Master Thesis

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Cancel culture: Do you hate or support DaBaby?

ABSTRACT

This study is concentrated around cancel culture and, in particular, DaBaby's cancelation process. As it was identified, the issue of cancel culture is prominent but is not studied well since the concept is relatively new. Nevertheless, cancel culture was present in various forms before it had been labeled accordingly. The scandal around the music band Dixie Chicks is argued to be the trigger for the development of the modern interpretation of cancel culture. It was suggested to continue researching the phenomenon as it may lead to hurtful consequences such as hate speech and doxing. Therefore, it was decided to study the perception of cancel culture from the perspectives of the ones who support the movement (anti-fans), and the ones who try to defend the accused individual (fans) to retrieve the motivation of both parties which could suggest the further positive development of the phenomenon. Thereby, the study concentrated around the recent cancelation of the rapper named DaBaby who translated homophobic statements on the stage of the festival Rolling Lound 2021 in Miami. Thus, the central research question was constructed: "How do DaBaby's fans and anti-fans differ in their perception of the artist's cancelation after his homophobic statements towards the LGBTQ+ community?". It was decided to follow the qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants. Twelve interviews were conducted where six individuals represented anti-fans sub-group and other six participants represented the sub-group of fans. The participants were approached through Twitter and Instagram as the participants representing the sample are active on these communicational platforms. The further textual transcripts of the interviews were analyzed with the help of Atlas.ti as the analysis followed the three steps of the Thematic Analysis. The analysis resulted in four major themes which were *Ambiguity, DaBaby's acquisitions, Cancel culture's effectiveness,* and *Ethical & Moral considerations.* It was identified that both sub-groups acted from the perspective of their values where anti-fans were more liberal and fans were more conservative. Besides, fans are motivated to support the artist they listen to. Nevertheless, the central finding to answer the research question is the ambiguity of cancel culture. Despite fans translated negative opinion about cancel culture, they yet admitted that necessary regulations should apply to specific influential cases, whereas anti-fans agreed that cancel culture may be overused in the negative manner. Therefore, hate-speech regulations, critical approach to cancelations, and attention to the relevant severe cases can be applied to enhance the cancel culture's efficiency. It is suggested to enrich the number of participants in the study, conduct extra research of adjacent concepts, and to keep the ambiguity in mind in the future works regarding the cancel culture.

KEYWORDS: cancel culture, hate speech, fans, anti-fans, ambiguity

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The issue

MRC, the movie studio, was supposed to release the documentary about the life of a famous rapper Kanye West in 2022, however, this release of the documentary was permanently postponed (Palmeri, Bhasin & Bloomberg, 2022). Similarly, Creative Artists Agency, the rapper's touring representative, stopped any business affairs with the artist in the same year (Palmeri, Bhasin & Bloomberg, 2022). This backlash resulted after the allegations towards the artist because of his offensive and anti-Semitic statements towards the Jewish people and other controversial media cases in which Kanye West was involved like wearing a T-shirt with "White Lives Matter" caption (Bowen, 2022). Will Smith, famous actor and artist that had an inspiring and long-living career in cinematography, was cut from his upcoming cinema projects and resigned from the major cinema Academy after the incident on the Oscar's 2022 ceremony where he slapped another famous comedian Chris Rock (Geigel, 2022). Similarly to Will Smith, another famous actor Johnny Depp faced a severe backlash after which he lost his contracts with movie studios and brands (Sarkisian, Ntim & Adekaiyero, 2022). The reason for such precedent was presented by the actor's ex-wife Amber Heard who referred to Depp as an abuser (Sarkisian, Ntim & Adekaiyero, 2022).

There is one particular phenomenon that unites all these cases. All these stories of successful celebrities that further lost their reputation and income can be referred to cancel culture as these individuals were practically 'canceled' to remove the support for these celebrities by cutting their presence in the media (Dershowitz, 2020). Nevertheless, despite cancel culture, as a term, is arguably a new concept that is being widely used nowadays, cancel culture had also been present before it has been labelled accordingly (Romano, 2019). Cancel culture took various forms and names to fit the time better. To explain what is meant by that, the example from Dershowitz's (2020) book can be presented where the author compares modern cancel culture with the cancel culture of his generation which was "McCarthyism" where blacklisted personas in USA were cut from the society and other individuals couldn't openly interact with them. These blacklisted personas didn't have to be artists or other influential media personas, school teachers could also have been put in the blacklist (Dershowitz, 2020). The author also stated that cancel culture, similarly to McCarthyism, limits free speech as cancelation means boycotting personas-non-grata, and individuals who go against this initiative are not welcomed by the public (Dershowitz, 2020). On the other hand, there is a clear difference between McCarthyism and cancel culture since the modern version is a social movement and doesn't imply any governmental consequences what can't be said about McCarthyism. Nonetheless, even before the term 'cancel culture' was applied, the same social sanctions were imposed on individuals objectionable to the public. An evident example of cancel culture before it has been called accordingly is Dixie Chicks and their scandal in 2003. The backlash resulted from the group's public negative statements towards the war in Iraq and the US President George Bush at that time (Snapes, 2020). The scandal took its place because the majority, at that time, supported the

