

Master Thesis

A qualitative research on users engagement and disengagement
from celebrities and their perception of cancel culture

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ABSTRACT

Cancel culture has become a prominent aspect of social media, with many users engaging in public shaming aimed at celebrities who have committed perceived transgressions. (Norris, 2021). According to Norris (2021) the term cancel culture refers to the practice of calling for boycotts or other forms of revenge against individuals that are deemed to have violated social norms or values. Cancel culture is often motivated by a desire for justice, but it can also be driven by a desire for power or attention (Mishan, 2020). Previous study conducted by Yousef and Ayari (2022) found that the impact of cancel culture on the relationship between consumers and influencers has a negative impact on the relationship between them, as the majority of consumers' trust and commitment towards the influencers decreased after they are cancelled. Other studies have indicated that users may likely disengage from celebrities who have been embroiled in controversies (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). Research by Saldanha et al. (2022) states that if fans notice lack of warmth and competence in celebrities and if they experience a negative episode with a celebrity, they disengage with them to avoid further emotional distress towards themselves. The current research took a qualitative approach and interviewed 13 participants. The in-depth interviews explored different topics such as participants engagement and disengagement with Johnny Depp and their perception of cancel culture. It also included questions related to their attachment with the celebrities that hints parasocial interaction with them. The data retrieved from these interviews derived four themes; Pro-Johnny Depp fans, For and against cancel culture, Complete disengagement due to controversy, Those who don't care about personal lives of celebrities. These themes show how social media users engage and disengage with celebrities online. Aside from this, social media users' participation in cancel culture is also understood through this research and how their "parasocial connection" is affected with celebrities due to controversies. These elements therefore impact their total engagement and disengagement with Johnny Depp which is the main topic of discussion in this research.

KEYWORDS: *Johnny Depp, cancel culture, parasocial relationship, fandoms, transitioning objects.*

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The topic and questions for this study were inspired by my own experiences and intense fascination with the world of entertainment, together with years of observation of the changing online environment. The findings of this study were very intriguing, and the qualitative information gathered is crucial in answering the questions of this research.

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1. Introduction

The term "cancel culture," also referred to as "call-out culture," is a culture in which those who are thought to have behaved or spoken in an inappropriate manner are shunned, stigmatized or boycotted (Norris, 2021). According to Norris (2021), cancel culture acts as a powerful tool for individuals to maintain interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviours, values and attitudes. In fact, with each shocking case, individuals are reminded just how fascinated we are about monitoring each other's habits online and offline.

For example when Johnny Depp was depicted to be a "wife-beater" (Marshall, 2020) due to allegations, he was publicly shamed by a large audience and was dismissed from the cast of the movie *Fantastic Beast* as the production company Warner Bros did not want to associate with someone who goes beyond the normal patterns of the society (Rao, 2020). Here, media played its role of circulating the news, and the audience participates equally in disseminating the matter even further. This thesis will examine cancel culture and the audiences participation in cancel culture; and what leads to the audiences engagement and disengagement with public figures.

Definitions of the cancel culture phenomenon continue to be a source of controversy among popular commentators as well as academics. However, there is some consensus that cancellation involves those who call for a measure of accountability or even an act of vengeance against people or organizations who are accused of problematic or damaging practices (Bouvier & Machin, 2021, p.311). Driessen (2020) describes the relationship of audiences online with celebrities to be vigilant; where audiences keep a close eye on things being said, posted online or acted out in order to conclude what behaviour is appropriate and what is not. She specifically describes the role of fandoms as, "pre-existing collectives" that can keep celebrities or artists responsible for behaviours committed. These groups of people are united by a shared set of ideals that may be concerned with what celebrities are indulged-in online as well as in their private lives.

Thus, viewers' close examination extends both offline and online from well-known public figures to less well-known people. Audiences quickly report and shut-down actions that are deemed un-ideal to their societies (Driessen, 2020). On one hand, cancel culture can be seen as a form of accountability, forcing celebrities to confront the consequences of

their actions and encouraging them to make amends for any harm they may have caused (Norris, 2020, p.2). On the other hand, cancel culture can also be seen as a form of mob rule (Norris, 2020, p.3), with social media users using their collective power to impose their own values and beliefs on others with different degrees of severity, often by limiting their access to online platforms, damaging their reputations and sometimes causing an end to their careers (Norris, 2020, p.2).

Delineating the causes and consequences of cancel culture is difficult because there is no set formula for what constitutes a cancellation. Celebrities and influencers may instantly be viewed online and cancelled. Anybody can criticize them, and this could also possibly be due to animosity, which leads to public outrage directed at a particular person, ultimately cancelling them by closing down their Twitter, Instagram accounts or demonetizing their YouTube channels (Clark, 2020). As various viewpoints contribute to the meaning of cancel culture, a number of meanings keep coming into existence.

According to Clark (2020), the act of cancelling is an example of a "statement of agency" in which a person refuses to engage with or support something or someone "whose principles; in actions, or speech are so offensive" (p. 88). Norris (2020) defines it as "an attempt to isolate someone for disobeying societal norms" (p. 2). These and numerous additional definitions take different stances when addressing the idea. Nevertheless, very little academic research has been done on the audience's roles and the participation of cancellation practices.

Therefore, this research will focus on the following research question:

RQ1- How do social media users engage or /disengage from celebrities and perceive cancel culture online?

1.1 Academic relevance

Because of cancel culture's interdisciplinary nature and possible societal influence (Tandoc et al., 2022, p.11), cancel culture and social media users' engagement and disengagement with celebrities have academic value. Scholarly research on cancel culture is swiftly becoming popular (Clark, 2020), but from the perspective of the audience remains scarce. The challenge of researching such a varied and scattered phenomena is one of the

main causes of the inadequate knowledge of the audience's perspective on cancel culture (Driessen, 2020). A number of elements may affect the audience's intentions and views; social identity, personal perceptions, moral standards and cultural setting in which the cancellations take place could be some of the reasons (Tandoc et al., 2022). These complexities must be taken into account in order to comprehend the audience's viewpoint, and extensive qualitative research must be done in order to examine the underlying motives and mechanisms of this phenomenon.

Another reason for the shortage of research on audiences perception and participation of cancel culture is also because of its recent rise as a leading phenomenon. In recent years, cancel culture has become a prominent topic of discussion, raising both curiosity and alarm. Because of this, academia has lagged behind in reacting to this developing phenomena and carrying out thorough study to look at audience viewpoints (Driessen, 2020). Nowadays, celebrities get cancelled for things that seem like an attack to certain people leading to audience shunning them (Clark, 2020). Sociology, psychology and communication studies are all relevant to this topic as it clarifies how social media platforms have transformed the way people engage with public figures as well as their views and reaction to celebrity behaviour. However, the study of cancel culture has broader consequences for the right to free speech, public dialogue, and the distribution of power in society. For academics and decision-makers interested in the nexus of media, technology, and society, it is crucial to comprehend the dynamics of cancel culture and social media users' involvement and disengagement with celebrities.

1.2. Societal relevance

Cancel culture, we can argue, reflects the power dynamics and values of our society (Lewis, 2022, p.636). In particular, it draws attention to how power and influence in our society are shifting as a result of the rise of social media, which has given people a bigger voice and more opportunities to hold others accountable for their actions. Important issues like free speech, justice and responsibility in our society are raised by this conversation (Lewis, 2022, p.634). While cancel culture has the potential to be an effective tool for holding people and organizations responsible for their actions (Norris, 2021), it may also have unintended effects like silencing critics and sustaining a culture of fear among people because of which many people are unable to voice-out their opinions to avoid any form of

implications on them (Lewis, 2022). As a society, there are many competing interests and ideals, which can often give rise to conflict and difficulties. Different cultural, social, and economic viewpoints, as well as the dynamic nature of technology and its effects on our lives. These are just a few of the variables that contribute to these disputes and it's necessary to have bright, inclusive conversations in order to create a balance between these opposing interests and beliefs. Taking into account the viewpoints of different people, communities, businesses, and the government, we might be able to create a society that fosters respect for one another, a culture of responsibility that is just and fair, and the wellbeing of all of its members by promoting a balance between competing interests and ideals.

1.3. Research question

The research for this MA thesis has a focus on one specific case, in order to more specifically zoom on the ways in which social media users engage and disengage with celebrities online and participate in cancel culture. The scandal involving Johnny Depp and his ex-wife Amber Heard is a widely known controversial case, that spawned significant discussion and attention on social media which is explained in detail in chapter 4. For this study, this case presents itself as an excellent example in exploring how social media users engage and disengage with celebrities online, furthermore, how they participate in cancel culture. Fans and non-fans alike expressed their opinions publicly by discussion on social media about the trial-case surrounding Depp and Heard's relationship. By examining how social media users responded to the scandal and how their engagement and disengagement with Depp changed over time, this research can hence provide insights into the motivations of cancel culture and the impact it has on parasocial relationships between celebrities and their fans.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Social Media

Understanding social media is essential in the context of cancel culture since these platforms have taken over as the main means of launching and sustaining movements related to cancel culture. It is the primary platform where individuals are able to publicly share their expressions, opinions and call to action which results in amplified voices for cancel culture that often involve hashtags and social media call-outs that go viral (Norris, 2021). Due to the viral nature of cancel culture on social media, even a single allegation or contentious speech may easily turn into a significant response from the general public. The consequences may include harm to one's reputation, lost employment possibilities, social isolation, and even psychological misery for those who are "canceled." (Norris, 2021). Social media platforms also influence the dynamics of cancel culture in addition to facilitating its growth. Algorithms, for example, establish which subject is prioritized, possibly strengthening controversial narratives and publicizing certain people (Norris, 2021). This may produce a divisive atmosphere where opposing viewpoints are marginalized or silenced (Driessen, 2020).

