion criteria (attributes that qualify elements to be selected for a study) and exclusion criteria which include attributes that might disrupt or fall outside the scope of a study. Since this study centres around the cancellation of journalists, the population will exclude all the cases in which journalists were not the targets of cancel culture. Some inclusion criteria for this study incorporate the claim, stated by Basham (2020), that journalists can also get cancelled at the hands of other journalists, and that cancellation efforts also predominantly start on Twitter (Bouvier & Machin, 2021).

Majid (2018) uses the terms 'population of interest' and 'target population' interchangeably, while Casteel and Bridier (2021) claim that populations of interest are narrowed down to smaller versions which are called target populations. For this study, the population will be discussed as a target population, which represents all the cases in which journalists have been scorned on Twitter and cancelled or nearly cancelled as a result by, not only strangers or ordinary people, but also their own fellow journalists and others in news distribution.

The accessible population consists of the portion of participants from the target population that are accessible to the researcher (Fetzer, 2020). Population parameters are also used to determine a study's population and consist of the variables in populations like age groups (Babbie, 2008; 2021). The temporal and geographical parameters also need to be established (Neuman, 2007, 2014).

For this study, there were no geographical or timeframe-related parameters. While instances of cancellation and online public shaming are not new developments in society (Mishan, 2020), as mentioned before, such instances have increased over the last few years due to ever-growing social media platforms (Sossi, 2021). Alexi McCammond, for example, posted offensive tweets in 2011 (Rutz, 2021), but on the surface it seems as if the journalist was only called out and cancelled for it in 2021, as according to Rutz (2021), she was called out after she was announced as the new editor for Teen Vogue. Even though the incentive for call-outs against her occurred over a decade ago, it seems as if her call-outs and cancellation occurred during more recent years. There will thus be no timeframe parameter as it seems as if people can get called out and cancelled for mistakes that they made well into their past.

Another parameter to consider, is the type of people that were targeted by cancel culture. Since this study involves the cancellation of journalists, the population will only include cases where journalists were the targets of cancel culture. However, targets of cancel culture can get cancelled due to alleged or actual wrongdoings, according to Trotter (2020). The accessible population thus consists of all the cases in which journalists were justly or unjustly called out on Twitter for actual or perceived wrongdoings and cancelled or nearly cancelled by, not just strangers or ordinary citizens, but other journalists or individuals in the mainstream media, regardless of when they committed the actual or perceived wrongdoings. When collecting data to study such a population, it is not feasible to incorporate the entire targeted population into the study, which is why researchers use samples (Majid, 2018; Mayring, 2014). The accessible population will thus be narrowed down during sampling.

3.2.3 Sampling

Sampling involves the selection of participants or artefacts for examination (Kumar, 2011, 2019) to address the objectives of a study (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbin, 2015). A sample is thus a subset taken from a population that is studied (Neuman, 2007, 2014; Taherdoost, 2016; Vehovar et al., 2016).

The study's scope of focus has been narrowed down from social media to Twitter, from people who got cancelled to three people in the journalism community that experienced aspects of cancellation, and from the last few years of modern cancel culture to two specific months in 2021, which is when the cancellation cases started. This was done, because the larger the scope of focus is, or the more a researcher attempts to take on in one study, the smaller the accuracy of findings and predictions is (Siponen, M. and Klaavuniemi, T. 2019). The phenomenon will be studied on a smaller scale which would allow the researcher to sift through a smaller amount of data to complete the study within a specific timeframe. Two phases of sampling will occur, the first of which involves purposively identifying three cases of attempted or actual journalistic cancellation through just or unjust Twitter call-outs due to actual or perceived wrongdoing. During the second phase, purposive non-probability sampling will be used to sample text from tweets and online newspaper articles.

3.2.3.1 Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling will be used to select the sample for this study, which is employed when researchers choose samples subjectively instead of randomly (Bigsby, 2017; Casteel & Bridier, 2021). Because of such subjective selection, sample sizes are thus rarely chosen in advance (Neuman, 2007, 2014), which is also why tweets and news articles will be collected until data- and theoretical saturation is reached. Such saturation concepts are explained in more detail later.

This sampling method can be used for research that is still in its early stages (Mauldin, 2020), and since modern-day cancel culture is a new discussion (Cook et al., 2021), non-probability sampling can be used to study it. The researcher will purposely select and analyse specific tweets and news articles that the researcher believes might be applicable to the topic being studied.

When a researcher has limited time or resources, non-probability sampling is frequently used since it is both time-effective (Etikan et al., 2016) and cost-effective (Etikan et al., 2016; Wiśniowski, Sakshaug, Ruiz & Blom, 2020). This sampling strategy will be utilised because the researcher has a deadline to abide by as well as limited financial resources. Twitter is a free platform that many researchers have used before (Sinnenberg et al., 2017), so sampling tweets is also a way to preserve finances. Some news outlets provide readers with free news articles online, while others have introduced models that require payment from their consumers (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017). For this study, the researcher will only collect online news articles that are freely accessible. Non-probability sampling will also

be applied, using purposive and theoretical sampling.

3.2.3.1.1 Purposive sampling

The research will involve the use of a type of non-probability sampling, known as purposive sampling, which, according to Omona (2013), is the most common sampling method in qualitative research. It refers to the choosing of participants or text based on certain characteristics that the researcher is interested in (Casteel & Bridier, 2021; Etikan et al., 2016; Mauldin, 2020) or that allow the samples to provide needed knowledge for the research (Babbie, 2008, 2021; Neuman, 2007, 2014; Omona, 2013; Padgett, 2016). For this study, purposive sampling will take place in two phases, as mentioned before; the first of which comprises of the selection of three cases of journalists' cancellations, and the second includes focusing on tweets and online newspaper articles that possibly relate to the key concepts and constructs identified in the theoretical framework and literature review that the researcher believes can address the research questions.

Purposive sampling can help identify either similarities or variations present in samples (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015). The challenge is that the range of variation in a sample is not always easy to detect at the start of the research process (Palinkas et al., 2015). To combat such a challenge, an iterative strategy involving sampling and re-sampling can be used to ensure that theoretical saturation occurs (Miles & Huberman, 1994, cited in Palinkas et al., 2015). Theoretical saturation is elaborated on when discussing theoretical sampling.

For this study, the researcher will focus mostly on purposive sampling from a maximum variation perspective. Maximum variation sampling is a purposive sampling design and involves the selection of cases from different contexts or settings that vary from one another (Suri, 2011) to gain a global understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019; Suri, 2011). This design entails providing detailed descriptions of each case (Patton, 2002) that can help to determine the similarities between cases that cut across variations (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). Firstly, the dimensions of variations must be determined, before the sample cases can be chosen (Suri, 2011). In this study, the variation dimensions or considerate criteria will be geographical, ethnical, and temporal, as explained below.

Several cases of journalistic cancellations were mentioned in the literature review, namely the cases of Andy Mills, James Bennet, Piers Morgan, Lindsay Dentlinger, Katie Herzog, Alexi McCammond, and a former editor at The Philadelphia Inquirer. Most of these cases

involved journalists or news organisations that are stationed in America. Cases involving journalists from different countries will thus be selected to increase variation. According to Shea, Pesa, Geonnotti, Powell, Khan, and Peters (2022), a lack of diversity in a study, especially racial or ethnic diversity, limits the potential for richness in findings. Sandelowski (1995) also suggests that pre-determined samples should represent maximum variation in demographics like race and gender. Although this study selects cases, and not participants, the researcher will adhere to Sandelowski (1995) and Shea et al.'s (2022) concept of diversity in samples when selecting the journalists' cases. The study's sample will thus include the exemplar cancellation cases of journalists Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan; none of whom share a common ethnicity or nationality, but whose cancellation journeys started around the same time (in February and March of 2021).

Purposive sampling is limited by the presence of potential scholar partiality as the sample is created based on the acumen of the researcher because the samples are chosen selectively (Sharma, 2017). However, this is only a concern when the researcher's judgements have not been based on pre-existing knowledge or theories on the topic (Sharma, 2017). An existing study with a sample of 100 articles determined the ways in which researchers enhance the rigour of their research, and it was concluded that approximately 50% of studies use theories and conceptual frameworks to inform their research (Barusch, Gringeri & George, 2011). The sample of tweets chosen for this study will largely be because cancel culture thrives on Twitter as explained in the literature review. A conceptual framework containing aspects of the theoretical framework and literature review will also be used to guide data collection. The sample will thus be selected with the support of pre-existing information on the nature of cancel culture to reduce researcher bias. Such bias can also be reduced through reflexivity (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017), which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 (page 165).

3.2.3.1.2 Theoretical sampling

Although theoretical sampling originated in studies of grounded theory (Davoudi, Nayeri, Raiesifar, Poortaghi & Ahmadian, 2017; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Gentles et al., 2015), it has been integrated into many other qualitative studies (Gentles et al., 2015). Theoretical sampling is a process in which an argument or theory under development serves as a guidance for data collection with the goal of developing, comparing, and integrating abstract categories or concepts within the argument or theory being developed

(Gentles et al., 2015).

This type of sampling is an ongoing sampling process, where sampling decisions are made even after data collection has already begun (Gentles et al., 2015). Theoretical sampling will thus occur throughout data collection as needed. Concepts from the study's theoretical framework and literature review will be used to discern whether any changes in the sampling process are needed to explore elements of the nature of cancel culture involving journalists.

Gentles et al. (2015) claim that several grounded theory authors suggests that multiple data sources be used during theoretical sampling. Data samples will be collected from multiple sources, namely Twitter and online newspaper sites. Sampling decisions can also be made based on theoretical leads (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp & LaRossa, 2015), which is why concepts from the study's theoretical framework and literature review will be used to construct a conceptual framework (see in Chapter 4, page 94), to aid in the collecting and analysing of data.

Sample size, in terms of theoretical sampling, will be determined when theoretical saturation is achieved when the researcher judges that the properties and dimensions of abstract categories or concepts within the developing theory or argument are comprehensive (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Gentles et al., 2015; Sandelowski, 2008). However, some qualitative researchers claim that complete theoretical saturation is not needed (Gentles et al., 2015). Theoretical saturation will be deemed to occur once the researcher is satisfied with how the collected data highlights the complexity of concepts used to develop theoretical descriptions of the notions related to codes and themes identified in the data.

3.2.3.2 Sample size

Gentles et al., (2015) claim that qualitative researchers generally believe that it is impossible to accurately determine the size of a qualitative study's sample in advance. Determining or explaining sample sizes and designs have been deemed as unnecessary in qualitative research, but such practices add more richness to a study (Omona, 2013). However, for the samples or findings to be richly applied to theories or general constructs, sample sizes should be determined through data saturation (Gentles et al., 2015; Morse, 1995). Data saturation is achieved when additional information becomes needless as no new acumens can be accumulated from the data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021; Kumar, 2011, 2019; Nascimento, Souza, Oliveira, Moraes, Aguiar & Silva, 2018). It differs from

theoretical saturation, as theoretical saturation is not achieved by seeking repetitions in the data (Sandelowski, 2008). While the sample of cases was chosen using maximum variation sampling, the sample size of tweets and articles, that represent the sample of cases, will be determined beforehand but its most adequate size will ultimately be influenced by data- and theoretical saturation, which will be elaborated on later in this section.

Typically, the larger a sample is, the more accurate the findings are (Kumar, 2011, 2019). However, small samples are capable of being adequate for qualitative purposes, which means that automatically choosing a large sample size does not guarantee that it would be a representative sample (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Smaller samples allow for an in-depth understanding of specific social contexts (Padgett, 2013, cited in Subedi, 2021) and studies about management and medicine have illustrated that a sample with just one single case can be informative and appropriate enough to illustrate a study's findings (Boddy, 2016). Small samples allow for thicker description than large samples do (Subedi, 2021), but unnecessarily small samples could make it difficult to achieve data saturation (Omona, 2013) and adequately answer research questions (Andrade, 2020). On the other hand, samples that are needlessly large increase the risk of inaccuracy amongst the results of a study (Andrade, 2020) and problematise the in-depth examination of data (Subedi, 2021).

This study has a multiple-case study design, as discussed in Chapter 1 (page 11), which means that more than one case needs to be selected and explored. Creswell (2002) suggested that, when selecting cases, the optimal sample size is three to five cases, which is why the three cases of McCammond, Dentlinger, and Morgan were selected, along with the variation criteria that was previously discussed. In terms of the sample of tweets and online news articles, factors of sample-size consideration include the workings of Twitter and the internet, as well as the timeframe of each case, as explained below, but the ultimate sample size will be determined through data- and theoretical saturation.

Twitter has an abundance of data available for researchers to collect, as approximately 500 million tweets are posted daily (Housley et al., 2014; Serfass & Sherman 2015), but all existing tweets on the app cannot be collected for a study, as the large size of the data makes it impractical to analyse the entire network (Piña-García, Gershenson & Siqueiros-García, 2016). During data collection, tweets and retweets posted on Twitter within a 30-day period of each of the three cancellation incidents will be collected. Roughly 100-150 posts per case, i.e., 300-450 posts in total, will be collected. The timeframe of the tweets is chosen based on the dates that call-outs and cancellation occurred in each case.

Twitter call-outs against McCammond started around the 7th of March 2021 after her promotion to editor-in-chief was announced (Cinone, 2021; Rutz, 2021), and confirmation of her resignation was released on the 18th (Breuninger, 2021). Which means it took about 12 days for the cancellation to be implemented. In Dentlinger's case, call-outs started with the posting of an interview that she had conducted on the 24th of February 2021 (Pijoos, 2021) and on the 19th of March the complaints made against the journalist were officially dismissed (Mitchley, 2021). It thus took about 24 days for the issue to be resolved. Backlash against Morgan started on the 8th of March 2021 (Adam, 2021) and by the 24th it was known that both he and his friend, Sharon Osbourne, were unemployed (Kilkenny, 2021). The process took about 17 days. The timeframe of the collected tweets will thus be 30 days, so that it includes the perceived cancellation process of all three cases: from the initial call-outs till serious cancellations like job loss occurred. The timeframe was scaled up to 30 days instead of the 24 days in Dentlinger's case – which was the longest period out of the three cases – to allow for data saturation to be reached in case a timeframe of 24 days is not enough.

After the collection of tweets, approximately 15 to 20 online newspaper articles will be collected for each cancellation case: 45 to 60 in total. Online news articles, instead of print newspapers, will be gathered, because, according to Koundal and Mishra (2018), the internet allows readers to search for their topic of interest with just the click of a button which saves time. The internet is also a fast and inexpensive source of information, that social researchers regularly use, and that can be accessed at any time from many locations (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Online sites also have links that provide readers with additional sites or pages of information (Neuman, 2007, 2014). It is thus easier and quicker to find and access articles that the researcher wants to use. The dates that the articles were published can surpass the dates of the collected tweets, as explained below.

While Dentlinger did not experience job loss during her interaction with cancel culture (Baloyi, 2021), McCammond became unemployed and only got a new work opportunity at MSNBC months after losing her job (Koenig, 2021), and Morgan launched his new career almost a whole year after leaving Good Morning Britain (Quadri, 2022). So, the timeframe for the articles will be longer than the 30 days for the tweets, to analyse the effects that cancel culture might have had on the journalists long after the first call-outs and cancellation attempts began. The date of the collected articles will be of the time that each cancellation event started and can be up to the date that data collection ends, depending on when the data is saturated.

Whether samples are small or large, it is generally acknowledged that sample sizes are not wholly predicted beforehand (Curtis et al., 2000; Casteel & Bridier, 2021), as sample sizes depend on the nature of a study and the emergence of new codes (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). However, as mentioned before, one way to reach an optimal sample size in qualitative research is through saturation. Sampling and resampling will be done as necessary to ensure that data- and theoretical saturation is reached. Determining saturation is thus vital during the collection process (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). In qualitative research, data saturation is the key to determining when data collection should be halted and when the sample size is adequate for the study (Nascimento et al., 2018). Samples should have enough in-depth data to illustrate the patterns and various aspects of the topic being researched (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). For this study, the researcher will thus review the collected tweets and articles and contemplate whether the information is rich enough to identify patterns of meaning and themes related to the research questions to ensure that data- and theoretical saturation is achieved.

3.3 Methodology

Research methodology examines how the research process will be conducted and provides necessary steps on how to address a study's research problem (Patel & Patel, 2019; Sileyew, 2019). In this section, it will be discussed how research methodological aspects and elements, such as data collection, data analysis and interpretation, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations, will be used within a case study design, i.e., how the three selected cases of cancel culture will be researched.

The methodology includes qualitative methods to collect and analyse data about three instances of cancel culture that are pertinent to the study. Details about the collection method, and analysis method are provided below.

3.3.1 Data collection

Data collection is one of the most important steps in the research process and refers to first determining what kind of data is needed to answer the research question, and then assembling that data (Kabir, 2016). Data collection, analysis, and interpretation will be conducted in an iterative manner. Moving back and forth through the steps of a research process is a predominant feature in qualitative studies (Neuman, 2007, 2014), and is called iteration, which is used to conduct data collection and analysis somewhat simultaneously or cyclically to help fill any gaps of information (Ravindran, 2019). Analysis and interpretation are also done recursively because the researcher repeatedly analyses and

interprets the data to discern meaning from it (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021). The processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation will thus be conducted iteratively. The goal of this study is to understand the nature of cancel culture on Twitter, as well as how journalists' actions and reporting connect to it. Data collection, through qualitative content analysis, will be conducted to achieve this objective.

3.3.1.1 Qualitative content analysis (QCA)

Many authorities have attempted to define qualitative content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Shava et al., 2021), but all the definitions mention that QCA allows for the exploration of the underlying contexts of texts and the understanding of social realities (Shava et al., 2021). Unlike many other data collection methods that open and expand a data set, QCA helps with the reduction of data to avoid cognitive overload (Flick, 2014), which is needed because it is difficult to analyse unnecessarily large sets of data (Ravindran, 2019). Qualitative content analysis entails the collecting of text data for the eventual categorisation of that data according to repetitive codes, themes or meanings that are gained from the texts (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Mayring, 2014; Prasad, 2019; Shava et al., 2021).

The collecting and categorising of raw data are guided by a coding frame (Flick, 2014), which will be provided as a conceptual framework in the next chapter. Because iteration will be used, the precision of the coding frame can be assessed – and the frame can be edited as needed – throughout data collection and analysis. QCA is an unobtrusive research method that tends to be done using an inductive approach (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021), which is discussed as inductive coding later in data analysis, since data collection and analysis will be approached in an iterative manner. This inductive approach is helpful when exploring textual narratives in news stories (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021), which is why inductive coding will also take place when collecting news articles, but only after deductive coding has occurred.

3.3.1.1.1 *Directed and summative QCA*

Two methods of qualitative content analysis will take place, namely directed and summative. In qualitative studies, research must be guided by existing theoretical arguments on the topic being studied (Mayring, 2014). This is in alignment with directed content analysis which includes the collecting of data in relation to previous theories or themes that are used as guides to form specific categories to help confirm or expand on theoretical frameworks (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

A set of news articles and tweets will be collected for the study based on pre-established themes or concepts that seem to be present in all three cancellation cases. This method can be used to increase the existing knowledge of a phenomenon (Humble & Mozellius, 2022), and since there is a lack of academic knowledge on contemporary cancel culture (Cook et al., 2021), this approach will be used to extend the prevailing description of the culture.

Summative content analysis, on the other hand, occurs when a researcher identifies specific keywords and makes comparisons between the sets of collected keywords, whilst reading and understanding the underlying meaning or context of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The collection process of tweets and article information might be extended to include the further categorisation of the tweets and information based on specific keywords that relate to the three cancellation cases. Some of the keywords might include 'racist,' 'sexist,' 'bigot,' 'cancel,' or certain hashtags that tend to be used during cancellation events, as these are the typical labels that cancel culture targets tend to get branded with, according to Zille (2021a). The underlying context of tweets might consist of the outrage and decontextualisation that lie behind certain posts. QCA can also be conducted in a deductive and inductive manner (Drisko & Maschi, 2016); two methods of coding that will be explored in the data analysis section of this chapter.

After the data has been collected, it will be stored in a well thought-out manner to make it easier for the researcher to obtain the data again if needed (Kanza & Knight 2022). Having an organised data management system is key to completing a successful research study (Kanza & Knight 2022). Possessing several storage backups is a method that many science organisations have investigated when it comes to storage solutions (DeVries, Fenchel, Fogarty, Kim, Timmons & White, 2017). The collected data for the study will be stored in two locations, to ensure that the data is not lost. Another way to manage data is by considering how to name the files (Kanza & Knight 2022), which can also prevent data from going missing (DeVries et al., 2017). The naming of the data sets might be considered a tedious discussion (DeVries et al., 2017), but is important as it can be a time-saving manoeuvre by making it easier to locate files and the data that an analyst is looking for (DeVries et al., 2017; Kanza & Knight 2022). The name of a file should be able to tell the researcher what the content of the file is with a mere glance which can make it easier to locate the desired data (DeVries et al., 2017). The names of the data storage files will be carefully considered and outlined in Chapter 4.

3.3.1.1.2 Critique

Any content analysis, whether quantitative or qualitative, can be modified or adapted to be used across different sciences and research studies, with most of its concepts having been used at a universal level (Bengtsson, 2016; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Thus, due to the flexible nature of this method, data can be collected regarding the topic of cancel culture involving journalists, as QCA can be used for a variety of different topics from different fields of research.

The patterns determined during QCA can be applied to other studies of similar contexts if the requirements of dependability and credibility are met (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen & Kyngäs (2014). The use of QCA in this study can thus be beneficial to other research projects, and the researcher will ensure that this is made possible by abiding by the requirements, that are discussed in more detail as part of trustworthiness in Chapter 4 (page 162).

Qualitative content analysis has many unique attributes in comparison to other methods, mainly that the method focuses on contexts and meanings, and can be used to address questions or issues that are sensitive (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Sensitive topics, such as race and gender, are popular subjects in the cancel culture world (Furedi, 2020), which means that QCA can be used to study cancellation cases involving such topics.

Unfortunately, QCA can be time-consuming (Bengtsson, 2016; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017), but in this study that disadvantage can be equilibrated through other carefully selected time-effective processes, such as the chosen sampling method that was discussed earlier. A conceptual framework that outlines the core concepts and related categories of a research topic can also increase the speed at which data collection takes place (Holton, 2010). Researchers can focus on predetermined concepts that are then linked to the raw data (Namey, Guest, Thairu & Johnson, 2008), instead of collecting unnecessary additional material (Holton, 2010). A conceptual framework will be drawn and provided in Chapter 4 (page 96).

Another time-effective practice is the taking of notes during data collection and analysis, especially when conducting interviews (Holton, 2010). Taking notes is a considerable practice for any field research, though (Bezuidenhout & Strydom, 2021), not just for interviews. The researcher will not be doing interviews to collect data but will still make notes of things that seem relevant. There is also a lack of clarity around the epistemological underpinnings of QCA's techniques for understanding reality, or the

validity and trustworthiness of the reality determined by the approach (Prasad, 2019). To combat this, research findings must be dependable and consistent (Prasad, 2019), as will be explained in Chapter 4 under Trustworthiness (page 162).

The final critique is that research students tend to confuse QCA with Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) when conducting research, which causes studies to apply QDA whilst claiming to use QCA; an issue that can be avoided by clearly defining the QCA method and the steps that were followed (Prasad, 2019). As a research student, the researcher for this study could become a part of the group that inadvertently mistakes QDA for QCA but will prevent this by defining QCA and elaborating on the steps taken during data collection in the next chapter.

3.3.2 Data analysis and interpretation

Interpretation occurs whenever meaning is assigned to data (Flick, 2014; Neuman, 2007, 2014) which is why interpretation could ensue iteratively throughout data collection and analysis. Data analysis is the deconstruction of a phenomenon (Novikov & Novikov, 2012) to discern patterns in the data (Nauman, 2007), and extract significant information to help make informed assumptions about that phenomenon (Ibrahim, 2015). It is the conversion of raw data into themes or descriptions that are interpreted to address the research questions (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin, 2007).

For a study to be considered trustworthy, the data analysis process must be done rigorously and explained in detail so that the readers can determine whether the analysis process is sound (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). The analysis process is explained in this section, and the application of the data analysis method is explained in the next chapter. Data analysis can be challenging at times if the data sets are large, as it all needs to be read, reflected upon, and compared (Ravindran, 2019). The raw data will be reduced during the data collection process of the study, through QCA and data- and theoretical saturation. Very few researchers utilise all their collected data because field research spread over several pages can be cumbersome and makes it difficult to see the data as a whole (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 1994). Reducing the amount of collected information will sharpen and organise the data so that conclusions can be made and verified (Namey et al., 2008). Data reduction is also part of data analysis and involves only focusing on data that is relevant to the study (Namey et al., 2008). However, for this study, paying attention to only relevant information will begin during data collection, to make the data analysis even easier, in an iterative manner, as mentioned before. Focus will be placed solely on data that encompasses the three cancellation cases.

Qualitative researchers tend to take lots of notes (Neuman, 2007, 2014), which is why data will also be analysed using memos. Memoing is the taking of notes (Babbie, 2008, 2021) that allows researchers to be immersed in the data in an in-depth manner that might be difficult to achieve otherwise (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). Many qualitative researchers believe that understanding a phenomenon is easier when the researcher becomes immersed in it (Krauss, 2005). There are many ways in which memoing enhances a qualitative study, one of which is to extract meaning from the textual data (Birks et al., 2008). Memoing will be used to analyse the tweets and articles after data collection takes place. Three types of memoing will be used, as distinguished by Strauss and Corbin (1998), namely code-, theoretical-, and operational notes. Code notes provide definitions and meanings of the codes, while theoretical notes detail the underlying meaning of codes, the relationship between codes, and its relation to theories and literature (Babbie, 2008, 2021). Operational notes describe the methodological issues and data collection circumstances that occur throughout the research process (Babbie, 2008, 2021). Notes will thus also be taken during data collection. The topic of memoing is also discussed in Chapter 4 under trustworthiness.

A challenge of qualitative analysis is converting collected data into text (Ravindran, 2019). This will, however, not be a problem for the study, as textual data will be collected from the start and no visual or auditory data will be collected. The research study will use thematic analysis as a form of textual analysis to examine textual data.

3.3.2.1 Textual analysis

A text is anything from which meaning is derived including text and images from magazines and televisions shows (McKee, 2003). There are two typical categories of text, namely transcripts from recorded interviews, and outputs of communication which are the messages given by communicators (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 1999). The latter is easier and less time-consuming to obtain as it is readily available, while the transcripts of some recordings still need to be composed (Frey et al., 1999). This is one of the reasons why the researcher will analyse outputs of communication, i.e., tweets and news articles.

Textual analysis is a qualitative analysis method that involves the examination of textual material to discern any patterns or omissions, as well as cultural beliefs and underlying ideologies, within the text (Fürsich, 2009; McKee, 2003). A paper by Nguyen, Liakata, DeDeo, Eisenstein, Mimno, Tromble and Winters (2020), provides a general guide to using computational textual analysis, but the steps seem suitable for regular textual analysis as well. Some of the steps will be applied to this study. One of which is the

choosing of a research question that has to do with a big question that has been brought up in society over the last few years, like new events involving social media for example (Nguyen et al., 2020). As mentioned before, cancel culture is a new phenomenon, with a link to social media, that has been debated over recent years (Cook et al., 2021), which is why textual analysis can be used for the study as cancel culture seems to be a big question mark. Research questions can also be influenced by the availability of data, and social media platforms possess an abundance of data that is free to obtain (Nguyen et al., 2020), which is why the research question for this study involves the social media platform Twitter.

The Nguyen et al (2020) paper also mentions how things like conceptualisation and data acquisition affect the research process. Conceptualisation for the study has already taken place in Chapter 1 (page 4). In terms of data acquisition and analysis, many scholars in social sciences use multiple data sources to enhance the accuracy of their findings (Nguyen et al., 2020). Qualitative studies, utilising a case study design, also use multiple sources of data to understand the contextual factors of the selected cases in the study (Yin, 2003, 2014). Thus, in this study, data from both newspapers and born-digital data from Twitter will be analysed. However, tweets only allow for the posting of a limited number of characteristics (Crosset et al., 2019; Malik et al., 2019), which is why newspaper articles will also be collected and analysed to fill in the gaps of information left over by tweets and make it easier to determine the cancel culture process in the three cases of Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan.

3.3.2.1.1 Critique

Textual analysis allows researchers to understand the cultural norms at a time that made the collected text seem appropriate in society (Arya, 2020). The cultural norm in the world of cancel culture seems to be the assumption that one can shame someone on Twitter or call them derogatory terms in the name of cancelling them as a part of social justice (Chiou 2020). The online cultural norm of cancellations in modern-day times will thus be studied through the cancellation enforcers' own words on Twitter as well as their actions that are illustrated in news stories.

This type of analysis can also be used to study data from various cultures, to determine the similarities and dissimilarities between people's different rationalisation practices (Arya, 2020). Twitter is a universal platform that allows people from diverse backgrounds to communicate (Velasco, 2020), but for this study, users will be seen as one culture without physical borders as they form part of one large culture of cancellation that mostly

operates on Twitter. However, the cultural and social situatedness of texts and their vastness of meanings and interpretations makes it difficult to analyse such data on a computer (Nguyen et al., 2020). In this study, textual analysis will not be computational, but will be done manually by the researcher.

A major criticism of the analysis is that of Philio (2007), who claims that textual analysis (by itself) is insufficient when researching news media, as it fails to accurately reflect reality because it does not convey how a journalist went about producing an article, how readers consumed an article, and how audiences reacted to and interpreted an article. This suggested disadvantage directly affects the study about cancel culture, as text from newspaper articles will be collected and analysed. Fürsich (2009), however, argues that, although Philio's critique is a valid assessment, researchers need only read the ideological potential of the texts that occur between producing and consuming an article, and that the text represent a version of reality that is normalised. The study will thus analyse news articles and will accomplish this by using thematic analysis.

3.3.2.1.2 Thematic analysis

Analysis includes the scrutinization of data (Ibrahim, 2015) to help interpret the information to discover themes (Ryan et al., 2007). Themes are meanings derived from data that help answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Roberts, Dowell & Nie, 2019). Themes, however, do not passively emerge from the data, the researcher actively seeks it out (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves scouring a set of collected data to identify, analyse, organise, and report reoccurring themes or patterns that might be present (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Scharp & Sanders, 2018). Braun and Clarke (2019), suggests conducting reflexive thematic analysis, which entails a researcher's self-awareness and how the researcher affects the coding process. More information on reflexivity is provided under Trustworthiness in Chapter 4.

Although thematic analysis is seen as a nonlinear, iterative process, pursuing a template of steps creates transparency between the researcher and the readers (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). The steps can be followed in a linear way, whilst keeping in mind that thematic analysis can be flexible and even messy (Lester et al., 2020). The steps will be followed in a linear manner, but iteration will also be applied as necessary.

Six steps of thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), will be used as a guide throughout the analysis process. The phases are summarised as (Braun & Clarke,

2006; Dawadi, 2020; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017):

- i) Familiarisation with the data: getting acquainted with the data;
- ii) Searching for codes: identifying pre-established and emerging codes present in the data;
- iii) Developing themes: dividing the codes into code categories or themes;
- iv) Reviewing themes: evaluating the themes to discern if they accurately represent the data;
- v) Defining and naming themes: giving theme names that summarise the corresponding codes; and,
- vi) Writing the report: putting the various aspects of the research process onto paper.

During the familiarisation step, referential adequacy will take place as a way of ensuring that transferability – which is discussed in Chapter 4 (page 163) – is achieved. Referential adequacy firstly requires analysing half of the collected data and then analysing the other half in comparison to the first (Scharp & Sanders, 2018). Tweets will be reread, as they were read during data collection, and analysed first, while online news articles will be reread and analysed after to fill in the gaps of information provided by tweets. The information from each case will then be summarised, and timelines will be drawn.

Adriansen (2012) discusses the importance of timelines in life history studies that utilise interviews, and states that timelines help untangle events. Although data will not be collected through interviews, and the study is not a timeline-based study or a life history study, the data will portray the history of the three journalists' cancel culture experiences. Timelines will thus be drawn, as part of familiarisation, to untangle the sequence of events that took place in each case.

These timelines will display the chronologies of the cases in a networks format, which, according to Miles et al. (1994), shows nodes and links through lines and arrows. The researcher can also refer to the timelines as needed during analysis, instead of sifting through the set of collected data. Step six, however, will take place throughout the entire course of the study, as Neuman (2007, 2014) describes written reports as records of the research process that should not be delayed.

The concept of bricolage will also be applied to the research process. A qualitative researcher is referred to as a bricoleur, who interprets pieces of data representing real-world experiences to construct one big collage of representation, called a bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, 2018). Bezuidenhout and Cronje (2021) liken the researcher to

a quiltmaker who fractures collected data – that represent pieces of a phenomenon – to weave the pieces of information into a quilt. The bricoleur thus connects smaller representations of reality to be able to see the bigger picture of a phenomenon (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021; Wyatt & Zaidi, 2022). The researcher will be the bricoleur of the study while the data analysis and interpretation will be the bricolage in which the contexts of three cancellation cases will be analysed and interpreted configurationally to understand the phenomenon of cancel culture involving journalists.