president's initiative (Jewell, 2023). The band received a lot of negative feedback from the public as their concerts were getting canceled and their music wasn't being played on the radio (Jewell, 2023). The band was also openly hated and discriminated within the social circles that supported the governmental initiatives which affected the group's ability to successfully release new music (Jewell, 2023). The similar scenarios can be witnessed in the beginning of this section where the recent cancel culture cases were presented. It is even argued that the Dixie Chick's backlash triggered the development of cancel culture in the current rhetoric (Jewell, 2023). Nonetheless, cancel culture, in the modern shape, is not studied well enough, and academics are still arguing on its relevancy and efficiency (Douthat, 2020).

The Research Question

As it could have been already identified, this study will focus on cancel culture and will try to bring new insights to the notion. Nevertheless, despite the few mentioned examples of cancel culture above, none of these will be the primary focus of the study. The cases of Kanye West, Will Smith, and Johnny Depp are relatively new, and the heavy debates on these personas are still present in the media (Geigel, 2022). On the other hand, the case of Dixie Chicks is relatively old, is not part of the current social movement, and it will be much more challenging to assemble the sample that could reflect on this case. Therefore, it was decided to study the relatively new case similar to Kanye West's, but it had to be currently less prevalent like the Dixie Chick's example so that it would be possible to reflect on it.

Rolling Loud is the largest hip-hop festival in the world happening each year in Miami, California, Asia, and Europe (Rolling Loud, 2023). The controversy that will be discussed happened during the Rolling Loud festival in Miami in 2021. DaBaby, the hero of the precedent, alongside other artists such as Post Malone and Megan Thee Stallion, performed at Rolling Loud 2021 (Chan, 2022). The performance was meant to be exciting for his fans and other people standing in the crowd, however, the performance got spoiled when the artist translated homophobic and misogynistic statements: "If you didn't show up today with HIV, AIDS, or any of them deadly sexually transmitted diseases that make you die in two to three weeks, then put your cell phone lighter up… Fellas, if you ain't sucking d**k in the parking lot, put your cell phone lighter up!" (King, 2021). These statements were instantly picked up by the media which resulted in the backlash which can be called "cancel culture" as DaBaby got 'canceled' meaning that his concerts and music were boycotted, live performances were terminated, DaBaby's character was hated on social media, and other artists shared their negative opinion about the rapper (King, 2021). It was witnessed that DaBaby posted his apologies to what had happened, however, it was believed that the apology wasn't sincere since the rapper has released a song where he ironized the cancelation towards him (Maurice, 2021). Nonetheless, DaBaby also received support from the industry from the rapper T.I. and the comedian Nick Cannon (Chan, 2022).

As mentioned in the article written by Bouvier (2020), there are usually two sides that are involved in cancelation processes which are defenders of a canceled individual that support the celebrity, and detractors that join the movement to fulfil the purpose of cancelation. By looking at DaBaby's case, these sides were evident as it was possible to witness fans of DaBaby that didn't turn their back on the rapper and disagreed with the negativity, and anti-fans that openly translated allegations against the celebrity. In Bouvier's (2020) article the author explored the communication patterns of racists and anti-racists on Twitter to determine the efficiency of Twitter to lead the social justice campaigns. Given that cancel culture has a fair amount of academic space to fill in, it is also relevant to study the perception of cancel culture of the individuals that stand for and against the canceled artist as this will explain the motives and the reasons for both sub-groups to behave the certain way. This will help to embrace the understanding of the phenomenon as this will uncover the potential relevancy of artists' cancelations as the participants representing both sub-groups will present their opinion and stimulus to either support or oppose DaBaby.

Therefore, it is possible to present the main research question of the study: "How do DaBaby's fans and anti-fans differ in their perception of the artist's cancelation after his homophobic statements towards the LGBTQ+ community?"

Societal and academic relevancy

As was already briefly mentioned, one of the most valuable outcomes of the study is that the motivation of the actors of cancel culture will be determined directly. As cancel culture is a provocative movement, fans and anti-fans oppose each other and both communities may provide their own understanding of the phenomenon which can bring the answers to the question why certain people are willing to cut specific individuals and why others are against this initiative. Therefore, this study will also bring potential advantages and disadvantages of the study which will not only enhance the existing debate on the relevancy of the movement but will also reflect on the effectiveness of the phenomenon to determine how inappropriate social behavior could be possibly addressed further avoiding heated controversial debates online which results in other destructive consequences like doxing or hate speech which will be also discussed further. Also, it is valuable to determine whether the opposing sub-groups justify their position based on their believes and knowledge. It is important to identify since, as will be elaborated further, cancel culture may lead to offensive behavior online which can result in hurtful consequences for celebrities and other members of social media platforms who participate in controversial debates, where the vulnerable group of people (which may also include specific celebrities) may mentally struggle after the offensive speech towards them. Therefore, by receiving justification for a specific behavior, it will be possible to reflect on the significance of cancel culture and its worthiness.