According to Siddiqui and Singh (2016) social media are collaborative technologies that make it easier to create and share content across virtual communities and networks, including information, interests, and other kinds of expression. In relation to media, the term "social" implies that platforms are user-centric and encourage social interaction. Social media can therefore be seen as an online facilitator of human networks of people that improve social connection (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). According to Lewis (2002) user-generated content is what moves social media forward and fans engagement play a key-role in this process where they are committed to viewing and following content from their favourite celebrities as they have taken up the role of opinion leaders (Croes & Bartels, 2021). Because it requires witnesses or participants to operate, cancel culture encourages us to broaden our individual and societal gaze. Social media platforms are hence, used by users to become intelligent agents who gather and share information about cancellations (Andrejevic, 2004). Due to this, understanding social media's function in modern culture is essential to appreciating its effect and significance. It poses significant issues with power relationships, responsibility, and the possibility for online mob mentality. It is crucial to

strike a balance between the right to free speech and the appropriate use of social media platforms in order to promote an atmosphere that values conversation, empathy, and constructive criticism rather than one that values quick judgments and unfair punishments.

2.2 Fandoms and engagement

Since social media has allowed fans to engage directly with their favourite celebrities, fans often feel a personal connection with them by having more knowledge of their whereabouts and personal matters making them feel a sense of belongingness as well as a shared identity towards them (Tukachinsky, 2010, p. 90). This personal connection can deepen a fan's enjoyment of the celebrity's work, as they feel a greater appreciation for the artist. Fans engage with public figures because they are curious and at the same time want information about celebrities, even if it is irrelevant, they feel a bond with them. Pearson (2010) describes fans as enthusiastic supporters who are eager to learn about somebody in a continuous cycle to feel a sense of belonging to them (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). A collective of those are referred to as "fandoms". They are a community of people who are keen to keep themselves up-to-date with information related to a celebrity who they develop fondness for (Pearson, 2010). Celebrities or YouTubers create a social-appearance where audience feel emotionally connected with them. They develop a strong bond with their fans by dynamically connecting with them through two-way communication methods like comments and sharing their daily lives with them (Marwick & Boyd, 2011, p. 145). In order to gauge the audience's reactions and develop fondness, celebrities and their agencies use different tactics to keep the audience interested by releasing songs, merchandise, and engaging videos (Kim & Kim, 2020). Due to its distinctive accessibility, cancel culture and its spread via social media is a unique phenomenon that allows many different entities to establish, maintain, or question social standards and ideas of civility. It is a process that aims to correct transgressions that interfere with a group's comprehension and application of appropriate behaviour (Bouvier & Machin, 2021).

Sometimes, celebrities present themselves in certain ways to make themselves more appealing to the public and indulge in behaviours that are favourable to their reputation (Marwick & Boyd, 2011, p. 145). Papacharissi's concept of "The Networked Self" describes how normative attitudes and activities are reinforced in both public and private displays of identity by popular culture or what is pleasing in the public-eye (Markman,

2012). Self-identity in both; public and private life moves across various networks due to popular demand (Markman, 2012). Social media personalities often regard their fans as families because they want them to feel that they acknowledge their presence even though they don't know them; where the fan knows ample about the celebrity but the celebrity has limited information of the fan (Ferris, 2001, p. 44).

In addition, influencers share chunks of their lives online making their followers feel that they know everything about them and that they have a say in their lives which is why the connection between them goes beyond just watching them. This connection is therefore, described as the Para-social Interaction which is a theory by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl (Liebers & Schramm, 2021). According to Douthat (2020) regular individuals or fandoms tend to be the more easy targets or more vulnerable victims of cancel culture, because their feelings are involved to the fullest with the celebrity of their choice. Hence, looking at how the audience engages with their idols through the lens of Para-social interaction theory can elaborate the study further and give a critical analysis on how they participate in cancel culture.

2.2.1 Fandoms and their involvement within Parasocial relationship theory

Fandoms, or groups of people that are enthusiastic about a particular form of media or culture, are becoming more and more prevalent in today's society. Within fandoms, people develop loyalties to their preferred celebrities and frequently participate in fandom-related activities including fan literature, fan art, and convention attendance. The parasocial interaction theory, which explains the phenomena of audiences developing one-sided, emotional connections with media personalities, artists and celebrities are fandoms who have complicated and varied relationships (Chung & Cho, 2017).

In spite of the absence of any real-life interactions or relationships, individuals can create one-sided, emotional connections with a media personality or character, according to Horton and Wohl's initial description of parasocial relationships from 1956 (Chung & Cho, 2017, p. 483). This phenomenon is frequently seen in fandoms, as people develop strong bonds with their preferred media or personalities and these attachments can manifest in a variety of ways, such as idolizing a public figure or becoming fixated on a fictional character, sometimes resulting in powerful emotional experiences. In this context, very little previous research has looked into the audience's relationship with what contributes to audiences

disengagement or engagement or their overall relationship with a cancelled personality. According to the Para-social interaction theory, people are drawn to public figures because they have common values and they exhibit comparable behaviours (Liebers & Schramm, 2021). According to Liebers and Schramm (2021), audiences choose to interact with certain celebrities or artists because they feel they have similar morals, values and interests. People feel a sense of resonance and familiarity when they discover artists or celebrities who share their own moral values. These prominent people are seen by them as relatable and genuine, which increases their likeability and appeal. However, this study delves deeper into the consequences when a celebrity engages in behaviour that the public deems unconventional or immoral, as well as how the public influences the process of cancellation. Furthermore, whether they continue to be interested in the celebrity or quit supporting them after a controversial issue.

For fandoms, parasocial ties can have detrimental effects. According to one study, those who have parasocial interactions with media personalities are more prone to feel jealous and anxious when the media personality interacts with other people (Giles, 2002). When people believe they are "lesser" fans than other members of the community, this can cause feelings of rejection and isolation within the fandom (Giles, 2002). Parasocial relationships can also result in a blending of the lines between the real and imagined worlds, which can be troublesome for people who find it difficult to tell the difference between the two (Rubin, 2002, p.258). This can result in a loss of identity and a fixation on the media or celebrities, which may cause feelings of emptiness and discontentment with one's own life (Rubin, 2002).

Similarly, research conducted by Saldanha et al. (2022) states that when an audience encounters a bad experience with an influencer or celebrity, they evaluate the severity of the incident in relation to their previous interactions with the celebrity and hence, they tend to rely on negative experiences more heavily than good experiences (Wang & Kim, 2020). For fans, negative information is easier to recall and is better remembered than the good, which then leads to potential cancelling behaviours (Wang & Kim, 2020). Consumers' attachment to celebrities hence, declines if they believe they lack qualities that give them authority, such warmth and competence. Normal consumers would normally experience a loss of attachment and loyalty to the concerned

celebrity as a result of this circumstance. However, this results in consumers cancelling celebrities to stop additional exposure for the worried or avoidant type of consumer (Saldanha et al., 2022, p.9). In this study, these conclusions were taken into consideration to assess if previous findings align with the outcomes of this research.

2.2.2 The concept of transitional object

The idea of "transitional objects" explain how fandoms and parasocial engagement are related (Yin, 2020). In various adaptations of Winnicott's psychoanalytical idea of transitional object, Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005) argued that fandoms should be viewed as transitional objects that link fans' inner selves to the outside world. They saw fandom as a presentation of the self that included both conscious subjectivity and the covert display of fan identity. The main focus of this research was typically on how fans create and realize their strong emotional attachment to the fan object and exercise this attachment to create their own identity and existence.

People sometimes employ transitional items or experiences to bridge the gap between the real world and their imaginations. Media and celebrities can act as stepping stones for people in fandoms, enabling them to connect with their own feelings and experiences through their adoration of the media or celebrity. The sharing of experiences and feelings with others who have the same attachment can build community values (Obst et al., 2002, p.90). From this perspective and with the growing importance of digital media in our daily lives and experiences of fans, it is essential to investigate the underlying motivations and mechanisms that underlie fans' involvement and disengagement with their favourite celebrities in the wake of controversies in order to properly comprehend the impact of cancel culture on parasocial interactions of fans.

2.3 Cancelling

Technology today provides people a platform to represent themselves. People want to be heard, seen and identified in ways that seem unique and this might be because they want to be individualistic in their approaches and be appreciated individually rather than as a society (Mueller, 2021). However, being different can sometimes come with a few problems, such as online shaming where individuals are publicly shamed or humiliated via social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter or other platforms by releasing private

information (Mueller, 2021). Holding individuals in positions of power accountable for offensive activities or hurtful demeanour is the goal of cancel culture which is frequently inspired by voices calling for social justice (Ng, 2020, p.623). Ng (2020) examines the circumstances surrounding the Television series *The 100* and how the show's audience voiced concern about the demise of a lesbian character and the alleged exploitation of young, queer female viewers. After this controversial storyline, showrunner Jason Rothenberg lost fans and received criticism on social media. This example demonstrates how cancel culture has an impact on fandoms since it displays how people express their unhappiness and collectively discontinue supporting their favourite celebrities, thus engaging in a boycott.

Similarly, some cancellations, especially those involving regular people, influence how the public views proper attitudes to be and conduct in relation to freedom of speech, censorship, social media, and the effects of endangering social order. "The goal isn't to punish everyone, or even very many someone's; it's to shame or scare just enough people to make the rest conform" (Douthat, 2020, para. 21). However, discussions and criticisms of cancel culture draw attention to worries about its tendency for moral purity, a lack of balance in reactions, and exaggeratedly adverse impacts on those involved (Ng, 2020). Therefore, to understand how people encounter and engage in these cancellations, the next paragraph is devoted to learning how digital public shaming takes place.