There are three core elements of bricolage, as listed by Baker and Nelson (2005), namely i); The bricoleur makes do with what is available and constructs a coherent argument to answer a research question by engaging with existing theories and collected data (Pratt, Sonenshein & Feldman, 2022), ii); The bricoleur also comprehends and becomes familiar with the available resources, such as existing coding methods (Pratt et al., 2022), to draw on the resources that are best suited to the study and the bricoleur's capabilities and expertise (Prasad, 2005), and, iii); the bricoleur combines some of the resources that are available to the researcher (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Pratt et al., 2022). These three elements show that bricolage is the exploration of an issue through the combining of research methods and materials that are best suited to the research study (Pratt et al., 2022).

The researcher will take on the role of three types of bricoleurs, as described by Denzin and Lincoln (1999, 2018), namely the interpretive bricoleur, methodological bricoleur, and the narrative bricoleur. The interpretive bricoleur is aware of how their own perspectives and demographics influence the research process, and that reflexivity needs to be a part of the research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, 2018), which will be discussed in Chapter 4. There is no universally correct explanation to a phenomenon (Ben-Asher, 2022; Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, 2018), because the findings are influenced by the literature, the information that is gained from the collected data, the data analysis, and the bricoleur's fluctuating viewpoint (Ben-Asher, 2022), as well as the bricoleur's understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, cited in Ben-Asher, 2022). The bricoleur will engage with three theories, namely the theory of confirmation bias, social identity theory, social contagion theory, as well as four main literature concepts, namely Twitter as a conduit of cancel culture, wokeness, which includes Orwell's (1946) novella and mainstream media bias, decontextualisation, and cancellation and call-out.

The methodological bricoleur follows an eclectic approach by combining methodological tools or resources that are available to the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, 2018),

which is the second element of bricolage that was mentioned earlier. The researcher will sample and analyse multiple cases of journalistic cancellation since the study will have a multiple-case study design, as previously discussed. Two sampling methods, namely purposive and theoretical sampling, will be used. The bricoleur will conduct data collection, analysis, and interpretation in an iterative manner, and will use a hybrid form of deductive and inductive coding, along with three other types of coding.

The narrative bricoleur knows that reality is constructed of multiple perspectives, and thus explores phenomena within specific contexts, and utilises research techniques from multiple perspectives and sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, 2018). As explained in Chapter 1, the contextual factors of each of the three cancellation cases will be explored, along with the similarities and dissimilarities between the cases.

3.3.2.1.3 Types of coding

Codes consist of words or phrases that symbolise portions of data and have meaning attributed to them for the purpose of identification, categorisation, theorisation, and further analysis (Saldaña, 2009, 2016). Codes are like the titles of movies that describe the content of those films (Saldaña, 2016). Coding in qualitative studies is the classifying of data (Babbie, 2008, 2021), and initially occurs during data collection but is applied more rigorously afterward (Flick, 2014)

Coding reduces the denseness of data to make it easier for researchers to navigate their way around the data by pinpointing or highlighting specific themes that link to the research question instead of going through the loads of data every time a theme needs to be reviewed (Elliott, 2018). A coding process, typically reserved for studies of grounded theory, where data is divided into codes and those codes are divided into code categories (Holton, 2010), will be used for this study. Grounded theory tries to develop or expand on theory, while content analysis focuses more on descriptions rather than theory development (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The study will focus on understanding and describing the nature of cancel culture despite using the coding processes of grounded theory. Yin (2003) also suggests replicating processes for each case being explored if a multiple-case study design is being used. The coding process will be conducted the same way for each of the three cancellation cases.

There can be two cycles of coding, the first of which includes summarising large sets of collected data by coding a sentence, paragraph, or whole page of textual data (Saldaña, 2009, 2016). The first coding cycle for this study will consist of line-by-line open coding

to complete step two of the six thematic analysis steps. It is, however during this first cycle that researchers, especially inexperienced ones, might feel overwhelmed and insecure, which could cause researchers to jump to the last step in the coding process (Glaser, 2004; Holton, 2010), potentially affecting the accuracy of a study's findings. This is a possibility for this study, as the researcher is untried. The solution, though, consists of the researcher simply trusting and following the coding process whilst taking notes throughout (Holton, 2010).

The second cycle of coding includes further coding or even reconfiguration of the results from the first cycle (Saldaña, 2016) and involves the abstract interpretation of the already coded data (Punch, 2014, cited in Elliott, 2018). This will be done through axial coding and selective coding as part of steps three to five of the six thematic analysis steps. The three types of coding, i.e., line-by-line open, axial, and selective, will take place in an iterative manner, where the researcher will revert to a previously conducted coding method but will not unnecessarily jump ahead in the research process. However, another coding method will be used all throughout the collection and analysis processes, namely a mixed method of deductive and inductive coding called abductive coding.

a) Abductive coding: Deductive and inductive coding

Thematic analysis can be conducted through deductive or inductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Deduction is tautological and consists of subsumption, which is the seeking of information that relates to an already known rule or context (Flick, 2014). Deductive coding thus occurs when a researcher divides the gathered data into concepts that have been pre-determined when the theory and literature on the subject was examined; the codes have already been established and are now being applied to the collected data (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Mayring, 2000; Miles et al., 1994; Neale, 2016; Xu & Zammit, 2020). A conceptual framework, consisting of theories and literature, is used to identify specific deductive codes and themes in the collected data, and then those codes and themes are linked back to general concepts from the theories and literature (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021). The conceptual framework is provided in Chapter 4 (page 96) and consists of concepts from the predefined theories for this study, namely the theory of confirmation bias, social identity theory, and social contagion theory, as well as concepts from the predefined literature topics, namely Twitter as the ultimate conduit of cancel culture, wokeness, decontextualisation, call-outs, and cancellation. This framework will be used to determine deductive codes, which, according to Bezuidenhout and Cronje (2021), are also called *a priori* codes, and used as a guide during data collection, analysis, and

interpretation.

Opposite to deductive coding is inductive coding, which includes dividing the data into newly discovered codes or themes, that have not been predefined, and linking those themes as near as possible to the gathered material (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Mayring, 2000; Neale, 2016); codes emerge from the data or are largely determined by the data (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021; Miles et al., 1994; Xu & Zammit, 2020). A conceptual framework is not used to determine inductive codes (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021), so induction thus conveys more than just the truth expressed in the original premise of the research (Flick, 2014). However, it does not find entirely new information, it only finds “new versions of what is already known” (Flick, 2014: 129). This type of coding will also be done to determine any *in vivo* codes. *In vivo* codes are emerging codes and can consist of the actual words in the collected text (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Saldaña, 2009, 2016). When reporting the findings of a study, the voices and perspectives of the people involved must be emphasized while describing the findings of a study, and the researcher's own prejudiced opinions must be minimized (Elo et al., 2014). *In vivo* codes will be determined, but emerging – as well as deductive – codes depicting direct quotes from the raw data, will also be incorporated into the interpretation section of the report.

When conducting analysis in a deductive manner, researchers can easily overlook unanticipated concepts that are vital to the study, because the aim is to attest predetermined arguments (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). Inductive coding, on the other hand, is critiqued because it is unwise to believe that data can be collected and analysed without any predetermined knowledge about the topic being studied to guide the research process (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). Abductive coding, which is a hybrid form of deductive and inductive coding (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021), will therefore be used to cancel out the disadvantages of utilising either deductive or inductive coding on its own. With abduction, researchers do not just intend to pursue *a priori* codes and compare the codes to pre-established theories and literature (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021; Kelle, 1997), nor does the researcher intend to only discover emerging codes (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021). The goal of this type of coding is to find the most logical explanations for the phenomenon being studied (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

During collection and analysis, the researcher will first conduct deductive coding by pursuing and comparing *a priori* codes to the theoretical framework and the literature, then conduct inductive coding by reviewing the collected text again to determine and make note of any emerging codes that come from the raw data. This hybrid method ties

back to the concept of bricolage that was discussed earlier in Chapter 3, as the bricoleur uses a combination of two different coding methods. Three other types of coding will also be used, as discussed below.

b) Line-by-line open coding

Line by line coding includes reading data in a line-by-line manner and assigning codes when concepts become clear (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). However, line-by-line coding, on its own, is not adequate to see data as one complete entity (Chenail, 2012), but it can be used interchangeably with open coding (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019); a coding method that occurs when the researcher reduces the mass of data (Neuman, 2007, 2014) by breaking the data into smaller parts (Babbie, 2008, 2021; Jiang, Chen & Wang, 2018). The whole text is also read to gain an overall impression of the data (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021). Codes are also derived from the data through open coding (Neuman, 2007, 2014) by asking questions of the data that encourages the researcher to focus on specific patterns (Holton, 2010), such as “What category does this incident indicate? What is actually happening in the data?” (Glaser, 1998: 140, cited in Holton, 2010: 24). Data is also examined at a low level of abstraction (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Below is an example showing how to code, that the researcher will use as a guide.

¹ I notice that the grand majority of homes have chain link fences in front of them. There are many dogs (mostly German shepherds) with signs on fences that say “Beware of the Dog.”	¹ SECURITY
¹ He cares about me. He has never told me but he does. ² He’s always been there for me, even when my parents were not. He’s one of the few things that I hold as a constant in my life. So it’s nice. ³ I really feel comfortable around him.	¹ SENSE OF SELF-WORTH ² STABILITY ³ “COMFORTABLE”

Figure 3.1 – Coding example (Saldaña, 2009: 3, 2016: 3)

In the first excerpt, a participant describes what houses in inner cities look like. Chain link fences are used for protection, as are dogs that guard homes, so the code derived (in the right column of the figure) from the description is ‘security’ (Saldaña, 2009, 2016). A pattern code might be deduced from the codes determined in the first example, as one might infer that the excessive security measures means that the residents of inner cities do

not feel safe or that there is a lot of crime in those areas (Saldaña, 2009, 2016). The second box is an excerpt from an interview of a student describing his favourite teacher and follows the same coding process as the first example. The code consisting of the direct words of a participant in this example is in quotation marks (Saldaña, 2009, 2016), which is also how some *a priori* and *in vivo* codes in this study will be written during analysis.

During analysis, it is important to determine the emotions that participants portray, as well as the various meanings that a single word can yield (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher will gauge the emotions potentially portrayed in the collected tweets, like outrage that was discussed in the literature review, along with the various meanings or codes that can be ascribed to single words or phrases.

After dividing the data into codes, the codes will be rearranged into code categories using axial coding. The process of breaking text down into codes and grouping the codes into code categories is called fracturing (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021; Scott & Medaugh, 2017). The collected data will also be deconstructed and reconstructed. Deconstruction involves destabilising the meaning of texts, and challenging well-known rationales and existing knowledge (Payne, 2002). Reconstruction tends to follow deconstruction and involves offering new meanings or alternate explanations (Payne, 2002). This relates to the concept of bricolage, as text from tweets and online articles will be fractured, deconstructed, and reconstructed, and the researcher will also analyse the interpretations noted as part of memoing, to form a story or argument.

c) Axial coding

After codes have been detected, the large number of codes needs to be grouped into smaller, more coherent sets (Scott & Medaugh, 2017), which is where axial coding comes in. Axial coding occurs when large sets of open coded data are assembled into more abstract (Babbie, 2008, 2021; Scott & Medaugh, 2017) and nuanced categories (Manning, 2017), with the purpose of comparing categories or subcategories and discerning how they relate to one another (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021; Jiang et al., 2018; Saldaña, 2009; Scott & Medaugh, 2017) to determine “both general properties of a phenomenon and dimensional variation” (Scott & Medaugh, 2017: 1). A code category is thus the axis around which codes revolve.

Two types of comparisons will be used to compare the codes, code categories, and code subcategories, namely constant and theoretical comparison. The former occurs when incidents are compared to every other incident in the data, and similar concepts between

the incidents are grouped together (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The codes will thus be compared to determine the similarities and dissimilarities between the three cancellation cases. Theoretical comparison is when comparisons are made about figurative meanings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, someone claiming that their workday was 'like a zoo,' does not necessarily mean that they work in a zoo, it could mean that their day was hectic and demanding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The codes procured through line-by-line open coding for this study will be compared, to distinguish relations between the codes, and categorised. The bricoleur will also glean the connections between the codes that are pre-established and emerging. Corbin and Strauss (2008) also suggest searching for a negative case during comparison, which is a case that does not fit any pattern and can help the researcher to establish alternate explanations for the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative researchers tend to explore differences between concepts from collected data (Davoudi et al., 2017) and thus seek negative cases to gain unique insights into a phenomenon (Abrams, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

d) Selective coding

After code categories have been established through axial coding, they are further analysed on a high abstract level, and allocated into core categories that shape one cohesive theory; a technique called selective coding (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019). It allows the researcher to further categorise the results of axial coding into themes (Neuman, 2007, 2014; Williams & Moser, 2019), which have a more abstract scope than initial codes that are developed because they represent the complex relationships between concepts, as well as the central argument being made (Flick, 2014).

Once themes have been developed, the researcher will then know the central code or phenomenon that all codes are related to (Babbie, 2008, 2021; Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019) and can finally answer the research question (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019). Since this will be done as part of thematic analysis, which tries to integrate data into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Scharp & Sanders, 2018), the results of selective coding will be labelled, not as 'core categories' as Kaiser and Presmeg (2019) call it, but as distinctive themes. The codes, code categories, and themes will be attached as an addendum, labelled as Table 4.1. It will take on a matrices format, which according to Miles et al. (1994), consists of rows and columns.

e) Summary of the coding process

To reiterate, the coding process involved in thematic analysis will be as follows: Deductive and inductive coding will occur throughout data collection and analysis as part of abductive coding, with inductive coding occurring sometime after deduction. Line-by-line open coding will be used to analyse the raw data by breaking it up into smaller parts to produce codes. Axial coding will then lead to the examination of the codes to determine which of those codes can be divided into the same code categories and/or subcategories that will be compared. During selective coding, the code categories and/or subcategories will be allocated into themes that will answer the research question. These last three types of coding will take place in an iterative manner, where the researcher will move back and forth between the three to determine codes, code categories, and themes that will be organised into a table of rows and columns. However, the researcher will avoid unnecessarily jumping ahead during the steps of thematic analysis. A summarised illustration of the process can also be found in Figure 3.2 below.

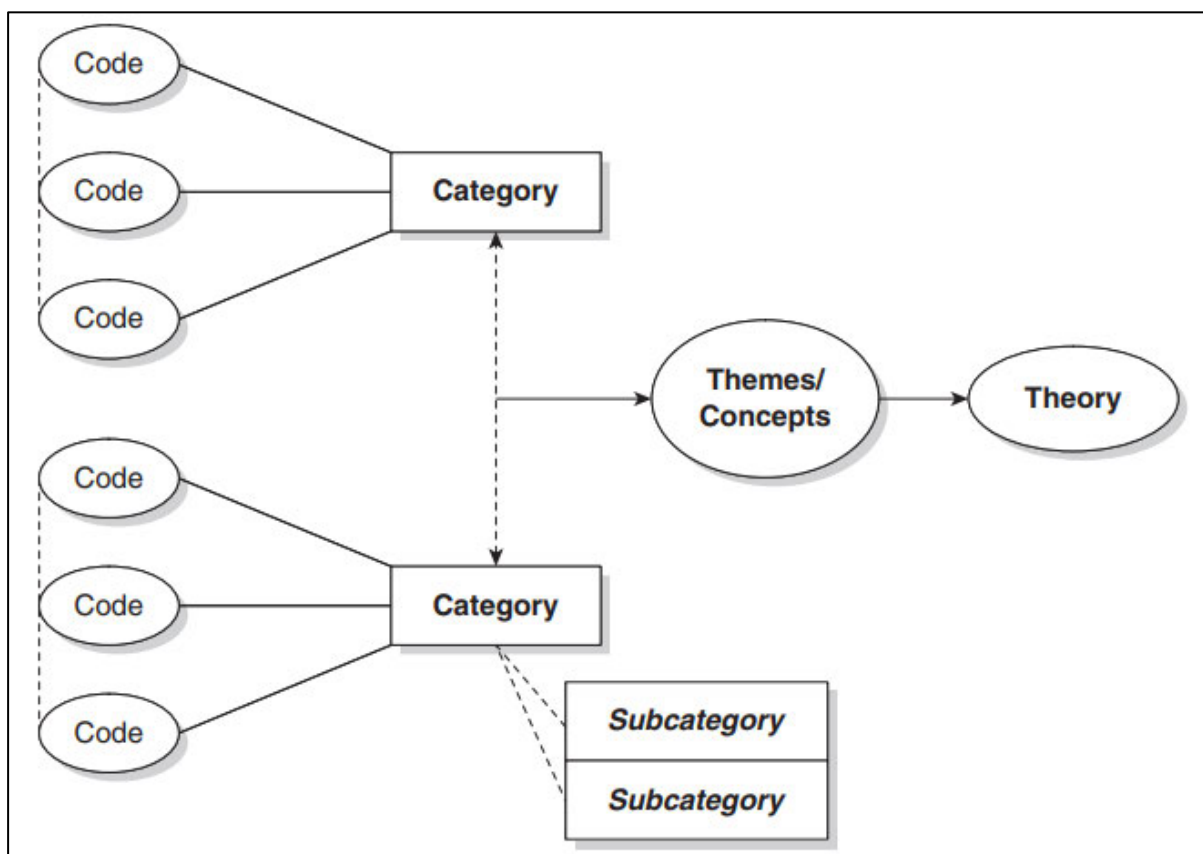


Figure 3.2 – The coding process (Saldaña, 2009)

3.3.2.1.4 Critique

Thematic analysis is the ideal analysis method to utilise by those who are somewhat inexperienced in the field of research, as the process is easy to understand and does not

require a researcher to be knowledgeable about other qualitative tactics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher, who has only done a similar project once before, can thus use this method to conduct the study on cancel culture.

This type of data analysis also helps researchers to perform many other types of analysis and has been referred to as a translator of some sorts as it enables researchers with various research methods to transmit information in some ways (Boyatzis, 1998, cited in Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is thus a workable method that can be beneficial to researchers who are studying cancel culture or a similar topic like online shaming. However, such flexibility can make the method seem less rigorous unless the role of the paradigm and literature themes is thoroughly determined and stated in a research study (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). To prevent such a mistake, the researcher elaborated on the interpretivist paradigm in Chapter 1 and the available literature on the topic – and how that literature relates to the study – in Chapter 2.

The process of thematic analysis can also be difficult to understand or apply meticulously when basing the analysis activity on existing discussions about qualitative research, because detailed descriptions of the methodology are absent in some academic texts (Roberts et al., 2019). A case study, done by Roberts et al. (2019) provides a basic outline, that expands on already-accepted models, for researchers and students to work from when conducting thematic analysis. The framework is as follows (Roberts et al., 2019): First, the collected data needs to be read and reread to summarise the information and determine reoccurring codes until data- and theoretical saturation is achieved, then the codes need to be reviewed to ensure that the list of codes accurately reflects the data, the codes are then grouped and compared to develop themes and subthemes, and finally the codes and themes are evaluated again to ensure its reliability.

Braun and Clarke (2019) claim that such engagement with the data leads to every step in the research process being deliberate as the researcher does not just blindly follow the research methodology, but can also make decisions based on epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Mayring (2014) also claims that summarising or reducing the text is necessary to ensure that only the most essential information remains. For this study, the researcher will apply such suggested steps, along with the coding processes and six steps of thematic analysis.

3.4 Conclusion

Chapter 3 discussed research design and methodology. The chapter explored how a

population is determined and how it is narrowed to a smaller population that, for this study, represents all journalists who have been cancelled or nearly cancelled through Twitter call-outs—whether justified or not—for their actual or perceived activity, not only by complete strangers or ordinary citizens, but also by their own fellow journalists and others in the mainstream media.

Out of the targeted population, a sample of three cancellation cases, involving journalists Lindsay Dentlinger, Piers Morgan, and Alexi McCammond, was selected. 300 to 450 Twitter posts, and 45 to 60 online news articles, will be collected, but this number of tweets and articles is flexible as it depends greatly on the saturation status of the data. The text from the tweets and news stories constitutes the study's unit of analysis. Purposive non-probability sampling will be used to selectively choose the tweets and articles that will represent the chosen sample, and a focus will be placed on the similarities between the three cancellation cases.

The data will be collected, using the qualitative content analysis method in a directed and summative manner. After the sample of data has been collected, thematic analysis will be conducted as a form of textual analysis to analyse data in six steps or phases. Abductive coding, in the form of deductive and inductive coding, will be present throughout both data collection and data analysis, but three other coding processes will also be implemented. Familiarisation will occur as the first step in the analysis process, then line-by-line open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, will be used to extract codes from the collected data, divide the codes into code categories, and the code categories into themes that will address the research question. The research report will be written throughout the research process.

The next chapter describes how data collection and analysis took place. Interpretation of the data is provided throughout, methods of trustworthiness are described, and ethical considerations are listed.

CHAPTER 4: DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

A qualitative research approach helps researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of certain phenomena by collecting and analysing non-numerical data (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Qualitative researchers attempt to explore people's behaviours and understand their experiences without intervening (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). The approach also allows for thick descriptions that help with the interpretation of people's experiences (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003).

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3 (pages 16 and 66), the unit of analysis for this study will be social artefacts, which, according to Kumar (2018) can include newspaper articles and online sites. Text from online newspaper articles and the social media site Twitter were thus sought after and collected, with tweets being the primary social artefacts and articles being the secondary artefacts.

Cancel culture is a phenomenon in which individuals get lambasted on social media platforms such as Twitter (Bouvier & Machin, 2021; Nguyen, 2020) and suffer financial or social loss (Brito, 2021; Ng, 2020), because their words or actions were seen as offensive or derogatory (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Sossi, 2021). The culture tends to encompass topics of racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and sexual crimes (Norris, 2021).

The research design and methodology were discussed in Chapter 3, and the application and execution of the methods are detailed in this chapter. The next few pages thus describe how data was iteratively collected, analysed, and interpreted to determine themes to answer the research questions. The data, i.e., tweets and articles, was collected through qualitative content analysis (QCA) in a directed and summative manner. Six steps of thematic analysis were used, with its accompanying coding methods, to analyse and interpret the textual data by dividing the raw information into codes, code categories, and themes. Before collection or analysis was implemented, though, a conceptual framework was created to act as a guide throughout the final parts of the research process.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

A coding frame is at the heart of QCA in data collection (Flick, 2014), and is the visual representation of related theoretical constructs and concepts that grounds and allows the

meaningful interpretation of data and ultimately the credibility of findings (Adom et al., 2018). Using deductive coding and theoretical sampling, the three chosen theories – theory of confirmation bias, social identity theory, and social contagion theory – and literature constructs including wokeness, decontextualisation, and call-outs and cancellation, were used to amass *a priori* codes to build the foundation of the conceptual framework, as seen in Figure 4.1. *A priori* codes consist of codes that are deductively generated from theories and literature before analysis takes place (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). *A priori* codes are thus deductive codes (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2021).

The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of cancel culture on Twitter, and how journalists are involved in the phenomenon. As discussed in Chapter 2 (page 46), cancel culture is the manifestation of wokeness, which is why wokeness would be regarded as the main theme for the research study. Wokeness and social identity theory were used centrally because both have to do with the construction of social groups on social media platforms. Decontextualisation is the first rule of cancel culture (Zille, 2021b), however, it stands to reason that an incident must first exist for it to be decontextualised. First, an incident – involving controversial topics such as race and gender (Chiou, 2020) – occurs. The decontextualisation of incidents will be explored in terms of the social processes of contagion and confirmation bias. Seemingly, Twitter users name and shame the person responsible for the incident (Favarel-Garrigues, 2020), and make demands for accountability (Mishan, 2020), apology (Mueller, 2021) and cancellation (Cook et al., 2021), such as a loss of employment (Sailofsky, 2021) to take place. The typical labels that cancel culture targets tend to get branded with include ‘racist,’ ‘sexist,’ ‘bigot’ (Zille, 2021a), which are included as *a priori* codes in the conceptual framework. Call-outs contain hypocritical elements (Zille, 2021a) and the supposed wrongdoer seemingly suffers consequences because of call-outs, such as censorship (Brito, 2021; Tufekci 2018, cited in Cook et al., 2021) or a loss of support (Chiou, 2020; Nakkab, 2020; Ng, 2020).

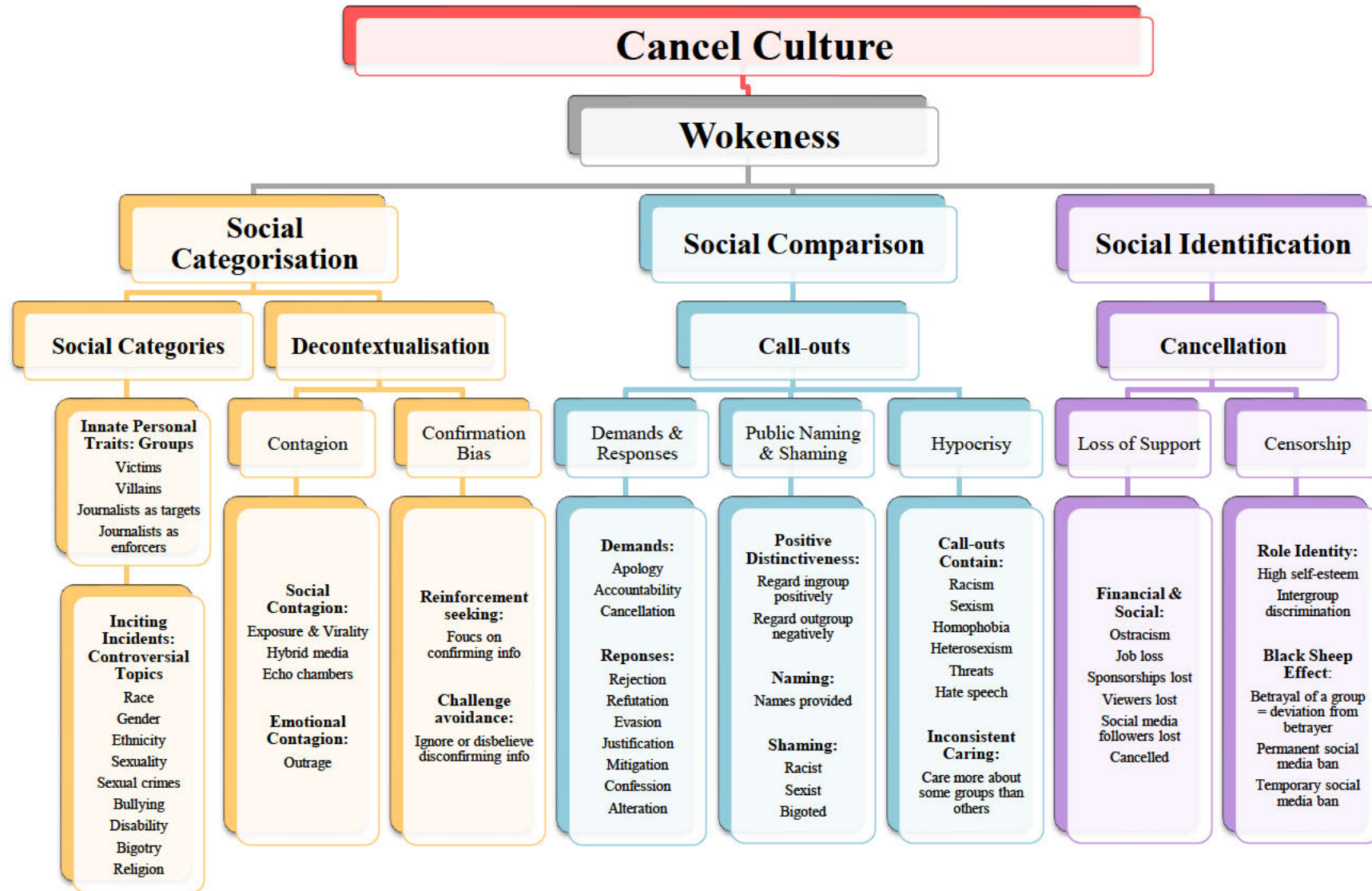


Figure 4.1 – Conceptual framework of *a priori* codes with code categories presented as themes and subthemes

4.3 Data collection

All the collected data was in textual form, as text was derived from tweets (that were posted within 30 days of each cancellation case's starting points in February 2021 and March 2021, as discussed in Chapter 3), and online articles (distributed online any time from the cases' starting points up until the end of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes, which was also explained in Chapter 3). There was no need to transcribe the data since it was already in textual form, and the data was also used verbatim, and no text had been changed.

Data collection for each case was completed sequentially. In the McCammond case, the journalist lost her position at Teen Vogue because some of her decade-old tweets resurfaced, which people deemed to be racist and homophobic (Breuninger, 2021). Dentlinger was called out on Twitter for interviews she had done in which she asked two African politicians to wear masks but neglected to ask the same of a Caucasian politician (Pijoos, 2021). Morgan suffered consequences for not believing what British royal Meghan Markle had said during an interview with Oprah Winfrey (Kilkenny, 2021).

Data collection involves the assembling of relevant data for a study (Kabir, 2016). Data was collected using qualitative content analysis (QCA) in a directed and summative manner. The conceptual framework provided the researcher with *a priori* codes based on pre-determined theoretical constructs and was used as a guide to determine which data to collect, as part of theoretical sampling and directed QCA. Notes were made in a notebook about all *a priori* codes that were detected during data collection. Summative QCA, on the other hand, involved the detection of keywords, mostly related to the codes in the conceptual framework, such as 'racist,' to interpret or determine the underlying context or meaning of the text. For example, some text displayed users' decontextualisation and outrage.

QCA is regarded as the method that is most like thematic analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) and can be conducted using deductive and inductive coding (Drisko & Maschi, 2016), which was discussed in Chapter 3 (page 86). Deductive and inductive coding – as a form of abductive coding – were thus applied iteratively throughout both data collection and data analysis, but deductive coding was done first, and then the collected text was read again to apply inductive coding. Data collection and analysis also took place iteratively. Any deductive or *a priori* codes, that were derived from the raw data during directed QCA, were written down in a notebook, and on the printed data itself. Emerging codes, procured through inductive coding, were also noted.

Data was collected until data- and theoretical saturation was achieved. Data saturation occurs when no new insights can be gleaned from the data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021; Nascimento et al., 2018) and can assist researchers in knowing when to stop collecting data as the size of the sample has become sufficient (Nascimento et al., 2018). Theoretical saturation occurs when the researcher is satisfied with the complexity of concepts and categories that are used in the development of theories and arguments in the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Gentles et al., 2015; Sandelowski, 2008).

The data collected consisted of two types, including tweets from Twitter and articles from online newspapers and magazines. The data was read and reread, with the researcher deeply immersed and engaged, as per Roberts et al.'s (2019) instructions which consisted of reading and rereading the data to summarise the text to determine reoccurring codes until saturation was achieved. Data- and theoretical saturation was reached at approximately 330 tweets and 45 articles. It significantly reduced the predetermined size of the data that was discussed in Chapter 3. Data reduction also took place by focusing on only relevant information, as suggested by Namey et al. (2008), such as tweets and articles that encompassed the three cancellation cases.

4.3.1 Collecting online articles

Due to the abundance of information on social media, data is sampled differently from social media platforms than they are from conventional media, such as printed newspapers, because the hard copies of traditional media do not have limitless capacity for content (Kim, Jang, Kim & Wan, 2018). Online newspapers also allow for easier access to desired articles which saves time (Koundal & Mishra, 2018).

The collected tweets consisted of multiple sentences, while the collected articles consisted of multiple paragraphs and sometimes multiple pages. Twitter posts only allow people to write a certain number of characters (Crosset et al., 2019; Malik et al., 2019). The content of online newspaper articles outweighed the content of Twitter posts, which is why far fewer articles were collected than tweets. The content of the articles also provided more in-depth information that were not conveyed in any of the collected tweets. The articles thus provided context to each cancellation event that filled the gaps of information not addressed in the tweets.

However, online newspapers were not the only source used to accumulate online articles, as magazine articles were also collected. As mentioned in Chapter 3, using multiple data sources is a way of ensuring the accuracy of a study's findings (Nguyen et al., 2020). Tweets and online

newspaper articles were thus collected to ensure the accuracy of findings, and most of the available newspaper articles about the three cases were from the same news organisations. One of the initial goals for data collection was to select online articles from news publications, but the search expanded to online magazine articles, to depict a greater variety of sources, as Nguyen et al. (2020) expressed that possessing multiple data sources increases the accuracy of a study's findings, and Yin (2003, 2014) claimed that multiple sources can help understand the contextual factors of cases being studied.