Besides the societal reflections of cancel culture, this study will also bring new insights to the world of academia from the perspective of fan and anti-fan theories. As presented in the previous

section, the relation between the opposing groups can be linked with the fan and anti-fan relations. By studying the perception of cancel culture, it will be also feasible to bring new insights to the fan theories to better understand the connections and contradictions between the opposing groups. Also, besides fan studies, this paper will also enhance the theories of other concepts applicable to cancel culture by reflecting on them in the theoretical framework chapter and also by including them in the research design to make the participants elaborate on them. Finally, by elaborating on the cancel culture insights and reflecting on the fan and anti-fan studies, this research will be beneficials for professionals working in entertainment industry and, in particular with artists, to understand how the community is divided and how both sub-groups of fans and anti-fans behave under critical media issues. By understanding how fans and anti-fans behave online in the cases of cancel culture, managers will be able to navigate the audience to sustain the desired financial goal.

Before diving into the theoretical framework section where the essential concepts will be discussed and evaluated, it is valuable to briefly describe the chosen method for the research. As will be further explained, the most appropriate method for this particular research is qualitative semi-structured interviews. Since it is important to identify the perception of the individuals, the participants will be interviewed to uncover their personal relation towards DaBaby's cancelation and other adjacent concepts. The anti-fan participants will be gathered on Twitter based on their negative tweets towards the artist with the help of the related hashtags. The sample of fans will be gathered through Instagram as there are more representative fan communities on this platform. It is suggested to conduct 12 semi-structured interviews with the chosen participants where 6 participants will be representing the fan sub-group and 6 individuals will be reflecting from the perspective of anti-fans. Further, the Thematic Analysis will be applied to analyze the retrieved data from the interviews with the help of Atlas.ti in three steps which are open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. It is expected to come up with two distinct codebooks for both sub-groups, nevertheless, the final outcome will be decided after the end of the analytical process.

After presenting the topic, current issue, and the direction of the research, it is expected to identify the evident differences in the responses of sub-groups. As fans and anti-fans are the opposing communities, it is expected to witness contradicting perceptions of DaBaby's cancelation. Nonetheless, various similarities in reasoning may also have a place to be. Besides, as the research will not only concentrate on DaBaby's cancelation but will also elaborate on the adjacent concepts like doxing and hate speech, it is expected to see in-group deviations from the general reasoning as opinions regarding these topics are subjective and do not necessarily correlate with the perception of cancel culture and DaBaby in particular. However, this will be closely discussed and evaluated further, and, before the start of the analytical process, the central concepts will be explored to prepare the foundation for the data gathering.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter of the project will elaborate on the preexisting literature and concepts to connect the current issue with the theoretical background. In order to continue with the study, five major concepts were identified. These concepts are cancel culture, doxing, hate speech, fans, and anti-fans. In the case of DaBaby, the situation can be addressed with the help of the aspects that are were mentioned.

These notions are also interconnected with each other. When specific persona is being 'cancelled', his/her anti-fans become very active on various channels, and the number of supporters of such movement increases. On the other hand, active fans are also getting into the controversy, leading to the created opposition to anti-fans and to increased attention to the case. Therefore, it is necessary to dive into cancel culture, fan & anti-fan studies and what these notions entail to be able to address DaBaby's case in a more comprehensible way.

Moreover, cancel culture may provoke unpleasant techniques that are used to harm individual's mental health and/or reputation. The scope of the analysis does not allow to cover most of the techniques, but it is definitely possible to analyze the most evident, frequent, and hurtful which are hate speech and doxing. As presented in the introduction, DaBaby faced a backlash after his homophobic statements during Rolling Loud festival in 2021. Considering further discussions, DaBaby's case can be related to the concept of cancel culture. Therefore, the artist may be hated and openly criticized by the public to accomplish the purpose of cancelation. Hence, various individuals may incorporate hate speech that the artist has to witness. On the other hand, DaBaby engaged in hate speech himself which ignited the conflict. Hate speech may be diverse and subjective, and, as will be discussed further, different people might disagree whether a specific message consists or doesn't consist of offensive language. A similar scenario is applicable to doxing. Before Internet it was difficult to spread the message around, however, with the rise of social media the private information leakage is getting more widespread and frequent (Solo, 2020). Regardless of whether DaBaby's private information was leaked, there is no guarantee that because of the incident it wouldn't be leaked in the future. Doxing, or private information leakage, may have a clear definition but people may disagree whether a certain leakage can be considered as doxing. Thus, it is necessary to study both concepts to be able to conduct a valid investigation of community's perception of the case. Also, by identifying the relevancy and correlation of doxing and hate speech with cancel culture, it will be possible to dive deeper into the reasoning of the participants that either apply or do not apply these techniques.

This chapter will elaborate on each concept step by step and further suggest the methodological application of discovered knowledge.