Cancel culture has two forms; passive and active (Tandoc et al., 2022), the passive form is people cutting ties with or withdrawing support from a person or group without actively taking part in public humiliation or urging others to do the same, however, the current study does not concentrate on this form. The active version of cancel culture, which is the subject of the study, involves open dialogue and public humiliation of the responsible party (Mueller, 2021). It frequently takes the form of making public comments on the person's social media posts, disclosing details of their alleged transgressions, or setting up online campaigns to compel the person into giving a public apology or incurring other repercussions. According to Tandoc (2022) active cancel culture aims to make the targeted person reflect on their actions and publicly apologize. Advocates claim that it acts as a tool for keeping people accountable and increasing public awareness of widespread problems or

harmful habits. Nevertheless, detractors contend that the cancel culture can result in severe punishment, online harassment, and the repression of free speech (Tandoc et al., 2022).

Although cancel culture has received a lot of attention lately, it's vital to understand that there are many different ways to see it. Others consider it as an example of mob mentality or online vigilantism, while some regard it as a vital tool for social justice and accountability (Mueller, 2021). The active version of cancel culture, which is the subject of the study, involves open dialogue and public humiliation of the responsible party. It frequently takes the form of making public comments on the person's social media posts, disclosing details of their alleged transgressions, or setting up online campaigns to compel the person into giving the public an apology or incurring other repercussions. This study solely focuses on active form of cancellation (Tandoc et al., 2022).

2.4 Public shaming

With the rise of social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, users have been given a powerful platform to express their opinions and hold celebrities accountable for their actions. However, this power can also be wielded in a negative and harmful way, as public shaming can have serious consequences for the mental health and wellbeing of celebrities (Dudenhoefer, 2020). Public shaming is a way for social media users to vent their anger and express their disapproval of celebrity actions that they perceive as inappropriate (Trottier, 2019). Trottier (2019) distinguishes different types of public shaming, such as call-outs, cancelling (cancel culture), and doxing publishing private information. Cancel culture changes how we think and practice shame because it uses digitally mediated technologies to gather evidence and disseminate it across various social platforms to attract large number of viewers. The functions of this phenomena are somewhat inspired by lateral or peer-to-peer surveillance techniques that address any violations that threaten various interpretations and views of social order (Trottier, 2019). Because of this, people can widen their attentive gazes to capture individuals who pose a threat. No matter the rationale for the cancellation, the accused is still subject to an eternal digital blunder (Hess & Waller, 2014).

According to Clark (2020) cancel culture serves as a correcting force intended to restore an envisioned normal if someone is deemed to be a disruptor. The offense serves as

a reminder of what is unacceptable. Although this viewpoint recognizes the motivation behind cancel culture, a more analytical examination reveals its possible flaws and consequences. Moreover, cancel culture frequently takes place online, where the quickness and anonymity of social media platforms can increase its influence. Without adequate fact-checking or due process, accusations can spread swiftly and cause reputational harm, employment loss, and even personal threats. Unchecked online mob power has the potential to disproportionately damage underrepresented voices and exacerbate already-existing power disparities in society.

The potential for cancel culture to restrain important conversation is another worrying feature which can hinder progress (Wang & Kim, 2020). With little opportunity for human growth and repentance, cancel culture tends to enforce a binary perspective of good and wrong rather than engaging in fruitful discussions and providing opportunities for education and understanding (Driessen, 2020). By limiting free discussion and restricting the examination of opposing viewpoints, this discourse stifling might impede advancement (Clark, 2020). Additionally, the opportunity for individual and community development is undermined by the cancel culture's emphasis on punishment as opposed to rehabilitation. The need to "cancel" people right away may prolong a cycle of shame and exclusion, obstructing opportunities for learning, understanding, and eventually, good transformation (Clark, 2020). This is true even though some situations may call for accountability and repercussions (Driessen, 2020). An examination of cancel culture critically exposes a number of issues; the subjective nature of defining disruptions, the possibility of online mob mentality, the silencing of diverse voices, the obstruction of constructive criticism and the lack of emphasis on rehabilitation. All raise legitimate concerns about cancel culture's effectiveness and its effects on people and society as a whole, even though it might be motivated by the desire to restore an imagined normal (Clark, 2020). Hence, it is important to understand people's perceptions and participation in it as a whole to draw conclusions of their mentality towards cancel culture.

3. Methodology

This research aims to understand the role of audiences in cancel culture and emphasize the various motivations of the fandoms to engage or disengage and participate in cancel culture by using the trial court case of Johnny Depp and his ex-wife Amber Heard. Through this case it is examined; what leads to the phenomenon of cancel culture and how the informants engage and disengage with celebrities. In-depth interviews with people who were purposefully selected as fans of Johnny Depp from different parts of the world were undertaken. These were selected to extract what motivates an individual's behaviour of engagement and disengagement with celebrities. In order to make this research project feasible, the focus of the study was the above mentioned case due to its far-reaching impact where the public played a major role in shaming Johnny Depp as well as boycotting him (Sarkisian et al., 2022). Thus, the research focused on his trial against Amber Heard and the way this triggered the public and their motivations to shame him, leading to his several cancellations. A qualitative approach, that aims to understand the complex personal experiences and reflections of the respondents is deemed to be the most appropriate for this study (Malterud, 2001; Marshall, 1996).

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Qualitative research design

The nature of this research is qualitative because it is explorative and interested in understanding how people construct and make meaning of cancel culture and their engagement and disengagement with celebrities. Data collection has been done through interviews. Since cancelling is a collective act, usually done by a community, it was important to examine peoples participation in this process. In-depth interviews were the best way to investigate how this concept is best understood and taken part in as qualitative research concentrates on understanding varying meanings, beliefs and disciplines (Baškarada, 2014). Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were asked as this provided flexibility for participants to put-forth their opinions.

The method of purposive sampling was adopted for the research and careful selection was done of individuals who are active users of online platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and of those who stay up to date with celebrity news. As the research

question is on social media users' perception and participation in cancel culture, people who have knowledge on cancel culture were interviewed. For convenience, a total of three well informed personal acquaintances working in media were also added to the sample. This resulted in a purposive sample, ultimately helping examine their participation towards the phenomenon of cancel culture as a whole. Twelve individuals aged between 18-30 as well as a communications professor aged 52 years old were interviewed for this research.

3.1.2 Semi-structured in depth-interviews

To find structures of disengagement and engagement through shared experiences, semi-structured in-depth interviews have been used. According to Longhurst (2016) the real advantage of such an interview style is the usage of an informal tone and inviting the interviewee for an open discussion to get a more . In-depth interviews have long ruled the interviewing process (Boyce & Neale, 2006) as they help to understand people's real motivations behind things. Interview research, in Opdenakker's opinion, explains human behaviour as well as experiences and relationships that people have with one another (2006). In-depth interviews are helpful in this situation because they provide context for the research question and allow for the exploration of specific information about an individual's participation in cancel culture.

The main benefit of in-depth interviews is that they allow for freedom of speech and open communication while fostering a relaxed environment in which data is gathered through open dialogue. Individual interviews will also aid in preventing grouped answers like those in focus group setting, where collaborative answers can create bias. Hence, in-depth interviews are appropriate as they get individual points of views across. (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are considered flexible and for this topic flexibility is needed as users' personal participation in cancel culture and engagement and disengagement with Johnny Depp was important to derive the right answers (Boyce & Neale, 2006). To avoid sticking to a predefined order of questioning, the interview flow was based on the participants' responses to get the most honest answers (Babbie, 2013).

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Process of data collection

The data collection has taken place in the month of April where the interviews have taken place virtually online via Zoom and then transcribed. Participants were approached through Johnny Depp's fan page, as well as LinkedIn. In addition, acquaintances working in the media industry professionally or those with ample knowledge on the matter were also approached. A semi-structured interview guide was used to cover all relevant aspects of the research topic; as the interviewer I allowed the interviewees to freely express their ideas and feelings. Additionally, questions were employed to ensure comprehensive data collection while maintaining accuracy, validity, and reliability. To create a comfortable and relaxed environment for the interviewees, rapport-building techniques were implemented by the interviewer (Boyce & Neale 2006). The interview sessions commenced with clear introductions and ended with a definitive conclusion.

Thematic analysis was opted for this research where the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006) are followed. Coding is followed to form categories that evolved to the main themes of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Theory driven thematic analysis allows the examination for studying human behaviour and discovering the patterns and themes within the selected text (Gilbert, 2008; Boeije, 2012), where open coding, axial coding and selective coding helped find themes within the theory as well as the conducted interviews, providing a complete picture of how people engage and disengage with celebrities online (Boeije, 2012).

The gathered information was transcribed to assist identify commonalities among the performed interviews. Following transcription, conversations are summarized to find similar data which were then categorized in order to look for common themes among the categorical variables and those themes related to the theory. The study issue is also supported by an examination of earlier studies and looked through the lens of para-social interaction theory (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). The topic list featured questions on Johnny Depp who has been cancelled before. Additionally, questions related to users media consumption, their engagement etc. that further investigated the para-social interaction

theory with the above mentioned public figure and their perception of cancel culture is included.

3.2.2 Consent form

To ensure that the interviewee was participating in the interview voluntarily and that their responses could be used for research purposes, they were asked to sign a consent form before the interview began. Each interview was conducted for 20 to 45 minutes.

3.3 Demographics of Participants

All 13 participants of this study can be considered active social media users as during the in-depth interview they declared that they are active users of Instagram, twitter, YouTube, snapchat etc. All of the participants are aware of the controversy regarding Johnny Depp and are from different parts of the world aged between 19 – 52 years of age. The details of each participant is given below.