Most of the collected articles were from: The Guardian, The New York Times, CNN, National Post, CNBC, Fox News, Newsweek, Daily Mail, SABC News, News24, Sowetan LIVE, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Digital Music News, The Independent, The South African, Evening Star, Independent Online (IOL), The Citizen, Insider, Deadline, Forbes, Vulture, and Daily Star. Four articles in total were from magazines, and some articles were from the textually transcribed version of a South African radio talk station, called Cape Talk, and one article was from Page Six; the gossip column in the New York Post.

The collection of these newspaper- and magazine articles was conducted with the researcher typing keywords, phrases, or concepts from the cancellation cases and conceptual framework into Google's search bar, for example: 'Lindsay Dentlinger racist' or 'Lindsay Dentlinger mask controversy,' as seen in the figure below. Sometimes dates were also inserted into the search bar along with the needed keywords, such as 'Dentlinger racist February 2021' for the Dentlinger case as that is the time that her cancellation debacle started.

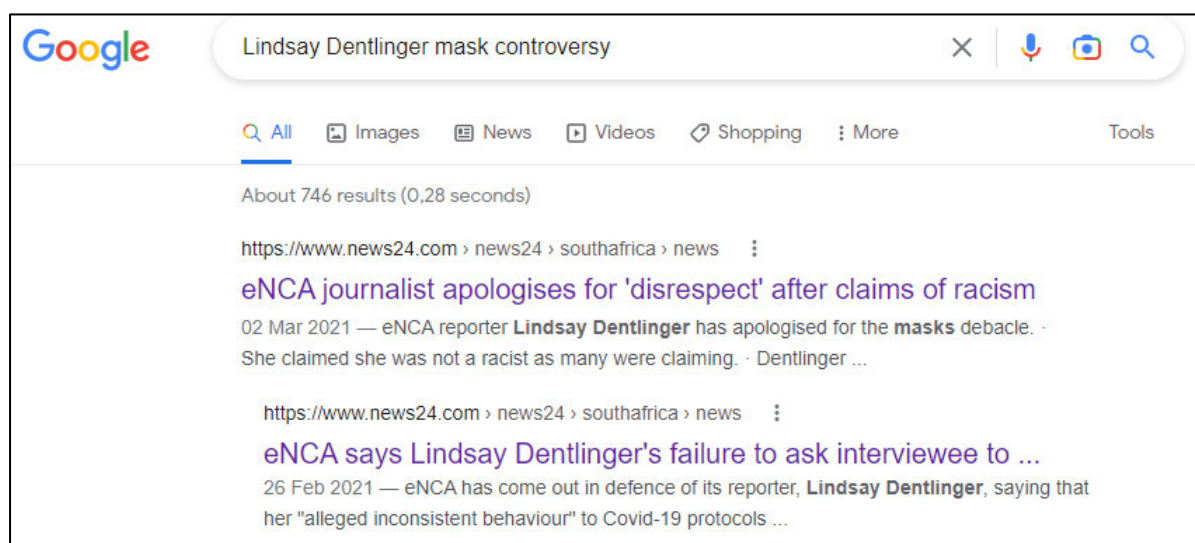


Figure 4.2 – Googling keywords (Google, 2022)

Articles from the search results were read, starting from the top of the Google Results page to

the bottom and onto the next pages. Directed qualitative content analysis dictates that data be collected if it relates to previous literature on the topic (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Large sets of available data can be reduced by paying attention to relevant information that will help draw and verify conclusions (Namey et al., 2008). Focus was thus placed on articles that were directly related to the three cases and the concepts determined in the conceptual framework. For example, in Figure 4.2, the article at the top of the Google page with the title ‘eNCA journalist apologises for “disrespect” after claims of racism,’ still had to do with Dentlinger’s viral mask controversy and was therefore not overlooked.

With summative qualitative content analysis, keywords are determined along with the underlying meaning or context of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Specific keywords, that were related to the three cases, were sought after in the collected articles, such as ‘racist’ and ‘cancel.’ Data fracturing occurred by dividing the text into codes made up of such keywords. The data was also deconstructed and reconstructed to analyse the potential meanings in the text. The researcher also determined and took note of any potential underlying meanings in the articles when choosing the correct articles, as part of memoing in the form of theoretical notes, that was defined in Chapter 3 (page 80).

The collecting of articles continued until data- and theoretical saturation had occurred. The initial calculation for a suitable sample size was 15 to 20 articles per case, as discussed in Chapter 3, but saturation was reached at 15 articles for each cancellation case: 45 articles in total. The researcher also re-read all the gathered data and concluded that the data was related to each cancellation case, and none of the articles were irrelevant to the cases, making the sample size seemingly satisfactory so far.

The timeframe of the desired articles was not fixed like that of the tweets. While the researcher looked for tweets that were posted within 30 days of each call-out or event that led to call-outs, the sought-after articles were gathered from the start of each event up till the end of data collection. For example, in the Piers Morgan case, the first collected article was published on 8 March 2021 and describes what Morgan said about the Markle-Oprah interview, and the last collected article is from 16 January 2022 and elaborates on how Morgan finally returned to breakfast TV after the whole cancellation debacle. There were thus articles almost a year apart from one another that documented how a journalist could be impacted by cancel culture long after first call-outs occurred.

Each time an article seemed suitable for the research, the article was copied and pasted onto a

Microsoft Word document; one document for each case's articles, i.e., three documents in total. Considering the storage locations of collected data is a data management strategy that saves time and contributes to the success of the research process (Kanza & Knight 2022) and using more than one storage backup is a time-effective method that also eliminates the loss of data (DeVries et al., 2017). The collected articles were stored in two different locations: on a memory stick, and a computer desktop. Appropriately naming data files can also save time (DeVries et al., 2017; Kanza & Knight 2022) and prevent the loss of data (DeVries et al., 2017). A file name should indicate the contents of the file (DeVries et al., 2017). The documents were aptly named 'Alexi McCammond Articles,' 'Lindsay Dentlinger Articles,' and 'Piers Morgan Articles,' to indicate whether the data in the documents were tweets or articles and what case it was about.

4.3.2 Collecting tweets

Twitter is a free platform (Sinnenberg et al., 2017), which made it easy to gain access to desired tweets for the study. Tweets were collected in three different ways, the first of which included the use of Twitter's search bar (see in the figure below), which can be accessed on the home page of a Twitter account or on Twitter.com (Twitter, 2022a). The red arrow shows where the search bar is situated.

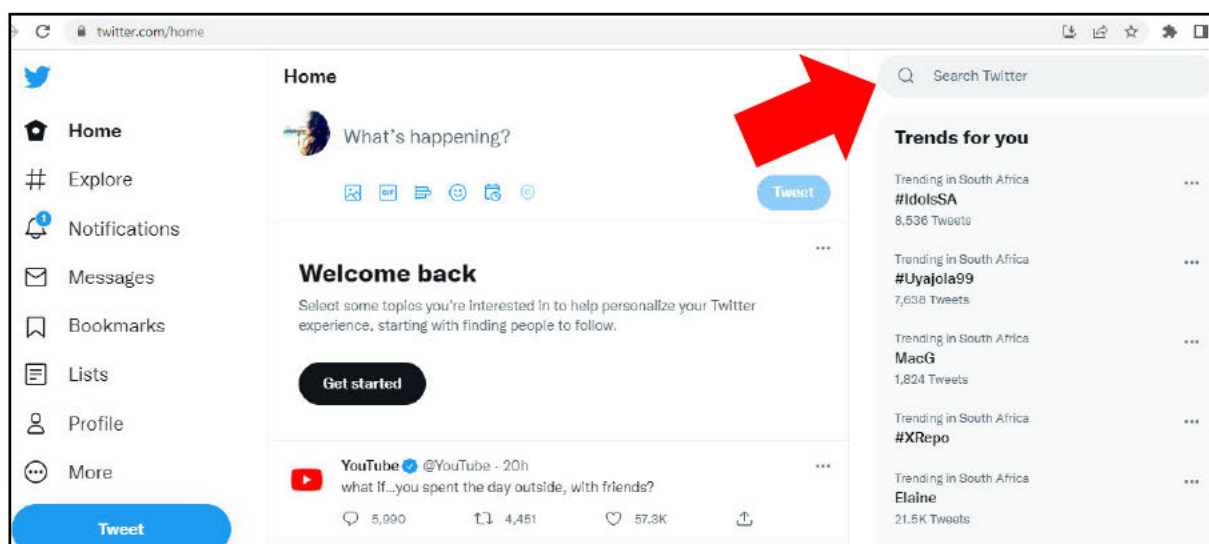


Figure 4.3 – Search bar on Twitter's Home Page (Twitter, 2022a)

Posts were located using keyword searches. The search terms or keywords, for all three cases of cancellation, were gained from the literature and the conceptual framework. For example, keywords used for the Lindsay Dentlinger case included 'Lindsay Dentlinger,' 'Dentlinger,' 'racist.' Tweets were only considered if it was posted within 30 days of each initial incident.

As discussed in Chapter 3, all three journalists experienced call-outs and subsequent consequences within less than 30 days: McCammond lost her job 12 days after initial call-outs began, the complaints against Dentlinger were dismissed 24 days after people wanted her to be cancelled, and Morgan and his friend both lost their jobs within 17 days. The time-period was scaled up to 30 days to allow for the accumulation of enough data to ensure that saturation was achieved.

The second way that tweets were collected, was through Twitter's Advanced Search engine (as seen in the multiple figures below), which can be accessed through Google, by typing in 'Twitter Advanced Search' and clicking the first option that appears. Another way to access this engine is to type the desired keywords into Twitter's search bar – depicted in Figure 4.3 – then clicking the three dots on the top right corner of the screen that will appear and selecting 'Advanced search.'

The search engine was used to locate tweets from each case individually; not tweets from all three cases together in one search. Figure 4.4 illustrates a part of the search engine that allows for the typing of specific words, phrases, or hashtags. Terms, present in the conceptual framework, such as 'racist' were typed into the 'Words' section. Piers Morgan's cancel culture case, for example, started with his criticism of an interview done between Meghan Markle and Oprah Winfrey (Kilkenny, 2021), which is why words like 'Markle' and 'Oprah' were also used for his case.

× **Advanced search** **Search**

Words

All of these words
Example: what's happening · contains both "what's" and "happening"

This exact phrase
Example: happy hour · contains the exact phrase "happy hour"

Any of these words
Example: cats dogs · contains either "cats" or "dogs" (or both)

None of these words
Example: cats dogs · does not contain "cats" and does not contain "dogs"

These hashtags
Example: #ThrowbackThursday · contains the hashtag #ThrowbackThursday

Figure 4.4 – Words section in Twitter’s Advanced Search engine (Twitter, 2022b)

Under the heading ‘Accounts’ (see Figure 4.5) in the box ‘Mentioning these accounts,’ the Twitter handle (the username of the account holder that appears after the @ sign in a profile URL) for each journalist was typed in, such as ‘@alexi’ for McCammond, and ‘@piersmorgan’ for Morgan. An account name for Dentlinger, however, was not found, and the journalist’s lack of a current Twitter handle was substituted for hashtags (keywords or phrases preceded by the hashtag symbol - #) including her name, such as #LindsayDentlinger. This ‘Accounts’ section of Twitter’s Advanced Search engine allowed for the use of theoretical sampling, which, according to Gentles et al. (2015), occurs after the data collection process has begun. In Chapter 2 it was discussed that targets of cancel culture are named and shamed (Favarel-Garrigues et al., 2020), and this section allowed the researcher to collect posts that named the journalists’ by tweeting their Twitter handles. This aided in understanding notions of how exactly journalists are named during call-outs, as the different ways of their naming and shaming could be compared.

Accounts

From these accounts
Example: @Twitter · sent from @Twitter

To these accounts
Example: @Twitter · sent in reply to @Twitter

Mentioning these accounts
Example: @SFBART @Caltrain · mentions @SFBART or mentions @Caltrain

Figure 4.5 – Accounts section in Twitter’s Advanced Search engine (Twitter, 2022c)

Filters, as seen in Figure 4.6, were set to ‘Include replies and original tweets’ and ‘Include tweets with links,’ while the ‘Engagement’ section (Figure 4.7) remained untouched.

Filters

Replies

Include replies and original Tweets ☒

Only show replies ☐

Links

Include Tweets with links ☒

Only show Tweets with links ☐

Figure 4.6 – Filters section in Twitter’s Advanced Search engine (Twitter, 2022d)

Engagement

Minimum replies
Example: 280 · Tweets with at least 280 replies

Minimum Likes
Example: 280 · Tweets with at least 280 Likes

Minimum Retweets
Example: 280 · Tweets with at least 280 Retweets

Figure 4.7 – Engagement section in Twitter’s Advanced Search engine (Twitter, 2022e)

The dates (see Figure 4.8) were set to 30 days from each incident’s starting point, as per the 30-day period that was decided on in Chapter 3. For example, the Dentlinger mask furore started when the journalist conducted a live broadcast on the 24th of February 2021 (Pijoos, 2021), so the time stamp was set between 24 February 2021 and 25 March 2021.

Dates

From

Month Day Year

To

Month Day Year

Figure 4.8 – Dates section in Twitter’s Advanced Search engine (Twitter, 2022f)

The third way that Twitter posts were collected, consisted of sampling tweets that were present in the collected newspaper and magazine articles about each case. Figure 4.9 illustrates such an example. The name of the Twitter user in the figure has been blacked out as per the ethical considerations – that are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Whenever a tweet was selected, a screenshot was taken of it and pasted onto a Microsoft Word document and stored in the same locations as the collected articles. As mentioned before, naming data files is an important practice in a research study that should be considered carefully (DeVries et al., 2017). The tweets of each cancellation case were kept separate from one another and placed in digital documents, aptly named after each journalist, for example: ‘Alexi McCammond Tweets,’ ‘Lindsay Dentlinger Tweets,’ and ‘Piers Morgan Tweets.’

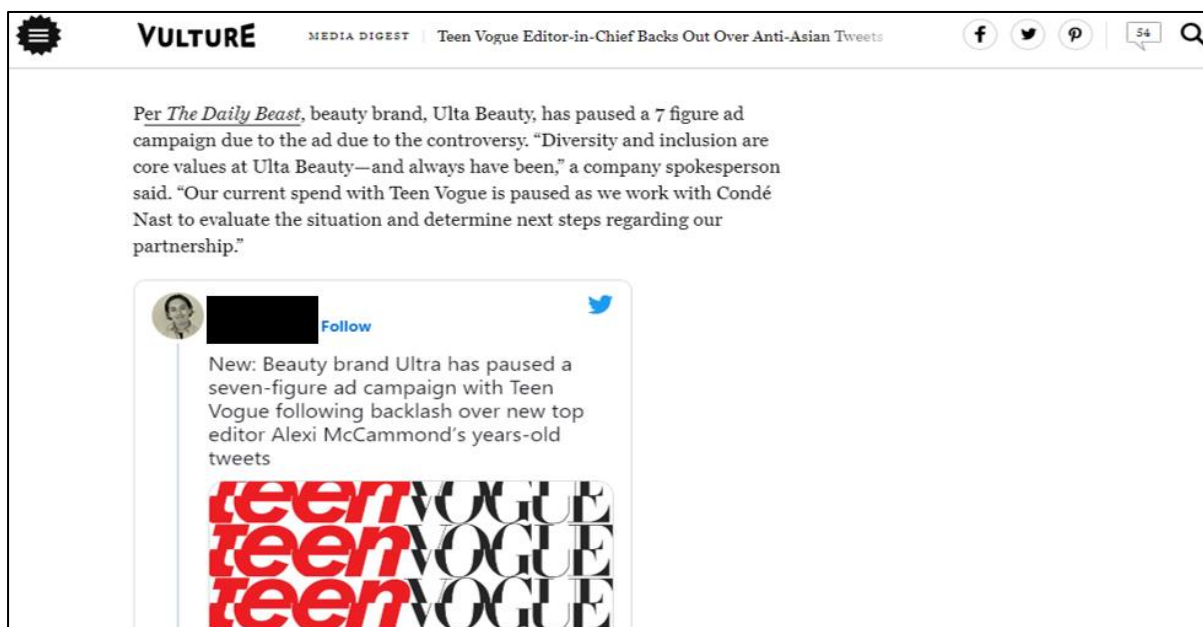


Figure 4.9 – Tweet in news article (Curto, 2021)

Collecting and storing tweets took longer than collecting news articles. Screenshots were taken of tweets using the ‘prt scr’ button on the computer keyboard, pasted onto word documents and

cropped. Reading, selecting, copying, cropping, and storing screenshots were the most arduous processes during data collection.

Approximately 400 tweets were collected in total, but the tweets were reread and reduced as data- and theoretical saturation was achieved at around 110 tweets per case (about 330 in total). The search results for the cases, however, yielded fewer tweets available for the Dentlinger case, but more for the McCammond case, and the most for the Morgan case. Piers Morgan appears to be more popular than the other two journalists as he has over 8 million Twitter followers (Morgan, 2023), whereas McCammond only has 119 000 followers (McCammond, 2023) at the time of data collection. The journalists' levels of popularity could have influenced the number of available tweets surrounding their cancellation cases. Dentlinger's number of followers, however, is unknown as the journalist's Twitter handle – '@metro babe' – did not appear to exist anymore as it was not found during data collection.

4.4 Data analysis and interpretation

Analysis does not proceed in a clear, linear manner, and is interconnected with data collection in qualitative research (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2005). Data collection, analysis, and interpretation thus took place in an iterative manner and analysis and interpretation was initiated whilst data collection occurred. Textual outputs of communication, namely tweets, retweets, online newspaper articles, and online magazine articles, were collected for the study, and reduced as much as possible, as per the data- and theoretical saturation level during data collection, to make further data analysis easier. Thematic analysis was used as a form of textual analysis to determine reoccurring themes or patterns in the textual data. Six steps of thematic analysis were followed, and five types of coding took place throughout those steps: deductive and inductive as part of abductive, line-by-line open, axial, and selective coding. As mentioned before, deductive coding was used to construct a conceptual framework and determine any *a priori* codes present in the data during data collection and analysis, while inductive coding was later used to detect any emerging or *in vivo* codes.

Two cycles of coding occurred, the first of which included fracturing and summarising the raw data, creating timelines, and coding the data using line-by-line open coding. The raw data was also coded using open coding to ensure that no vital information had been overlooked during summarisation. The second cycle of coding involved further coding the results of the first cycle and abstractly interpreting the data, through axial and selective coding. The codes procured through line-by-line open coding were compared and grouped into code categories and

subcategories using axial coding. The code categories and subcategories were then divided into themes using selective coding.

As mentioned in the third chapter (page 86), novice researchers could get overwhelmed during the first cycle of coding and unnecessarily jump ahead to a final phase in the research process, but continuing a linear trajectory is the best way to avoid such a mistake. So, despite iteratively moving between data collection and analysis, during the final analysis of the study, the six linear steps of thematic analysis were followed in order. Iteration still took place in the form of reverting to previous steps as needed but jumping ahead to any next steps was not done. The first cycle took place during step one of thematic analysis, while step two included line-by-line coding, and steps three to five included axial and selective coding.

Analysis, broadly following the process itemised by Braun and Clarke (2006), thus took place as follows:

- i) Abductive coding, i.e., deductive coding and inductive coding, occurred throughout data collection and analysis.
- ii) Step 1: Familiarisation of data included the first cycle of coding by summarising the collected tweets and articles and creating timelines for each cancellation case.
- iii) Steps 2: The summaries, and the raw tweets and articles, were coded using line-by-line open coding to detect any more *a priori* codes and *in vivo* codes, as part of first cycle coding.
- iv) Steps 3 to 5: The second cycle of coding occurred. The codes determined in the previous step were divided into code categories, which were compared and then divided into abstract themes. Data interpretation took place during these steps.
- v): Step 6: The rest of the report was then written.

4.4.1 Step 1: Familiarisation of data

Getting acquainted with collected data is the first step of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data needs to be summarised to determine reoccurring patterns (Roberts et al., 2019). Summarising data is also a way of reducing data further to ensure that only relevant text remains (Mayring, 2014). Prolonged engagement with the data corpus took place by reading, rereading, and summarising the collected tweets and articles. The collected tweets and articles were printed to allow for reading and memoing to take place. Wide margins were left on the right side of the documents containing the articles to make notes, as part of memoing, while the tweets were printed and cut out. Codes and notes were written down on the blank backs of

the tweets.

Twitter only allows for the posting of a very limited number of words (Crosset et al., 2019; Malik et al., 2019), and as discussed before, a single collected newspaper- or magazine article could consist of more words than any single collected tweet. The articles were thus used in accordance with tweets to fill in any gaps of information regarding the three cancellation cases. Referential adequacy, mentioned in Chapter 3 (page 83), which refers to analysing the first half of collected data and then the second half, was applied to the analysis process. During familiarisation, the collected tweets (110 tweets per case) were first read, and the online articles (15 articles per case) were then read to fill in any gaps in knowledge. Collected tweets were then analysed, followed by the online articles and summaries. Timelines were also drawn to illustrate the cancellation processes of the three cases in an even simpler manner. The detailed summaries and timelines have been provided below.

4.4.1.1. Alexi McCammond's case

110 collected tweets and 15 collected online articles, about the McCammond case, were used to formulate a summary of the journalist's case, as provided in this section. American journalist, Alexi McCammond, posted tweets that were considered racist and homophobic when she was seventeen years old in 2011. Most of the tweets were in reference to Asian people, some of which are depicted in Figure 4.10. With regards to her tweets about sexuality, she referred to a sports player publicly declaring his homosexuality status, and wrote: "Why is this 'newsworthy?' It's not." In a different post, she wrote "Hahaha you're so gay," and in another she used an offensive term for homosexual individuals. Several of the collected articles quoted or displayed screenshots of McCammond's original tweets regarding Asian people, but her tweets about homosexuality were only found in one collected article.

In 2019, she was called out for those tweets, and she ended up apologising and deleting the posts. She has since climbed the ranks in her career and was announced as the new Teen Vogue editor-in-chief on Friday, 5 March 2021 by Condé Nast, the parent company to Teen Vogue. McCammond also tweeted about her excitement and gratitude over her new job.

Outdone by Asian #whatsnew [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/lifestyle/alexi-mccammond-teen-vogue-editor-resigns-racist-tweets-cancel-culture/> [Accessed 15 July 2022].

now googling how to not wake up with swollen Asian eyes... [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/lifestyle/alexi-mccammond-teen-vogue-editor-resigns-racist-tweets-cancel-culture/> [Accessed 15 July 2022].

give me a 2/10 on my chem problem, cross out all of my work and don't explain what I did wrong..thanks a lot stupid asian T.A. you're great. [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/lifestyle/alexi-mccammond-teen-vogue-editor-resigns-racist-tweets-cancel-culture/> [Accessed 15 July 2022].

Figure 4.10 – McCammond's 2011 tweets (Naidoo, 2021)

During that weekend, the editor director for a food magazine, Diane Tsui, considering McCammond's new status as editor, posted screenshots of McCammond's 2011 tweets to her Instagram account and called McCammond a "questionable hire". Actress Olivia Munn commented on Tsui's post, bringing renewed attention to the situation.

On Monday, 8 March 2021, over twenty of Teen Vogue's employees wrote a letter to the company's management and posted the statement on some of their personal social media accounts. The letter is about their concerns with McCammond's hiring and can be read in the figure below.

As more than 20 members of the staff of Teen Vogue, we've built our outlet's reputation as a voice for justice and change – we take immense pride in our work and in creating an inclusive environment. That's why we have written a letter to management at Condé Nast about the recent hire of Alexi McCammond as our new editor-in-chief in light of her past racist and homophobic tweets. We've heard the concerns of our readers, and we stand with you. In a moment of historically high anti-Asian violence and amid the on-going struggles of the LGBTQ community, we as the staff of Teen Vogue fully reject those sentiments. We are hopeful that an internal conversation will prove fruitful in maintaining the integrity granted to us by our audience. March 8th, 2021 [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://www.vulture.com/2021/03/teen-vogue-new-editor-alexi-mccammond-racist-tweets.html> [Accessed 27 February 2023].

Figure 4.11 – Colleagues' letter (Curto, 2021)

The tweet led to Twitter users demanding for McCammond's dismissal and for Teen Vogue to issue an apology. One user tweeted that the reporter owed an apology to the entire Asian community as well as all non-racists. On the same day the staff's letter was sent, McCammond

emailed her Teen Vogue colleagues and apologised for her past tweets, writing “...there’s no excuse for language like that... I am determined to use the lessons I’ve learned as a journalist to advocate for a more diverse and equitable world.” McCammond apologised on social media and had a meeting with staff members where she apologised again and listened to their concerns. Some Twitter users were dissatisfied with her apology, with one calling it insufficient and arrogant, while others thanked her for acknowledging that she had made a mistake by tweeting what she had. Anna Wintour, the chief content officer for Condé Nast, sent out a statement saying that McCammond had apologised for her tweets back in 2019.

Those who hired her knew about her tweets mentioning Asian people when she was being vetted, and it was addressed during her interview for the editor’s position, but the management team was unaware of her supposed homophobic tweets. Amidst all the controversy it was also discovered that she had worn a Native-American costume for Halloween in 2011; a costume that people seemed to have deemed problematic. It became apparent that McCammond might be at risk of losing her job when a meeting for all the editors was abruptly cancelled two days before it was supposed to take place with a note saying that it would not be rescheduled.

On the 10th of March, Olivia Munn did an interview about the whole situation and a former editor-in-chief, Elaine Welteroth, also discussed it and condemned McCammond’s past actions on CBS. Companies such as Ulta Beauty and Burt’s Bees halted their business with Teen Vogue, with Ulta Beauty suspending a seven-figure advertising campaign with the outlet. Twitter users also threw backlash against Teen Vogue magazine, with one calling it “terrible” and saying that no one reads it. The Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) spoke with McCammond and Condé Nast’s chief diversity officer and McCammond wrote another apology letter that was sent to her fellow staff members.

By this time, Twitter users had already tweeted about the debacle, calling the reporter racist and homophobic. However, users also debated amongst each other over whether McCammond could be deemed racist due to her being a ‘person of colour’ in America, with some saying that she can indeed be deemed racist and others claiming that calling her racist is a racist thing to do. Users also said that Teen Vogue and Condé Nast would be racist if they decided to go through with hiring the reporter.

On March 11, McCammond posted an apology statement to her Twitter account, and an internal email from Condé Nast was sent around stating that the company had decided that it was “best to part ways” with the journalist. McCammond had also discussed her resignation in

the statement she had posted. The day after (12 March), McCammond's former colleague from Axios, Jonathan Swan, defended her and criticised the media industry for not being able to accept her sincere apologies.

McCammond's controversy occurred during a spike in hate crimes against Asian-American citizens due to the Covid-19 pandemic having originated in an Asian country, and some Twitter users have said that her tweets were inciting violence against Asian people and hashtags such as #StopAsianHate accompanied tweets about McCammond. On the 16th of March, six Asian women were shot dead in Atlanta. Condé Nast's chief executive sent a memo to their staff saying that every one in ten of their employees were Asian and that the whole company was saddened by the tragedy that had occurred.

Hey there: I've decided to part ways with Condé Nast. Here is my statement about why -

I became a journalist to help lift up the stories and voices of our most vulnerable communities. As a young woman of colour, that's part of the reason I was so excited to lead the Teen Vogue team in its next chapter. My past tweets have overshadowed the work I've done to highlight the people and issues that I care about – issues that Teen Vogue has worked tirelessly to share with the world – and so Condé Nast and I have decided to part ways. I should not have tweeted what I did and I have taken full responsibility for that. I look at my work and growth in the years since, and have redoubled my commitment to growing in the years to come as both a person and as a professional. [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/alexi-mccammond-tweets-teen-vogue-editor-resign-b1819768.html> [Accessed 1 March 2023].

Figure 4.12 – McCammond's resignation tweet (Ritschel, 2021)

Over a two-week period since the uproar started, a Change.org petition had gathered over 1600 signatures to fire McCammond. On March 18, McCammond posted a statement on Twitter confirming that she had officially resigned from her new position as Teen Vogue's editor, as seen in Figure 4.12. McCammond's career, however, picked up again when she worked as a contributor at MSNBC (it is not clear if she worked there as a permanent member of staff or just as an occasional contributor) in May and got her old job back at Axios in July 2021. There is some background information that might have attributed to people's judgement of McCammond and Condé Nast, mainly that the company had previously had an editor-in-chief resign due to "accusations of a discriminatory culture and racial bias" at the Teen Vogue magazine. The new editor, who replaced McCammond and advocated for her firing, was also the talk of a scandal when it was revealed that she had also posted problematic racial content before.

Throughout the whole ordeal, Twitter users argued over cancel culture, with some saying that McCammond losing her job is merely her being held accountable for wrongdoings and concluding that it is also what she deserves for trying to have others doxed and cancelled in the past. Others said that cancel culture has gone too far as the reporter lost her job before she had even started it due to decade-old tweets and that she needed to be given a chance at redemption. Some users called out the MSNBC network for interviewing a guest that defended the journalist, claiming that the network usually stoked the flames of cancel culture and was then trying to rectify something that they helped. Users also posted about the fact that McCammond was young when she posted those tweets while others argue that they themselves never tweeted such things when they were that age.

And McCammond had also been a part of a scandal a few months prior, when she was reporting on Joe Biden's campaign and dated the campaign's press secretary, TJ Ducklo. Her boyfriend was suspended from the campaign after threatening a journalist who wanted to report on their relationship. The figure below shows the timeline of her experience with cancel culture in a networks format containing arrows that show the sequence of events.

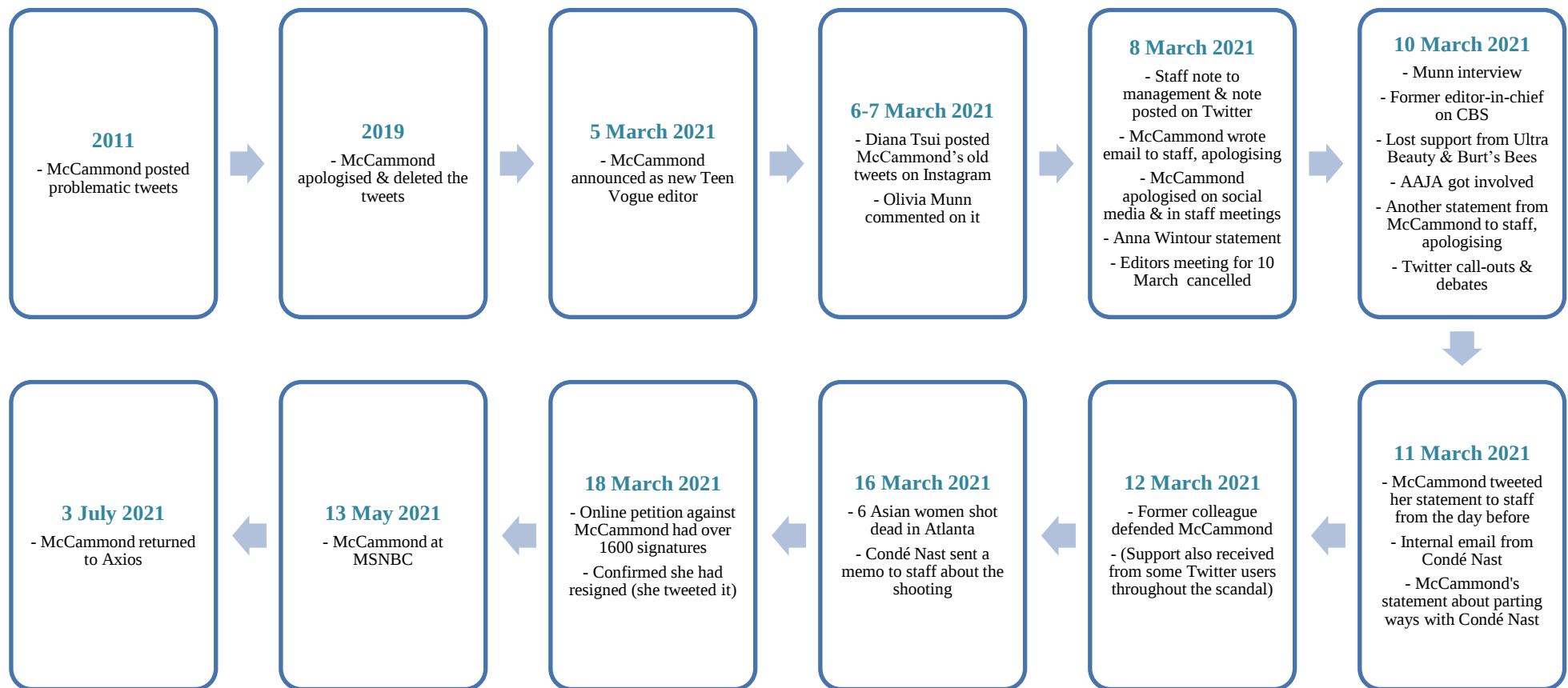


Figure 4.13 – McCammond case timeline

4.4.1.2. Lindsay Dentlinger's case

The 15 collected online articles and approximately 110 collected tweets for this case were used to summarise the events of the Dentlinger's cancel culture experience. On the 24th of February 2021, South-African journalist Lindsay Dentlinger attended an annual budget speech, where she interviewed several politicians afterward outside of the parliament building. A video of Dentlinger's post-budget interviews was posted on Twitter and went viral.