Cancel culture

The theoretical framework chapter will start from elaborating on cancel culture and its elements as this concept is the essential topic surrounding the Rolling Loud controversy. Firstly, it is necessary to identify cancel culture and what it entails. Various sources present diverse perspectives on the notion, nevertheless, it is possible to construct a general and objective definition of the phenomena. Technically, cancel culture is the action of accusing and cutting the individuals that engaged in racism, harassment, homophobia, anti-Semitism and in other violation of norms from a community (Clark, 2020). Therefore, cancel culture protects the society from so called "taboos" that are widely unaccepted (Garcia, 2021). But this is not only for the matters of protection, the purpose of cancel culture is also to bring 'justice' to the society and to call for accountability (Mueller, 2021). Nonetheless, here, it is important to elaborate on injustice that cancel culture fights against. Generally speaking, there is a clash of two societies that do not necessarily contradict each other but do not share the same range of values: *conservative* & *liberal* (Norris, 2023). These societies co-exist due to the polarization of the world (Esteban & Schneider, 2008). This brings disbalance and inevitable conflicts around the members of these societies where one community prevails and another one concedes in a particular location leading to inequality (Esteban & Schneider, 2008). It may be elaborated in the congruence theory which states that if conservative societies matter more and have more followers, liberal representatives will be the ones who remain their opinion silent (Norris, 2023). Therefore, the injustice and accountability are subjective and relative to the norms that society is carrying on.

Nevertheless, liberal values prevail extensively in the Western world, and cancelation is mostly visible in the US and concentrated around the personas active on the US market (Ng, 2022). This is not a coincidence and has a reasonable cause. The tendency for 'justice' and accountability was evident in the end of 20th century by the US president John F. Kennedy with the "Great Society" plan (Garcia, 2021). Furthermore, after the values from the "Great Society" plan were incorporated, other figures empowering the trend of bringing accountability emerged that greatly influenced the development of cancel culture mindset in the society (Garcia, 2021). Given that, it is possible to conclude that Western values and psychological patterns driving people to behave accordingly to the established societal norms are the initial force fighting injustice and inequality but in their own definition (Mueller, 2021).

However, there is a controversy. Cancel culture becomes very powerful force that is privileged with the responsibility to be a judge to every individual that goes against the left ideology (Velasco, 2020). Nevertheless, this contradicts with the initial values of the society including the freedom of speech (Norris, 2023). Thus, it is possible to claim that cancel culture has a positive side with the efficiency in fighting sexism and racism, but also has a downturn as it is manipulative and destructive (Norris, 2023). Recent academic works suggest applying critical thinking when facing cancel culture cases as the downturns are unhealthy, contradicting with the values of the Western society which cancel culture is aimed at protecting, and bringing more hate and discrimination

(Garcia, 2021). On the other hand, there is another reason why cancel culture becomes more common and popular despite having an irrational side. It is also concentrated around the "attention economy".

Ng (2022) wrote a book addressing essential and relevant aspects on cancel culture. However, to discuss cancel culture and attention economy further, it is necessary to reflect on the cases of cancelation such as the case of James Charles which was described in Ng's (2022) book. James Charles is a famous blogger in the US that got 'canceled' in 2019 because of the conflict with Tati Westbrook who was in the advantageous position in the eyes of the audience (Ng, 2022). The backlash resulted in a huge loss of followers on various social media platforms, acquisitions, profit losses, and unfollowing from the Instagram account by many celebrities that Charles has been working with and has also been in contact (Ng, 2022). Nonetheless, it was stated that despite all the negativity that the influencer has received, Charles more than recovered from the backlash by returning a significant amount of his profits and followers, and by 2021 the situation was almost forgotten, and James was not in the spotlight of controversy (Ng, 2022). Also, even during the conflict James Charles received a huge wave of attention as his 'apology' video gather more than 40 million views on YouTube in a few days alongside circulated fan videos, reactions, discussions, comments (Ng, 2022). Therefore, it can be witnessed that the James Charles' cancelation process was also an act of an entertainment performance that reached a wide range of audience and, most importantly, attention which led both parties including James and Tati financially benefiting from it. The artist Doja Cat has a similar case of such cancelation. Doja Cat and her 2015 song called "Dindu Nuffin" which was resurfaced in 2020 referred to the term that racially mocks the victims of police brutality (Gopal, Velasquez & Wu, 2022). The situation resulted in a serious allegation against the pop star (Gopal, Velasquez & Wu, 2022). Nevertheless, despite Doja Cat faced the backlash and as not numerically successful as other female pop star singers like Adele, the singer has a wide media presence with her music (Gopal, Velasquez & Wu, 2022).