Table 3.3.1: *Table presenting participant information*

Name	Age	Gender	Education/Prof ession	Place of residence	Nationali ty	University
Participant 1	21	Male	Actor by profession/Bach elors in English Literature	Bombay, India	Indian	Indira Gandhi National Open University
Participant 2	24	Male	Bachelor of Film Production Design (BCA)	Toronto, Canada	Indian	Toronto Film School
Participant 3	52	Female	Professor & Head of the Department of Communication Research	New Delhi, India	Indian	Indian Institute of Mass Communica tion

Participant 4	20	Male	Bachelor in Media and Culture	Amsterdam,	Dutch	Amsterdam University
Participant 5	19	Female	Bachelors in Fashion Design	New Delhi, India	Indian	Pearl Academy
Participant 6	26	Female	Masters in Data analysis	Coventry, England	Indian	Warwick University
Participant 7	20	Male	Bachelors Optical Engineering	Tomsk, Russia	Russian	Tomsk State University
Participant 8	23	Female	Academic Bachelors in Computer Science	Liepāja, Latvia	Latvian	Liepaja, University
Participant 9	30	Female	Project Analyst at Etiqa Digital Solutions/ Bachelors in Media and Communication	Malaysia	Malaysia	International Islamic University Malaysia
Participant 10	28	Female	YouTuber/Masters in Journalism & International affairs	Dublin, Ireland	Indian	University College Dublin
Participant 11	25	Male	Marketeer at PlusPort/Masters in Film Studies	The Hague,	Dutch	Amsterdam University
Participant 12	29	Male	Founder & Journalist at MainMedia/Dipl	India	Indian	Indian Institute of Mass

			oma in Radio & Television Journalism			Communica tion
Participant 13	30	Male	Works as a marketeer at greengrape.nl/ Bachelors in Education and Social work	Greece	Greek	University of Patras

3.4 Operationalization

For this study, the concepts that have been explored in Chapter 2, cancel culture, parasocial interaction theory, fandoms, cancelling, transitional objects, fans engagement and disengagement with celebrities due to cancellations are being measured. Although these concepts cannot be quantified directly, they are operationalized in different ways. These concepts are used to construct a topic list that fits the scope of the research and are used for the data analysis and coding of the data.

Questions were created based upon the researches conducted by Yousef and Ayari (2022), where they found that the impact of cancel culture on the relationship between consumers and influencers has a negative impact on the relationship between them, as the majority of consumers' trust and commitment towards the influencers decreased after they are cancelled. Questions regarding the social media user's behaviour towards Johnny Depp who has been cancelled on multiple occasions were created to understand how users participate in cancel culture and what affects do controversies have in the way they look at celebrities and if their opinion of the accused celebrity changes after a major controversial episode. These questions also helped to access the changing patterns of the users relationship with Johnny Depp.

The concept of transitional objects by Donald Winnicott (1953) and Parasocial Interaction Theory by Horton and Wohl (1956) are related to one another according to findings (Yin, 2020). The idea of "transitional objects" explains how fandoms and parasocial engagement are related (Yin, 2020). According to Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005), fandom can be considered as a transitional object that connects fans' inner selves with the outside world. This allows fans to present themselves and their fan identity both consciously and subconsciously. The focus of their research was on how fans develop a strong emotional attachment to the object of their fandom, that being the celebrity and hence, they use this attachment to shape their own identity and existence. Fans use media and celebrities as a means to connect with their own emotions and experiences, bridging the gap between reality and imagination. Sharing these experiences and emotions with like-minded fans helps to create a sense of community and shared values. As a result, research was done to determine how people were affected when they saw their favourite celebrities involved in problems.

3.5 Data analysis

Before the outcome of this research, the interviews were prepared for analysis. All interviews were conducted in English and were recorded. The transcripts have been written down by Zoom. Additionally, I went through all the transcripts to include what Zoom might have missed out and refined the total transcripts due to repetition of words or laughter. The collected data via interviews has been analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that has been used by many scholars in social science research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is a six-step process that begins with reading the data and becoming familiar with it. Then categories are found and commonalities lead to the coding process that eventually develop into the data's primary themes while continually reassessing the data's component parts and their significance (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Reading the data in order to become familiar with it is the first step (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this point, as an interviewer, I read the interviews several times of each individual participant, underlining the answers which seem the most relevant to my research topic and then their answers were put down in a list. Repeated patterns such as unfollowing Johnny Depp, unable to look at Johnny Depp, supportive of cancel culture, positive interactions with Johnny Depp were put side by side to the data.

The second phase involved creating codes for the data presented which is an important step to group those categories to find a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After reading the material again, 170 fragments were selected, and each one was categorized according to the recurring pattern it fits within. The coding scheme can be found in the appendix.

The third phase involves deciding which codes may be related to one another and organizing them into more comprehensive categories, or "themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The open codes included 38 themes which led to codified data themes of 8 themes. The fourth phase involves rereading each of the grouped pieces to evaluate consistency and determine whether any emerging themes are indicative of the entire set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 9 themes that emerged from this categorization of the codes; celebrity defender, mixed feelings, attached fans, positive opinion towards cancel culture, negative opinion towards cancel culture, reasons to unfollow Johnny Depp, aversion to Johnny Depp, reasons to follow celebrities and lack of interest. These categories are in the coding tree in the appendix.

After the themes have been created, the fifth step involves looking at them to determine their significance for understanding the dataset and the research question, how they relate to one another, and whether any sub-themes already exist (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Four themes came out as final. The first theme was "pro-Johnny Depp fans despite controversy" and included the previous categories celebrity defender, mixed feelings, attached fans and reasons to follow celebrities. The theme "for and against cancel culture" was followed from positive and negative opinions towards cancel culture as participants had two siding opinions towards it. The theme "complete disengagement due to controversy" included two previous categories; Reasons to unfollow Johnny Depp and aversion to Johnny Depp. The fourth, "those who don't care about personal lives of celebrities" remained on it's own followed from lack of interest. Finally, in the sixth step, a report is written, explaining how these themes came to existence, giving examples and offering insights related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6 Quality criteria (reliability and validity)

Words like validity and dependability are more frequently linked with quantitative research than with qualitative research. The same phrases, however, can be used to refer to

comparable criteria, according to certain academics like Silverman (2011), who argues that this is necessary to provide the academic rigor that qualitative research demands. The reliability of a research project, according to Silverman (2011), can be characterized as "the degree to which the findings of a study are independent of accidental circumstances of their production" (p. 360). To put it another way, the notion behind dependability is that other researchers should be able to duplicate the study using the same techniques and produce the same outcomes (Silverman, 2011).

Transparency in the research and theoretical processes is essential for achieving reliability in a study like this thesis. It is important to describe the decision made and explaining why these decisions have been made. The detailed descriptions of the concepts and theories that make up this thesis' theoretical framework are described in detail to give readers a better understanding of the research conducted for this study. The process of collecting the data was made visible in the second chapter of this thesis and a full descriptions of the 13 interviews have been placed in Appendix E in a separate document. The transcriptions of the interviews are placed in a separate document which is attached with this thesis. In summary, the transparent nature of the data gathering process, the method of analysis, and the theories and concepts applied strengthened the reliability of this study.

When evaluating the validity of this study, it is useful to remember that in quantitative studies, this notion relates to the results pertaining to the particular subject matter being examined and how well those results relate to other studies on this subject (Silverman, 2011). According to Silverman (2011), research is considered to be credible when it provides an account of the phenomenon it claims to describe. As a result, the researcher should challenge the truthfulness of the subject matter being investigated (Silverman, 2011). Guaranteeing the validity of this study meant to ensure that the study regarded engagement and disengagement of users with Johnny Depp exclusively as well as understanding if participants were supportive or unsupportive of cancel culture. Through in-depth interviews understanding of fandoms parasocial connection with celebrities was understood as well. References to the academic literature are made regularly throughout the results chapter's interpretations of the data. This chapter also contains data extracts from the participants that serve to illustrate and support the ideas. What is indicative of the

accuracy with which the concept that cancel culture affects the relationship of social media users with their favourite celebrity. However, after the research it was found that findings show two sides of the coin where one agree to have disengaged with Johnny Depp due to his controversy and the latter who support Johnny Depp despite the controversy.

This thesis adopted a self-reflexive mindset and an active intrusive role as the researchers values and the impact from the environment are aspects that affect the overall validity of the study (Silverman, 2011).

4. Research result

Studies on the subject of cancel culture conducted by Yousef and Ayari stated that cancel culture has a negative impact on the relationship between consumers and influencers as the majority of consumers' commitment and trust towards the influencers decreased after they are cancelled (Yousef & Ayari, 2022). Four primary themes about participants' patterns of engagement and disengagement with relation to Johnny Depp were identified in this thesis after in-depth interviews. As a result of Johnny Depp's cancellation, the results showed that the majority of participants took an unsupportive stance towards him, indicating a substantial change in their commitment to and connection with him.

The studies by Marwick and Boyd (2014) and Saldanha et al. (2022) offer important insights into how social media users disengage when interacting with public figures that are caught in issues (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). It's interesting that their findings agree with those of this particular research, which found that majority of Johnny Depp's followers showed disengagement from him after the scandal involving Amber Heard. From all the data that was retrieved, four main themes have emerged. The four main themes are important to discuss in great detail as it defines the main characteristics of this research. This chapter is structured in terms of each theme that was identified and formed from the collected interview data. The entire coding scheme can be viewed in Appendix D: Coding tree. A brief synopsis of the Johnny Depp scandal is discussed before proceeding with the main themes that were found in the research.

4.1 Johnny Depp Scandal Synopsis

On May 23, 2016, Amber Heard filed for divorce from Johnny Depp and he was served with a temporary restraining order due to certain allegations towards him by his ex-wife, Amber Heard. Amber stated that Johnny had physically assaulted her during their relationship under the influence of alcohol and drugs. (Sarkisian et al., 2022). Reactions coming out of Depp's fans due to his domestic violence allegations differed substantially; where some people were extremely disturbed while others wanted answers. Depp however, denied these accusations and years after in 2020 he sued the publisher "The Sun" and its executive editor Dan Wootton for calling him a "wife-beater" (Marshall, 2020). The

internet was taken by storm with mixed feelings and emotions for and against both Amber and Johnny (Sarkisian et al., 2022). Numerous transmissions of evidence proliferated, demanding involvement and attention, and drawing people into a blustering online debate with the truth, revelations, libel and rumours (Andrejevic, 2004).