The video showed Dentlinger first interviewing white politician, Pieter Groenewald, without him wearing a mask during the Covid-19 pandemic. It then shows her asking two black politicians, Nqabayomzi Kwankwa from the United Democratic Movement (UDM) and Mkhuleko Hlengwa from Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), to wear or keep their masks on. A compilation of newsclips was also tweeted showing Dentlinger asking black politicians to wear masks but neglecting to make the same request of white politicians.

Over the next two days, Dentlinger, as well as the broadcasting company she works for, eNCA, were trending on Twitter for allegations of racism. Users demanded an apology from her and necessitated that she be held accountable for her actions by being fired or suspended from eNCA. Users also called for her to be shamed. Photos of the journalist were spread around as well as her Twitter handle ('@metrobabe'), so that users and cancel culture enforcers could identify and get into contact with her. Tweets and comments were also posted referring to Dentlinger's perceived skin colour and dubbing her a "racist pig" in several posts.

The eNCA network was also labelled as racist on twitter, with hashtags like #eNCAMustFall trending. Several users had blocked eNCA from their Twitter feeds and claimed to have sent complaints about Dentlinger to the right officials. The controversy was discussed on shows such as 'Barbs Wire' and statements about it were released by the Economic Freedom Fighters political party as well as the UDM. A civil rights movement, called #NotInMyName, protested against eNCA in Johannesburg.

eNCA made a statement claiming to have met with Dentlinger to discuss the matter and they defended her, saying that her behaviour "was not racially motivated or with malicious intent." The broadcaster also said that the post-budget meeting was an "intense live broadcast environment" where their journalists had to compete with being live on air whilst adhering to producer instructions through an earpiece. Twitter users however, posted that the broadcaster's statement was a "lame" excuse and that eNCA should admit that they were at fault.

Throughout the whole debacle, several tweets mentioned cancel culture, with some saying that it is not real or does not exist in South Africa and that they are only asking for justice to be served regarding Dentlinger's actions. Others claimed that her prematurely being labelled as racist shows that cancel culture has gone too far.

At the end of February, Geordin Hill-Lewis, a member of the Democratic Alliance, came out in defence of Dentlinger, tweeting images showing her interviewing black politicians without masks on and one of himself where he claimed she had asked him to keep his mask on (see figure below). Another white interviewee of Dentlinger's also took to Twitter to claim that she had asked him to keep his mask on after he tried to remove it when he approached her microphone.

A [thread] in defense of Lindsay Dentlinger @metrobabe: When I saw that video montage, I knew the footage of me at the end was from last October. Here's my own interview from Wed's Budget, when LD *did* tell me to keep my mask on. [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/geordinhl/status/1365221278513311744> [Accessed 4 March 2023].

Figure 4.14 – Former interviewee defending Dentlinger (Hill-Lewis, 2021)

Other Twitter users, of different ethnic backgrounds, have also supported the journalist, questioning the validity of the controversial video, with one saying that Dentlinger should not be branded as racist for a “manipulated video that tells only half of the story,” and another saying that she should not be fired as she can be rehabilitated and should not be punished for one mistake. One tweet enunciated that situations could easily be taken out of context in modern times and that the accurate context of the situation might still be revealed in the future.

During an eNCA interview on the 1st of March 2021, Dentlinger disputed the claims made against her and apologised for the disrespect that the situation has caused “people who don't deserve to be drawn into” it. She also apologised to Kwankwa and Hlengwa over the phone. She also said that the white politician was the first person she interviewed after the budget speech and that her mind was only on asking the right journalistic questions, and when her second interviewee approached (with a mask visibly in his possession) she remembered that she was supposed to ask her interviewees to wear or keep their masks on. When watching her post-budget speech interviews, one cannot see a mask in Mr. Groenewald's possession, at least not one that was visible in the camera shot. And when Mr. Kwankwa approached the camera,

one can see him starting to remove his mask before she asked him to keep it on.

Dentlinger went on to talk about the hypocrisy of her accusers, saying that they called her racist on the “premise that I am white because it is perceived that I am white,” when she is in fact of a different race. She denied being racist and expressed that she had received threats, some of which included rape threats. Due to her following her public apology up with such statements, users on Twitter refuted her apology and said that it was disingenuous and patronising, and others stated that an apology was simply not enough, and that the reporter needed be shamed and fired. eNCA’s managing director also addressed the statement that they issued in February, admitting that the situation could have been handled better and that they could have finalised their investigation quicker before releasing their initial statement.

On the 2nd and 3rd of March 2021, news reports stated that the UDM, on behalf of Kwankwa, had laid a formal complaint against Dentlinger to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) over the mask saga from February. Hlengwa from IFP, however, said that he had accepted Dentlinger’s apology but that he would not be doing any interviews until he had spoken to eNCA’s management.

The African National Congress (ANC) protested at eNCA’s head offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and issued a list of demands to the network, requesting that 1. eNCA withdraws its “offensive” statement from February in which it defended their reporter, 2. Dentlinger apologises to all South Africans for the “pain and hurt” that she has caused, 3. The news channel sends its staff members for human rights training to “learn the values of equality and non-racialism,” and 4. eNCA publicly acknowledges its history of alleged racial prejudice. eNCA eventually accepted their demands. However, one tweet was found that stated that sensitivity training is not enough, and that Dentlinger should be fired instead. By this time, several Twitter users had posted links to online petitions calling for Dentlinger’s firing, one of which had generated over 8000 signatures.

By 6 March 2021, The DA tweeted that they would lodge a formal complaint against the ANC and EFF for defaming Dentlinger and “race-baiting”, to which the EFF responded by labelling the DA as “racist apologists.” The DA revealed that the compilation of news clips that circulated Twitter and exacerbated the whole Dentlinger controversy was proven by fact checkers to have been misleading, as some of the clips were from before the pandemic, when wearing masks was not yet mandated. On the 7th, SANEF (South African National Editors’

Forum) tweeted that Dentlinger had received threats through online platforms, some of which included rape threats.

Finally, on 19 March 2021, the BCCSA dismissed the claims made against Dentlinger after concluding that there was no indication that Dentlinger or eNCA advocated hatred based on race. However, some Twitter users still believed Dentlinger to be prejudice, claiming that the BCCSA would always defend a racist. Figure 4.15 illustrates an even shorter summary of Dentlinger's cancellation case in a networks format.

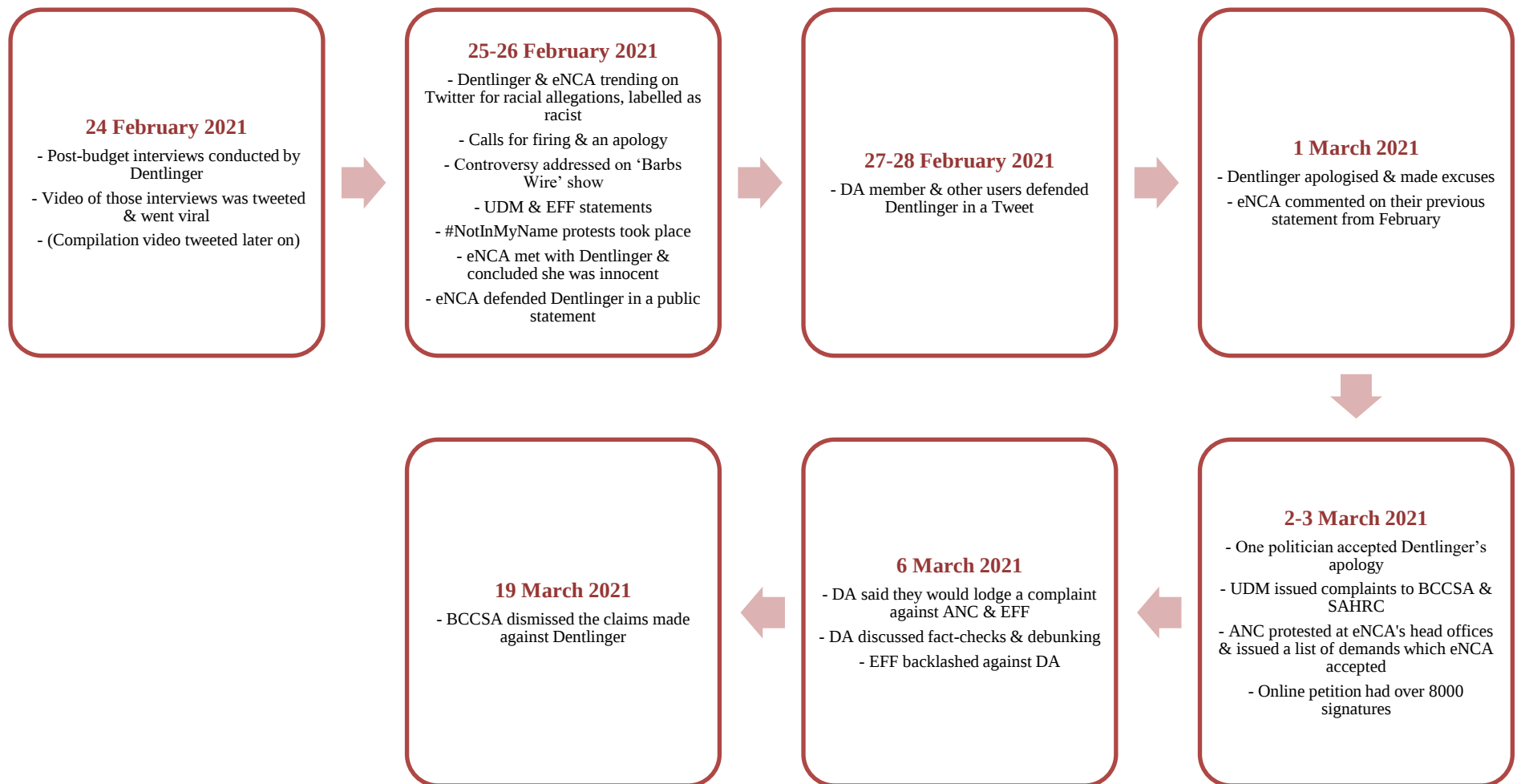


Figure 4.15 – Dentlinger case timeline

4.4.1.3. Piers Morgan's case

15 online articles and approximately 110 tweets were used to summarise the Morgan case. On the 7th of March 2021, an Oprah Winfrey interview with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, aired on television. #AbolishTheMonarchy was trending on Twitter mere hours after the airing, and a day later British journalist Piers Morgan published an article for Mail Online about the interview where he gave his opinion on the two royals. In the interview, Markle made allegations of racism about a member of the British monarchy, saying that there were questions surrounding the possible skin colour of her child: "...concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he's born." In Morgan's article he pointed out that Markle neglected to give details on what exactly had been said and in what context it had been said or who had said it.

Morgan pointed out that the two royals have always claimed to value their privacy but was doing an interview aired to 10 million people. Markle also claimed that the intrusion from the British press in her life was enough to make her consider suicide at one point and that the royal palace had turned down her appeals for psychological aid, but Morgan found that difficult to believe as Prince Harry has had his mental health taken care of for years and has advocated for those struggling with similar issues. The prince and his wife talked about how difficult the pandemic and its consequent lockdowns were for them because they could not go "meet their friends for lunch." Morgan pointed out the hypocrisy by writing that the two royals lived in a \$14 million mansion, not in a cramped space like many middle- or lower-class families who had to home-school their children and might have struggled to pay for food during the coronavirus lockdowns. Morgan disbelieved most of the claims made by Markle and her husband and said that it was all an acting performance worthy of an Oscar.

On the same day that Morgan's article was published, he tweeted about the interview, calling it a "disgraceful betrayal" of the Queen and British royal family (see Figure 4.16). Another of his tweets read: "Harry wants America and the rest of the world to hate his own family, hate the Monarchy and hate his country. I suggest everyone waits for the victims of his wife's rampage to have their say on her outlandish claims before they do so."

Morgan also talked about the interview on his instalment for ITV's Good Morning Britain (GMB) show, calling the interview a "two-hour trash-a-thon" and saying that he disbelieved Markle of ever having suicidal thoughts and said that he would not believe her if she gave him the weather report.

This interview is an absolutely disgraceful betrayal of the Queen and the Royal Family. I expect all this vile destructive self-serving nonsense from Meghan Markle – but for Harry to let her take down his family and the Monarchy like this is shameful. #OprahMeghanHarry [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/piersmorgan/status/1368788165230796800> [Accessed 1 March 2023].

Figure 4.16 – Morgan’s tweet about Oprah interview (Morgan, 2021)

A British mental health charity, called Mind, criticised Morgan’s remarks on Markle’s suicidal claims. Other Twitter users also called Morgan out for his comments about mental health. It was later reported that Markle sent a formal complaint to ITV’s CEO, voicing her concerns over his remarks and how they might affect their viewers dealing with mental illness. Only a month before, had 1200 TV freelancers written to Morgan’s ITV management team about their worries regarding his behaviour and tweets, but ITV said that it could not control the tweets of a freelance presenter like Morgan.

On Tuesday, the 9th of March 2021, Morgan walked off the set of GMB while they were live on air after his co-presenter Alex Beresford criticised the way Morgan constantly “trashed” Meghan Markle. The presenters were discussing the popular Oprah interview from two days prior, and Morgan said that Markle had a habit of “dropping” people when she no longer had any use for them and that she had done the same to him a few years ago.

Beresford responded by saying: “I understand you’ve got a personal relationship with Meghan Markle, and she cut you off. She’s entitled to cut you off if she wants to. Has she said anything about you since she cut you off? I don’t think she has but yet you continue to trash her...” That is when Morgan stood up and proceeded to leave the studio, but later returned after a commercial break to continue the discussion. That GMB instalment received over 41 000 complaints and an investigation was launched to examine Morgan’s public remarks.

Twitter users called for Morgan’s firing and demanded that he apologise for his comments on the Oprah interview as well as his reaction to his colleague. One user tweeted that GMB was complicit in everything the journalist said and did and expected that the network should also apologise. ITV asked Morgan if he would apologise live on air, but Morgan decided to resign from GMB instead, and an ITV spokesperson addressed his resignation and said that they have accepted his decision. Ofcom also launched an investigation into Morgan’s comments. Morgan did however end up stating that mental illness and suicide are serious things that need to be taken seriously, and that if Markle’s claims are true then the royal aides or family members

who refused to give her treatment should be fired. He admitted that he is prepared to be proven wrong on his belief that Markle was lying. Morgan also responded “Yes” on Twitter to a user that asked: “Can we just cancel Piers Morgan?”

On Twitter, several public figures who have been interviewed by Morgan in the past, condemned his words and actions, with one tweeting that Morgan had cancelled himself. Sharon Osbourne, Morgan’s long-time friend, defended him in a tweet (see figure below) and Piers tweeted his gratitude regarding her support for him.

@piersmorgan I am with you. I stand by you. People forget that you’re paid for your opinion and that you’re just speaking your truth. [Tweet]. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MrsSOsbourne/status/1369361831354073091> [Accessed 1 March 2023].

Figure 4.17 – Osbourne defending Morgan (Osbourne, 2021)

A day later, on March 10, Morgan told reporters outside his home in London that he did not regret the comments he had made about Markle and the infamous interview. He also stated that the “woke crowd” might think that they had cancelled him, but that they will be surprised when he re-emerges. Morgan tweeted that he would stand by his opinions and framed the saga around the topic of freedom of speech. Twitter users also called out ITV for having hired someone like Morgan.

Osbourne also had to defend herself on her talk show, *The Talk*, that same day. She was near tears when she discussed how people had called her racist for defending Morgan because he was branded as racist for criticising Markle’s claims. She reiterated that neither she nor Morgan were racist and that she only judged people on whether they were nice and respectful, irrespective of race or religion. The discussion escalated with producers bleeping a profanity that Osbourne had said and eventually cutting to a commercial.

A co-host claimed that Osbourne’s defence of Morgan validates something that he had said that was racist. Osbourne asked her co-hosts what racist things they’ve ever heard Morgan utter and one of them responded: “It’s not the exact words of racism, it’s the implication and reaction to it.” The hosts then had a back-and-forth exchange of words until the episode came to an end. Two days later Osbourne apologised in a tweet.

By the 26th of March, it was reported that Osbourne had decided to depart from *The Talk*,

although some news articles claim that she was fired, and their network released a statement saying that her prior behaviour on the show did not align with their values. The network also coordinated workshops and training for their staff on inclusion, equity, and cultural awareness.

Piers Morgan publicly defended Osbourne and called her departure from the show “outrageous” and said that it proves how demented cancel culture has become and how it represents the tyranny of wokeness. By the beginning of April, Alex Beresford had quit social media due to alleged racist attacks that he received online after his disagreement with Morgan the day that Morgan walked off the GMB set.

On the 5th of April 2021, Morgan appeared on a Fox Nation interview where he said that he still stood by his opinions on Markle’s allegations and wondered how disbelieving someone could be considered an act of racism. He found it difficult to comprehend how more than one person in the palace turned away a suicidal pregnant woman. He also discussed Osbourne’s removal from her show and tweeted that it was a disgrace that she had lost her job for defending him.

58 000 complaints were compiled by the time Ofcom cleared Morgan for his remarks. In January 2022, nearly a year after Morgan had left GMB, it was reported that he had returned to Breakfast television to be the host of a new show.

Throughout the whole fiasco, some users supported Morgan and said that neither he nor Osbourne was a racist, while others called him “racist,” “misogynistic,” and a “toxic male.” Some users said that Osbourne was racist for defending Morgan. Users also debated about whether it was racist to disbelieve the words of a ‘person of colour’ (Meghan Markle). Some users pointed out the holes in Markle’s claims, such as the archbishop himself who contradicted something she had said in the interview. Others tweeted that Morgan should fight this wokeness and cancel culture that was trying to bring him down. The Twitter conversations also centred around the topic of freedom of speech, with some saying that Morgan had the right to give his opinions. The figure below displays a networks format of Morgan’s cancellation timeline.

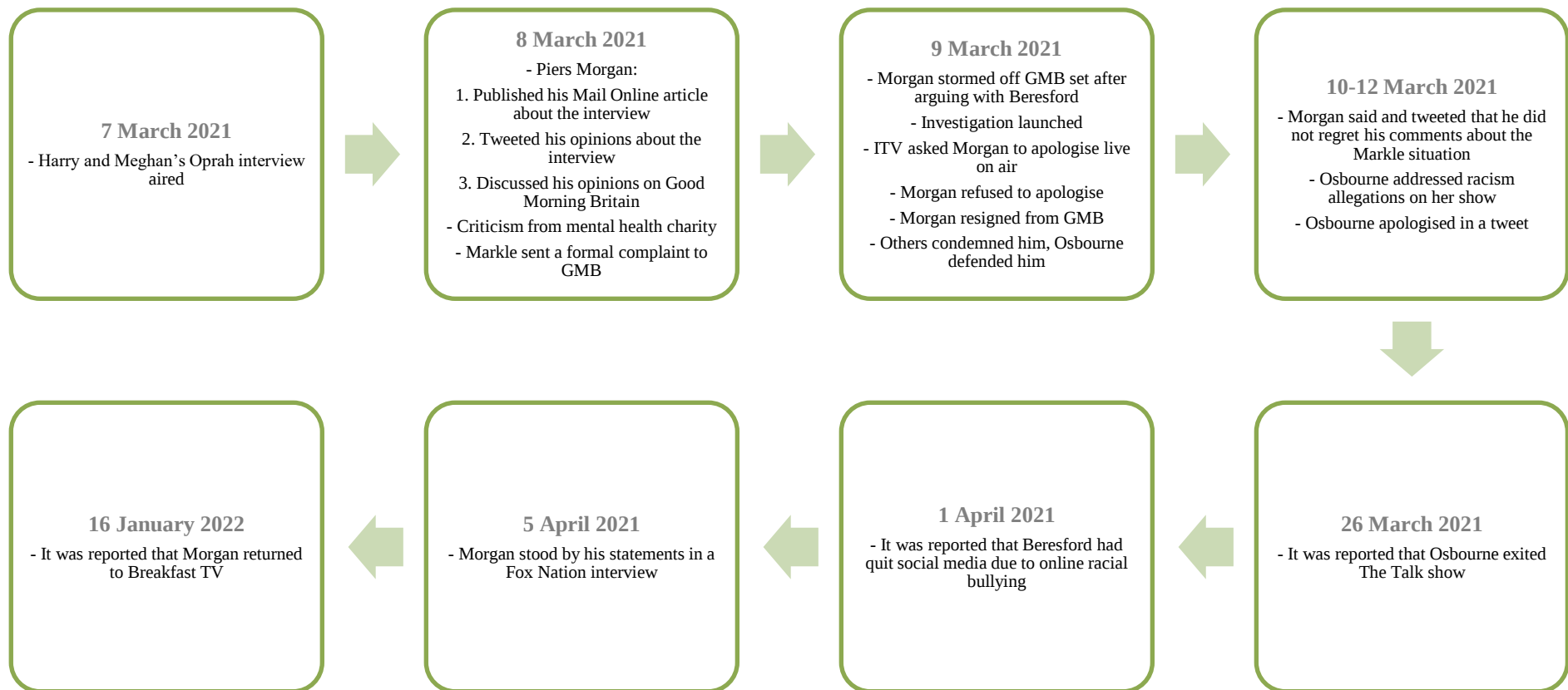


Figure 4.18 – Morgan case timeline

4.4.2. Step 2: Codes

Line-by-line open coding was used to analyse the printed tweets and articles by reading each line of text and fracturing the data and determining codes. The data was also fractured, deconstructed, and reconstructed throughout the coding process. Deductive coding – as the first part of abductive coding – was used to detect the *a priori* codes that were present in the data. The texts were then reread to inductively determine emerging or *in vivo* codes – as the second part of abductive coding. These emerging or *in vivo* codes, however, did not convey completely new information, it merely conveyed new versions of what was already known. As part of referential adequacy, the printed tweets were first analysed, and then the articles were analysed. The summaries and timelines, discussed in the previous step of thematic analysis, were then also printed, and analysed to ensure that no important information was overlooked.

Codes and interpretive details were developed concurrently and written in the right margins of the printed article pages, while the codes determined in the tweets were written on the back of the printed tweets. This was done as part of memoing. Code notes and theoretical notes were also made in a notebook. The multiple meanings of words, along with the emotional connotations attached to words or phrases, were also determined, and made note of. Figure 3.1 from Chapter 3 (page 88) was used as a guide to conduct this type of coding. The following figure is a digital illustration of how coding was done regarding the collected tweets. The *a priori* or *in vivo* codes that represent the direct words in the text are in quotation marks.

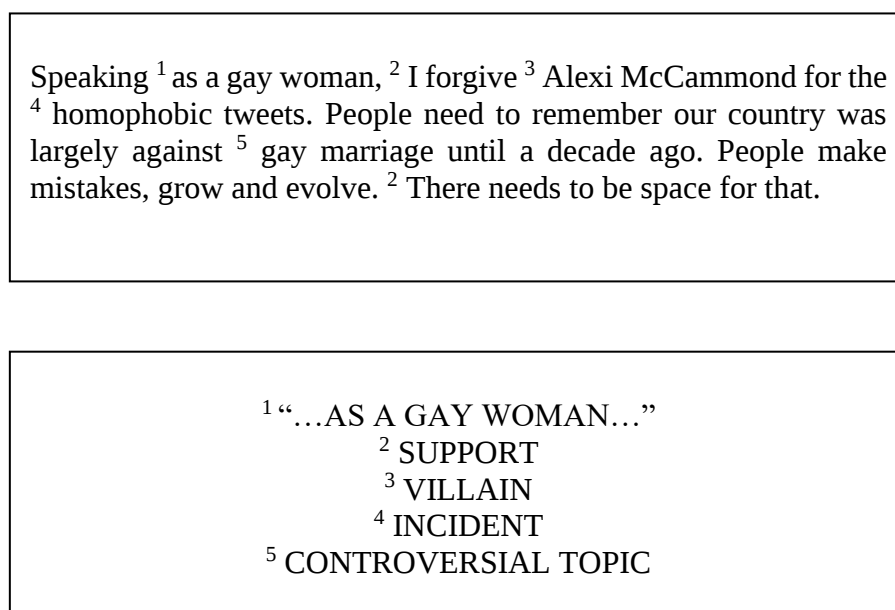


Figure 4.19 – Coding a tweet

The first box in the above figure shows a tweet from the Alexi McCammond case. The second box is a digital illustration of the back of the hard copy tweet where the codes were written. Code 1 is an *a priori* code, quoted from the text, that illustrates the concept of innate personal traits, as sexuality is such an immutable trait that people identify by. In Chapter 2, under social identity theory, an example was given of a journalist, Andy Ngô (2022), who identifies in a similar manner and voices his sexuality status on Twitter as well. This was expressed in code- and theoretical notes. A code note would thus be as follows: “‘...As a gay woman...’ = innate personal traits.’ Code 2 appears twice in the tweet and shows the user’s support of the journalist. The third code illustrates who the supposed wrongdoer in this case is, which is McCammond. In the literature review it was stated that cancel culture categorises people into groups of victims and villains (Zille, 2021a), which is why McCammond is listed as a ‘villain.’ Code 4 references a part of the incident that led to McCammond’s cancellation journey: her homophobic tweets. Code 5 has to do with the controversial topic of sexuality, which is an *a priori* code that is depicted in the conceptual framework.

The concepts for most of the codes were procured through deductive coding, but Code 2 is an emerging code, as it was predicted in Chapter 2 that targets of cancel culture tend to lose support, not gain support. Journalists gain support from friends, such as Piers Morgan who was defended by Sharon Osbourne (Kilkenny, 2021), or from their news organisation, such as Dentlinger who was defended by eNCA (Pijoos, 2021), but during inductive coding, it was discovered that journalists gained support from some Twitter users as well.

When it came to analysing newspaper- and magazine articles, the data was coded paragraph by paragraph, as part of open coding, and each line of those paragraphs were analysed as part of line-by-line coding. The text was also read as a whole, during open coding, to gain an overall impression of the data.

The below figure digitally showcases the coding of an excerpt from a printed article about Lindsay Dentlinger. The left margin in Figure 4.20 shows two paragraphs obtained from the collected news article, while the right margin demonstrates how the codes were written. Code 1 expresses who the villains are: Dentlinger and eNCA, as it was expressed in Chapter 1 that journalists and their news organisations can receive digital criticism, as expressed by Cheruiyot (2022). The second and third codes illustrate how the journalist was labelled as a racist and what demands were issued. Code 4 shows how Dentlinger’s news outlet supported her. Code 5 constitutes the incident that started the whole situation, i.e., the interviews that the journalists

conducted at the annual budget speech.

Some South Africans have branded ¹ her a ² racist, while the ANC in Gauteng ³ demanded answers from the media house. Managing Editor at ⁴ eNCA John Bailey says, “In an intense live broadcast environment like the ⁵ Budget Speech coverage, our journalists are under pressure...”	¹ VILLAIN ² “RACIST” ³ DEMANDS ⁴ SUPPORT ⁵ INCIDENT
The Economic Freedom Fighters has described Dentlinger’s actions as ⁶ racist micro-aggressions and says it reveals a deep-seated disrespect for ⁷ Black people. The UDM’s ⁷ Kwankwa has meanwhile told the National Assembly that he does not want a ⁸ “patronising apology” from ¹ eNCA over the perceived biased treatment from the media house’s reporter.	⁶ CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC ⁷ VICTIM ⁸ DISSATISFIED WITH APOLOGY

Figure 4.20 – Coding an article

The sixth code has to do with the controversial topic that Dentlinger’s incident is about, which is race. From codes 2 and 6, it can also be deduced that race is the innate personal trait present in this case. Code 7 appears twice and shows who the direct and indirect victims are, as per the rules of social categorisation. It shows how individuals in the case, along with their respective social groups, were considered to have been victimised. Finally, code 8 depicts that the victim, Kwankwa, was not satisfied with the excuse that eNCA had given.

Throughout the whole ¹ fiasco, some ² users supported ³ Morgan and said that neither he nor Osbourne was a racist, while others called him ⁴ “racist,” ⁵ “misogynistic” and a ⁶ “toxic male.” Some users said ³ Osbourne was racist for ² defending Morgan.	¹ INCIDENT ² SUPPORT ³ VILLAIN ⁴ “RACIST” ⁵ “MISOGYNISTIC” ⁶ “TOXIC MALE”
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Figure 4.21 – Coding a summary

The above figure is a passage from the summary provided in step 1 about Piers Morgan. The fiasco mentioned in Code 1, refers to Morgan’s controversial comments about the Markle-Oprah interview. Code 2 expresses that the journalist received support from Twitter users and from Osbourne. Code 3 was used to showcase who the direct and indirect villains of this case were. The last three codes are codes that quote the names that Morgan has been labelled with by Twitter users. These labels also showcase that the controversial topics and innate personal

traits of this case were race and gender. Although “misogynistic” and “toxic male” are terms that were not expressed in Chapter 2, “sexist” is a term that was discovered during the literature review. Code 5 and 6 were thus grouped under the term “sexist” in the researcher’s notebook, since the codes, along with the term “sexist,” have to do with gender.

While determining the codes from the tweets, articles, and summaries, questions were asked, in accordance with how open coding is typically done. Such questions included: “What category can this emerging code fall into?” “Should this code be kept in quotation marks?” “Is this a controversial topic?” The conceptual framework was used as a guide to answer most of the open coded questions. The codes and details that were derived from the tweets, articles, and summaries were also written down in a notebook, as part of code- and theoretical notes. As per Roberts et al.’s (2019) suggestion (to revise the list of codes to ensure that it accurately reflects the data), the codes were reviewed.

4.4.3 Steps 3 to 5: Code categories and themes

The second cycle of coding took place during these steps. Axial coding was used to further fracture the data by dividing the codes, procured in step 2, into abstract code categories. The connections between pre-existing and emerging codes were determined. The codes and details written in the researcher’s notebook were colour coded according to the potential code categories that it could belong to. 28 code categories in total were determined and compared to ascertain how each relates to the other. The main concept or axis that the codes revolved around in this study, was wokeness, as seen in the conceptual framework. The codes were compared to one another to distinguish similarities and dissimilarities between the three cancellation cases, and to determine what code categories the codes fit into. Comparisons also helped with the discovery of the negative case; the case that does not fit any pattern (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as mentioned in Chapter 3 (page 90). The Dentlinger case was the negative case, as it did not fit a specific key characteristic of the cancel culture process, which is discussed in more detail later. Theoretical comparisons were also made to determine the meanings behind figurative language that was present in the codes or data, as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008) in Chapter 3 (page 89). Selective coding was then used to allocate the code categories into abstract themes that could illustrate the nature of cancel culture on Twitter, involving journalists. Seven themes in total were established, most of which had already been predetermined through deductive coding. The themes, code categories, codes, and case details were inserted in Addendum 1, in a matrices format of rows and columns. Below is an excerpt

from that Addendum, containing only the codes from Figures 4.20, 4.21, and 4.22. J1 refers to Journalist 1, which is McCammond. J2 is Dentlinger and J3 is Morgan. (D) refers to code categories that were determined through deductive coding, while (I) refers to code categories that were not predetermined and are either partially made up of *in vivo* codes or completely made up of *in vivo* codes. The deductive and inductive codes that represent the direct words in the text are in quotation marks.

Table 4.1 (Excerpt) – Themes, code categories, and codes

Theme	Code categories (D) or (I)	Journalist (J)	Codes and details of each case
Wokeness	Innate personal traits (D)	J1	Homosexuality Users mentioned their own sexuality as well “...as a gay woman...”
		J2	Race
		J3	Race Gender
	Direct and indirect victims (D)	J2	Direct: Kwankwa Indirect: Black people
	Direct and indirect villains (D)	J1	Direct: McCammond
		J2	Direct: Dentlinger Indirect: eNCA
		J3	Direct: Morgan Indirect: Osbourne
Inciting incident	Incident (D)	J1	Old tweets
		J2	Post-budget interviews
		J3	His comments about the Markle-Oprah interview
	Controversial topics (D)	J1	Sexuality
		J2	Race
		J3	Race Gender
Call-outs	Public naming & shaming (D)	J2	“racist”
		J3	“racist” “misogynistic” “toxic male”
	Demands for confession (I)	J2	ANC demanded answers from eNCA
	Demands for apology (D)	J2	Kwankwa dissatisfied with eNCA’s apology
Public support	Gained support (I)	J1	From users
		J2	eNCA
		J3	From users

Wokeness shows how those involved in the case were categorised into groups of victims and villains, some of which was done based on innate personal traits like race and gender. The direct victims are the ones directly involved in the inciting incidents, like politician Kwankwa who was interviewed by Dentlinger. The indirect victims are the larger groups that the direct victims belong to, based on their immutable traits, such as Kwankwa being a part of the black race. The direct villains are the three journalists, and the indirect villains are typically those that showed support to them.