In the article written by Gopal, Velasquez & Wu (2022), the authors analyzed the effects of cancelations on Twitter for various celebrities. The results showed that the volume and the longevity of negative perception of the artist by the public including possible revenue losses differ by various factors including gender, genre, and the reason of cancelation (Gopal, Velasquez & Wu, 2022). Despite all the negativity that artists receive, they acquire a short-term boost of attention that circulates through media; therefore, more people are getting acquainted with the artists' case and their art (Gopal, Velasquez & Wu, 2022). This is the reason why the term "attention economy" was presented earlier. When there is an excess of one aspect, there is always a scarcity of another (Tufekci, 2013). From that perspective, if there is a large amount of accessible information, then the lower is the extent of attention to one specific piece of information (Tufekci, 2013). Thus, with the rise of Internet, social media platforms, streaming services, professional music production tools, more artists or celebrities appear in the medium with their product which makes it harder for them to maintain the desired amount of attention for a long period of time (Fairchild, 2007). Therefore, these artists come

up with entertaining scenarios and exploit the media ecology within the attention economy (Tufekci, 2013). There is no transparent evidence to claim that artists purposefully provoke cancel culture towards them, but it definitely has its benefits regarding the media presence and popularity (Ng, 2022).

Despite everything that was mentioned regarding cancel culture and what it entails, this concept still remains exclusively subjective and complicated to define and/or label. It definitely has the positive side as it controls media norms and society by guiding the audience towards a specific set of morality to sustain the comfortable education and development of future generations. On the other hand, this movement is being exploited for profit and rising more controversy between various groups. Community, generally speaking, divides in clusters that agree or disagree with the movement. Both clusters have their own arguments to defend their opinion. Therefore, by studying cancel culture, it is difficult to come categorize social sanction as purely destructive or exceptionally necessary. However, it is feasible to study the perception of the phenomenon to have a better understanding of the reasons for specific reactions from both sides; and this perspective on the problem may develop cancel culture to the extent when it will be feasible to execute it in the most efficient and valid manner.

Doxing

Furthermore, after cancel culture, the analysis will switch its attention to concepts that are used to describe harassment that happens online and is often exploited by users on Twitter. These techniques may also be evident in the cancel culture cases as they refer to digital vigilantism which is considered as a set of practices to inflict moral damage to individuals that go against moral boundaries to leverage social justice (Trottier, 2019). The following sections will elaborate on "doxing" and "hate speech", discuss the main aspects and how to fight them, and link them with cancelations of celebrities.

Technically, both techniques may relate to the cyberbullying as doxing exists exclusively online and, as will be elaborated further, hate speech becomes more evident online compared to real life (Bei Li, 2018). However, the section will start with doxing as this notion is more complex and may be more harmful compared to aggressive speech. Doxing refers to disclosing private information online (Moyer, 2016). Nevertheless, doxing has to be clearly distinguished from other types of private information disclosing like blackmailing (Douglas, 2016). Despite doxing refers to the same threat as blackmailing, doxing is a pure act of information denunciation serving morality whereas the purpose of blackmailing is to financially benefit from the act of information revelation (Douglas, 2016). Doxing is also not aimed at security breaching or governmental information leakage, it refers to individual users and their private content with the purpose of equalizing the scales of justice by taking 'revenge' (Moyer, 2016).

Similarly to cancel culture, it is evident that a specific act of damaging someone's reputation is protected by pursuit of justice. Despite the similarity, to avoid misunderstanding, it is also important to mention that cancel culture is a non-traceable social movement with the intention to naturally detach the society from the influence of a subjectively harmful individual. Therefore, cancel culture does not violate any laws related to personal freedom and rights whereas doxing is aimed at reputational emotional damage that violates private information and executed either by an individual or a group of individuals, thus, doxing has to be regulated and punished (Bei Li, 2018). Aforementioned claims regarding consanguinity of cancel culture and doxing are rather related to their similarities in moral purpose than to their similarities in nature. Doxing may result as a method for successful cancel culture movements but definitely not its existential part.

Given that, it is valuable to identify diverse reasons and types of doxing to connect it with the purpose of the research. Douglas (2016) elaborated on three major types of doxing presented in his study which were: deanonymizing doxing, targeting doxing, and delegitimizing doxing. Deanonymizing doxing refers to the act of uncovering someone's hidden identity (Douglas, 2016). Targeting doxing uncovers individual's certain information making it feasible for anybody to physically locate the individual (Douglas, 2016). Delegitimizing doxing discloses private information that would negatively influence individual's credibility and/or reputation (Douglas, 2016). Nevertheless, Chen, Cheung & Chan (2019) also identified social and hostile doxing in their study. Authors identified that female adolescents engage more in social doxing meaning that they are interested in personal information of their peers whereas boys are more engaged in hostile doxing which is concentrated around peers' living situations and conditions. The ethical question arises from the observation: considering doxing being illegal as it violates privacy means, is there any reasons to justify doxing?