4.2 Themes

As discussed in the theoretical framework, fandoms parasocial connection to celebrities is important to understand in order to understand how they disengage and engage with celebrities online (Tukachinsky, 2010). Disengagement and engagement with Johnny Depp can be evidently seen in this research by looking at the results in combination with the literature, providing an answer for the research question. Different elements and themes popped-up during this research out of which four prominent themes emerged: Pro-Johnny Depp Fans Despite Controversy, For and Against Cancel Culture, Complete Disengagement due to Controversy, Those who don't care about Personal Lives of Celebrities.

4.2.1 Pro-Johnny Depp fans despite controversy

In the interviews the participants were asked about their different ways of interaction with Johnny Depp, their opinion on the controversies as well as of their connection with Depp to understand if they felt a parasocial connection with him. The first theme that emerged were of those who supported Depp despite the scandal, from which 2 sub-themes emerged; celebrity defender and attached fans.

Sub Theme: Celebrity Defender

This theme was named as participants indicated that they supported Johnny Depp despite the controversy, this was particularly because participants were fans of Johnny Depp from many years. They admired him and followed him for inspiration and hence, the controversies did not change their opinion of him. Because of this, those who have been supporting him from a long time refused to disengage with him despite the controversial issues he had faced. As the quotation of participant 4 states: "Even if the verdict went against him, I might've found myself actually [...] still engaging in content about him" (Participant 4, Male, 20 years of age). Other participants indicated that they admired the actor dearly for his movies and that they would continue to support him because of his

movies. Here, it is the quality of his acting and movies that continue to engage his fans. “I am well-versed with his movies, very few characters have the charisma that Captain Jack Sparrow does. He is a fine performer in my eyes” (Participant 1, Male, 21 years of age).

Some participants more explicitly drew a line between Depp as an actor/celebrity and as a private person. They believed that whatever happens in Depp’s life is his personal matter and that the audience should not have an opinion because his personal life is not associated with his public life as an artist. As stated by participant 1: “This is one of those situations where one needs to separate the art from the artist” (Participant 1, Male, 21 years of age).

Furthermore, despite the controversies many participants reported that they did not disengage with Johnny Depp due to the trial. They believed that they supported him once and should continue doing so no matter what. One participant shared: “I did not unfollow him, because of his scandals, I don’t see why I would have to unfollow someone I have followed for some good years now” (Participant 3, Female, 52 years of age). Some even actively supported Depp by having positive interactions with his social media for instance: liking his posts, commenting in order to defend him and posting videos in his support throughout the trial. Participant 9: “During the case I posted stories, I remember once I made a selfie video of myself talking about the case and explaining to people why we need to support him” (Participant 9, Female, 30 years of age). Similarly, participant 4 shares: “I did post about Johnny Depp’s case on my Instagram before, just how I support him and that he is being framed. I think that the people’s opinion is taken so seriously I had to say my part” (Participant 9, Female, 30 years of age).

Participants stressed the relevance of sharing their thoughts and feelings online and highlighted the significance of having their views shared for the public and the media. They emphasized the importance of speaking up for the people they support since it might provide them (in this case Johnny Depp) with the necessary emotional support.

Sub Theme: Attached fans

Many Johnny Depp fans were vastly affected by the controversy and that gave them a sense of anxiety and discomfort as reported by them. This is a clear indication that supporters faced a sense of parasocial connection with Depp where seeing him in difficult situations made them feel upset because they admired him.

I don't feel good. I mean...I like them, so naturally I want to take their side and feel anxious when they are surrounded by negativity...I was anxious, truly. He had to go through so much due to Heard's actions...falsely accusing him, trying to destroy his career...I mean, this case made me stay up reading about it at nights. [...] I mean it made me feel a certain bad energy, very sad whatever happened. (Participant 4, Male, 20 years of age)

Similarly, others held similar views "Yeah for this one it made me feel very sad, I mean I felt very bad for him and also for her, but more for him... because of my love for him. Drove me crazy mad you know?" (Participant 6, Female, 26 years of age).

While the above illustrations show that fans are saddened and emotionally disturbed by what was happening to Depp, they were also furious and showed rage towards Amber Heard due to her accusations towards Johnny Depp. Some also participated in liking videos against Amber Heard which likewise indicates the participants parasocial connection with Depp. Participant 6 continues to show her anger towards Amber Heard's ill-statements against Johnny Depp.

Come on, she pooped on his bed. What the actual f*ck is that? I mean...of course I would be so mad like...of course I would be pissed. Oh my god, I can go on forever. How dare she speak ill of Johnny and expect that he would never speak out? [...] I have made comments, and also maybe liked videos of people making fun of Amber Heard on TikTok. [...] I was f*cking furious man, it was sickening to even watch her pretending to cry! (Participant 6, Female, 26 years of age).

Such strong statements coming out from participants not only portray a strong parasocial connection with the Oscar-winning actor but also portrays the fans unending support towards Johnny Depp in spite of the major controversies he has been involved in. Another effect of a strong parasocial connection is that most of those who are also supportive of Johnny Depp were repulsed by cancel culture in a more general sense and did not support it due to its demeaning nature. Here, the specific case of Depp being cancelled provoked more general feelings of disgust against bullying and shaming. "No, I have not, I think it is disgusting. it is very demeaning... It divides the society without any sense of proportion cancel culture leads to online bullying" (Participant 3, Female, 52 years of age).

Discussion of Theme 1

This first theme that emerged are of those who support Johnny Depp and their opinion of him has not changed due to what he has done in his personal life. This category did not understand why they had to unfollow him or disengage with him because they were very fond of him and were fans since a young age. Even though they shared that they felt sad or frustrated looking at his situation, they hoped that he came out to be victorious because of their love for him. This proved that the participants wanted to believe what their love for him made them believe, which is suggestive of parasocial connection discussed in the theoretical framework, where fandoms want to support their favourite celebrities based on their similar values and beliefs.

These findings reinforce Tukachinsky's research on parasocial connection, which explains how fans develop a deeper bond with celebrities through their content, thereby strengthening their sense of identity with them (Tukachinsky, 2010). This personal connection let's fans enjoy a celebrity's work on an intimate level, which explains why they continue to remain devoted and engaged despite the celebrities personal transgressions. In other words, the strong bond that has been already established with the celebrity is what motivates them to retain their loyalty and support.

4.2.2 For and against cancel culture

Participants expressed varying feelings towards cancel culture, out of which they participated in cancel culture through likes, comments, reposting and tweeting. Two sub-themes emerged within the second theme regarding cancel culture; positive opinion towards cancel culture and negative opinion towards cancel culture.

Sub Theme: Positive opinion towards cancel culture

There were instances where those who support Johnny Depp also supported cancel culture, calling it a good move towards making people more aware of what they say in public. "Such a culture does keep people with influence in check for they can sway minds. [...] it makes people self-aware and conscious of their actions, however sometimes it does get too overbearing." (Participant 6, Female, 26 years of age)

Then there were those who showed support towards cancel culture and unsupported Johnny Depp, mentioning it's pros and how it can help society put things into perspective. They made remarks regarding how it can make people more aware about what they say out-loud, thinking of the consequences of their actions. As quoted by participant 8: "I understand it as a common people's weapon against influence. I think it makes people aware of themselves and their actions" (Participant 8, Female, 23 years of age). Similar opinions were shared by another participant:

Cancel culture I do have to say I support. ... cancel culture puts a filter between your thoughts and your mouth. ... It makes you rethink your choices for you know it'll lead to consequences. Society in general is learning the boundaries of their independence. (Participant 11, Male, 25 years of age)

Sub Theme: Negative opinion towards cancel culture

Finally, there were participants who supported Johnny Depp but hated cancel culture due to its harsh nature, calling-out on its demeaning nature and believing that it splits the society into two halves. They believe that it turns people against one another. "I think it is disgusting. it is very demeaning... It divides the society without any sense of proportion, cancel culture leads to online bullying" (Participant 3, Female, 52 years of age). Overall, the interviews highlighted the complexity of cancel culture and the range of opinions it can elicit, with participants expressing a variety of views on the subject, with some in support while others condemning it.

Discussion of Theme 2

The topic of cancel culture is complicated and highly debated, respondents have expressed a variety of opinions on the subject. Some people are in favour of cancel culture because they believe it is a way to make influential people answerable for their deeds and statements. They suggest that cancel culture might increase people's awareness of their responsibilities and motivate them to exercise caution while speaking because doing otherwise could have unfavourable effects on the society. On the other hand, other respondents condemn cancel culture, calling it harsh, demeaning, and perhaps even encouraging bullying. They argue that cancel culture can be harmful, ultimately causing more societal divide and hostility.

Some others adopt a more balanced perspective on cancel culture, acknowledging both its potential advantages and disadvantages. Some people think that cancel culture may bring people together to fight injustice and direct society toward a shared goal. They believe that while cancel culture has the potential to be an effective instrument for enforcing social justice and holding people accountable, it must be utilized with caution and due consideration for its possible negative effects.

In general, the subject of cancel culture continues to elicit passionate discussion and disagreement and agreement among people, underlining the complexity of this issue and the requirement for continued participation and conversation within this subject.

4.2.3 Complete disengagement due to controversy

The two sub-themes that emerged; reasons to unfollow Johnny Depp and aversion to Johnny Depp explains the perceptions of those participants who's opinion of Johnny Depp changed after his trial with Amber Heard.

Sub Theme: Reasons to unfollow Johnny Depp

Most of the participants shared that they disengaged with Johnny Depp, some by partially muting him, while others by unfollowing him. They shared their feelings that they felt he was not worth following anymore as their opinion of him had completely changed. They also felt toxic energy around his content and were adversely disturbed. Participant 5 shared that she unfollowed him because she felt toxic energy around him.