The inciting incident column shows the incidents, surrounding controversial topics, that caused the journalists to become the targets of cancel culture. Call-outs express the labels that the journalists were branded with, and the demands that were given to them. In the conceptual framework it was noted that apologies could be seen as insufficient, which is illustrated by the way that Kwankwa was dissatisfied with eNCA's apology in Figure 4.20. As stated before, it was unexpected to discover that the journalists received support from Twitter users. Although the literature expressed single instances of support, like in the Dentlinger and Morgan cases, as mentioned before, it did not state that support was a common occurrence in cancel culture. 'Gained support' is thus, for the most part, an emerging concept. All the data was interpreted iteratively throughout data collection and analysis. The following headings express the themes, concepts, and interpretations derived from the coded data. To strengthen the legitimacy of the findings, quotes from the collected tweets were incorporated during the interpretation of the data, as suggested by Elo et al. (2014) to minimise the researcher's own biases. The following headings show the main theme – wokeness – and the subthemes that were determined.

4.4.3.1 Wokeness

The data proved that the core of cancel culture is wokeness, which refers to the social construction of reality through groups (Beiner, 2020, cited in Velasco, 2020). The collected and analysed data coincided with the depicted literature on wokeness, specifically pertaining to woke mannerisms in Orwell's (1946) *Animal Farm* philosophy. Aspects of Tajfel's social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Trepte & Loy, 2017; Turner, 1975) were present in the data, supporting Cook et al.'s (2021) claim that cancel culture is associated with identity. Wokeness was regarded as the main theme in the research.

4.4.3.1.1 *Social categorisation*

Social categorisation was defined as the first step in constructing a social identity which occurs when individuals categorise themselves into groups that are seen as vital and that dominate the

forefront of people's minds (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Groups that people are categorised into are known as ingroups, and groups that individuals are not a part of are called outgroups (Islam, 2014; Trepte & Loy, 2017).

a) Innate personal traits

According to Kaufmann (2020), wokeness requires innate personal traits, such as race, gender, and sexuality, to be the indicators that help determine the groups that people belong to in the world of cancellation. The same concept was proposed by Furedi (2020) who believed that cancel culture is rife with identity politics, which is a political intervention that characterises people based on immutable characteristics like race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion (Younge, 2019).

These claims were supported by the data, as an innate attribute that was consistently brought up throughout the collected data for each cancellation case was race. The data showed that the McCammond case involved sexuality as well, and the Morgan case also dealt with the attributes of gender and mental illness. Mental health or illness was an emerging concept, as none of the gathered literature had mentioned it as an immutable trait existing in the realm of cancel culture. In collected tweets about the McCammond case, Twitter users talked about their own sexualities and races, the Asian race, and McCammond's race. Tweets also mentioned Dentlinger's perceived race, the black race, and the skin colour of the two politicians that she had interviewed. Collected tweets, in the Morgan case, contained discussions about mental health as well as the racial and gender differences between Piers Morgan and Meghan Markle.

b) Victims, villains, and vigilantes

Concepts exemplified in Orwell's (1946) *Animal Farm* about group categorisation were present in each cancellation case, as the novella dealt with characters being labelled as good guys and bad guys. In the novella, the pigs outline the traits that predict who the victims and who the oppressors are; they say that all those who walk on four legs (animals) are good, and all those who walk on two legs (humans) are evil (Orwell, 1946).

The data showed that, just like the pigs in Orwell's (1946) story, the cancel culture community used innate identity traits to categorise the people in each cancellation case into two main groups: victim ingroups and villainous outgroups. The data buoyed the notion that cancel culture typically clusters people into groups of victims and villains, as expressed by Zille (2021a). The collected tweets and articles illustrated that there was an emphasis on victimhood,

corroborating Roger's (2020) claim that cancel culture is used to convey victimhood.

In terms of victim ingroups, the data portrayed instances of supposed direct victimisation and indirect victimisation. In McCammond's case the direct victim was the Asian person that she mentioned in her tweet, seen in Figure 4.10, and the indirect victims were seen as all people of Asian descent and all homosexual individuals, since the journalist's tweets were about Asian- and homosexual people. The data in the Dentlinger case, indicated that the direct victims were Kwankwa and Hlengwa whom she had interviewed after the annual budget speech, while the indirect victims were all black South-Africans and the black race in general. For Morgan's controversy the direct victim of his supposed crime was Meghan Markle, a mixed-race woman who many users viewed as a black woman in the collected tweets, while the indirect victims were all black people, women, black women, and individuals who struggle with mental health. Alex Beresford was also an indirect victim since he claimed to have experienced racist online attacks after arguing with Morgan on GMB, according to the collected data.

Some users, who called for the journalists' cancellation, referred to their own race and gender and mentioned how they were affected by the actions of the journalists. This concurs with claims made by Zille (2021a) about how cancel culture enforcers can be a part of the victim groups and how people can award themselves with the victim status. The victims were thus not only those directly affected by the situations but all those who were indirectly affected or who shared immutable personal traits with the direct victims and who might have been hurt or offended by the journalists' actions. This coincides with the view that cancel culture determines who the victims are based on their politico-symbolic potential, as mentioned by Kaufmann (2020). It also reiterates the literature claim that social identity can be ascribed based on innate personal traits (Taylor, 1989, cited in Demirden, 2021), in the case of the indirect victims.

Just like the victim groups, the group of wrongdoers consisted of direct and indirect villains. Suler (2004) stated that groups with shared affects and emotions tend to see an evil 'other' that must be dealt with. In this study, the data indicated that the cancel culture brigade declared the journalists who caused the controversies, i.e., McCammond, Dentlinger, and Morgan, to be those evil 'others,' or direct villains. These villains were not necessarily classified as villains because of the innate traits they possessed or the social groups that they belonged to, but negative generalisations were made regarding the races and genders of some of the journalists. The collected tweets and online articles showed that generalisations were made about Morgan and Dentlinger's race or perceived race, as well as Morgan's gender. This corroborates the

literature information stating that social identity can be attained based on the actions of an individual (Taylor, 1989, cited in Demirden, 2021). The journalists were thus labelled as direct villains due to the inciting incidents that they had caused.

Unlike indirect victims, the indirect villains did not always share the same innate traits as the direct villains. The collected data showed that indirect villains were those seen as guilty by association, specifically the people who defended the villainous journalists or were affiliated with them. These included Teen Vogue, Condé Nast, MSNBC, eNCA, the DA, BCCSA, GMB, ITV, and Sharon Osbourne. Piers Morgan, for example, was believed to be a racist and users branded Osbourne as such for defending him and being his friend, as seen in the tweet below.

If you stand by a racist, guess what? You are a racist. Also, didn't you attempt suicide several times? Did your friend Piers call you a liar? GTFOH

Collected tweets, like the above, concur with Bouvier's (2020) claim that acquaintances and supporters of the accused can also be subjected to vilification in the cancel culture process. Below is another such example, of a user claiming that a company's possible support of one of its journalists means that the news organisation is at fault to some extent.

If @CondeNast goes through with the hiring of @Alexi McCammond it means they stand with racism and hate and enable the perpetuation of bigotry against the AAPI community.

Basham (2020) also said that those in the mainstream media can not only be the targets of the cancellation process but can be enforcers as well. The cancel culture targets were the direct villains, i.e., the three journalists, but collected tweets pointed out that McCammond herself had been an enforcer of cancel culture before, as she had supposedly doxed people and tried to get them cancelled in the past. Tweets also stated that she deserved cancellation, not only because of her inciting tweets, but because of her past doxing and cancelling behaviour. McCammond's colleagues at Teen Vogue also participated in cancel culture as they publicly condemned the journalist's old controversial tweets, as corroborated by the collected data. A former editor-in-chief at the same magazine also publicly condemned the reporter's 2011 tweets as seen in the summary during the familiarisation step of thematic analysis. McCammond, however, was also seen as a victim by some Twitter users. The analysed tweets showed that some users believed that accusing the journalist of racism was an act of victimisation against her. Some journalists can thus be classified as both victims and villains, depending on the perspectives of different Twitter users.

Some of the indirect villains inadvertently became enforcers of the culture as they sided with the cancellors or the perceived victims by separating themselves from the direct villains, in accordance with Lewis's (2020) concept of woke capitalism, to ensure that their reputations remained intact (Saint-Louis, 2021). The data showed that Teen Vogue, for example, had McCammond resign at the behest of Twitter users. The company also sent out a memo to their staff, after fatal shootings in a different region led to the deaths of Asian individuals, to insinuate that they valued their Asian employees. This proves the literature saying that companies also try to show moral allegiance to victim groups (Lewis, 2020) and try to advertise woke ideals (Erving, 2021; Kaufmann, 2020). One user accused Condé Nast, the company that owns Teen Vogue, of engaging in cancel culture by having a hand in McCammond's resignation, as seen below.

Cancel culture can't exist w/o entities like Condé Nast giving into the distorted voice of the mob.

After MSNBC interviewed someone who defended McCammond, collected tweets contained accusations, accusing the network of perpetuating cancel culture in the past, as seen below. This could reiterate the literature claim that the mainstream media shapes and/ or confirms beliefs (Elejalde et al., 2018; Mbindwane, 2015). It also corroborates the idea that the mainstream media tends to report on woke stories, like those involving cancel culture (Lynch, 2021). The below tweet, and similar collected tweets, makes it seem as if MSNBC had reported on cancel culture before, in a way that did not show the phenomenon in a negative light, until one of their own affiliates – McCammond – was affected by it.

MSNBC led the charge on cancel culture till it hit one of their own. Good for them for trying to rectify something they helped create.

ITV and GMB also unintentionally enforced aspects of cancellation when they asked Morgan to apologise on-air and later accepted his resignation, as was discovered during data collection and analysis. eNCA, however, did not cater to woke culture, as they supported their journalist (Pijoos, 2021), Dentlinger, but the collected online articles showed that eNCA did, however, say that they could have handled the situation more efficiently from its inception.

There was a third social group that was not deductively determined or added to the conceptual framework with the guide of literature and theory. The cancellors, i.e., the enforcers of cancel culture, were the third group, and did not just consist of Twitter users, but of public figures, like the ANC, as well. They also consisted of some indirect villains that aided the cancel culture

process, as mentioned previously. Cook et al. (2021: 5) discussed actions of “digital vigilantism,” which coincides with the typical actions of cancel culture enforcers. Enforcers, or cancellors, will thus also be referred to as ‘vigilantes’ from here on out.

Orwell’s (1946) pigs convinced the other animals on the farm to revolt against the humans, which led to the humans fleeing the farm, and the pigs then became the new leaders of the land and drafted new rules that needed to be followed. Just like the pigs, Twitter users determined who the victims and villains were, and convinced others (the indirect villains) to do as they commanded. The data illustrated that most of the indirect villains ended up taking the side of the vigilantes instead of the journalists and might therefore be labelled as indirect vigilantes. This corroborates the claims made in the literature about how social media allows the voices of ordinary denizens to be heard (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021), and how there is a shift in societal power hierarchies (Brito, 2021; Hagi, 2019, cited Cook et al., 2021; Sailofsky, 2021) as direct vigilantes held most of the power in these cases and convinced indirect vigilantes to enact punishment onto the direct villains.

4.4.3.1.2 Social comparison

After social categorisation comes the comparisons that people make between their ingroups and contrair outgroups (Trepte & Loy, 2017; Turner, 1975). Collected tweets showed that users made comparisons between racial groups in all three cases and compared gender groups in the Morgan case. Below is an example of one user comparing the race of the direct victims in the Dentlinger case and Dentlinger’s perceived race.

White people don’t criticise each other, or completely avoid the conversation, or blatantly support each others racist doings. They’ll never say arrest De klerk they’d rather say arrest Zuma. It’s just blacks who are confused. #eNCAMUTFALL #LindsayDentlinger

The data and the literature (Zille, 2021a) showed that comparisons caused vigilantes to negatively regard villains or villain groups and positively favour the victims and victim groups, whether the vigilantes were classified into the victim groups or not. This supports the claim that individuals biasedly attribute positive characteristics to ingroups and negative characteristics to outgroups (Martiny & Rubin, 2016; Stets & Burke, 2014; Tajfel & Turner 1979; Trepte & Loy, 2017).

a) Positive distinctiveness

Since individual identity is linked to an individual's respective ingroup, people tend to view their group more positively, to have a positive view of themselves, whilst viewing outgroups negatively, which is a phenomenon called positive distinctiveness (Trentham & Loy, 2017). The dissimilarities between ingroups and outgroups can rouse negative feelings for some individuals (Smith, 2000). Such positive ingroup favouritism was present in the data, as in each case the victim groups were viewed in a positive light, while villains were labelled negatively.

The animals from Orwell's (1946) story viewed themselves – the victims – positively and thought negatively of the humans – the villains. Positive and negative generalisations were made in each cancellation case. For example, Dentlinger claimed that the only reason people called her racist was because of what they assumed her race was. The tweets in Morgan's case, indicated that women, and people of colour – *POC* – were regarded positively, with some users saying that it is racist to question the words of a person of colour. Meghan Markle is regarded as a woman of colour, which is why some tweets branded Morgan as a racist for disbelieving Markle's claims. This concurs with the claim that the cancel culture community tends to regard villains negatively because of characteristics of identity politics, like race and gender, as claimed by Zille (2021a).

Not surprisingly, in the McCammond case, the Asian victim group, which is labelled as a group of colour, was regarded positively, while anyone who potentially harmed the group was tweeted about in a negative light. What was interesting though, was that McCammond was also seen positively by some users, as she is a woman of colour. Some collected tweets claimed that accusing McCammond of racism was in itself a racist thing to do, and that it was not possible for a person of colour to partake in acts of racism. Positive ingroup bias was thus also directed toward the racial group that this journalist belongs to, because individuals' self-identities are linked to the group that they belong to (Tajfel, 1978, cited in Islam, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), so people try to maintain their group's positive image to maintain their own image (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Support of McCammond, because of her race, can be seen in the tweet below.

You can't say #trustblackwomen and not grant second chances when we make mistakes. In the same way that white men get opportunities to grow or make amends, #Blackwomen should have these things too. What @alexi said was wrong but where is the opportunity for a #secondchance?

Mishan (2020) claims that cancel culture enforcers cannot identify with those they deplore, however, some users who identified with McCammond's racial group seemed to have experienced positive distinctiveness of that group to preserve their own positive self-image since the literature stated that self-identity is linked to group identity and that a threat to the group is a threat to the individual self (Islam, 2014; Smith, 1999). The more someone's identity is linked to their group, the more positive bias they will display (Tajfel et al., 1971).

b) Inconsistent caring

The pigs in Orwell's (1946) book claimed to care about all the victimised animals but pampered themselves human luxury while they had the other animals perform hard labour. They also treated the farm dogs well and had them police the other animals (Orwell, 1946). The pigs thus cared more about their own species, and those who were doing their bidding, than the other species of animals. Different acts of such inconsistent caring were gleaned from the data.

Despite supposedly victimising a group of colour, McCammond was supported by users in some collected tweets because she identifies with another group of colour. Her race and the Asian race seem to be part of a larger ingroup: people of colour in general. This coincides with claims made by Kaufmann (2020), reiterating that there is a level of inconsistent caring amongst cancel culture participants, where certain victim groups are cared about more than others. In the McCammond case, vigilantes seemed to debate which race, between the victim's race and the villain's race, was the true victim. Below is a corroborating example.

There needs to be an acknowledgement of anti Black racism within the Asian community. You can't expect us to be an ally and forget about the racism directed at us. I don't condone violence against anyone, but Black people have endured this shit for 400+ years and it continues.

Race was also talked about more than any other innate attribute in the case. McCammond had made tweets about both race and homosexuality, but collected tweets mentioned the topic of race more than sexuality. However, during data collection, the content of McCammond's racial tweets was talked about in a majority of tweets and displayed in several articles, but only one collected article and a few tweets displayed or talked about her sexuality-related posts. It is possible that the sexuality tweets were not available online anymore, so more users were aware of- and discussed the racial tweets rather than the sexual orientation ones.

With Dentlinger's controversy, the only immutable characteristic that was discussed

throughout the whole debacle was race, so there did not appear to be any other trait that was favoured by vigilantes. In Morgan's case, people focused more on the race and gender differences between the victim and the villain, with a particular emphasis on race, while the topic of mental health did not attract as much attention, despite it being one of the innate personal traits present in the case. Since race was the topic that was given high levels of attention throughout all three cases, it can be concluded that race was given more attention than any other trait in general.

These levels of inconsistent caring prove Kaufmann's (2020) claim that the victim-oppressor moral hierarchy displays specific races as the biggest victims at the top of the hierarchy, followed by women and sexual minorities (gender and sexuality).

4.4.3.1.3 Social identification

Social identity is established after comparisons take place, and occurs when social identity and status are determined, typically in a positive manner (Trepte & Loy, 2017), which causes individuals to have high self-esteems and partake in intergroup discrimination (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). The self-esteem level of the users was difficult to determine outright, but rather high levels of confidence lined their statements in the collected tweets. The different groups, as determined by wokeness, took on different identity roles.

a) Role identity

Social identities seemed to have been established before and during the cancellation cases, as users talked about their own races, genders, and sexuality in the collected tweets, and related those identities to the victim groups. This corroborates Stets and Burke's (2000) definition of social identity; that refers to people knowing what social groups they belong to.

Role identities, or the meanings that are ascribed to people when partaking in a certain role (Stets & Burke, 2014), could also be determined from the collected tweets and articles. These identities consist of labels that are ascribed to people when they participate in certain societal roles (Stets & Burke, 2014). The vigilantes took on the roles of those who defend specific racial groups, women, the mentally ill, and the LGBT community. This concurs with Chiou's (2020) notion that cancellors are activists that take on supposed social injustices, to safeguard society's most vulnerable members (Bérubé, 2018). They could thus be labelled as activists or defenders. Some can even be labelled as protesters since digital protests took place through call-outs and real-life protests were conducted in the Dentlinger case outside the eNCA headquarters,

according to the analysed data. The vigilantes in the three cases seemed to believe that they were protecting victim groups by fighting against elements of racism, sexism, homophobia, and judgment of the mentally ill.

The direct villains who admitted to wrongdoing and offered apologies, McCammond and Dentlinger, thus took on the roles of wrongdoers and apologisers. The news organisations and their parent companies in the McCammond and Morgan cases took on the role of indirect vigilantes as they contributed to the two journalists' cancellation. Condé Nast went above and beyond to show their dedication to the Asian community, as mentioned earlier. These news establishments could thus also be labelled as defenders of the victim groups. eNCA, however, made a public statement supporting their journalist, Lindsay Dentlinger, and did not defend the victim group in her scandal. eNCA is thus also a defender, just not of any victim group.

The vigilantes were thus the judge and jury, deciding who the victims were, and whether the villains were guilty or not. But the role of executioner, or punisher, was played by some of the indirect vigilantes who aided in two of the villains' punishment, as expressed before.

b) Intergroup discrimination

Martiny and Rubin (2016) claim that positive bias of an ingroup leads to the discrimination of outgroups. When it comes to the concept of intergroup discrimination, outright acts of such unfairness were not apparent in the data, but the data showed that users and vigilantes insinuated that such discrimination was present in the cases. Dentlinger, for example, claimed that negativity was directed toward her, because people believed that she was Caucasian, insinuating that vigilantes treated the white race differently from other races. One tweet commented on the positive ingroup bias of McCammond's racial group and insinuated that intergroup discrimination was a reality, as written below.

Let's not kid ourselves that the reason they had this discussion is because @alexi is considered part of their tribe. Switch this from her to anyone conservative, or ANY white male, and these same folks would have piled on.

Negative generalisations were also made or implied about certain villain outgroups. The most reoccurring personal traits in the Morgan case, aside from mental health, were race and gender. Vigilantes made negative generalisations about Morgan's race and his male gender. Users, who were against Morgan and Osbourne, said that individuals who are not people of colour would never truly know how it felt to experience racism, as written in the quotes below. Vigilantes

thus made generalisations about certain individuals and groups.

When a POC says you made a racist remark (not said you were racist) @MrsSOsbourne #TheTalk you should close your mouth and apologize listen to them instead of making it about you #SharonOsborne she should not be allowed on this platform ever again! I'm appalled @TheTalkCBS

Are you a POC? If not then you would never truly know what it's like when a POC says someone is racist. Alex is a POC and I'm pretty sure he knows what racism looks like.

In McCammond's case, the racial group that she belonged to – a group of colour – was not regarded negatively. However, McCammond, as an individual, was regarded negatively in some of the collected tweets.

c) Black sheep effect

The black sheep effect, as described by Marques and Yzerbyt (1988) and Steain et al., (2019), comes into play during the social identification phase, when individuals are judged or exiled for disagreeing with the typical beliefs associated with their ingroup. Despite some tweets claiming that McCammond had done nothing racist based on the premise of her race, other users viewed her as a person of colour who had betrayed the People of Colour Community with her past tweets about Asian people.

In the Dentlinger case, a collected online article stated that the Democratic Alliance was described as *racist apologists* for defending the journalist, despite the racial diversity of its members. Users who defended Morgan were also perceived as the black sheep of their respective groups, even when they were part of the victim ingroups. This concurs with the notion that individuals who call for cancellation want complete consensus from their group members (Beard, 2020) and shame those who deviate from their beliefs (Norris, 2020a, 2021). An example is provided below, of one female user calling out another female user for defending Morgan.

Even if he's not a racist he's a misogynist and you as a female should be ashamed supporting him. Take the perceived racism away, take Meghan out of it. Lots of other women he's insulted and abused.

The literature expressed that those who betray their social groups are wheedled or threatened as part of the black sheep effect (Ling, 2020), but the data showed that individuals experienced

shaming instead, as seen in the above tweet. It was also discovered that users believed that, because they identify with the victim groups, that they had the prerogative or correct prerequisites to be able to either condemn or defend the villains. One user defended Morgan by posting a link to an article she wrote, titled *Why As A Black Woman I Believe Piers Morgan Is NOT A Racist*. Another user defended McCammond for her supposed homophobic posts, as seen below. This tweet also supports the notion that users emphasise labels of identity politics in their social media identities (Rogers & Jones, 2021).

Speaking as a gay woman, I forgive Alexi McCammond for the homophobic tweets. People need to remember our country was largely against gay marriage until a decade ago. People make mistakes, grow and evolve. There needs to be space for that.

4.4.3.2 Inciting incident

It was determined that something must first be said or done by a journalist to start the chain of cancel culture events that would make them targets of the culture. This concurs with the definition of contemporary cancel culture that states that people suffer consequences after saying or doing something that is deemed offensive or derogatory (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Sossi, 2021).

4.4.3.2.1 Incident

McCammond tweeted her opinions on Asian-Americans and homosexual individuals in 2011 when she was a teenager (Ritschel, 2021) and those tweets resurfaced due to the announcement of her new position as editor-in-chief at Teen Vogue magazine (Cinone, 2021; Rutz, 2021). Dentlinger conducted interviews after a budget speech that were seen as controversial, where she asked two black politicians to keep their masks on during the Covid-19 pandemic but neglected to do the same for a white politician (Pijoos, 2021). Through data analysis, it was determined that her incident led to the making and tweeting of a compilation video showing clips of her past interviews that outlined a similar pattern as the budget interviews. Morgan made comments in a collected online article, on Twitter (Hendricks, 2021), and on his morning show (Kilkenny, 2021) about an interview between Oprah and a mixed-race royal, Meghan Markle, and questioned the claims made during that interview (Kilkenny, 2021).

4.4.3.2.2 Controversial topics

The three cases had to do with controversial topics, i.e., race, gender, sexuality, and mental illness – reiterating the literature discussed in Chapter 2, maintaining that cancel culture

revolves around controversial matters and actions that may be seen as offensive, mainly involving acts of racism, sexism, and bias against a certain sexual orientation (Ng, 2020). Chiou (2020) also stated that people get called out for offending groups of people, specifically racial or gender groups. As mentioned before, the indirect victims are the offended groups in the three cases, namely the Asian race, the black race, women, and homosexual people. This also concurs with aspects of wokeness as these controversial topics are also innate personal traits that are used to categorise people and distinguish victimisation. Race was the only trait that was prevalent in all three controversies, while sexuality was also discussed in the McCammond case, and the Morgan case included gender and mental illness. Mental health was not deductively determined as a controversial topic, as none of the literature had mentioned it.

The offensive words or actions of the journalists can be old, like in the McCammond case, where the controversy surrounded tweets that were over a decade old (Ritschel, 2021), or it can be recent, like the actions of Dentlinger (Pijoos, 2021) and Morgan (Kilkenny, 2021). The controversy can also be from something that was done on social media, like McCammond's old tweets, or done in real life, like the other two cases.

4.4.3.3 Decontextualisation

Decontextualisation is the first rule of cancel culture (Zille, 2021b), and constitutes taking something out of context (American Psychology Association, 2021; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), which can lead to the adding of new meanings to ideas or beliefs (Chun-chieh, 2013). This is proven by the collected data in the way that the inciting incidents, caused by Dentlinger and Morgan, were decontextualised which started those cancel culture processes. The decontextualisation determined in the collected data, was explored through the lenses of two theories, namely the social contagion theory and the theory of confirmation bias.

4.4.3.3.1 Contagion

The data reinforced notions of Le Bon's (1895) social contagion theory, which states that attitudes and behaviours can spread like a disease amongst people. It also aligns with Wright's (2020) statement that cancel culture is a form of social contagion. The data illustrated how the decontextualisation of an incident could lead to the virality of that incident on Twitter, and users' increased exposure to the information and the emotions associated with it, which could increase social and emotional contagion or portray instances of homophily.

a) Social contagion

By examining the data, it became clear that for Twitter users to decontextualise a controversy involving a journalist, they must first be aware of- or exposed to that controversy. This involved the tweeting of the incidents: McCammond's former Teen Vogue colleagues posted their letter to their management on Twitter (Cinone, 2021), Dentlinger's post-budget interviews were posted (Pijoos, 2021) along with a video montage of some of her prior interviews (determined during data collection and analysis), Morgan tweeted his opinions about the Markle-Oprah interview (Hendricks, 2021), and collected tweets portrayed how users tweeted about the inciting remarks that Morgan had made on GMB. Two of the incidents appeared to have been decontextualised. The data showed that Dentlinger's budget interviews were taken out of context, according to her and her news outlet, and the resulting video montage that followed was proven to contain clips that were edited out of context. The collected data also showed that Morgan's comments were decontextualised as the motivations behind his remarks were seen to contain elements of racism and sexism.

Posting the inciting incidents on Twitter contributed to the exposure of those incidents. Social contagion is driven by exposure (Piedrahita et al., 2018) as an increase in exposure causes an increase in digital infection (Hodas & Lerman, 2014). According to the gathered literature, increased user involvement is caused by controversial or taboo topics (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021; Kim, 2015) or topics that evoke strong emotional responses (Myers, 2010, cited in Bouvier, 2020). The incidents could thus have led to an increase in user participation as the three cases involved the controversial topics of race, sexuality, gender, and mental health. After the controversies were posted on Twitter, the next step was for the incidents to gain more exposure by going viral. Hodas and Lerman (2012) claim that virality increases contagion.

Collected articles from each case claimed that the inciting incidents were trending on Twitter shortly after the incidents had occurred. Al-Rawi (2017) claims that social media users are enticed by viral stories. Evidence of social contagion was apparent by the fact that vigilantes elicited similar call-out behaviour and used the same words, phrases, and hashtags on Twitter when posting about the three cases. This proved the social contagion notion that people mimic each other's attitudes and behaviour (Le Bon, 1895; Mendoza & King, 2020). Unlike what was claimed in the literature, the hashtag #Cancel (Mishan, 2020) was not present in any of the collected tweets, but other hashtags with a similar premise to #Cancel were used. In the Dentlinger case, for example, several tweets used the hashtags *#eNCAMUSTFALL* and

#LindsayDentlingerMustFall. In McCammond's case the repeated hashtags were *#StopAsianHate*, *#StopAAPIHate*, *#RacistTeenVogue*, and *#WalkAway*. In the Morgan case it was *#bekind*, *#YouAreRacist*, *#Meghan*, and *#TheTalk*, with the last hashtag referring to the show that Osbourne was fired from. However, most of the hashtags in the collected tweets surrounding Morgan's controversy were only used once, apart from *#TheTalk*. Other hashtags contained the villains' names, such as *#LindsayDentlinger*, reiterating examples provided by Bouvier (2020) about how users add hashtags to the names of the accused in high-profile cases.

The duplication of words and hashtags amongst tweets shows the socially contagious effects of cancel culture and could also support Anderson-Lopez et al.'s (2021) and Piedrahita et al.'s (2018) claim that social media hashtags aid in the public recognition of information. Even when the inciting incidents did not start on Twitter (like McCammond's tweets did), the incidents were brought to more people's attention through Twitter posts. This could concur with the claim that users are enticed by viral stories, as stated by the Al-Rawi, (2017). However, the similarities in users' beliefs, about who the victims and who the villains were, could prove the presence of homophily, where people exhibit the same behaviour, not because they influence one another to do so, but because they are like-minded, as explained by Burgess et al. (2018) and Ling (2020). This also concurs with the literature stating that social contagion and homophily could occur simultaneously (Burgess et al., 2018).

The data supported the literature about how the spread of information on social media is abetted by the presence of a hybrid media (Chadwick 2013, cited in Milas et al., 2021). All three cases dealt with the topic of racism, which concurs with the notion that activist campaigns on social media, such as ones fighting racism, get noticed and reported on by the mainstream media, as claimed by Bouvier (2020). The data showed that news organisations wrote articles about the three incidents and included users' tweets, as seen in Figure 4.9 for example, into their articles, and then posted the links to those stories on Twitter. It thus concurs with the claims that the mainstream media finds information on Twitter, sows that information into a news story, and posts that news story on Twitter, as expressed by Dubois et al. (2018).

The data also concurred with the statement made by Neuman (2007, 2014) about how newspapers do not always portray a realistic view of situations. Each collected article did not display all the contextual elements of the three cases. For example, not every article mentioned that McCammond had previously apologised for her old tweets and deleted those tweets two years prior to her becoming Teen Vogue's new editor. Users also linked some of the articles in

their tweets, which means that they could have lacked having all the necessary information and thus decontextualised some aspects of the cases.

It could not be discerned, however, if all these news- and magazine outlets enacted selection bias, as mentioned in the literature, by Groeling (2013), by focusing on the three incidents of wokeness and cancel culture rather than other stories. Articles about other topics were not collected as it was irrelevant to the study, so no comparisons could be made between the articles about the three cases and other articles distributed by the same outlets.

However, one user pointed out that GMB had one of its most profitable segments when Morgan had stormed off the set. On that day, the journalist was debating Alex Beresford about Morgan's comments on the Markle-Oprah interview, and Morgan did not agree with what Beresford had said and eventually left the studio while they were live on-air. Even though it was difficult to determine clear patterns of selection bias, this event could support the Christensen et al. (2021) study claiming that the media deliberately reports on controversial or argumentative content to increase their profit. Lobell (2021) and Van Heerden (2021) also stated that the media profits from concepts of wokeness and identity that enrages people.

In terms of echo chambers, it was difficult to conclusively discern if users were a part of an echo chamber or not, because users had different reactions to the inciting incidents, with some claiming that the journalists did nothing wrong, others tweeting that there was wrongdoing, but that punishment was pointless, and several others saying that cancellation was indeed warranted. It could be argued that users who used the same hashtags and phrases were affected by Le Bon's (1895) social contagion in their echo chambers, as they may have received the information from like-minded users and posted similar opinions (Cinelli et al., 2021; Terren & Borge, 2021).).

Users also debated about race, gender, and sexuality. The fact that users were contending with one another and presenting different rationales shows that people from different echo chambers had interacted. Even though the presence of echo chambers in the three cases could not coherently be proven, this could confirm what Terren and Borge (2021) found, i.e., that evidence of echo chambers is not always present, exposure to like-minded content is limited to some extent when there are echo chambers, and echo chambers tend to circle around controversial topics. It was also difficult to determine whether Twitter algorithms played any part in the cancellation cases.

b) Emotional contagion

Emotional contagion seems to have occurred across physical distances (through Twitter) in each cancellation case, which could also have contributed to the virality of the incidents, as Berger and Milkman (2013) and Nelson-Field et al. (2013) claimed that negative or arousal emotions like anger have a strong effect on the sharing of content; on virality. Not only did users display social contagion through their similar behaviour, words, and hashtags, but many vigilante tweets conveyed the emotion of anger, which could suggest that the emotion was spread like a contagion.

However, they were not always angered by their own hurt, but were also outraged on behalf of the victim groups, even when they were not members of those groups. Users were offended on behalf of Asian and black people, the gay community, women, and the mentally ill. They were also outraged on behalf of the direct victims, namely Kwankwa, Hlengwa, Markle, and the Asian individual mentioned in one of McCammond's tweets. This concurs with research, by Kramer et al. (2014) and Herrando and Constantinides (2021), claiming that emotional contagion can occur on social media even when users merely witness an event without directly experiencing it themselves. This also supports aspects of social identity that claim that a threat to the ingroup is a threat to the self since individual identity is tied to group identity, as stated by Islam (2014).