The most famous cases of doxing are related to female celebrities and their leaked nude photos (Moyer, 2016). In 2014 an anonymous hacker released the nude photos of famous female celebrities including Jennifer Lawrence and Gabrielle Union (Marwick, 2017). The same happened to Scarlett Johansson, Milla Kunis and Christina Aguilera in 2011, however, the identity of the doxer was publicly available which leaded to an immediate punishment (Moyer, 2016). Marwick (2017) argues that this type of doxing is popular because of endless amount of social media platform users that engaged in cultural misogyny urged by "revenge porn" (Marwick, 2017). This notion means nude material of a person that was leaked without the personal consent (Marwick, 2017). This may also be considered as another type of doxing as it is also used to manipulate and/or take revenge on ex-partners, co-workers, offenders etc. (Marwick, 2017). However, the revenge porn doesn't only relate to female celebrities. DaBaby's private nude photos have also been leaked in 2019 before the Rolling Loud controversy (Coleman, 2019). This example shows that doxing may exist independently from cancel culture.

Therefore, by answering the previously mentioned question, it is difficult to justify doxing as a concept. Douglas (2016) argues that any type of doxing may be justified if it leads to uncovering deception, proving someone's innocence, or discovering wrongdoing except for targeting doxing as it may lead to physical harm. From that perspective, doxing that is used against individuals that are being cancelled may be justified as it may uncover the wrongdoing or other private conversations or actions that may support the intentions of cancelation. On the other hand, as doxers may act from the paradigm of 'revenge', the offenders may also leak private information of the individual that goes beyond rational reasons for the leakage like sex tapes or personal emotional states. These doxing actions don't correlate with Douglas' arguments for doxing justifications (2016). Therefore, despite doxing may also be valuable in some specific actions, it doesn't guarantee classic harmful denunciation. Thus, it should be monitored and controlled even if it may prevent positive influence. Also, if doxing is not being eradicated or controlled, there is no guarantee that celebrities will not be doxed in the future. As DaBaby has already been the victim of doxing and captured in the spotlight of controversy, his anti-fans may use targeting doxing techniques that could endanger the artist. On the other hand, deanonymizing doxing and delegitimizing doxing may be contested from the matter of perception. If a celebrity has been captured by a journalist during an unpleasant event, this can be evaluated as delegitimizing doxing as this a breach of private life with the purpose of ruining someone's reputation, but this may also not be considered as the journalist's footage was published with consent. Therefore, it is valuable to address this issue of perception during interviews to understand the participants' standpoint.

In her article, Moyer (2016) is discussing and evaluating doxing, and reflecting on the steps that could prevent such form of harassment. The author compares doxing with catching a cold: an individual can take all the necessary steps to prevent it and reduce the chances to get ill, but it is still not promised that it would be possible to fully avoid it (Moyer, 2016). Since these practices are performed by individuals, everyone is vulnerable to doxing. Another perception of doxing prevention is inspired by the article written by Farnum & Karimi (2020). It can be compared to cancer: if it appears, it may be eradicated. Hence, Farnum & Karimi (2020) presented an application for Twitter that detects private information denunciation and informs the platform about it. Nonetheless, it is not guaranteed that cancer will not recur. However, at least, there will be available tools for 'recovery'. On the other hand, the reason why these tools may not be widely supported by media regulators may be interconnected with the reason for cancel culture existence described in the last section. Media platforms like Twitter or Reddit are profiting from online engagement emerging from shaming campaigns, therefore, sometimes, it may be more important for platforms to tolerate doxing rather than fighting it in specific cases, especially if particular doxing doesn't cross the 'imagined line' of allowable information which was determined by the governmental authorities (Trottier, 2019).

Hate speech

  A similar situation can be witnessed with hate speech. Hate speech also remains one of the harshest techniques on the internet that relies on discrimination and structural abuse. Hate speech is even more evident and severe compared to doxing as doxing requires specific action, research, and data to be executed whereas hate speech only requires Internet connection and active account on the chosen platform. Hate speech is often directed at targeted demographic categories such as gender, race, religion, sexuality etc. and executed by applying specific offensive words representing stereotypes and social contexts (Yoder et. al., 2022). Nevertheless, the use of hate speech may also be non-political in the sense that hate speech may not only be expressed from the perspectives of power, capital, and/or marginalization since any evident trait of an individual can be possibly addressed but that should still be categorically escalated before it becomes something meaningful and relatable. Despite various necessary regulations that each country provides, it is still difficult to detect the hate speech in every case and situation (Laub, 2019). That becomes even more complicated as regulations per country might contradict with each other making unilateral regulation attempts suffer whereas multilateral regulations are not advanced yet because of the cultural and jurisdictive dissimilarity (Banks, 2010). Besides, in comparison with hate speech, doxing always leaves a trail and encourages closer attention whereas with the undisputable rise of the Internet, unconditional anonymity, and frequency it is much harder to sustain strict hate speech regulations (Banks, 2010). Another aspect that makes it harder to detect and erase hate speech is that because these comments are 'supervised' by algorithms that may misinterpret the case, therefore, facilitating the continuation of hate speech (Laub, 2019). Also, one of the most important problems is that police that is responsible for applying these regulations to practice against severe hate comments is relying more on the reduction of freedom of speech which results in various cyber organizations that are pursuing their own interests and goals making hate 'crimes' more widespread around the internet (Laub, 2019).