I like him for his movies but not interested in him anymore. ... Is unfollowing someone disengagement? If so then yeah... many of the times when I have unfollowed a celebrity it's simply because I don't relate to their content anymore...same for Johnny, I felt toxic energy around him. (Participant 5, Female, 19 years of age)

Another participant emphasized that they cut Depp out completely because he was upset with him winning the defamation case. They did not believe he was innocent in this case and that justice was not served by giving him the hero status in the trial. He shares:

Oh absolutely I did, I unfollowed him I was a massive fan of his before this drama... He is an abuser. [...] I did in this very case actually. I unfollowed and cut him

out completely. I was mainly upset with him getting a hero status for winning a defamation case. (Participant 7, Male, 20 years of age)

Interviewees highlighted that they felt betrayed because of what they heard and saw about Johnny Depp. Even though they were once fans of Johnny Depp, they felt hurt by his actions and felt a sense of betrayal when they found out he was abusive towards his ex-wife Amber Heard. Participant 8 elaborates that one is not obligated to keep supporting an actor, despite the connection they feel with them. They highlighted that it is important to know your own morals and supporting bad behaviour makes you question your own morals. One participant shares: "If someone has done something severe, nah you can't support with them after, of course you can't. Makes you question your own morals" (Participant 11, Male, 25 years of age).

Interviewees feel it is important to employ personal reasoning in order to keep supporting celebrities, not letting emotional feelings overtake wrongful behaviour just because they feel a connection, emphasizing that, fans love is not unconditional especially if they feel betrayed by them.

I do feel betrayed again because of the something... You get my love, admiration, respect, attention and what not, but it's not unconditional. [...] When they participate in things that are unacceptable, of course it feels like betrayal. It feels like I wasted my energy on the wrong person, my time on the wrong person. (Participant 8, Female, 23 years of age)

Others indicated that their opinion of Depp had completely changed after the scandal as they believe they cannot remove the abusive image of him while they even watched his movies. "Oh yes!... my opinion of him has changed definitely. I would watch his movies but in the back of my head, yeah I do think of how he abused his wife and same with Amber" (Participant 10, Female, 28 years of age).

Sub Theme: Aversion to Johnny Depp

Majority of the participants stated that their opinion of Johnny Depp changed and admitted that they participated in cancel culture; leading them to completely disengage with the actor. Some of the interviewees agreed that they participated in posting videos against him and liking content online that went against him as they felt furious with him

getting all the support. Some questioned how Amber received all the hate whereas Johnny received all the love and this made no sense to them as both of them were abusive towards each other. Some participants posted stories against Depp and wanted their followers to be more aware of his abuse towards his ex-wife. "People just like a hero story, so they showered him with love and hated on her, like how the f*ck does that make sense? I was trying to tell people through my stories to be a little more incorporative" (Participant 7, Male, 20 years of age). Other participants on the other hand had an interesting approach where they shared videos from different psychologists decoding both Amber and Johnny's body language on their Instagram which is a form of participation in cancel culture.

Participant 10 mentions:

I guess most I did was share a few views of like YouTubers or influencers or even Psychologists who read both their body languages on Instagram and TikTok. I thought it was a very interesting take for psychologists to decode their body language haha. (Participant 10, Female, 28 years of age)

Others went as far as to say that they were unable to look at Depp because of what he had done and hence, stopped watching his movies. Additionally, they felt sick of him because of his manipulative behaviour and him coming out as the hero in the story while he was indeed abusing his ex-wife. As quotes by participant 8 and 11 suggest that they were completely repulsed by him and could not bring themselves to look at him because of the hero title he received, illustrating disengagement with Johnny Depp. "I can't look at the guy's face to be honest. [...] Yeah it made me feel sad to see how the American society crowns a man victorious and a woman insane the second they can" (Participant 11, Male, 25 years of age). Similar and strong opinions of disengagement were shared by another interviewee, participant 8 shares:

I can't continue watching his movies [...] he is still a potential assaulter. But like he came out as a hero in front of the world, and she came out as a villain. It didn't make sense to me...after the whole thing every time he would like pop up or get some sort of hero treatment it would make me feel sick you know? I was cringing at the pedestal he was being put on. And you might say that my disengagement doesn't change anything, but I would like to hope there are other people who see it for what it truly is. (Participant 8, Female, 23 years of age)

Discussion for Theme 3

The vast majority of study participants displayed an intense desire to stop interacting with Johnny Depp and cited a fundamental shift in their opinion of the actor both during and after the trial as the reason for this. Many respondents claimed to have felt betrayed with Johnny Depp and had a hard time coming to terms with the person he was now than what they thought of before. They also participated in cancel culture where they interacted with content against him and ultimately unfollowed him. As a result, they were unable to communicate with him further. These participants' decision to stop participating was largely influenced by Depp's reputation as an abuser. They insisted that Depp's conduct were unacceptable and reprehensible even after he won the case. They were visibly enraged and frustrated, and many claimed to feel sick to their stomachs and were repulsed by the idea of supporting Depp in any manner. The majority of participants loyalty towards Johnny Depp declined, following Yousef and Ayari's (2022) research on cancel culture, demonstrating the negative impact on the relationship between fans and influencers due to their cancellations. These conclusions are supported by my own research, which showed that most participants in my survey stopped caring about Johnny Depp and unfollowed him as a result of his scandals.

Finally, considering the recent developments of this case, it is evident Depp's fans who have distanced themselves from him are driven by their deep affection for him. The sense of betrayal they experience indicates a genuine parasocial connection with the actor as a whole. If they felt no parasocial connection, they would not hold such strong opinion of him and feel furious with the situation. It is plausible that in the future, these fans may reconsider their opinion and resume their support for him. However, at present, the key findings of the study highlight the significance of cancel culture and how personal lives of celebrities can profoundly influence their fanbase. Numerous participants highlighted that their decision to withdraw from supporting Depp stemmed from their belief in commitment towards upholding what is morally right and opposing abuse. Considering Saldanha et al. (2022) findings which state that when fandoms witness a negative event or unpleasant situation which involves a celebrity they admire, they end up unfollowing and disengaging with them to further protect themselves from the trauma and distress, this was quite visible in the participants of this research, who disengaged with Depp to avoid feeling troubled and avoid emotional discomfort. Many interviewees shared that they stopped looking at content

coming from Depp's social media platform as well as from YouTube because they felt betrayed and did not want to disturb themselves further.

Similarly, Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005) emphasize the emotional attachment fans form to their fandom idols, and celebrity-related controversies which can affect fan engagement and the disengagement that may occur as a result of such events. In this case, evidently, fans can be seen disassociating themselves from Depp because his values and morals don't align with those of their own. Here, fans express and create their fan identities both consciously and unconsciously which acts as a bridge between their inner feelings, towards the actor and the outside world. On the other hand, it could be stated that users who experience strong parasocial connection with celebrities are more likely to show correspondingly strong feelings to disconnect themselves from those celebrities, which is a result from their intense emotional attachment to their likeable celebrity.

4.2.4 Those who don't care about personal lives of celebrities

The last theme of this research is of those participants who do not care about the personal lives of celebrities and are unbothered. They also believe that there are better things to worry about in their lives and stories about celebrities' personal lives have no effect on them. "I don't really care. They have a name, so their issues are treated like they are more important than others'. However, it is just like anyone else's pain. Treat it like that" (Participant 13, Male, 30 years of age). Another interviewee shared similar views, "I felt nothing, It's his life. [...] Only like him in movies, don't care about his personal life." (Participant 12, Male, 29 years of age)

Another reason that this was shared by these participants was that they did not feel any kind of connection with the celebrities they liked, which is why they never participated in cancel culture or did anything to support Johnny Depp during his trial. The celebrities' sorrows and happiness has no effect on them and they did not take any action towards Johnny Depp after the trial. However, they expressed their complete support for cancel culture, believing that it could improve society by imposing necessary restrictions. "One can't deny that it has created an atmosphere of awareness. Things we never knew were wrong to say, we are made aware that it's not okay." (Participant 13, Male, 30 years of age)

Discussion for Theme 4

The final group of respondents who expressed little interest in the private lives of celebrities were identified. These people had little curiosity in celebrities outside of their performances or the films they starred in, and they had no parasocial links to them. These participants felt no need to develop emotional relationships with celebrities because they felt that doing so would not add any value to their lives. It was discovered that the study's participants had different opinions about cancel culture. They voiced their support for its objective even though they did not participate themselves. They held the opinion that individuals may use cancel culture as a potent tool to defend themselves from harmful influences and hold those in positions of authority responsible. A better society was also desired by these participants, and they believed cancel culture could aid in this endeavour. The participants did not engage in cancel culture themselves, despite their support for it; instead, they opted to stay away from (in their view) from pointless drama and negative energy.

5. Conclusion

In order to answer the research question, this chapter aims to combine the conclusive data gathered in the previous chapters. The previous chapters were crucial in constructing and formulating all the necessary data and insights required for this analysis. This chapter will serve as the conclusion to this research and provide a complete answer to the research question upon which this study is based. This study is aimed at answering the following question:

How do social media users engage and disengage with celebrities online and participate in cancel culture?

Four major themes emerged in total. The responses toward Johnny Depp were both positive and negative with majority of respondents being provoked with a lot of negative thoughts towards him caused by the controversies, Hence, 6 out of 13 participants disengaged with him, while 5 stayed engaged and the other 2 did not care for his personal life. It is to be noted that, this small sample is not definitive of the population, however, it still gives an idea of the thinking pattern of fandoms and what leads to fans disengagement with a celebrity. Even though some of the participants showed mixed feelings, majority leaned towards not supporting Johnny Depp. Furthermore, social media users engaged in more complex practices than just unfollowing him, they participated in liking posts against him as well as participating in cancel culture due to their feelings of betrayal and sudden untrustworthiness towards the actor. In-depth interviews brought out their real sentiments related to him by showcasing a complex side where, it is also evident that those who disengaged with him also felt a parasocial connection with him, that led them to feel betrayed and hurt immensely which is why they withdrew themselves to protect their emotional feelings suggestive of previous research findings as well (Saldanha et al., 2022).