It was not conceivable to tell whether users deliberately sought out content that enraged them or if their outrage was real or fake to support the claims made about fauxrage, as proclaimed by Karrim (2020). Woke concepts also have emotional connotations attached to them which cause emotions to rule over logic, according to Kaufmann (2020). It was possible, however, to determine that the posts were about controversial topics typically involved in woke discussions that tend to evoke negative emotions like anger or anxiety, as expressed in the literature by Berger and Milkman (2013) and Wakefield and Wakefield (2018). These topics included race, gender, sexuality, and mental health. The innate personal traits involved in woke culture thus come into play here.

The findings thus support the literature that equates cancel culture with the term 'outrage-culture' (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021) claiming that outrage follows decontextualisation (Zille, 2021a) and that decontextualisation occurs because people are influenced by affect and emotion rather than logic, as expressed by Bouvier (2019) and Papacharissi (2015). The literature also stated that vigilantes deliberately look for posts that could anger them, but this

was difficult to discern as there was no way of telling why or how users sought information about the three cases.

4.4.3.3.2 Confirmation bias

Evidence of Wason's (1960) theory of confirmation bias was found in the data and contributed to how vigilantes decontextualised certain aspects of the cases. This type of bias occurred through two overlapping methods: reinforcement seeking and challenge avoidance, as stated by Festinger, 1957 (cited in Brugnoli et al., 2019).

a) Reinforcement seeking

One of the main features of cancel culture and wokeness is to twist information, i.e., decontextualise it to some extent, until it becomes offensive or controversial (Zille, 2021a). Collected articles expressed that a compilation video, showing supposed controversial past interviews conducted by Dentlinger, were tweeted. But the collected data stated that the montage video was investigated, and it was determined that some of the clips had been edited out of context. Morgan's disbelief of Markle's claims, was decontextualised and seen as an act of social injustice, as people believed that he had ulterior motivations, such as racism and sexism, driving his disbelief. This supports both the literature stating that meaning and interpretation is subjective (Edwards et al., 2017; Schoth & Liossi, 2017), and that cancellors jump to conclusions and misinterpret information (Brooks, 2020), and that those who are woke deliberately seek or misinterpret things in a way that makes the information seem controversial and reinforces their beliefs (Karrim, 2020).

Reinforcement seeking occurred through trait ascription, where each journalist's personal innate traits were brought up; some of which were used to confirm the allegations made against them. This corroborates Peters' (2022) claim that people pay more attention to the innate personal traits involved in an event rather than the circumstantial evidence. Dentlinger claimed that judgements against her were made based on the premise of her perceived race, and Morgan's gender was referred to in many tweets, as seen in the post below. Again, the concept of woke social categories and judgements based on innate personal traits came into play here.

Piers Morgan is your typically toxic male who is overly nice to a woman he likes, but at the first hint she's not into him turns into a bitter, spiteful, and nasty man. We know the type, they're not unusual, he's just a very public and obvious example.

The literature also claimed that negative impressions are easy to confirm and difficult to

disconfirm (Beaumeister, et al., 1986). Tsfat et al., (2020) stated that a person's negative opinion on something can be reinforced if new information about it is shown in a negative light. Interpretation bias, as mentioned in the literature review, could also be linked to the confirmation of negative beliefs as some users tended to view the inciting incidents in a negative light. Users' negative opinions about the journalists or their networks were reinforced by the controversial inciting incidents. For example, users seemed to have believed the racial allegations previously made against Condé Nast and eNCA, and the newest scandals involving those companies' journalists solidified those beliefs.

My opinion on the eNCA #LindsayDentlinger debacle. [THREAD] I have consistently said that eNCA has a deep problem of structural racism. What is even more sad is that this company was established AFTER Apartheid but racism rears its ugly head consistently.

Some users also tweeted that their negative feelings about Piers Morgan were confirmed by his controversy, proving that he was guilty of racism and sexism in their eyes. Vigilantes thus decontextualised journalists' blameworthiness as they believed that the confirmation of negative opinions was proof of guilt. This reinforcement of negative opinions also ties in with a type of cognitive phenomenon called biased assimilation, summarised by Hahn and Harris (2014), in which people tend to let their pre-existing beliefs guide their interpretation (Dandekar et al, 2013; Greitemeyer, 2014).

A study conducted by Dibbets and Meesters (2022) proved that such negative bias can be changed when exposed to disconfirming information. Users claimed that their opinions on Piers Morgan, Teen Vogue, eNCA and GMB changed after the three inciting incidents had occurred. However, it was positive beliefs about the journalist and organisations that changed when they were exposed to events that they interpreted as showing the mainstream media entities in a negative light. Users' negative opinions about two of the journalists did not change after the complaints about them were dismissed by Ofcom and BCCSA. Negative bias was thus confirmed through reinforcement seeking, while an exposure to disconfirming information changed positive bias into negative.

Vigilantes also seem to not differentiate between culpability and apology, as they appeared to believe that apologising is a sign of admitting one's guilt, proving Nkanjeni's (2021) statement that vigilantes decontextualise apologies and see it as proof of misconduct. Two of the journalists apologised, one of whom resigned from her job, therefore inadvertently admitting

fault, and reinforcing people's beliefs that they were guilty of wrongdoing. This also coincides with Snyder and Swann's (1978) study that found that targets can internalise other people's perception of them and then act according to that perception. People thought that McCammond, for example, had committed an offence, and by apologising and resigning, the journalist displayed the behavioural evidence that proved her culpability to her accusers. It is possible that the journalists might have internalised some of the accusations made against them and felt the need to apologise as the vigilantes demanded they do.

b) Challenge avoidance

In the theory of confirmation bias, people tend to ignore information that disconfirms their pre-established beliefs (Dibbets & Meesters, 2022; Nickerson, 1998; Wang & Jeon, 2020). Three types of cognition were distinguished from the data, as summarised by Hahn and Harris (2014), namely that some vigilantes did not attempt to falsify their own beliefs about the journalists, were reluctant to change their beliefs as part of the inertia effect – as described by Alós-Ferrer et al. (2016) and Bourdieu (1985) – and were confident in their statements despite the presence of ignorance in them.

After BCCSA had dismissed the claims made against Dentlinger, one user said that the results of the investigation were incorrect and that the BCCSA would *of course defend a racist*. The negative opinions about journalists were thus not altered, as some users refused to believe the disconfirming information that they were presented with. Journalists were seen as guilty before being proven innocent, and even when they were proven innocent, some people refused to believe the verdict. This concurs with the literature statement that there is no appeal for someone once they have been deemed guilty in the eyes of the public (Sossi, 2021).

There was also evidence supporting Dechêne et al.'s (2010) concept of familiarity and truth being interchangeable. The literature stated that even when consumers of news are exposed to the truth of a specific event, that they do not believe that truth, because they have been exposed to the lie so often that they believe that lie to be accurate (Tsfati et al., 2020). Tweets indicated that people believed inaccurate information about the journalists even after that information was investigated and deemed to be false. This could also be due to the insularity of Twitter feeds, tying to the concept of echo chambers and how users are exposed to the same information over and over, as mentioned by Bouvier (2020), Bouvier and Machin (2021), and KhosraviNik (2017). However, it was not possible to determine if Twitter's algorithm caused users to be exposed to the same information repeatedly, as stated by Matamoros-Fernández (2017). Users

who experienced repeated exposure to tweets saying that the journalists had done something wrong might thus have believed that information to be true purely because it has become familiar to them.

The lack of disconfirming information could also have occurred as users might have focused on certain keywords and ignored others, as stated by Tsfati et al. (2020). In a New York Times tweet, reading *A group of Teen Vogue staff members raised concerns on Monday over decade-old racist tweets by their new editor in chief, Alexi McCammond*, users might have focused on terms like ‘racist’ and ‘Alexi McCammond,’ inadvertently labelling the journalist as racist without investigating any further. However, there was no way to conclusively prove that users focused more on certain keywords than others.

Posting news stories about the controversies could also unintentionally spread bias or fake news, as claimed by Herman and Chomsky (2008), because the mainstream media write and post news stories as quickly as possible without having the capability to verify all the information provided by the internet. Neuman (2007, 2014) also claimed that the news does not always accurately portray reality. Newspapers might thus have accidentally posted about incidents containing elements of wokeness without knowing all the facts or the full context, unintentionally contributing to users’ decontextualisation through a lack of disconfirming information. This is corroborated by the fact that some of the available online articles did not contain vital information of the three cases, which is why the collection of articles continued until data- and theoretical saturation had occurred, because a single article from each case did not paint the full picture to construct a timeline. News outlets might thus have contributed to vigilantes’ lack of abundant and disconfirming information.

The avoidance of disconfirming information was also palpable in the way that collected tweets claimed that cancel culture was not real, as a way of justifying vigilantes’ own beliefs and actions. The users’ beliefs on cancel culture concurs with the literature stating that cancel culture is not real as it is merely a form of accountability being implemented (Chiou, 2020; Willingham, 2021). One user, in reference to the Dentlinger situation, said that cancel culture did not exist in South Africa. When confronted with the suggestion that vigilantes might be taking it too far by demanding that the journalists face cancellation, users dismissed such claims by saying that they were merely asking for justice and accountability. Vigilantes thus seemed to dismiss disconfirming information, not just about the cases, but about their own actions and beliefs.

Challenge avoidance and a lack of disconfirming information can also cause confidence amongst individuals, as illustrated by the Dunning Kruger effect, that was mentioned in the literature, which expresses that ignorance begets confidence (Fritz, 2019; Dunning, 2011). Users displayed high levels of self-assurance in the collected tweets despite showing signs of ignorance. All collected tweets, except one, neglected to mention that McCammond had already apologised for her old posts back in 2019. In the Dentlinger case, the journalist, and her news outlet, eNCA, claimed that her situation had been interpreted in the wrong way and that the journalist had no ill intentions behind her actions. The journalist's race was also misinterpreted as users believed her to be Caucasian when she is not. The compilation video of her old interviews was also debunked by the BCCSA, the DA, and a former interviewee, who all claimed that the video clips had been edited out of context. A few users mentioned the circumstantial aspects of the cases, but most vigilantes seemed to overlook the full context of the situations.

The ANC and the self-appointed morality police branded Lindsay Dentlinger of eNCA as 'racist' based on a manipulated video that tells only half of the story.

Tweets, like the one above, prove that some users did consider the full context of a controversial case, however those users were the minority. The majority of collected tweets were not framed in the same light as the above example and the users did not appear to have considered waiting for a full investigation to take place before posting their opinions on the matters. Decontextualisation is thus the rule, not the exception. In this case, specifically, the data supports the notion that cancel culture causes people to jump to conclusions and misinterpret information (Brooks, 2020) and that hasty collective judgements are made on Twitter before users know all the facts, as stated by Bouvier and Machin (2021) and Ott (2017). This transient nature of tweeting causes vigilantes to react and tweet on impulse. A similar claim, stating that users find it difficult to verify information due to the rapid distribution of information, as suggested by Pałka-Suchojad (2021), could not be confirmed.

4.4.3.4 Call-outs

Ordinary citizens were able to express their opinions about the cases on Twitter, corroborating what Anderson-Lopez et al. (2021) had said about social media allowing ordinary denizens to share their beliefs, as seen in the way that most of the collected tweets were not from public figures. After the inciting incidents were posted and started trending on Twitter, the vigilante group members called the villains out on their words or actions, shaming or condemning them

and handing over a list of demands.

4.4.3.4.1 Demands and responses

Call-outs contained demands for confession, with some users demanding that either all three journalists admit to their wrongdoings or that their news organisations admit to it. The notion of confession is an emerging concept in the study as the researcher had not come across it during the literature review. What was not new, however, was the claim made by Mueller (2021) stating that demands for apologies are provided by those who participate in call-outs.

Users demanded that the journalists apologise, not just to those they had supposedly wronged, but to everyone who belongs to that victim group. This corroborates Snyder and Swann's (1978) claim that individuals who internalise the perceptions of their accusers can apply those perceptions to others who are not the original accusers. McCammond was demanded to apologise to all Asians and all non-racists. Dentlinger was commanded to apologise to all South-Africans. Users demanded that Morgan apologise for the comments he had made about Meghan Markle. Tweets from all three cases can be seen below, the first is about McCammond, the second is about Dentlinger, and the third pertains to the Morgan case.

@TeenVogue your new editor in chief is anti-Asian. @alexi you owe the AAPI community and all non-racists an apology.

The first step in any sincere apology is to acknowledge what you have done wrong – before you start defending nonsense @eNCA. After a week, I'm still of the view that Lindsay Dentlinger @metrobabe doesn't gave AF; and she's only apologising bcos she was asked/instructed to

Christ that's so immature. Just own up to the fact that you have behaved massively irresponsibly and pig-headed over this affair, that you have helped to perpetuate this witch-hunt against a girl you hardly know. Just own it, admit you are WRONG, and apologise. Simple.

Vigilantes also demanded apologies from indirect villains, such as the journalists' news outlets. Some indirect villains also aided in asking the direct villains to apologise. For example, ITV asked Morgan to apologise on-air, and the chief diversity officer at Condé Nast helped McCammond draft and distribute an apology to staff members. However, in accordance with statements made by Mishan (2020), Bouvier and Machin (2021), and Nkanjeni (2021), even when the villains apologised, users tended to reject their apologies, claiming that it was not

adequate to rectify the journalists' wrongful actions. However, Dentlinger followed her apology up with excuses and accusations, and eNCA provided an excuse for their journalist's debacle rather than an apology, which is why most users expressed their dissatisfaction. Morgan refused to apologise, which disappointed some users. Vigilantes were also displeased with McCammond's apology, with one calling it *insufficient* and *arrogant*. Another user responded to her apology with sarcasm:

That's all it takes is to say I'm sorry if people are offended by my actions? I guess that means we should let Manson out of jail.

The gathered literature on the topic suggested that users might just be tweeting such things because they desire to increase the likes and responses to their tweets (Rambukkana, 2015, cited in Bouvier, 2020; Roos, 2020, cited in Sailofsky, 2021), as posts tend to be constructed with the goal of increasing online engagement (Breazu & Machin, 2019). However, there was no way to tell if that was the true intention behind users' dissatisfaction with apologies.

In congruence with the study's literature review, users demanded that cancellation occur (Cook et al., 2021; Matei, 2019), as the collected data showed how vigilantes called for the journalists' dismissal or suspension as well as action to be taken against the indirect villains, like Osbourne's departure from her show and ban from Twitter. Other calls for cancellation included calls for eNCA to be taken down. The below tweet shows a call for McCammond's firing. Vigilantes also called for her to suffer consequences back in 2019, which shows that call-outs can occur on more than one occasion for one inciting incident.

Teen Vogue- are you racist? You hired a woman -alexi mccammond who is racist. I will not buy your mag for my daughter unless you fire her. Show us you are not racist and stop giving her a little slap on the wrist by keeping her on.

An emerging concept was that of call-outs or demands that went beyond Twitter. These call-outs contained demands that were atypical because of what was demanded, or because of how it was demanded. The demands either happened outside of Twitter or were demanded in a way that did not include users just randomly tweeting their discontent; the demands were more formal.

All atypical call-outs, were determined by collecting and analysing the collected data, and included formal complaints made to Ofcom, GMB, BCCSA and SAHRC. Petitions, of which the links were also posted on Twitter though, were signed in the hopes of getting the journalists

fired. The petition against McCammond received over 1600 signatures, while the petition against Dentlinger had approximately 8000 signatures. The ANC demanded that eNCA staff members attend sensitivity training sessions. Real-life protests also took place outside the news offices of eNCA.

The three journalists responded after call-outs and demands have begun. The data supported some of the literature saying that journalists typically respond to digital criticism in seven ways, namely rejection, refutation, evasion, justification, mitigation, confession, and alteration (Groenhart & Bardoel, 2011, cited in Cheruiyot, 2022). Although the data showed that not all the journalists responded in all seven ways. In terms of rejection, the data indicated that Dentlinger said that she was not racist, and that Morgan stood by his comments about Markle's claims. It was gleaned from the data that, as part of refutation, Morgan continued defending his claims on more than one public occasion. In terms of evasion, which is the admittance of fault to evade accountability (Groenhart & Bardoel, 2011, cited in Cheruiyot, 2022), it was difficult to determine for certain if any of the journalists had responded in this way, because their motives behind their confessions were not clearly stipulated in the data.

The collected online articles stated that Dentlinger responded with justification, as she made excuses during an interview and made accusations against her critics, but it could also be determined that her justification was supported by mitigation, as Pijoos (2021) claimed that eNCA gave a seemingly genuine excuse for her behaviour, saying that the budget speech was an intense environment and that the journalist had to conduct interviews whilst receiving instructions through an earpiece. Despite this, Dentlinger still confessed to wrongdoing and apologised (Seleka, 2021). The collected data stated that McCammond also apologised and confessed to making a mistake. In terms of alteration, McCammond resigned from her job (Rutz, 2021), Dentlinger apologised (Seleka, 2021), and the data indicated that Morgan did backtrack on his comments, saying that mental illness is a serious issue and if people did genuinely deny Markle the psychological help she had asked for then those people needed to suffer consequences for it. Because of the uncertainty of an evasion response having occurred, that response will not be considered as a typical response. The journalists thus responded in six typical ways.

The collected data stated that McCammond apologised for her tweets two years prior when call-outs had occurred then, and she apologised again after call-outs started occurring in 2021. This shows that call-outs about a specific incident does not just occur once or at a specific time.

McCammond apologised on Twitter, in emails, and in staff meetings, and ended up resigning from Teen Vogue.

Dentlinger seemed to have made her Twitter account more difficult to trace, as the researcher could not locate her Twitter profile. The data also showed that Dentlinger did not resign from eNCA. The collected online articles stated that she apologised to Hlengwa and Kwankwa over the phone and apologised in an interview, not only to the two black South-African politicians again, but also to *people who don't deserve to be drawn into it*, again corroborating Snyder and Swann's (1978) idea that people respond beyond the original accuser or victim. The gathered tweets and articles indicated that her apology was also followed up by explanations and defences, which seemed to be what made users not want to grant any forgiveness. She said that she was called racist on the *premise that I am white because it is perceived that I am white*.

It was discerned from the data, that Morgan, on the other hand, defended his statements about Markle, hurled accusations at the cancel culture community, and refused to apologise, but did backtrack to say that mental illness is a serious thing, and that people should be fired if they did indeed refuse to give Markle the psychological help that she claimed she needed. Morgan also tweeted about the situation (Hendricks, 2021), and the data stated that he also stormed off the GMB set when pressured about his connection to Meghan Markle, resigned from his job, and was eventually interviewed about it on Fox News. His indirect partner-in-crime, Osbourne, did apologise for her actions in a tweet but was let go from her job (Kilkenny, 2021; Pineda, 2021). Some collected tweets claimed that Morgan's actions, in response to his inciting incident, are what led to his job loss. Since his responses were so drastically different from the other two journalists', it could be argued that he had made a significant contribution to his own cancellation.

4.4.3.4.2 Public naming and shaming

Villains – direct and indirect – were publicly named and shamed on Twitter as corroborated by Favarel-Garrigues et al. (2020). The fact that indirect villains were also named and shamed substantiates the claim, made by Bouvier (2020), that those associated with the accused can also get called out. It also concurs with the literature stating that journalists and their news organisations can experience such forms of digital criticism (Cheruiyot, 2022).

Journalists' names, Twitter handles and photos were posted and shared, accompanied by terms like *racist*, *homophobic*, or *misogynistic*, reiterating Zille's (2021a) claim that people are labelled as racist or sexist during public call-outs. In the Dentlinger case, several tweets

showcased a photo of the journalist, along with her name and suggestions to shame or boycott her.

The Twitter handle of the @eNCA racist reporter #LindsayDentliner is @metro babe. Let's show her flames, that we do not tolerate white madams.

The above tweet shows how Dentlinger's name and Twitter handle was posted and how the user called for others to shame her. Each journalist was also branded a *racist* in some of the collected tweets. McCammond was also called a *racist bigot* and *two-face coward* in some tweets, while Dentlinger was labelled a *racist pig*, and Morgan got called racist (Day, 2021) and a *toxic male* and *racist monster*. The below tweet is an example of someone naming and shaming Morgan.

Piers Morgan is the living, breathing definition of a bitch ass man, right. He's bitter, thin-skinned, and he's just super fucking gross.

Not only were the journalists named and shamed, but their organisations and supporters were as well (Cheruiyot, 2022). It corroborates the claim that supposed wrongdoers' familiars can also be subjected to digital criticism (Bouvier, 2020). All the indirect villains were called out, most of whom were labelled as *racist*. The researcher thus analysed such collected tweets to determine who the so-called villains were.

The villains' past actions were also searched for and posted online, a phenomenon that was detected inductively during analysis. Examples included users posting about McCammond's previous doxing and cancelling behaviour, her relationship scandal with a political campaign's press secretary, and the prior racism allegations that had been laid against Condé Nast. The revelation of her 2011 tweets is what started her whole controversy in the first place (Ritschel, 2021). It was also revealed that she had dressed up as a Native American woman for Halloween years ago, which people also found offensive. Despite most users displaying ignorance when it comes to the details of the McCammond case, a few users pointed out that the journalist had deleted the tweets and one user tweeted that she had apologised back in 2019.

Data collection and analysis revealed that clips from Dentlinger's past interviews were edited into a compilation video and shared throughout the Twittersphere, while users also tweeted about previous allegations of racism against eNCA. These allegations were also mentioned in the literature review, as referenced by Pijoos (2021). With the third journalist, collected tweets pointed out that many complaints have previously been sent to GMB about Morgan's

behaviour.

4.4.3.4.3 Hypocrisy

The hypocrisy bestowed in Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1946) was present in the data. The pigs in the novella said that everything on four legs was good and everything on two legs was bad (Orwell, 1946). However, birds have two legs, so the pigs changed the definition of bipedalism by declaring that wings were considered legs, so that birds could be perceived as good creatures with 'four' legs (Orwell, 1946). Some collected tweets claimed that McCammond's skin colour prevented her from being racist, despite other users believing that her tweets were indeed racist.

The pigs in Orwell's (1946) novella also changed rules like it being illegal to drink alcohol, to it being illegal to drink alcohol in excess, after the pigs were caught getting drunk one day. Some vigilantes expressed, in the collected tweets, that it is wrong to discriminate or make generalisations based on someone's race, but according to the gathered online articles, Dentlinger believed that people had made assumptions about her based on what skin colour they thought she was. Collected tweets also said that Morgan was racist – not for saying racist things – but for disbelieving the statements made by someone of a different race. Vigilantes thus seemed to make the definitions of race and racism more flexible to suite their agendas.

Another form of hypocrisy in the novella was of the pigs partaking in behaviour that they had previously deemed to be repugnant (Orwell, 1946). The pigs had convinced the other animals that it was wrong for humans to make the animals partake in hard labour, but after the pigs became the leaders, they had done the exact same thing (Orwell, 1946). It was determined that, in each cancellation case, the journalists were judged for saying or doing perceived derogatory things, but the vigilantes participated in disparaging acts when calling the journalists out. As mentioned before, Dentlinger was called a *pig* and Morgan was called a *monster*. Threats of violence like death- or rape threats are also seen as necessary evils in the minds of accusers (Leetaru, 2018). One collected online article expressed that some cancellors, for example, sent Dentlinger threats (which included rape threats), all in the name of defending the victims' honour, believing their immoral actions to be justifiable.

The literature claimed that digital accusations can also have traces of racism, sexism, homophobia, and heterosexism (Semler, 2020, cited in Cook et al., 2021). Vigilantes accused the journalists of racism, then made derogatory references about Morgan's race and Dentlinger's perceived race. The data displayed users calling Morgan sexist, whilst making generalisations about his gender. Some of the terms that the journalists were branded with

might also be considered hate speech, as mentioned in the literature (Leetaru 2018). Gauld's (2017) cartoon drawing, depicted in Figure 2.3, thus has merit in this study, as it shows how people judge others whilst sharing similarities to them. Wang and Jeon (2020) claim that people see the flaws of others but fail to see the flaws in themselves. Trepte and Loy (2017) also claimed that people do not desire to witness the similarities between their ingroup and other outgroups. The people depicted in the drawing are blind to their own hypocrisy, just like some of the vigilantes in each cancellation case.

All these instances of woke rule breaks concur with literature stating that any action is deemed justifiable so long as it is seen as being beneficial to society (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004) and helpful to society's vulnerable populations (Workman et al., 2020), which are the victims and victim groups in this study. It is also done to defend the honour of one's social group (Glick et al., 2016). A study by Workman et al. (2020) also expressed that people view immoral or violent acts as excusable if it is done in congruence with their own beliefs and opinions. The vigilantes seemed to believe that they were justified in their actions, calling it acts of *justice* and *accountability* used to fight social injustices such as racism, sexism, homosexuality, and unfairness directed at the mentally ill. This proves that cancellors believe themselves to be morally righteous people (Chiou, 2020; Kaufmann, 2020) who can treat others immorally in the name of moral justice. These hypocrisies thus contain echoes of the saying "All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others." (Orwell, 1946: 68).

4.4.3.5 Cancellation

It was determined that cancellation occurred after call-outs had started. To create the conceptual framework, it was determined that cancellation involved censorship (Brito, 2021; Tufekci 2018, cited in Cook et al., 2021) and the loss of support (Brito, 2021; Chiou, 2020; Nakkab, 2020; Ng, 2020) which also included ostracism (Norris, 2020a, 2021; Sage, 2022). Contrary to the gathered literature on the subject, none of the three candidates were completely censored on social media, and no obvious signs of ostracism were found. The only thing that might be regarded as ostracism, is how some users considered McCammond to be a person of colour who betrayed other people of colour, but there was no discerning way for users to have ostracised the journalist from her broader racial group. As mentioned before, indirect villains, like the DA and Morgan's supporters were also seen as having betrayed a specific racial- and gender group but were not ostracised.

In terms of censorship, Dentlinger appeared to have either deleted her Twitter account or

changed her account name, but no information in the collected data suggested that this was due to official censorship by the Twitter app. Both collected tweets and online articles expressed how users did however block eNCA on Twitter, which could have indirectly affected Dentlinger since she works for the network, but eNCA was still able to post tweets to other users and was not officially censored by Twitter. The data did not support the literature claiming that censorship can occur through deplatforming on social media platforms (Rogers, 2020).

One cancellation method that was implemented in all three cases, was the loss of support, as mentioned by Brito (2021), Chiou (2020), Nakkab (2020) and Ng (2020) in the literature review. Ng (2020) claims that a loss of support can include a loss of viewership, sponsorships or endorsements, or social media followers. With the aid of the collected text and the literature review, it was determined that not all journalists suffered a direct loss, but some of their associates or defenders did. McCammond lost her job (Rutz, 2021), and Teen Vogue's sponsorships from Ulta Beauty and Burt's Bees were halted. Teen Vogue also lost readers as some collected tweets expressed that users would not read the magazine's material again. Condé Nast, that owns Teen Vogue, said that it was *best to part ways* with McCammond, which could show how the company participated in Lewis' (2020) notion of woke capitalism, to ensure that they did not suffer any more financial losses (Lewis, 2020).

The fact that journalist's news outlets experienced cancellation corroborates Cheruiyot's (2022) claim that both journalists and their news organisations suffer from digital criticism. Collected tweets claimed that users blocked eNCA on social media and refused to watch the news network on television, which corroborates Ng's (2020) claim that disappearing support could include lost viewership and a decrease in social media followers. This could have indirectly affected Dentlinger as she works for eNCA.

Vigilantes expressed disappointed in the collected tweets, over GMB having hired Morgan in the first place and said that they would no longer support the televised programme. Sharon Osbourne lost her job at The Talk (Kilkenny, 2021; Pineda, 2021), and Morgan resigned from GMB (Kilkenny, 2021) after he had stormed off the set. He thus lost support from his employers as GMB accepted his resignation and did not defend him against his accusers. However, one user claimed that Morgan had *cancelled himself*. Although Morgan lost his job because it was his decision to resign, it could be argued that he had caused his own cancellation with his responses, as he had walked off the set of GMB while they were live on-air, and unlike

the other two journalists, he did not apologise at any point. Neither of the hashtags #RIP (Kato, 2021) and #Cancelled (Semíramis 2019, cited in Cook et al., 2021; Roos, 2020, cited in Sailofsky, 2021), as mentioned in the literature, were present in the tweets to signal someone's cancellation. However, some users celebrated the cancellation of the villains, as depicted below.

Piers Morgan is leaving Good Morning Britain. Finally! Britain will have a great morning.

The literature claimed that both Morgan (Kilkenny, 2021) and McCammond (Rutz, 2021) lost their jobs because they had resigned. During data collection, it was discovered that Condé Nast even sent a statement to staff, saying that they had decided it was best to deviate from McCammond. It could be argued that the call-outs made either Morgan and McCammond decide to resign or their employers to fire them under the public guise of resignation. The fact that vigilantes on Twitter can cause a journalist's cancellation, confirms the notion that social media has allowed for a shift in societal power to take place where ordinary denizens can have their voices be heard, as claimed by Anderson-Lopez et al. (2021).

The collected data makes it seem as if journalists can suffer from complete cancellation (as in the McCammond case where the reporter lost her job and her employers lost sponsors), partial cancellation (as in the Dentlinger case where the journalist kept her job, but her news outlet lost support), or self-inflicted cancellation (as in the Morgan case where his actions were unlike that of the other journalists', and he made the decision to resign from GMB).

The gathered data indicated that investigations done by BCCSA and Ofcom yielded that two of the candidates (Dentlinger and Morgan) had done nothing wrong, but the journalists and/ or their associates were still cancelled in some ways, which proves Trottier's (2020) claim that people get cancelled, not only for actual wrongdoings, but for theoretical ones as well. So, whether the journalists were guilty of wrongdoing is irrelevant to this study, because even if their transgressions were real and they were deserving of consequences, they (or their associates) still suffered cancellation, nonetheless. This supports the Thomas theorem (Thomas & Thomas, 1928: 572): "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

4.4.3.6 Public support

The data showed that, from the time that the inciting incidents went viral on twitter and call-outs occurred, public support for the villains began. The gathered literature mentioned single

instances of support, like Osbourne supporting Morgan (Kilkenny, 2021; Pineda, 2021), and eNCA defending Dentlinger (Pijoos, 2021), but never suggested that support might be a rule of thumb in the cancel culture process.

4.4.3.6.1 Gained support and awareness

The collected data indicated that all three journalists received support from both users and public figures in a public manner. The data supported the notion that Morgan was defended by his friend – and public figure – Osbourne, as claimed by Kilkenny (2021). It was also confirmed that Dentlinger was supported by her employers, eNCA, as stated by Pijoos (2021). Several collected online articles claimed that Dentlinger had received support from two public figures that she had interviewed in the past.

Collected articles claimed that McCammond was defended by Jonathan Swan, her former colleague from Axios. Tweets, that showed support to McCammond, claimed that she was very young when she posted her controversial statements in 2011 and that she could be redeemed, with users writing *#ImwithAlexi*.

I hope someone gives this very good reporter a job.

Exactly, @alexi was 17 years old. God, I was such an idiot at 17. So were most people (ok, maybe not Greta Thunberg or Malala, but most ordinary humans). Do we not learn as we grow up? Is there no #redemption?

The above texts are from collected tweets, saying that they wish for the journalist's recovery and that she was young and naïve when she had made those tweets about Asian and homosexual people. This shows that although some users displayed ignorance in this case, as mentioned before, other users looked at the context of the inciting incident. McCammond was also publicly defended by Anna Wintour, and a former colleague, according to a collected online article.

The collected articles expressed that Dentlinger was forgiven by a direct victim, Hlengwa, and was defended by a well-known political party and two former interviewees who claimed that she had asked them to keep their masks on during interviews that took place before the scandal had occurred. Dentlinger is also the only journalist out of the three cases that received support from her news outlet, as discussed before. Despite some collected tweets showing users' ignorance of the details of Dentlinger's case, others defended her by questioning the validity of the compilation video. The analysed tweets displayed how some users – who believed that

she had done wrong – still supported her by saying that she should be rehabilitated or educated instead of punished.

Morgan was publicly defended by Osbourne (Kilkenny, 2021; Pineda, 2021) and Twitter users who pointed out the holes in Markle's claims, according to the collected tweets. Some tweets also showed support for his decision to depart from Good Morning Britain and his refusal to apologise, while others supported his right to free speech even when they claimed to not like him or agree with what he had said. Tweets also expressed that Morgan would fare better from education rather than punishment for his supposed wrongdoings. This contradicts the Hart (2020) notion that cancellors believe that supposed wrongdoers lack the capacity for change or growth. Users and public figures also supported Osbourne along with Morgan, as seen below.

Well said Piers! Utterly disgusted at how you and Sharon have been treated! I am by no means a big fan of either of you but this racist slur can ruin peoples lives! I hope you both stand your ground and don't let these liars win! With you 100.

Love @piersmorgan or hate him, no one should lose their job at the behest of a twitter mob. Reports that @itvnews were insisting he apologise for his remarks about Meghan are deeply concerning. Piers has always defended others' right to free speech. We should stick up for his.