  Moreover, the earlier presented concept attention economy intersects with online hate speech as well. As was already elaborated with doxing, it is beneficial for platforms to sustain attention even if it requires toleration towards undesired forms of communication especially with the lack of strict law supervision (Bayer & Bard, 2020). Thus, if hate speech is not being deracinated and suppressed, the attention of the audience towards the case increases.

  Nonetheless, another important dimension of hate speech worth mentioning is that hate speech may lead victims to emotional and, most importantly, physical harm, therefore, platforms still come up with more advanced detectors and persecutors of hate speech (Williams, 2019). However, online hate speech regulations closely connected to free speech as everyone is allowed to share their opinion in any chosen form regarding any topic of interest. That is the reason why hate speech is difficult to regulate since hate speech may be controversial. Also, celebrities are always vulnerable to hate speech (Udoh-Oshin, 2017). Therefore, despite the Rolling Loud controversy happened almost 2 years ago, DaBaby may later encounter an influential wave of hate speech that will not be necessarily

related to the highlighted case. However, the act of blocking undesired comments subjectively perceived as 'hate speech' may also be referred to the concept 'selective free speech', and, as practice shows, selective free speech in media leads to more controversy and uncomfortable debates (Enarsson & Lindgren, 2019). Coming from that, Mathew et. al. (2019) discussed another point of view regarding hate speech regulations that does not contradict the concept of free speech but leverages the 'remedy' for hate speech. Counterspeech can be considered as a direct response to a hate speech that decreases the power and effectiveness of offensive language (Mathew et. al., 2019). In other words, counterspeech is a counterattack to acquisitions either in person or online (Cepollaro, Lepoutre & Simpson, 2023). Thus, counterspeech can be implemented as a tool for fighting hate speech effectively (Mathew et. al., 2019). Authors define several tactics for counterspeech which are: presenting facts, pointing out hypocrisy, warning of consequences, affiliation, denouncing hate speech, humor and sarcasm, positive tone, hostile languages (Mathew et. al., 2019). It was investigated that counterspeech receives more likes and public attention than non-counterspeech, thus, by applying effective counterspeech techniques against the hate speech, it is believed to reduce the amount of offensive language within the net as users realize the valuelessness of such comments (Mathew et. al., 2019). However, the strategy of counterspeech does not eliminate the most important aspect that urges the authorities to sacrifice free speech.

As mentioned earlier, hate speech influences victim's mental health that may lead to physical harm and other unpleasant consequences. Logically speaking, everyone has their own followers and detractors that may post various comments online. Thus, as discussed earlier, the more popular the person is (such as celebrities), the quantity of such characters increases, therefore, the quantity of offensive and pleasing comments also increases. By looking at the academic works regarding this topic, female celebrities are the most vulnerable group, hence, their confidence, self-representation, and mental stability can be damaged as hate speech online is often structured on masculinity and gender stereotypes (Ghaffari, 2022). It accelerates by the fact that the received hate speech may not be perceived similarly by the sender but still consists of the content reflecting the stereotypical way of thinking which insults the receiver (Elias & Gurbanova, 2018). For instance, these messages may reflect cultural movement of the society the celebrity lives in. Female celebrities in Ghana are receiving hateful comments under their posts on Twitter consisting of questions regarding their non-engaged relationship status and persuasions to get married as the local culture encourages women to get married and raise kids instead of committing to self-development (Watson & Osei-Mensah, 2022). Similarly, the case of Lena Dunham, American actor, represents the same reasoning where the offenders mobilized the beauty stereotypes under Lena's post covering her body rehabilitation by labeling her as "unhealthy" and urging to "lose weight" (Ghaffari, 2022). It was suggested that celebrities block these accounts, hire social media managers, or apply counterspeech, however, these counterspeech techniques also consist of offensive linguistic discourses (Watson & Osei-Mensah, 2022). Coming from that logic, hate speech may also be the source of defending mechanism against

hate speech. Thereby, counterspeech can also be hate speech. This can be applied to another wider cancel culture perspective.

Everything that was described regarding hate speech online doesn't only refer to celebrities as victims, artists may also perform the role of offenders. By looking at DaBaby' case, it is seen that the artist outraged LGBTQ+ community which was perceived as hate speech. The situation can be perceived as DaBaby may have been the victim of hate speech before the Rolling Loud festival where he applied counterspeech which implemented hate speech. Cancel culture is provoked after an unpleasant statement or action from a public figure. Therefore, when a celebrity's statement consists of 'hate speech', cancel culture, as a movement, performs as a counterspeech (English, 2021). This reasoning justifies cancel culture as it fights against hate speech, on the other hand, counterspeech that consists of hate speech also counts as hate speech that requires counterspeech (English, 2021). It comes down to a closed circle of hate speech. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, it is not guaranteed that the artist will not be affected by hate speech. However, this can be perceived differently as the same comment can be considered differently by individuals with different perspectives. These perspectives are built around two camps confronting each other. These camps present their own answers regarding this endless loop of hate speech. The differences in perception whether the term has to be mainly defined as hate speech or counterspeech will be further defined in the interviews to either confirm or decline the reasoning.