Furthermore, controversies related to celebrities also causes fandoms to lose the emotional connection they have developed towards them (Marwick & Boyd's, 2014). Fans' attachment to the celebrity acts as a link between their own experiences and the made-up world that the media has built (Douthat, 2020). With the help of this bridge, fans may connect with one another and feel a sense of community and shared values as they express their feelings and experiences with others who share their interests (Douthat, 2020).

Fans, however, have a conflict between their emotional attachment to the celebrity and the problematic behaviours or ideas connected to them when controversies occur (Marwick & Boyd's, 2014). The basis of the fan-celebrity relationship is put in jeopardy by this contradiction, and fans may feel a variety of feelings like disappointment, betrayal, or even moral difficulty. As a result, supporters of Johnny Depp stopped participating in the fandom in order to resolve their mixed emotions (Saldanha et al., 2022). In this thesis we also see the severity at which fandoms feelings and their sense of parasocial connection faded due to their anger and feelings of anger towards the actor which is indicative that fans feelings and emotions change no matter how strong they may feel a parasocial connection. It could be argued that due to the users intense emotions regarding the celebrity, those exhibiting strong parasocial connection to them are easily repulsed by them due to their strong feelings of betrayal. Hence, fandom is no longer able to act as a connecting element between fans' inner selves and the outside world when there are conflicts (Ng, 2020), instead, the fandom serves as a constant reminder of the dissonance and tension brought on by the debate, and as a result, some fans may choose to withdraw from it in order to safeguard their own emotional wellbeing (Saldanha et al., 2022).

In addition, it is possible to interpret a fan's withdrawal from the fandom in the wake of scandals as an act of self-preservation and a defence of their moral character. By disengaging, fans reassert their own moral principles and ideals while separating themselves from the negative behaviours or viewpoints associated with the celebrity. The scandal led people wanting to dismiss their feelings towards the actor as they felt a toxic energy around him and could not see themselves supporting abuse as it would make them question their own morals and ethics. It is to be noted that, those who supported cancel culture were not in favour of Johnny Depp, calling it a way to better the society and put the necessary restrictions on powerful people. Additionally, those who did not support cancel culture were in favour of Johnny Depp calling cancel culture demeaning and leading to a divide in the society. This research comes to a conclusion that even though people feel parasocial interaction and connection with celebrities it is not the ultimate decision that they will not later disengage. Respondents believe that there needs to be moral reasoning behind supporting actors as the actors' feelings and demeanour need to align with those of their fans, as also suggestive by Horton's parasocial interaction theory (Liebers & Schramm, 2021).

Thus, the conclusion of the analysis of the responses towards the cancellation of Johnny Depp can be understood as withdrawal from the celebrity due to their involvement in controversies, which strengthen previous findings (Marwick & Boyd's, 2014) and (Saldanha et al., 2022) where celebrities involvement in negative scandals can influence the feelings of fandoms to disassociate themselves from them. The disengagement observed in this research was rather shocking, especially considering that some of the interviews were conducted with individuals who had positively interacted with Johnny Depp previously on Instagram. Hence, it came as a surprise to discover that these individuals had distanced themselves from him, suggestive of their comments on his page, deciding to withdraw their support for his movies and discontinue further interaction with his content. However, it is important to understand that these feelings of betrayal are still fresh, triggered by the new revelation of his misconduct. As time goes on, there still remains a possibility that these long-term Johnny Depp fans may eventually find their way into forgiving him and re-engaging with him.

It is important to note that not all fans disengage their fandoms in the face of controversy. While some admirers would prefer to keep the artist and the work separate, others might take an active role in conversations and debates to voice their opinions or hold the celebrity responsible. However, because it has a big impact on the dynamics in fandom communities, the emotional impact of conflicts on fan participation cannot be ignored. In conclusion, fan disengagement following celebrity-related problems is clarified by Hills (2002) and Sandvoss' (2005) findings on fandom as a transitional object. Fans can connect with their own feelings and experiences through fandom, which fosters a sense of community and shared values. However, when scandals occur, the emotional bond that fans have with the celebrity is put under strain, which may result in disengagement.

5.1 Academic contributions

The findings of this research make significant contributions to the academic understanding of cancel culture and its implications for fan engagement with celebrities. It provides an insight into the dynamics of parasocial connections and the influence of personal controversies on fandoms, expanding on existing theories and adding new perspectives to the understanding of cancel culture and fan behaviour. The most obvious one being that of opposing viewpoints on cancel culture, emphasizing the different thoughts on its effectiveness, potential advantages, and drawbacks. This thorough examination of

cancel culture aids in a clearer comprehension of both its social effects and the mechanics of public opinion. Theories have been found useful in analysing data on fan engagement and disengagement, such as Tukachinsky's (2010) concept of parasocial connection that fans form close bonds with celebrities based on common ideals and worldviews. While some fans seemed to hold strong ties and admiration for Johnny Depp majority showed resentment towards him.

Other recent studies conducted by Saldanha et al., (2022) that suggest users disengagement is due to celebrities involvement in negative episodes aligns with this research. Although, the results of this research cannot be representative of the whole population, it is definitely important to take into consideration how previous research are similar with this one. On the other hand, followers' steadfastness and engagement with celebrities in the face of personal scandals can be explained by the existence of a parasocial link (Tukachinsky, 2010, p. 90). Overall, the thesis research findings are consistent with other studies on cancel culture and how it affects fan behaviour and interaction with celebrities. For example Yousef and Ayari (2022) discovered that cancel culture causes fandoms to be less devoted to influencers. In this research, the majority of participants showed a change in commitment and connection with Johnny Depp after his cancellation. This supports the idea that cancel culture can damage the relationship between fans and celebrities. Additionally, this study's findings regarding fan disengagement in response to celebrity controversies are supported by Marwick and Boyd research (2014). Social media users are more inclined to stop engaging with celebrities who are involved in issues, marking this research as holding a strong connection to previous studies.

With the aforementioned, the research expands existing literature by underlining the emotional impact that personal controversies have on fan engagement. It delves into the emotions of fans who have totally disengaged after feeling "betrayed" and "repulsed" by Johnny Depp's actions, stressing the role of fandom as a transitional object for fans to traverse these difficulties. Hence, acknowledging the tension and dissonance that develops when fans are faced with conflicting feelings as a result of conflicts and by examining the causes of such choices, the study also advances our knowledge of fan disengagement in the face of disagreement. It demonstrates that disengagement might be viewed as an effort at moral defences and self-preservation. Fans disengage in order to protect their own emotional well-being and assert their own morals and principles, distancing themselves

from the negative behaviours of celebrities (Saldanha et al., 2022). This perspective emphasizes the complexity of fan responses to conflicts and adds insight to the existing knowledge of fan disengagement and parasocial interaction theory. It is important to understand that fans frequently develop strong relationships to celebrities and influencers they look up to, according to theories. However, It is also crucial to recognize that these opinions might change considerably after a contentious incident involving the influencers or celebrities in controversies.

Finally, the study uncovers a particular set of people who showed minimal interest in the private lives of celebrities. This finding calls into question the findings of parasocial interaction theory where it states that all fans connect on a parasocial level. These people showed a lack of parasocial ties, emphasizing the value of keeping one's personal life and one's creativity apart. Their viewpoint draws attention to the wide range of fan perspectives and emotional investments in celebrities. This study hence, implies that not all fans are affected by private issues and that different variables may be responsible for some followers' participation or disengagement. Identifying these variables may be a good subject for future research.

Overall, the study's findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding of fan mentality and towards controversial circumstances where varying degrees of interest in celebrities' personal lives is seen, adding to our understanding of fan psychology. This complex viewpoint incites academics to look more deeply into the difficulties of fan-celebrity interactions and acknowledge the complexity of fan experiences.

5.2 Future research

For future research, many different elements have risen from this research to be explored in more detail. One recommended approach is to conduct a longitudinal study that encompasses the entire research to effectively observe how participants' engagement and disengagement with celebrities is affected. Additionally, how audiences' attitudes toward cancel culture change over time, especially when someone is exposed to controversies followed by disengagement and within a few years their feelings change or calm down. It is important to understand the timeline of their disengagement and re-engagement to take the study further and how their relationship with celebrities develop online from different experiences. As the case is relatively recent, people's emotions of anger and betrayal are still raw. However, if this study were to be conducted a few years later, the findings could

differ significantly. The interviews conducted for this research have identified engagement and disengagement as a critical factor that furthers the study and contributes to other facets of the research. Furthermore, for future research it's recommended to choose a broader age group to be able to see differences in answers among teenagers and adults. For this research answers were mostly recorded from young adults and a few adults, which might have given similar answers due to the age group. Age directly effects the research outcome as it correlated with the lifestyle and social media experience of each individual. Some participants also shared talking about this controversial issue with their friend groups which may have influenced their thinking due to multiple voices in their heads. For future research, it is advised to choose participants from different parts of the world with different cultural backgrounds. For this research, participants were chosen from different parts of the world, however, a more diverse and larger sample will give more definitive results. Participants from India, Netherlands, Greece, Russia and Malaysia were interviewed. Due to limited time and resources the sample consisted of 13 interviewees ranging from 18-52 years of age. While the focus of the current study has been Johnny Depp, it is important to remember that many other celebrities have experienced cancellation and subsequent audience disengagement. Therefore, a fascinating direction for future research could be to examine the occurrence with different public figures, such as a politician or another celebrity.