While some expressed that cancellation and cancel culture was a way to demand accountability and enact rightful justice (Chiou, 2020; Willingham, 2021), others supported the journalists in some of the collected tweets by claiming that cancel culture and wokeness needed to be stopped. These supporters also debated with vigilantes about the severity of wokeness and cancel culture, with some saying that the culture had gone too far. This shows that the supporters were aware of the debates surrounding cancel culture and wokeism when it comes to such controversial topics. Below are examples of supporting tweets from all three cases.

"Teen Vogue's newly appointed editor-in-chief Alexi McCammond resigns before her first day of work after receiving backlash over past Tweets." We've now entered a new #CancelCulture low – where people are cancelled before they even begin.

The canceling of Lindsay Dentlinger even when the evidence shows her behaviour was not racist and the footage was doctored goes to show how toxic woke culture has become. Even if people's offense is misplaced it's still more important than facts. Feelings don't care about facts.

We trust in you Piers to get this cancel culture canceled...

4.4.3.7 Recovery

Cancellation seems to be a temporary phenomenon, as each journalist recovered from the cancel culture process, according to the data collected. An analysed online article expressed that McCammond eventually worked as a contributor at MSNBC and later got her old job back at Axios. Collected tweets and articles claimed that Dentlinger stayed on at eNCA, the clips in the compilation video were debunked, and her name was cleared by BCCSA. Articles also said that Morgan got back on breakfast TV almost a year after his cancellation, and that Ofcom dropped the allegations made against him.

A Cable News Network article (Willingham, 2021), as mentioned in Chapter 1, gave examples of people finding employment again after call-outs as proof that no one can truly be cancelled. It could be argued, however, that acute cancellation does occur, and that job gains afterward merely show the presence of recovery, not the absence of cancellation. Some tweets showed users celebrating the journalists' redemptions, while others were dissatisfied with it, such as the example below.

All complaints filed with BCCSA against the racist reporter, Lindsay Dentlinger, were not upheld & were dismissed. On the other hand, the slow & unresponsive @SAHRCcommission continue to stall the process of investigation. The racist is already let free by the BCCSA. Unacceptable.

So, even though recovery seems to be an inevitable part of cancel culture, some vigilantes still call for retribution, which shows that calls for cancellation can arise long after cancellation and recovery have occurred. The evidence shows that public support can also be gained when a journalist's redemption is made public, seen in the way that users celebrated journalists' newfound success. Individuals can thus experience cancel culture, involving the same inciting incident, more than once, as the phenomenon is not a fixed linear process with a definitive end.

4.5 Trustworthiness

Bricoleurs have the responsibility of ensuring the trustworthiness of a study's findings (Pratt et al., 2022). Trustworthiness simply means: Can the findings of a study be trusted? (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are four dimensions of trustworthiness namely dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), that the researcher had considered.

4.5.1 Dependability

Dependability is one of the main dimensions of trustworthiness and refers to how stable the research is over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is the detailed description of how findings are procured (Scharp & Sanders, 2018). A study is more dependable when the research process follows a clear and logical path or audit trail that is well documented (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Each step in the research process for this study was documented in a notebook and defined and elaborated on in a clear and linear manner in the research report, to make it easier for the reader to examine the research process and understand the findings and conclusions. Steps were also replicated for each case, during data collection, analysis, and interpretation, to ensure consistency throughout those parts of the research process.

Peer debriefing, or the process of giving the research to an experienced researcher to evaluate, can also be used to accomplish dependability (Forero, Nahidi, De Costa, Mohsin, Fitzgerald, Gibson, McCarthy & Aboagye-Sarfo, 2018; Scharp & Sanders, 2018). The research report was handed to the researcher's supervisor as per master's degree stipulations. The submission of the thesis could only be accomplished once the supervisor was satisfied with the report.

4.5.2 Credibility

Credibility refers to how assured a researcher is in the truthfulness and accuracy of a study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It determines whether findings accurately represent the collected data and if that raw data was correctly interpreted (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The bricoleur experienced prolonged engagement with the collected data, as the data was collected, read, reread several times, summarised, analysed, and interpreted. *In vivo* codes in analysis and Twitter users' own words in interpretation were also used to represent the collected data and ensure the credibility of the research. Excerpts (Figures 4.20, 4.21, and 4.22) from the coded data were also provided along with explanations on how the data was coded.

4.5.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which a study's findings can be applied to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The successful replication of a study improves its validity (Mackey & Gass, 2005) and can be done by finely describing the study's research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Scharp & Sanders, 2018). Thick descriptions are thus to be provided (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher described the different components of the study in a clear and

detailed manner.

Another way of achieving transferability, is through referential adequacy, which refers to analysing half of the collected data, then analysing the second half in comparison to the first half (Scharp & Sanders, 2018). The collected tweets were read first and online newspaper- and magazine articles were read afterward to discern summaries and timelines for each case, and during line-by-line coding the tweets were analysed first, and the articles second. The bricoleur also conducted the data collection, and analysis and interpretation in an iterative manner and ensured that data- and theoretical saturation was achieved.

4.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to other researchers being able to verify a study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is increased when the researcher's findings and interpretations are clearly obtained from the composed data by clearly detailing how the conclusions were made (Scharp & Sanders, 2018; Tobin & Begley, 2004), and is established when the other main criteria of trustworthiness (dependability, credibility, and transferability) have been accomplished (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, cited in Nowell et al., 2017). The findings were drawn from the collected data and the researcher detailed how the data was coded, how the conclusions were made, and how those conclusions linked to the pre-determined elements of cancel culture. Confirmability was also assured through triangulation and reflexivity.

4.5.4.1 Triangulation

Yin (2003) suggested that triangulation is a way to ensure trustworthiness in case studies. Triangulation adds depth to collected data (Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2018) and occurs when several viewpoints, methods, theories, or sources of data are incorporated into a study (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). Data triangulation, which is the retrieval of data from multiple different sources (Denzin, 1970), occurred, as text was collected from tweets and online newspaper- and magazine articles. Having multiple sources can reduce bias and minimise the inadequacies associated with using a single source (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012) and can help achieve data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015, cited in Fusch et al., 2018). Theoretical triangulation, which is the combining of different theoretical constructs (Denzin, 1970; Fusch et al., 2018), was also used as three theories and several literature concepts were explored to interpret the collected data.

4.5.4.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity also ensures the trustworthiness of a study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and was used alongside memoing and iteration. It involves researchers critically reflecting on their own selves (Flick, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This method can be used to reduce bias and refers to a researcher being conscious of their subjective role in a study, how the research has affected the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Palaganas et al., 2017), and how they have influenced the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Rogers, 2012; Tracy, 2020). It recognises an 'Other' and is aware of the self in relation to that 'Other' (Pool, 2018). The nature of qualitative research requires the use of reflexivity as a researcher becomes immersed in the data (Birks et al., 2008). Since immersion into the data occurred, reflexivity was conducted throughout the research process.

Reflexivity, however, has several limitations. For example, researchers are not expected to control their emotions and completely detach from their research as such detachment may in some cases incumber a study (Van der Riet, 2012, cited in Palaganas et al., 2017). It is also difficult for researchers to refrain from influencing their participants and vice versa (Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009). Nevertheless, the reflexivity process acknowledges that the researcher's interpretation of the data inevitably affects a study's findings (Jootun et al., 2009). Reflexivity can be a positive process, especially when researchers acknowledge that it should be a part of their study (Palaganas et al., 2017). For this study, the bricoleur – being a journalism student – consistently questioned the assumptions made during data collection, and data analysis and interpretation, because the need to defend the three journalists, McCammond, Dentlinger, and Morgan, was present during the research process. The subjective role and potential bias of the researcher was questioned using memoing and the aid of a reflexive journal to record thoughts, reflections, and interpretations regarding the gathered literature and collected data.

Memoing is the taking of notes (Babbie, 2008, 2021) that enables researchers to immerse themselves in the material to a greater degree than would otherwise be possible (Birks et al., 2008). There are many ways in which memoing enhances a qualitative study, namely documenting the progression of a study, extracting meaning from textual data, and keeping track of how the subjective interpretation of the researcher influences the data (Birks et al., 2008). The latter refers to reflexivity.

In accordance with reflexivity, it is also vital to use iteration, specifically in a reflexive manner,

which requires repeatedly re-examining data and linking it to emerging themes or insights which will help the researcher's focus and will enhance their understanding of the data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Qualitative data analysis, especially, is an iterative process (Miles et al., 1994). It is good to interrupt the coding process of data analysis to make notes (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019), so iteration was conducted using memos. Iterative reflexivity was applied throughout the entire research process, as the researcher frequently paused the research process to reflect on inner thoughts and insights. Iteration was also used as part of reflexive thematic analysis, which, according to Braun and Clarke (2019) involves the researcher constantly questioning their assumptions made during data analysis and interpretation.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Ethics include the concerns pertaining to the correct way to conduct research and how to maintain morality whilst doing so (Neuman, 2007, 2014). Bias – not subjective interpretation – is an unethical practice in research (Kumar, 2011, 2019). Researchers who are incapable of controlling their biases, should avoid conducting a study (Kumar, 2011, 2019). Bias in this study was reduced through reflexivity, using pre-existing theories and literature to guide data collection and analysis. An expert in research and communication was also approached to review the final report. Quotes from collected tweets were also provided to emphasise the voices of the users and minimise the researcher's own opinions.

Another ethical practice taken into consideration was one provided by Maree (2020), which states that researchers must be sympathetic when collecting data if the research topic is sensitive. Cancel culture often deals with sensitive subjects such as race and gender (Furedi, 2020). The three cancellation scenarios in the study all dealt with an element of racism, while some of them involved gender, sexuality, and debates about mental health. The researcher conducted the study in a respectful manner and analysed the data as objectively as possible.

Consent is also an important ethical aspect to consider and must be obtained, not only from participants, but also from relevant parties at a student researcher's campus after the research proposal has been reviewed (Creswell, 2009). The research did not involve participants, but the study's proposal was submitted for an ethical review and ethical clearance was then requested and procured from the university of IIEMSA before any data was collected. The granted ethical clearance is attached as an addendum. The final report was submitted on an online university platform, called 'TurnItIn' to detect and fix any plagiarism in the document.

In terms of participant consent, partakers should be aware of what a study entails (Kumar,

2011, 2019) and their input should always be voluntary (Maree, 2020; Neuman, 2007, 2014). However, no consent was needed for this study as data was gathered from two public platforms, namely tweets from Twitter, and online articles from mainstream media sites on Google. However, the researcher did take the South African Protection of Personal Information Act into consideration to respect users' privacy by conserving their anonymity and confidentiality as much as possible, as explained below.

Anonymity protocols are vital ethical considerations (Maree, 2020), but true anonymity, where no personal identity markers are presented to identify an individual (Donath, 1999), is difficult to maintain online (Van der Nagel, 2017, cited in Gerrard, 2021). Social media platforms, like Twitter, allow users to use pseudonyms or set their accounts to 'private' so that only an approved list of followers can view their posts (Gerrard, 2021).

When it comes to privacy, people can post about private matters publicly on social media sites (Nguyen et al., 2020). Users also allow Twitter to store and process some private information by agreeing to the platform's terms of service (Twitter, 2022g). Despite the collected tweets posted in a public manner, the researcher could not identify the users behind the collected tweets, as some appeared to have used pseudonyms, and their identities were not deliberately pursued. Anonymity was thus only partially maintained.

Anonymity is a form of confidentiality (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015) which involves making sure that a source cannot be identified (Kumar, 2011, 2019), by keeping all identity markers hidden from everyone but the study's researchers (Saunders et al., 2015). For the sake of confidentiality, the research report does not display or mention the names of users – whether as pseudonyms or not – unless they were public figures, some of which included journalists, people associated with journalists, billionaires, comedians, and Twitch streamers, most of whom were discussed in the literature review, such as Elon Musk and Khoi Dao.

Another component to carefully consider in terms of research and ethics is a study's setting, of which the characteristics and proceedings need to be submitted for an ethical review before data collection can take place (Majid, 2018). Considering a study setting beforehand allows the researcher to determine any potential challenges or limitations that may occur as well as respective solutions that can be applied (Majid, 2018). Study locations for medical research, for example, include patient rooms, operating theatres, and rehabilitation clinics (Majid, 2018). Researchers also need to respect these study sites and be cognisant of how they might disturb the space (Creswell, 2009). The setting for this study, however, consisted of the internet,

specifically Twitter and newspaper- and magazine sites where tweets and articles were collected from. No physical settings were thus disturbed.

4.7 Conclusion

Qualitative content analysis was used in a directed and summative manner, with the aid of a conceptual framework, to collect 45 online newspaper- and magazine articles and approximately 330 tweets as data- and theoretical saturation had permitted. Six steps of thematic analysis were then followed to analyse the collected data. Abductive coding was used to deductively detect any pre-existing or *a priori* codes or concepts in the data and inductively determine any emerging or *in vivo* codes afterward. The raw data was summarised, and timelines were drawn of the cancellation process for each cancellation case. Two cycles of coding took place during the six steps, with the help of line-by-line open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, to divide the data into codes, code categories, and abstract themes to answer the research questions.

Analysis and interpretation yielded one main theme, i.e., wokeness, which was determined to be the core theme that had a hand in all other elements of cancel culture. Six subthemes were determined, including the inciting incidents surrounding controversial topics which is the concept that started the cancellation processes and was followed up with decontextualisation through social contagion and confirmation bias. Call-outs contained demands made by accusers, as well as practices of naming and shaming. The journalists responded to such call-outs in six typical ways. Cancellations included the cancellation of two journalists and the cancellation of people or organisations associated with all three journalists. Public support was provided by Twitter users, public figures, friends, former interviewees and colleagues, and a news organisation throughout the cancellation cases. Recoveries were obtained through employment, debunking of decontextualised evidence against the journalists, and the formal dismissal of complaints.

In terms of trustworthiness, four dimensions were considered, namely dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. The ethical considerations consisted of sympathetic approaches, bias reduction, consent attainment, maintaining confidentiality, partially ensuring anonymity, and considering the setting of the study.

Chapter 5 outlines the findings, brought on by analysis and interpretation, that answer the primary question and three secondary questions. Limitations and recommendations are also elaborated on.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Incidents of public shaming and punishment have always existed (Mishan, 2020), but contemporary forms of such punishment have caused individuals, such as journalists, to experience financial or social loss (Cook et al., 2021) because of actual or alleged transgressions (Trottier 2020). Twitter is the platform that primarily drives such a culture of punishment, i.e., cancel culture (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of cancel culture and how it both influences journalists and how it is influenced by journalists and other in the mainstream media, by collecting and analysing tweets and online articles. Data from three case studies, involving journalists Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan, was analysed, and interpreted to achieve this purpose by answering one primary question and three secondary questions.

Text from Twitter and online newspaper- and magazine articles were fractured, deconstructed, and reconstructed whilst the bricoleur was immersed in the data to compile pieces of information to form one big story, following the notion of bricolage. This final chapter of the research report highlights the findings, that resulted from the bricolage process, that answer the research questions. Some challenges almost hindered the research process, and details are provided regarding such limitations, along with respective solutions. Recommendations are also made to other researchers for further studies on similar or related topics.

5.2 Findings

The data analysis and interpretation led to the finding of one main theme, namely wokeness, and six subthemes, namely inciting incident, decontextualisation, call-outs, cancellation, public support, and recovery, that answered the primary and secondary research questions and contributed to the purpose of the study. Wokeness, however, played a central and essential role in all other themes.

5.2.1 Primary research question 1

What is the nature of cancel culture, as portrayed in Twitter tweets and online articles regarding journalists Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan?

The main theme, wokeness, and all the determined subthemes, answer this research question. Figure 5.1 has been constructed to show a summarised version of the cancel culture

phenomenon. Inciting incidents, laced with woke topics, occur, and can be decontextualised through contagion and confirmation bias. Call-outs ensue, and cancellation tends to follow (Cook et al., 2021). Public support and recovery from cancellation were also found to be permanent pillars of cancel culture. However, it was discovered that some of these phases, like decontextualisation, call-outs, and public support, can arise at any time. Two inciting incidents, mainly the ones involving Morgan and Dentlinger, were decontextualised, but new developments throughout the cancellation process were also misinterpreted. Call-outs in McCammond's case occurred in 2019 and again in 2021, while her inciting incident occurred in 2011 (Ritschel, 2021). Call-outs can thus take place years after an inciting incident had occurred and can arise more than once, starting the whole process over again. Some call-outs also transpired after the journalists had recovered from cancellation. Public support occurred throughout the cancellation process after call-outs had begun.

One of the phases that is at a fixed position on a timeline is the occurrence of an inciting incident, because it was determined that a cancellation process cannot take place if there is no incident that provides the desire for cancellation. Cancellation usually ensues after call-outs (Cook et al., 2021), because it is the result of call-outs. Recovery was found to transpire any time after cancellation has happened, because if there is no cancellation, then there is nothing to recover from. These fixed positions are represented by stars in Figure 5.1. All the elements in between can occur simultaneously with the fixed elements or with one another and can also occur iteratively. Cancel culture is thus a semi-linear phenomenon with clear beginnings, but no permanent ends in sight, with the implication that a flare-up and resurgence of the cancel culture process could happen at any time.

5.2.1.1 Inciting incident

It was determined that a journalist must first say, do, or post something that offends (Chiou, 2020; Norris, 2021; Sossi, 2021) specific identity politics groups, or involves controversial topics surrounding immutable characteristics (Ng, 2020) such as race, gender, sexuality, or mental illness, to start the chain of cancel culture events and become a target of the culture. Their words or actions must thus be seen as being offensive, especially if it consists of supposed or actual racism, sexism, homophobia, and judgement of the mentally ill. However, discussions surrounding the racial matters of cases were more prevalent than any other, showing that race is deemed as a more important innate trait in cancel culture than any other attribute, which corroborates Kaufmann's (2020) claim that race is at the top of the social hierarchy of identity

traits and victim groups.

The offensive words or actions of the journalists could be old, like in the McCammond case where the controversy surrounded tweets that were posted over a decade ago (Ritschel, 2021), or it could be more recent, like the actions of Dentlinger (Pijoos, 2021) and Morgan (Kilkenny, 2021). It was also discovered that the incident could have occurred on social media, like McCammond's old tweets, or outside of social media, like Dentlinger's interviews and Morgan's comments on the GMB show.

5.2.1.2 Decontextualisation

Decontextualisation involves taking something out of context (American Psychology Association, 2021; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), is a steadfast rule of cancel culture (Zille, 2021b), and was given occurrence in the three cancellation cases through contagion and confirmation bias. For decontextualisation, call-outs and cancellation to occur, vigilantes must first be exposed to inciting incidents, however it was determined that instances of decontextualisation and call-outs could occur simultaneously. Even though some instances of decontextualisation and call-outs were intrinsically linked, decontextualisation is seen as a separate element in this study, because the decontextualisation of the inciting incidents is what led to the start of call-outs in the Morgan and Dentlinger cases. Another reason is that not all collected call-outs showed evidence of decontextualisation, and McCammond's call-outs derived from an inciting incident that was not decontextualised.

It was found that exposure was typically done through the tweeting of the incidents. Exposure drives social contagion (Piedrahita et al., 2018) as increased exposure causes an increase in contagion (Hodas & Lerman, 2014). Vigilantes were exposed to the incidents, decontextualised some of the incidents, and tweeted or retweeted it as part of call-outs, exposing it to others, who in turn tweeted it to more users, eventually causing the incidents to go viral. This virality increased social contagion where people emulate each other's attitudes or behaviours (Le Bon, 1895; Mendoza & King, 2020), as evident by the fact that Twitter users elicited similar call-out behaviours and wrote the same words, phrases, and hashtags in their posts. Users' similar beliefs, however, could also portray the phenomenon of homophily (Burgess et al., 2018; Ling, 2020) where vigilantes displayed similar behaviours because they possessed similar ways of thinking. Virality, through hashtags and increased user participation (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021; Piedrahita et al., 2018), could also be driven by the controversial topics (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021; Kim, 2015) of race, gender, sexuality, and mental health or illness.

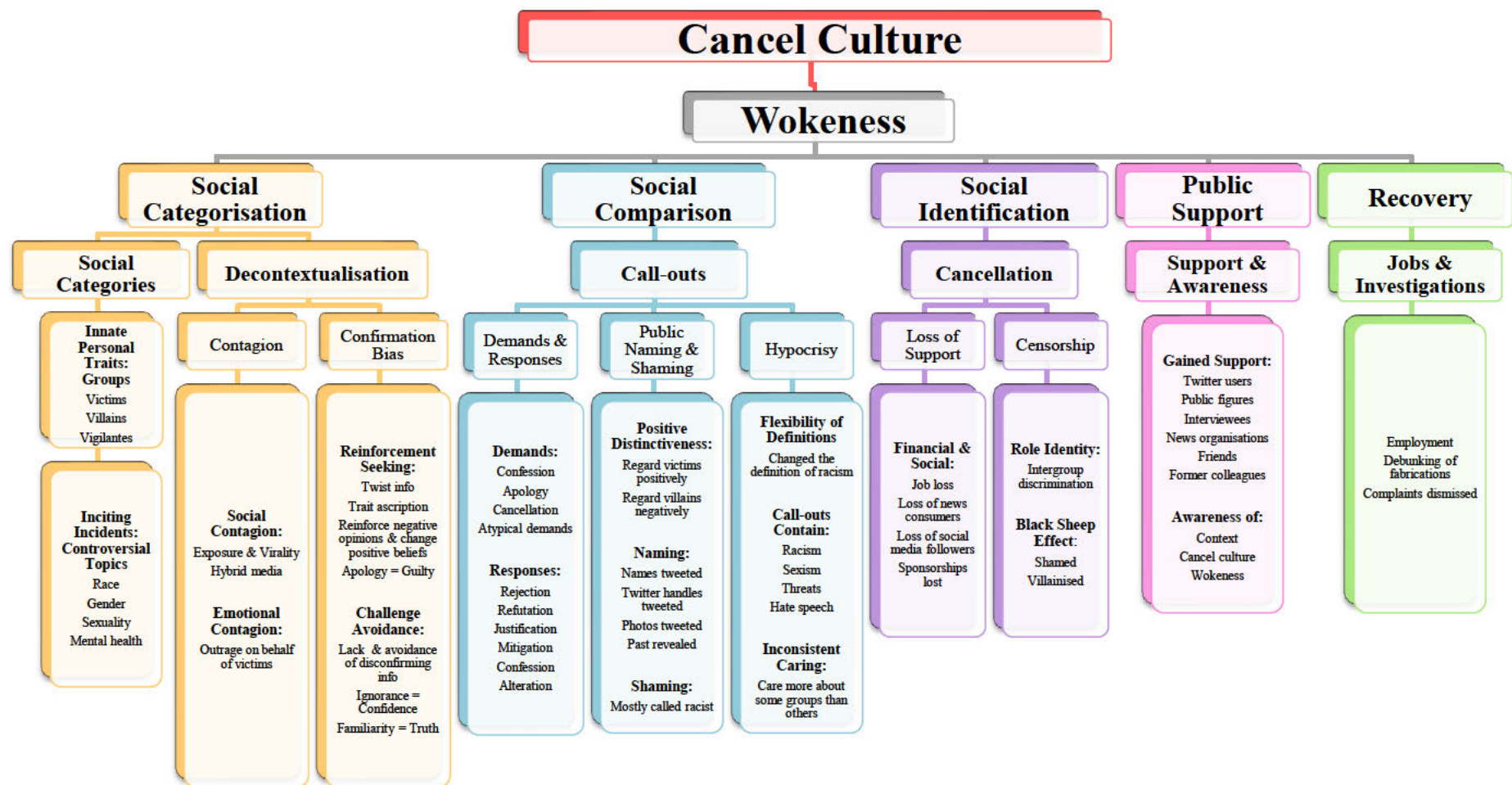


Figure 5.1 – The nature of cancel culture involving journalists

The data showed that the ‘hybrid media’ (Chadwick 2013, cited in Milas et al., 2021) also picked up the Twitter chatter, wrote articles about the incidents and users’ responses to it, then posted links to those articles on their Twitter feeds. However, some of the collected articles were retweeted by users and those articles did not contain all the contextual information of the cases, which means that users could have decontextualised the cases by not having all the necessary information. The motivation behind the media’s reporting on inciting incidents could be financial, as they tend to profit from stories containing controversial topics (Christensen et al., 2021; Lobell, 2021; Van Heerden, 2021). The inciting incidents were thus brought to more people’s attention through Twitter, with the help of users and the hybrid media. However, emotional contagion could also have contributed to the virality of the incidents.

When it comes to emotional contagion, users decontextualised the controversial incidents and any further developments because the outrage they felt from it seemed to guide their thinking more than rational thought did. Virality could also have been caused by the anger that users felt (Berger and Milkman, 2013 & Nelson-Field et al., 2013). And it was determined that this outrage was felt on behalf of the direct victims and the victim groups, regardless of whether the vigilantes belonged to those groups, as, according to Kramer et al. (2014) and Herrando and Constantinides (2021), emotional contagion can occur by merely witnessing something. It was not possible, however, to determine whether vigilantes’ outrage was real or fake.

Decontextualisation was also facilitated by confirmation bias in two ways, namely reinforcement seeking and challenge avoidance, which was defined by Festinger, 1957 (cited in Brugnoli et al., 2019). With reinforcement seeking, users tended to focus on information or innate personal traits, as part of Peters’ (2022) trait ascription, that reinforced the negative opinions they already had about the journalists or their news organisations. Vigilantes also twisted or decontextualised information to match their beliefs, and any offered apologies were seen as evidence of culpability (Nkanjeni, 2021). Although negative bias can change with an exposure to disconfirming info (Dibbets & Meesters (2022), the only times Twitter users’ opinions about villains changed with the provision of disconfirming information, was when the information showed the villains in a negative light, which changed the vigilantes’ opinions from positive to negative.

With challenge avoidance, some people seemed to ignore or disbelieve disconfirming information (Festinger, 1957, cited in Brugnoli et al., 2019) and posted their opinions without any forethought (Ott, 2017). It was discovered that, when journalists were dismissed of any

misconduct, some users were reluctant to change their negative opinions about the villains. Vigilantes thus also struggled to distinguish between familiarity and truth, as expressed by Dechêne et al. (2010), believing that the journalists were guilty of wrongdoing, because that was the narrative for most of the cancel culture process before two of the journalists – Dentlinger and Morgan – were proclaimed to be innocent by companies that launched official investigations into their cases. Lewandowsky et al (2012) claimed that it is difficult to disprove lies that have been repeated.

The collected online articles proved that news outlets also neglected to provide the vigilantes with all the facts of the cases, contributing to the ignorance of disconfirming information. Users also claimed that cancel culture was not real, and that they were only asking for justice to be served. This concurs with information in the literature about the contradictory beliefs that people have about cancel culture, as some claim that it is merely people rightly asking for justice and accountability (Chiou, 2020; Willingham, 2021). Users, who posted the collected tweets, were thus dismissing any information that contradicted the way they viewed their own call-out behaviour. The collected data showed that confidence levels also arose with ignorance amongst Twitter users, as part of the Dunning Kruger effect (Fritz, 2019; Dunning, 2011), which caused users to assign a guilty verdict to journalists without knowing all the details of the cases, proving that once someone is deemed guilty in the court of public opinion, then there is no appeal (Sossi, 2021).

5.2.1.3 Call-outs

Through data collection, analysis, and interpretation, it was determined that call-outs can occur any time after incidents are posted, when vigilantes call journalists out on their supposed offensive behaviour and provide a list of demands. Twitter allows ordinary citizens to express their opinions (Anderson-Lopez et al., 2021) on such matters and affect the trajectory of a journalist's life or career. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation helped determine that the journalists responded to their scandals once call-outs started, and the call-outs contained demands for confession, apology, cancellation, and atypical demands. The journalists or their news organisations responded through rejection, refutation, justification, mitigation, confession, and alteration, which are actions listed by Groenhart and Bardoel (2011, cited in Cheruiyot, 2022). However, it was gleaned from the data, that not every journalist responded in each of these ways.

With the use of collected tweets, users demanded that the journalists or their respective

employers confess to wrongdoing and that they apologise, not only to the direct victims, but the indirect ones as well. This shows that journalists and their employers can suffer digital criticism (Cheruiyot, 2022). The data showed that indirect vigilantes, such as the news outlets that direct villains work for, can also want their journalists to apologise. Demanding an apology seems to be a rule of cancel culture (Mueller, 2021), however, not every journalist provided one. The two journalists who did apologise (McCammond and Dentlinger), offered apologies to entire victim groups, not just to direct victims. Call-outs pressured McCammond to apologise on two separate occasions that were two years apart, which proves that call-outs, surrounding the same incident, can occur on more than one occasion. Two journalists – Morgan and McCammond – resigned from their jobs, and two – Morgan and Dentlinger – responded by being interviewed about the scandals. Dentlinger seemed to have deleted her twitter account or changed the name of her Twitter handle. Morgan and Dentlinger also defended themselves, made excuses, and threw accusations at their criticisers.

The collected tweets indicated that, when a journalist or their organisation did apologise, users tended to be dissatisfied with the apology. Most likely because they wanted to express their discontent to increase their own online popularity (Rambukkana, 2015, cited in Bouvier, 2020; Roos, 2020, cited in Sailofsky, 2021), or because they did not believe the apologies to be genuine or helpful, as some tweets suggested. Users also called for penalties to be enforced (Cook et al., 2021; Matei, 2019) such as unemployment, suspension, or censorship. The collected data in Dentlinger's case showed how vigilantes demanded that the journalist's news outlet take its staff for sensitivity training, which is an atypical request compared to the other demands that were more frequent. All atypical call-outs were deduced from the collected tweets and articles, with some demands venturing beyond Twitter or being done in a more formal manner, such as petitions, protests, and formal complaints.

Vigilantes also named and shamed the wrongdoers (Favarel-Garrigues et al., 2020) as a form of call-out. The data portrayed how journalists' names, photos, and Twitter handles were tweeted around, along with calls to digitally boycott or shame the mainstream media personalities. It was also inductively determined that the past actions of journalists and their associates were also posted online during call-outs. Some of the public naming and shaming, coincided with the social contagion process, showing that it could occur with elements driven by decontextualisation. It was discovered that the journalists' past negative actions were seen as more reasons to condemn them, and it was used to confirm vigilantes' negative opinions about the journalists or their news organisations, which is decontextualisation in the form of

confirmation bias. Shaming included labelling journalists according to the innate personal traits involved in the cases, as stated by Zille (2021a). Each case, for example, had to do with race, so each journalist was called a racist. The villains were also called names that could border on hate speech, which illuminated the hypocrisy of the vigilantes.

It was deduced that hypocritical elements in the three cases consisted of the altering of definitions or the breaking of rules that vigilantes had invoked, just like the pigs in Orwell's (1946) novella, as Twitter users seemed to change the definition of racism to fit their beliefs, declaring who can be racist and who cannot. Vigilantes also expressed, in collected tweets, that it is abhorrent to engage in acts of racism and sexism, for example, whilst they made generalisations about Morgan and Dentlinger's races and Morgan's gender. Cancel culture enforcers condemned deplorable acts but displayed hypocrisy by sending threats of violence to one of the journalists, as the data showed that Dentlinger, for example, had received rape threats from vigilantes. The vigilantes thus seemed to believe that their deplorable and hypocritical actions were morally justifiable, emphasising the Orwell (1946: 68) adage of "All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others."

5.2.1.4 Cancellation

The literature claimed that loss of support (Brito, 2021; Chiou, 2020; Nakkab, 2020; Ng, 2020), censorship (Brito, 2021; Tufekci 2018, cited in Cook et al., 2021), and ostracism (Norris, 2020a, 2021; Sage, 2022) are used to cancel public figures, but data collection and analysis yielded that no journalists fully and formally experienced the latter two forms of cancellation, despite users demands for censorship. The collected tweets claimed that social media users did block eNCA on Twitter, but it was not an official act of censorship as the outlet was not completely censored or banned by the Twitter platform and could still post content to other users. This loss of followers was classified as a loss of support. Dentlinger's Twitter account was nowhere to be found, so if she had deleted it, then she had censored herself in that regard. In terms of ostracism, tweets expressed how some users revered McCammond as a betrayer of her ingroup, but there were no collected tweets that called for her to be socially exiled from that group, despite the black sheep effect claiming that groups tend to deviate from a betrayer (Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Steain et al., 2019). The data showed that indirect villains were also portrayed as betrayers of the victim groups but experienced no ostracism.