5.3 Limitations

This research encountered certain limitations that influenced its outcomes. The results of this study were impacted by some restrictions. First off, the research's scope and depth were constrained by the sample size, which was only 13 participants, given the wide range of viewpoints on this topic. A greater number of participants would have made it possible to examine the subject in greater detail. As a result, generalizability is difficult but could be improved by the very acknowledgement that the researcher is not completely objective and should aim to being open to other interpretations (Van Gorp, 46 2010). Despite trying to be as objective as possible, the researcher could not help but feel a bias towards their own opinions of the actor and the situation as a whole. This may have come up sometimes during conversations with the participants, resulting in participants feeling a certain way and responding in certain ways. Additionally, since the time given for this thesis was short, it would be better for future researcher to be given more time in order to get

more participants and extract more information regarding the subject. Since the questionnaire was prepared by the interviewer, there might have been a bias towards the way the questions might have been prepped. Recognizing and acknowledging this potential bias is crucial to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should strive for a more objective approach by fostering openness to alternative interpretations and minimizing the impact of researcher bias.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A: Topic guide

My Introduction - Hello, thank you for joining me here today and for agreeing to be a participant for my master's thesis. I am Hana Mazhar and I am studying Media and Creative Industries at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Do I have your consent to audio-record you so that I can later transcribe the whole interview and use your name if necessary for my research? Also, do I have your permission and consent to use your full name or any other demographic information related to your education and background throughout my research? Before we begin, I want to declare that in this interview you are allowed to share all your thoughts and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers and I want you to be transparent with everything that you want to say. I want to understand your perceptions and use them for my research. This is a safe space and you can voice-out your opinions without any judgement.

- About this interview
- Confidentially answers
- No good/wrong answers
- If you want to stop, you can let me know
- If you don't want to answer a question, let me know
- Length of interview
- Consent form
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

Introduction of interviewee

1. Warm up:

- a. How often do you use social media platforms?
- b. Where do you receive most of the celebrity news from?

2. Questions on Social Media Engagement with Celebrities:

- a. How do you engage with celebrities on social media?
- b. Do you make comments on Johnny Depp's fanpage?
- c. Do you follow celebrities on social media to get information about them or just rely on the algorithm?
- d. What makes you follow celebrities online?

3. Questions on Social Media Disengagement with Celebrities:

- a. Do you consider yourself a Johnny Depp fan?
- b. Have you ever unfollowed a celebrity on social media? If so, why?
- c. How do you feel when a celebrity you previously supported is involved in a controversial issue?
- d. What actions, if any, have you taken in response to a celebrity's controversial behaviour on social media?
- e. Have you heard about the scandals with Johnny Depp? How did that make you feel? can you describe feelings in that moment?
- f. How do you feel about Johnny Depp's legal battles, such as the allegations of domestic abuse by his ex-wife Amber Heard?
- g. Have these controversies affected your perception of Johnny Depp as a person and as an actor?
- h. Have you ever considered disengaging with Johnny Depp on social media because of these controversies?
- i. Do such controversies around your favourite celebrity make you feel distressed or emotional?
- j. Do you think it is appropriate for celebrities to continue to have a public platform on social media despite engaging in controversial behavior?

4. Questions on Cancel Culture:

- a. What is your understanding of cancel culture?

- b. Have you ever participated in cancel culture? If so, can you give an example?
- c. Do you think cancel culture is an effective way of holding celebrities accountable for their actions?
- d. What impact does cancel culture have on the society?
- e. Have you ever defended Johnny Depp on social media in response to criticism or negative media coverage? If so, what motivated you to do so?

5. Questions on Parasocial Interaction

- a. Do you feel a personal connection with your favorite celebrity when interacting with them online? If so, how does that connection make you feel?
- b. Have you ever felt a sense of disappointment or betrayal when a celebrity you admire does something controversial or goes against your values?

6. Closing:

- a. Are there any things you'd like to add to our conversation that you haven't had a chance to do before?
- b. Do you have any feedback for me?

Stop Recording

Appendix B: Consent form**CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY****CONTACT:**

Hana Mazhar

Mail: 668174ah@student.eur.nl

Mobile: +31683966782

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in this research about disengagement and engagement with Johnny Depp and your experience with cancel culture. The purpose of the study is to understand how your understanding of cancellations related to the actor, Johnny Depp and his trial case with his ex-wife Amber Heard and how it affects your relationship with him; whether it leads to disengagement or you continue staying engaged with him. Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to participate in the in-depth interview. Generally, the conversations will be about social media usage, feelings towards cancel culture, engagement and disengagement with Johnny Depp and your experience with his trial as a whole. Unless you prefer to not be recorded while the in-depth interview, unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will be video recording the meeting via Zoom, you can of course be off camera or on camera. The audio however will be recorded to transcribe later. Additionally, you are always allowed to pause/not answer any question or ask additional questions for your comfort from the interviewer.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

I am aware that declaring the names or identifying the people who participated in this study, may involve risks for the future or past relationships with the actor. For these reasons, unless you want to be identified fully (first and last name, occupation). I will refer to participants in a way which may not lead to identify them. I will use the material from the interviews fully while keeping the observation exclusively for academic purposes, such as academic meetings, further research and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 40-60 minutes. You may stop your participation at any given time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this research, please be aware that your participation is voluntary and you have the sole right to withdraw from this research at any given time or discontinue at any given time without any penalty. Additionally, you have the right to refuse to answer particular questions during the in-depth interview. If you allow, your identification and output will be used in future research unless stated otherwise. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Thank you.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, or are dissatisfied with the study at any point of time, you may contact; anonymously, if you want – Erik Hitters hitters@eshcc.eur.nl

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. So you remain anonymous. Preferably it is suggested to give consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient. I give consent to be recorded during this study:

Name:

Signature Date:

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name:

Signature Date:

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep

Appendix C: Participant overview

All participants selected for this interview are regular media followers. The main criteria for this research was that participants should be fans of Johnny Depp or have ample knowledge on media and celebrities, students of media and communication, professionally involved in the media, and if participants ticked even one of the boxes then they were selected. A broad sample of people who are in touch with the cancel culture phenomenon were selected and I believe the participants who were chosen had each of these elements present in them as well as knew cancel culture due to their social media usage and as active viewers of celebrity news.

1. Participant 1 – Speaker 1 is a professional Indian actor, who I got acquainted with at the International Film Festival Rotterdam. He is 21 years old and is directly involved in the media industry. I thought he would be best person to approach as he would have good knowledge about the celebrity news as well as cancel culture closely.

2. Participant 2 – Speaker 2 is an Indian studying Film production at Toronto Film School and was introduced to me at the International Film Festival Rotterdam. He is 24 years old and I approached him on Instagram as I thought he was well-suited for this thesis due to his social media appearance and studies.

3. Participant 3 – Speaker 3 is an Indian who is a communications Professor at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, she is 52 years old. I approached her on LinkedIn as I thought her input and thoughts on this research will be useful given her educational background as well as involvement in media studies.

4. Participant 4 – Speaker 4 is a 21 year old Dutch student studying Bachelors in Media and Culture from Amsterdam University and was approached due to his educational background via Instagram as I believe he has knowledge on media and celebrities.

5. Participant 5 – Speaker 5 is an Indian who is 19 years old and is studying fashion design at Pearl Academy in New Delhi, India. I approached her on Instagram via Instagram direct message where she had commented on one of Johnny Depps photos. She is suitable for this research as she was found making comment on a Depps photo.

6. Participant 6 – Speaker 6 is a 28 year old Pakistani, who is completing her Masters in Data Analysis at Warwick University in Coventry, England. I approached her on Instagram via Instagram direct message where she had commented on one of Johnny Depp’s photos. She is selected for this research because she matched one of the criteria’s of my research where she was a Johnny Depp fan given her comment on his Instagram photo.

7. Participant 7 – Speaker 7 is a 20 year old student studying Bachelors of Optical Engineering at Tomsk State University in Tomsk, Russia. I found participant 7 through his comment on one of Johnny Depp’s fanpage photos and texted him via direct message on Instagram. He matched the criteria of him following celebrity’s on social media, and engaging with Johnny Depps post, which is why I approached him.

8. Participant 8 – Speaker 8 is a Latvian 23 year old student studying Computer Science at Liepaja University in Liepaja, Latvia. She commented on Johnny Depp’s photo and I approached her from there through direct messaging. Her comment suggested her love for Johnny Depp hence, she was a good fit for this research.

9. Participant 9 – Speaker 9 is a Malaysian 32 year old. She is a project analyst at Etiqa Digital Solutions and completed her Bachelors in Media and Communication. I found speaker 9 through one of her comments on Johnny Depp’s Instagram page and approached her through direct message on Instagram. I believe she was a fit participant for this research because of her comment on his page.

10. Participant 10 – Speaker 10 is a 30 year old Indian who is a part-time YouTuber who is also completing her masters in Journalism and International affairs at University College Dublin. I approached participant 10 through Instagram direct message as I have been following her from a long time. I believed Saba was a great participant for this research as she usually posted stories on celebrity news on her Instagram stories indicating that she has ample news on celebrities and opinion on cancel culture.

11. Participant 11 – Speaker 11 is a 25 year old Dutch, who has completed his masters in Film Studies at Amsterdam University. I approached this participant via Linkedin and asked him to participate in my thesis research due to his degree in film studies.

12. Participant 12 – Speaker 12 is an Indian journalist who is the founder of MainMedia, which is a hyperlocal journalism platform in India. Speaker 12 has also studied television journalism from Indian Institute of Mass Communication. I connected with him via linked in and decided to approach him there to get his insight on cancel culture and his involvement with Johnny Depp as I believed he would have ample knowledge due to his professional background.

13. Participant 13 – Speaker 13 is from Greece who works as a Marketeer at greengrape.nl. He has completed his Bachelors in Education and Social Work from University of Patras. Haris is an acquaintance and I believe he would have great insight on the topic as I know he follows celebrity news.

Appendix D: Coding Tree