A loss of support, expressed by Brito (2021), Chiou (2020), Nakkab (2020) and Ng (2020), however, occurred in all three cases, as both direct and indirect villains had suffered a loss. The

data portrayed how two villains (Morgan and McCammond) lost their employment, and indirect villains lost their sponsorships, readers, viewers, and social media followers, which in turn could have indirectly affected any journalists that still worked for the news organisations. Morgan and McCammond had lost their jobs, both through conscious resignation, but it could be argued that they were pressured to do so by vigilantes and their employers, or that resignation was just the word that was used publicly to mask their firing, as their employers deviated from them as a form of Lewis' (2020) woke capitalism. Dentlinger, who was the only journalist who was supported by her news outlet (Pijoos, 2021), did not experience direct cancellation in the form of job loss, according to the collected data, which shows that journalists' cancellation is also greatly affected by the choices made by their employers. It shows that regardless of what actions the journalists took during the cancel culture process, their ultimate loss of support – through unemployment – is entirely dependent on their news outlets, not by those who called them out.

Some collected tweets claimed that Morgan's actions, in response to his inciting incident, were what led to his job loss. Since the data analysis made it clear that his responses were drastically different from that of the other two journalists, it could be argued that he had gotten himself cancelled to some extent. Call-outs, however, still contributed, as it could have pressured his employers to either fire him or easily accept his resignation.

Cancellations occurred despite the data illustrating that some journalists, namely Morgan and Dentlinger, were exonerated from any wrongdoing, which shows that vigilantes target both real and perceived offences, proving Trottier's (2020) claim. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation helped discover that cancellations can be complete, partial, or self-inflicted, irrespective of whether cancellation is warranted or not.

5.2.1.5 Public support

The literature mentioned the support that two journalists had received, namely Morgan, who was publicly supported by his friend Sharon Osbourne (Kilkenny, 2021; Pineda, 2021), and Dentlinger, who was defended by her news organisation eNCA (Pijoos, 2021).

Despite a loss of support, the collected data showed that journalists and their associates gained support from Twitter users, public figures, former interviewees, and former colleagues, all of whom were either strangers or people who have encountered the journalists before. The public supporters also showed that they were aware of the cancel culture phenomenon and the wokeness and decontextualisation that tends to accompany it and showed discontent for how

it had affected the journalists.

5.2.1.6 Recovery

Despite cancellations taking place, the data showed that the journalists recovered from their battle with cancel culture by getting employed, having the misinterpretations of their incidents debunked, or having the claims against them officially dismissed. In Morgan's case, however, recovery occurred almost a year after cancellation. It was discovered, during data collection and analysis, that some users engaged in a new set of call-outs and still tried to pursue cancellation efforts after journalists' recoveries were made public, while others showed their support by celebrating the journalists' triumphant returns. This shows that recovery is merely a temporary reprieve from cancel culture experiences, as call-outs can occur again when a journalist's recovery is made public.

5.2.2 Secondary research question 1

What role did wokeness or wokeism play in the cancellation of Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan?

Figure 5.1 illustrates woke elements present in the collected data, as wokeness is the core that lies behind all the other aspects of Twitter's cancel culture, according to Beiner (2020, cited in Velasco, 2020). Wokeism and woke aspects of Orwell's (1946) *Animal Farm*, was present in the three common steps of social identity formation, namely social categorisation, social comparison, and social identification, that influenced the cancel culture process of the three journalists. In the three cancellation cases, it was discovered that cancel culture and woke topics centred around innate personal traits, as proposed by Kaufmann (2020), emphasising Furedi (2020) and Younge's (2019) notion of identity politics, specifically race, gender, sexuality, and mental health.

As mentioned before, wokeness entails that people use such traits to categorise individuals into groups of victims and villains (Zille, 2021a), just like the pigs in Orwell's (1946) novella had done. However, it was established, through data analysis and interpretation, that there are technically three groups of people in the cancel culture process, namely victims, villains, and vigilantes.

Through data analysis, it was determined that the direct victims represented the supposedly victimised individuals who were directly involved in the journalists' inciting incidents, while the indirect victims were those who had the same innate traits as the direct victims. The tweets

showed that users also identified with some of the victims or victim groups, which reiterates Zille's (2021a) claim that cancel culture enforcers can also be a part of the victim groups. In McCammond's case, the direct victim was the Asian individual mentioned in her tweet, but she had other tweets mentioning Asian stereotypes and homosexuality, so the indirect victims were all individuals of the Asian race and the LGBTQ community. In Dentlinger's case, the scandal involved two black politicians, Hlengwa and Kwankwa, who were classified as the direct victims, along with all black South-Africans who were seen as the indirect victims. In Morgan's case the direct victim was a female mixed-race royal (Meghan Markle) who claimed to have struggled with mental health at one point, so the indirect victims were women, the mentally ill, black women, and the entire black race, as well as Alex Beresford who claimed to have experienced online racism after publicly debating Morgan about his inciting incident. The data thus supports the claim that social identity can be ascribed based on innate traits (Taylor, 1989, cited in Demirden, 2021) in the case of the indirect victims.

The data portrayed that the direct villains consisted of the three journalists, McCammond, Dentlinger, and Morgan, while the indirect villains were their supporters, and anyone else who was affiliated with them, corroborating Bouvier's (2020) claim that those surrounding the targets of cancel culture can also be targeted. The social identity of the direct villains was thus attained through the actions of the journalists – through their inciting incidents – instead of their innate traits. This reiterates the notion that social identity can be ascribed based on actions (Taylor, 1989, cited in Demirden, 2021), in the case of the direct and indirect villains. The categorisation processes thus show that the social identities of direct and indirect villains were based on the inciting incidents of the direct villains, while the indirect victims' identities were based on the innate personal traits that they shared with the direct victims. While the identity of the indirect villain groups was not necessarily determined by innate traits, the data showed that generalisations were still made about Dentlinger's perceived race, and Morgan's race and gender.

The direct vigilantes consisted of Twitter users and other individuals who called the journalists out, some of whom possessed similar traits to the victim groups. Journalists and other mainstream media entities were indirect vigilantes as they aided in the villains' cancellations by perpetuating aspects of cancel culture either in the past or during the cancellation cases, and by morally allying themselves with the victim groups (Lewis, 2020) and deviating from the direct villains as part of woke capitalism (Lewis, 2020; Saint-Louis, 2021). The data showed that some villains or vigilantes were seen as victims, such as McCammond, while some villains

(also McCammond) engaged in acts of vigilantism. All three groups were thus intrinsically linked with no fixed boundaries between them.

The categorisation of people into groups, lead to group comparisons, that caused group members to view the victim ingroups positively and outgroups negatively; a phenomenon known as positive distinctiveness (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Vigilantes regarded victim ingroups positively, and the villainous outgroups negatively, which corroborates claims made by Zille (2021a). Sometimes negativity was directed toward the villains, not just because of their actions, but because of their immutable characteristics, like race and gender. However, one journalist – McCammond – was regarded positively by some users because, despite being a villain, she possessed the traits of a broader victim group, i.e., the group consisting of all people of colour.

Instead of corroborating Mishan's (2020) claim that cancellors do not want to identify with the villain groups, the data corroborated the notion that individuals would try to protect their own identity by maintaining a positive image of their group (Martiny & Rubin, 2016) because a threat to their group is a threat to their own self-image (Islam, 2014; Smith, 1999). This displayed Kaufmann's (2020) notion of inconsistent caring amongst vigilantes, as the collected tweets showed how users debated which racial group was the true victim in McCammond's case. The data indicated that vigilantes also tended to care more about some victim groups than others. For example, more attention was directed toward race, than gender, sexuality, or mental health.

Role identities were also determined from the data, with vigilantes and some indirect villains taking on the role of defenders, supporting the direct and indirect victims. This concurs with the claims about cancellors being activists that fight social injustices (Chiou, 2020), to help society's most vulnerable populations (Bérubé, 2018). The direct vigilantes also played judge and jury; judging who the victims and villains were and declaring a guilty verdict on the villains. The executioners, or punishers, however, were those that aided in the cancellation of two villains (Morgan and McCammond), such as the news outlets (GMB, Teen Vogue, and Condé Nast) that contributed to their journalists' resignation. Only one news organisation – eNCA – supported its journalist, landing it in the role of defender: just not the defender of any victim group. Two of the journalists, Dentlinger and McCammond, took on the roles of wrongdoer and apologist, by admitting fault and apologising.

In terms of Martiny and Rubin's (2016) idea of intergroup discrimination led by positive

ingroup bias, there was no clear discrimination displayed by the data, but users and villains insinuated that there was, specifically pertaining to race and gender. Negativity and generalisations were also directed toward a gender group (the male gender) and racial group (the Caucasian race). The villain who was a person of colour, McCammond, did not have negative comments made about her racial- or gender group, but was criticised as an individual.

Individuals, who formed part of victim groups can be criticised for betraying that victim group, as part of Marques and Yzerbyt's (1988) black sheep effect. According to collected tweets, McCammond is an ingroup member of the broader victim group of people of colour, who had betrayed that group. Those who supported the journalists, and were a part of the supposed victim groups, were also shamed. Other users who are a part of the victim groups seemed to believe that their similar traits to those groups uniquely qualified them to give their opinions on the situations and either defend or denounce the journalists. Some users mentioned their own personal traits in their tweets, emphasising that people add traits of identity politics to their social media bios and activity, as stated by Rogers and Jones (2021).

Victims were thus determined by looking at who was directly affected by the inciting incidents, and wokeness was used to then determine who the indirect victim groups were, based on the innate characteristics of the direct victims. The villains were determined by looking at who had caused the inciting incidents and who was associated with them. Wokeness also contributed to the decontextualisation of some aspects of the three cases, mostly through confirmation bias, which helped vigilantes to justify the call-outs and cancellations that had occurred. Wokeness thus helped determine who needed to be defended and who needed to be cancelled based on the social identity groups that individuals belonged to.

5.2.3 Secondary research question 2

How was Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan cancelled as a result of Twitter call-outs?

Call-outs were determined to involve three main criteria, namely public naming and shaming (Favarel-Garrigues et al., 2020), demands and responses, and hypocrisy. There was no linear timeline of the three criteria, as all three occurred simultaneously during call-outs. Public naming and shaming seemed to have caused news organisations to experience a loss of support, but call-outs involving demands for cancellation, and the atypical demands, seemed to have been what also incited instances of cancellation.

The literature review explained that call-outs lead to cancellation that involves ostracism (Norris, 2020a, 2021; Sage, 2022), censorship (Brito, 2021; Tufekci 2018, cited in Cook et al., 2021), and a loss of support (Brito, 2021; Chiou, 2020; Nakkab, 2020; Ng, 2020). Ostracism was not apparent in any cancellation case. McCammond was condemned for being a person of colour who had tweeted derogatory comments about another group of colour, essentially betraying that ethnic community, but vigilantes did not call for her to be extricated from any group. Indirect vigilantes, such as the DA and Morgan's supporters, were also labelled as betrayers but did not experience any ostracism.

The only journalist that may have experienced some form of censorship was Dentlinger, who either changed or deleted her Twitter account, so the censorship was her own doing. Her network, eNCA, was also blocked by some users on Twitter, indirectly affecting the journalist since she works for them, but the outlet was still able to tweet to other followers. Dentlinger experienced no censorship anywhere else as she was still able to be interviewed on a news network about the controversy that she was involved in. Official censorship, through temporary or permanent social media ban, as expressed by Rogers (2020), thus did not occur.

The call-outs contributed to McCammond resigning from her job (Rutz, 2021), as the pressure from the call-outs made the parent company of her magazine declare that it was best for them to deviate from her. Call-outs that publicly named McCammond and expressed her infractions, made Teen Vogue lose sponsorships, which was another reason for the company to part ways with McCammond. Dentlinger's cancellation was more indirect, as she maintained her employment, but her news outlet lost viewers and social media followers, which in turn could have led to financial loss for the journalist. The public naming and shaming of eNCA's journalists thus affected the news outlet. Morgan's resignation was either the result of call-outs that also pressured his employers, or it was because of the behaviour he displayed throughout the entire cancellation process. Dentlinger was the only one who received support from her news organisation (Pijoos, 2021), while both McCammond and Morgan experienced a lack of support from their employers. Teen Vogue, eNCA, and GMB lost readers or viewers, which was an indirect loss for each of the three journalists. Social and financial losses, as mentioned in the literature review, by Brito (2021) and Ng (2020), were thus present in each case.

News organisations' loss of support – through a loss of news consumers, social media followers, and sponsorships – was thus mostly caused by the public naming and shaming of the journalists and their companies. However, journalists' loss of support – through job loss –

was mostly caused by demands that included calls for their cancellation.

5.2.4 Secondary research question 3

How did Alexi McCammond, Lindsay Dentlinger, and Piers Morgan contribute to their own cancellation?

Each contributed firstly with their inciting incidents, even though some of the incidents may have been taken out of context. McCammond tweeted about Asian and homosexual people when she was a teenager (Breuninger, 2021), Dentlinger interviewed politicians in a controversial manner (Pijoos, 2021), and Morgan made public remarks about a former member of the British royal family (Kilkenny, 2021).

Six of Groenhart and Bardoel's (2011, cited in Cheruiyot, 2022) seven typical responses that journalists make toward digital criticism, seemed to be present in the data, namely rejection, refutation, justification, mitigation, confession, and alteration. However, not all were done by each of the three journalists. The data portrayed how McCammond did not seem to have done anything controversial after the incident, as she catered to the demands of the vigilantes; she resigned from her position at Teen Vogue (Rutz, 2021) and apologised several times. Although apologies were demanded by some users, as expressed by Mueller (2021), others declared that apologising was not enough to right her wrong. Thus, even when a journalist accommodates the needs of cancel culture enforcers, such as apologising, they can still get cancelled.

Dentlinger did not resign as vigilantes wanted her to, but she did apologise (Seleka, 2021) to the politicians she had interviewed as well as anyone who might have been hurt by her inciting incident. However, she followed her apology up with defences and accusations, saying that people were calling her racist because they assumed that she was white, which caused some users to believe that her apology was disingenuous. Unlike the news outlets in the other cases, eNCA did not deviate from their journalist, even though the news network was impacted by her scandal. In Chapter 3, it was mentioned that qualitative researchers need to look for a negative case that does not fit certain reoccurring patterns (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to gain unique insights into the phenomenon being studied (Abrams, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Dentlinger's case is the negative case that proves that whether a journalist follows the requirements of vigilantes or not, their cancellation is ultimately influenced by the decisions of their employers or news organisations.

Unlike the other two journalists, Morgan refused to apologise and continued to regurgitate his

opinions about the Markle-Oprah interview on both Twitter (Hendricks, 2021) and during an interview on Fox News. He also walked off the Good Morning Britain set after arguing with a guest and later resigned from his job. It could thus be said that his actions might have significantly contributed to his own cancellation.

5.3 Recommendations

This study was a basic research study, which according to Neuman (2007, 2014), lacks a practical application, but can provide a basis for other studies to work from. The study can thus be used for future studies, but a few recommendations are still provided.

It is recommended that researchers, who want to collect tweets for a study on cancel culture, also interview the users behind the tweets to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological phenomena that drive Twitter call-outs. However, as expressed in Chapter 3, converting interviews into text is a time-consuming practice (Frey et al., 1999), so qualitative researchers will need to carefully consider what time management practices should be implemented to combat this. Other studies could also include the exploration of cancellation cases that involve social media platforms other than Twitter, like Facebook or Instagram.

The findings revealed that cancellation is only temporary and that journalists tend to recover from the ordeal. It is recommended that further studies on the subject explore the topic of recovery, since it is not a largely mentioned aspect of the cancel culture process. Maybe researchers can explore cases where cancellation occurred again after recovery or if there is a connection between public support and recovery.

No clear-cut examples on ostracism and official censorship were found by investigating the cancellation of the three journalists. It is thus recommended that future studies look at journalists who have experienced such forms of punishment to see if it might be a vital and frequent form of cancellation.

Future studies on cancel culture could also try to ascertain what journalists should do differently during their cancel culture experiences, and what risk management they should apply, to possibly inoculate them from cancellation or accelerate their recovery. It was found that news organisations, along with their respective journalists, suffered a loss of support in the three cases. Other studies can thus focus more on the cancellation of news companies that is brought on by their journalists' behaviour. Research can also be conducted to determine what actions news outlets can take to prevent their own cancellation.

5.4 Limitations

Limitations are typically a few paragraphs in length, detailing the challenges of the research, that are provided before the conclusion of a study (Olufowote, 2017). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the study was conducted by a novice researcher, which is something that could potentially compromise the depth and reliability of a final report. To minimise the possibility of this occurring, the study was shown to the researcher's supervisor – who is an expert in the field of Research Studies and Communication and Media Studies – for evaluation, as part of peer debriefing.

As recommended before, it would have been better to interview Twitter users to understand the thought processes behind the collected tweets. The research was thus limited by the fact that only outputs of communication, i.e., tweets and online articles, were collected. However, the gathered theories, literature review, and conceptual framework were used as guides to gain a better understanding of the underlying contexts of the collected texts.

A computer was used during data collection to access online articles and Twitter features, search for tweets, copy desired articles, take screenshots of the desired posts, and paste it all onto Word documents. The internet connection was not always stable, so the taking and saving of screenshots and copying and pasting of articles ensured that the researcher had access to all the collected data without having to use the internet to revisit those tweets and articles.

The biggest potential limitation was the possibility of researcher bias and the resulting errors that could have occurred. The researcher has a soft spot for journalism and journalists and plans on working in the mainstream media someday. So, the need to defend McCammond, Dentlinger, and Morgan was always present during the research process. However, using reflexivity, with the aid of a reflexive journal, the researcher constantly reflected on interpretations and inner thoughts throughout the study to avoid favouritism and ensure that the three cases were looked at as objectively as possible.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of cancel culture, as it starts on Twitter, and how journalists are involved in it as the targets of the culture. Qualitative content analysis was used to collect 330 tweets and 45 newspaper- and magazine articles, while thematic analysis was used to code the data and determine one theme and six subthemes fit to answer the research questions.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that cancel culture is largely driven by wokeness and that it begins with an inciting incident, typically committed by a journalist, that contains woke controversial topics of race, gender, sexuality, or mental illness. Woke ideology helps determine which individuals involved in these incidents need to be defended and which need to be punished or cancelled. However, the groups that individuals belong to, based on their innate personal traits, are also determined to be either good or bad; victimised or villainous.

Parts of the inciting incidents, or any new developments that occur during the cancel culture process, are decontextualised, which leads to social and emotional contagion. Reinforcement seeking and challenge avoidance also cause decontextualisation. The wrongdoers, and their respective news outlets, are pursued by call-outs, which includes demands made for confession, apology, cancellation, as well as atypical requests. The vigilantes who enforce elements of cancel culture, also seem to break the rules of morality that they come up with, in the pursuit of moral justice. Their hypocritical actions thus follow Orwell's (1946: 68) philosophy of "All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others." The journalists typically respond through rejection, refutation, justification, mitigation, confession, and alteration.

The call-outs lead to complete cancellation, partial cancellation, or self-inflicted cancellation, whether punishment was justifiable or not. Cancellation of journalists – as a loss of support through unemployment – depends entirely on the reaction of their news organisation to its own loss of support; on whether they stand by their journalists or not. However, despite cancellation, journalists tend to receive public support throughout the whole process and eventually recover from their ordeals.

It was determined that cancel culture is not a fixed, linear process. Some of its elements can occur iteratively or simultaneously with others, and on more than one occasion, involving the same inciting incident. Cancel culture – and its respective Twitter call-outs – that involves journalists, is thus a seemingly endless process of wokeness.

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Addendum 1 – Themes, code categories, and codes

Theme	Code categories (D) or (I)	Journalist (J)	Codes and details of each case
Wokeness	Social categorisation: Innate personal traits (D)	J1	Race Asian race McCammond's race (mentioned by users and by herself) Users mentioned their own race Homosexuality Users mentioned their own sexuality as well "...as a gay woman..."
		J2	Race Kwankwa's race Hlengwa's race Dentlinger's race "white madams"
		J3	Race Markle's race Morgan's race Markle's gender Gender Morgan's gender Mental health Markle's mental distress Mental illness of any other individuals
		J1	Direct: The Asian person she mentioned in her tweets Indirect: All Asian individuals Indirect: All gay individuals
		J2	Direct: Kwankwa Direct: Hlengwa Indirect: Black people Indirect: All black South Africans
		J3	Direct: Meghan Markle Indirect: All black individuals Indirect: All women Indirect: All black women Indirect: Alex Beresford Indirect: All those with mental illnesses
		J1	Direct: McCammond Indirect: Teen Vogue Indirect: Condé Nast Indirect: MSNBC
		J2	Direct: Dentlinger Indirect: eNCA Indirect: DA Indirect: BCCSA
		J3	Direct: Morgan Indirect: GMB Indirect: ITV
	Social categorisation: Victims (D)	J1	Direct: The Asian person she mentioned in her tweets Indirect: All Asian individuals Indirect: All gay individuals
		J2	Direct: Kwankwa Direct: Hlengwa Indirect: Black people Indirect: All black South Africans
		J3	Direct: Meghan Markle Indirect: All black individuals Indirect: All women Indirect: All black women Indirect: Alex Beresford Indirect: All those with mental illnesses
	Social categorisation: Villains (D)	J1	Direct: McCammond Indirect: Teen Vogue Indirect: Condé Nast Indirect: MSNBC
		J2	Direct: Dentlinger Indirect: eNCA Indirect: DA Indirect: BCCSA
		J3	Direct: Morgan Indirect: GMB Indirect: ITV

Social categorisation: Journalists as targets or enforcers (D)	J1	Indirect: Osbourne Target: McCammond Enforcer: McCammond has tried to have others cancelled before Enforcers: Her colleagues tweeted that letter Enforcer: Condé Nast's chief diversity officer who wrote an apology with McCammond to staff Enforcer: Teen Vogue parted ways with her because of the call-outs, and sent out statement after Asian attacks Enforcer: Former TV editor condemns her tweets on CBS Enforcer: MSNBC as users said the news outlet usually stoked the flames of cancel culture themselves Enforcer: Condé Nast: "Cancel culture can't exist w/o entities like @CondeNast giving into the distorted voice of the mob"
	J2	Target: Dentlinger (eNCA did say that the situation could have been handled better, but they stood by her)
	J3	Target: Morgan Enforcers: GMB took cancel culture's side as they wanted him to apologise and accepted his resignation Enforcer: ITV asked him to apologise live on-air
Social comparison: Positive distinctiveness (D)	J1	Users said it was racist to call McCammond a racist One user said that McCammond is a part of the "tribe" Users said that McCammond could not be a racist as she is a person of colour Asians viewed positively
	J2	Not just defence of the two black politicians, but of the whole black race
	J3	Users said that it is racist of Morgan to disbelieve claims made by a person of colour (Markle) People of colour viewed positively Women of colour viewed positively
Social comparison: Inconsistent caring (D)	J1	Users mentioned race more than sexuality Users argued over POC races
	J2	Users focused solely on race
	J3	Did not focus on gender differences Users mentioned race more than mental illness Users mentioned gender more than mental illness Condé Nast: Supporter of Asians

	Social identification: Role identity (D)	J1	Cancellors: Activists of social injustices Cancellors: Defenders of Asians and the LGBTQ community McCammond: Wrongdoer eNCA: Supporter of Dentlinger
		J2	Cancellors: Defenders of Kwankwa, Hlengwa, and all black South Africans Dentlinger: Wrongdoer, accuser, defender of herself Cancellors: Defenders of Markle, black individuals, women, black women, and the mentally ill Morgan: Defender of himself Not against McCammond's race as she is a person of colour like the people of colour in her tweets
		J3	"... @alexi is considered part of their tribe. Switch this from her to anyone conservative, or ANY white male, and these same folks would have piled on." Caucasians (according to Dentlinger)
	Social Identification: Intergroup discrimination (D)	J1	Caucasians
		J2	Men
		J3	Users said that individuals who are not people of colour would never truly know what racism is like McCammond is a person of colour who betrayed people of colour with her tweets DA was called "racist apologists" for defending Dentlinger Female users attacked other females for defending Morgan
	Social identification: Black sheep effect (D)	J1	
		J2	
		J3	
Inciting incident	Incident (D)	J1	Old tweets
		J2	Post-budget interviews
		J3	His comments about the Markle-Oprah interview (in an article he wrote, a tweet he posted, and during a GMB segment)
	Controversial topics (D)	J1	Race Sexuality
		J2	Race
		J3	Race Gender Mental illness
Decontextualisation	Social contagion: Exposure and Virality (D)	J1	Colleagues tweeted their letter about McCammond's old tweets Incident was trending "#StopAsianHate" "#StopAAPIHate" "#WalkAway" "#RacistTeenVogue"
		J2	

		Post-budget interviews were posted on Twitter Compilation video posted Incident was trending “#LindsayDentlinger” “#eNCA” “#eNCAMUSTFALL” “#LindsayDentlingerMustFall”
	J3	Users posted about his criticism of Markle and the Markle-Oprah interview He also posted more comments on twitter Incident was trending Osbourne’s situation was also trending “#TheTalk”
Social contagion: Hybrid media (D)	J1	News organisations posted links to articles about the case on Twitter News articles included users’ tweets
	J2	Articles did not always provide all the facts News organisations posted links to articles about the case on Twitter News articles included users’ tweets
	J3	Articles did not always provide all the facts News organisations posted links to articles about the case on Twitter News articles included users’ tweets
Emotional Contagion (D)	J1	Articles did not always provide all the facts Outraged on behalf of Asians
	J2	Outraged on behalf of gay people Outraged on behalf of Kwankwa Outraged on behalf of Hlengwa Outraged on behalf of all black South Africans
	J3	Outraged on behalf of Markle Outraged on behalf of black individuals Outraged on behalf of women Outraged on behalf of black women
Confirmation bias: Reinforcement seeking (D)	J1	Outraged on behalf of the mentally ill Trait ascription: Debates over whether she can be racist based on her race Users’ negative opinions about prior racial allegations against Condé Nast confirmed
	J2	Admit fault: Apologised and resigned Trait ascription: Judgements made based on Dentlinger’s perceived race Users’ negative opinions and prior racial allegations against eNCA confirmed Admit fault: Apologised
	J3	Trait ascription: Morgan’s gender Trait ascription: Morgan’s race Users’ negative opinions about Morgan confirmed

	Confirmation bias: Challenge avoidance (D)	J1	Admit fault: Did not apologise, but backtracked and said that mental illness is serious & people should be fired if they refused to help Markle Guilty before proven innocent Users confident in their statements despite not knowing all the facts “Keep in mind both @alexi and @AliMCollins said nothing hateful toward Asians.” Users said it is accountability not cancellation Not all users knew that McCammond had deleted the tweets and apologised in 2019
		J2	Beliefs changed regarding Teen Vogue Guilty before proven innocent Users confident in their statements despite not knowing all the facts Some clips in the compilation video were taken out of context After BCCSA cleared her, users still thought she was prejudice and said that the BCCSA would of course defend a racist Beliefs changed regarding eNCA Users said they are only seeking justice Users said cancel culture is not real Users said cancel culture does not exist in South Africa
		J3	Guilty before proven innocent Users confident in their statements despite not knowing all the facts Users said that Morgan had cancelled himself Beliefs changed regarding eNCA and Piers
	Call-outs	J1	User wants Teen Vogue to prove that they are not racist
		J2	User grateful to staff who spoke up Users demanded that Dentlinger admit fault Users demanded that eNCA admit fault ANC demanded answers from eNCA ANC demanded that eNCA acknowledge the prior racial allegations made against them
		J3	Users demanded that Morgan admit fault Users demanded that GMB admit fault
		J1	Users demanded an apology to all Asians Users demanded an apology to all non-racists Also demanded apology from Teen Vogue Users dissatisfied with McCammond’s apology
	Demands for confession (I)	J1	
		J2	
	Demands for apology (D)	J1	

Calls for cancellation (D)	J2	One user called her apology “insufficient” and “arrogant” Users demanded an apology Users dissatisfied with Dentlinger’s apology Users dissatisfied with eNCA’s excuse Kwankwa dissatisfied with eNCA’s apology ANC demanded she apologise to all South Africans
	J3	Users demanded an apology
	J1	ITV asked that Morgan apologise Users demanded consequences in 2019 Twitter users demanded that she get fired in 2021
	J2	“She must be cancelled. Forever.’ Users called for her firing or suspension One said that she should lose more than her job Calls for eNCA to be taken down Users said that sensitivity training was not enough
	J3	
	J1	Twitter users called for his firing Petition had over 1600 signatures after apologies
	J2	Petition had over 8000 signatures after apologies Formal complaints to BCCSA Formal complaints to SAHRC #NotInMyName protested ANC protested ANC demanded that eNCA staff go to sensitivity training
	J3	Formal complaints made to GMB Formal complaints to Ofcom Markle made a complaint to GMB Over 58 000 complaints by the time Ofcom cleared him
	J1	Apologised in 2019 Apologised in 2021 on Twitter Apologised to staff in an email Apologised during staff meeting Apologised to staff again in another statement
	J2	Resigned Apologised to Kwankwa over the phone Apologised to Hlengwa over the phone Apologised to “people who don’t deserve to be drawn into it” Gave the same excuse as eNCA Said she was called racists on the premise that she is white

		J3	Did not resign Deleted Twitter account/changed Twitter handle He stormed off the GMB set Refused to apologise Said that he did not regret his comments Also tweeted that he did not regret his comments Resigned Did say that mental illness is serious Also said that if people denied Markle therapy then those people should be fired Tweeted about the whole situation
Public naming and shaming (D)	J1		Was interviewed about it Name tweeted around Twitter handle tweeted around “racist” “racist bigot” “homophobic” “two-face coward”
	J2		Teen Vogue called racist Called out Condé Name tweeted around Photo tweeted around Twitter handle tweeted around Calls for shaming “Let’s show her flames” “racist” “racist pig” “@metro babe”
	J3		Threats (including rape threats) eNCA was also called racist Name tweeted around Twitter handle tweeted around “racist” “racist monster” “misogynistic” “toxic male” “bitch ass man...bitter, thin-skinned... he’s just super fucking gross” Bashed for the way he supposedly treated female guests on GMB Criticism from mental health charity Osbourne called racist
Past revealed (I)	J1		Called out GMB Called out ITV 2011 tweets 2019 apology Tweets deleted in 2019 She doxed and cancelled others Native American Halloween costume in 2011

		J2	Her relationship scandal Condé Nast's previous racial allegations Clips of past interviews put into compilation video
		J3	eNCA previous allegations of racism GMB had received complaints about Morgan before
	Hypocrisy (D)	J1	Users said that McCammond could not be racist because of her race
		J2	McCammond was called names Called racist on the basis of her supposed race (according to her) Dentlinger was called names Received threats
		J3	Negativity about her supposed race Users argued that it is racist for him to disbelieve a person of colour (seen as racist because of his race) Morgan was called names Negativity about his race and gender
Cancellation	Loss of support (D)	J1	Lost job at Teen Vogue Condé Nast: "best to part ways" Ulta Beauty's sponsorship with Teen Vogue ended Burt's Bees' sponsorship with Teen Vogue ended Some users said they would not read Teen Vogue
		J2	Users did not want to watch eNCA anymore Users blocked eNCA on Twitter
		J3	Lost his job at GMB GMB did not defend him GMB accepted his resignation Osbourne lost her job Users did not want to watch GMB anymore
Public support	Gained support (I)	J1	From users "#ImwithAlexi" and "#redemption" Users said she was young when she tweeted those things "I was such an idiot at 17. So were most people..." "I hope someone gives this very good reporter a job." Anna Wintour sent out a statement saying that she had apologised in 2019 From former colleague
		J2	From users Users said she should be rehabilitated not punished Users questioned the validity of the compilation video

			Hlengwa accepted her apology From two former interviewees eNCA DA said they would lodge complainst against EFF and ANC DA discussed the fact-checking of the compilation video
		J3	From users Users also pointed out the holes in Markle’s claims Users discussed freedom of speech
	Awareness (I)	J1	From Osbourne Users also supported Osbourne Users said she was young Users tweeted about cancel culture “#CancelCulture”
		J2	Users said that being prematurely labelled as racist shows that cancel culture has gone too far Users questioned the compilation video
		J3	Users tweeted about wokeness Users tweeted about cancel culture Users tweeted about cancel culture Users tweeted about wokeness
Recovery	Recovery (I)	J1	MSNBC gig Axios job Users not happy
		J2	Kept her job Some clips were proven to be misleading BCCSA cleared her
		J3	Users not happy Ofcom cleared him He got back on Breakfast TV after almost a year Users not happy

Addendum 2 – Ethics clearance certificate





Our Ref: M. 441122
Enquiries: research@ie.ac.za

22 November 2022

Outcome of Ethics Clearance Application for Master of Philosophy in Arts

Student name: Teliza van Eeden Vorster
Student number: [REDACTED]
Brand and campus: IIE MSA

Dear Teliza,

Thank you for submitting the ethics clearance application for the study:

Cancel culture and journalists on Twitter.

We are pleased to inform you that the Higher Degrees Committee considered and granted ethics clearance. This means that you may proceed with data collection. Kindly ensure that all ethical considerations are duly applied whilst collecting, analysing and interpreting the data for the completion of your research. The committee noted and approves the change in title of the study from the initial proposal approval.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your programme team or supervisor directly.

All the best with your research.

[REDACTED]

Dr Wm Engelbrecht
Chair: Higher Degrees Committee





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