Fans & Anti-fans

This section will conclude the theoretical background regarding cancel culture and relevant concepts intertwining with the issue. After the discussion about harmful actions that can be potentially provoked by cancel culture but also exist independently it is also relevant to spill the light on the actors of such precedent. As mentioned in the end of the previous sections, there are always two major perspectives on controversial topics touching cancel culture and counterspeech reasoning. Basically, these parties are fans and anti-fans when it refers to cancelling a particular celebrity that has supporters and detractors. Nevertheless, the reality may be more complicated where both parties may not be perceived as outsider communities but rather exist in one media ecosystem. Nevertheless, the distinction between fans and anti-fans can be drawn and elaborated. To understand the differences, similarities, and relevance for the purpose of the research both concepts will be discussed further.

Academic works regarding fan and anti-fan theories are very similar in their behavior and nature towards a specific person or a character. In the thesis work written by Bartfeld (2021), the author stated that the fan interaction and perception of a celebrity are based on his/her loyalty and shaped in three phases: cognitive (being aware of the celebrity); affective (gets emotionally invested); conative (the most intense level of fanship). Music fandoms are in the list of the most strong, passionate, and popular fan movements (Yin, Aragon, Evans, & Davis, 2017). The example of such fandom where most of the followers reached conative phase of loyalty can be the ARMY of a K-Pop

group named BTS. The group's fandom is very influential as it consists of a large number of members that are 'obsessed' with their idols, that promote them everywhere, and able to assemble a huge amount of donations for any event or charity that their idols have shared (Lee & Nguyen, 2020). Lee & Nguyen (2020) researched the behavior of fans and explained ARMY's success from the perspective of participatory fandom meaning that fans are widely circulating on various platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, or music streaming platforms making it easier for fans to spread the message and put their idols at the top of the rating shadowing other artists even in discussion forums like Reddit. Critically thinking, it is beneficial for celebrities to obtain fandom similar to ARMY because during any unpleasant scenario like COVID-19 or cancelation, the artist may avoid existential consequences. For instance, popular musician that was a member of a band called The Smith, Steven Morrissey, has a well-established and wide fandom that protects him against, so called, 'haters' when artist has any confrontations with other celebrities, and controls the information online (Giles, 2013). Despite the fact that Morrissey's fandom consists of sub-communities that confront each other, Morrisey still benefits from a large number of followers not only commercially, but also reputationally (Giles, 2013). Therefore, by coming back to the topic of counterspeech perspective, when the artist is being 'hated', fans may enhance counterspeech, and when the artist is being cancelled fans may also successfully incorporate counterspeech techniques to defend the reputation of their idol and dissimilate the influence of hate speech.

However, aside from the powerful fandom movements, anti-fans are also an influential force that may successfully challenge supporters and demonstrate cohesive opposition since anti-fans may be even more knowledgeable and argumentized in the topic compared to fans (Gray, 2003). The power of anti-fans lies within uncovering 'creative deception' and further damaging the reputation. For instance, life-style bloggers are construct their content and popularity within progressive self-development, authenticity, and personalization of the character meaning that the blogger presents him/herself as 'true' and 'the same' as the audience (McRae, 2017). However, this often is a well-thought-of plan, therefore, anti-fans have a ground to uncover this 'character' by presenting facts ruining the image of a blogger (McRae, 2017). Thus, anti-fans may greatly affect the brand image not in favor of a celebrity. Also, aside of ongoing confrontation between fans and anti-fans, regular users facing the topic are more inclined towards disrupted prejudice of a celebrity as negative feedback or statement sounds more trustworthy compared to positive claims (Chin & Huang, 2023). Despite fandoms passionately support their idols, these fandoms may also perform as anti-fans if there is a confrontation with another celebrity or fandom (Chin & Huang, 2023). Hence, fans and anti-fans exist in one media ecosystem making them perform similar roles depending on the context, celebrity, brand and situation. Coming from that logic, it is possible to make a statement that fans and anti-fans may switch sides and values regarding their opinion about cancel culture when it is more beneficial in a particular situation.

Hermes & Stoete (2019) also present and elaborate that logic regarding one media ecosystem for fans and anti-fans that are believed to be the complete opposite extents. The article reflects on the hatred anti-fan campaign of the "Breaking Bad" character Skyler White (Hermes & Stoete, 2019). It is said in the article that the hate towards the character played by Anna Gunn arose from the fans of the TV show that actively participated in the discussion (Hermes & Stoete, 2019). Previous section that covers hate speech argued that the hate speech was mostly directed at the gender differences and misrepresentation victimizing and damaging the actress that has mostly nothing to do with the character itself (Hermes & Stoete, 2019). This case shows that people who like the TV show and people who disregard the character co-exist in one specific community and share the same fan base. Therefore, it is evident that anti-fans are not necessarily outsider community and can co-exist simultaneously with fans.

By linking fans and anti-fans literature to the book regarding cancel culture written by Ng (2022), one pattern can be identified. The book also presents the case when the fans of a popular TV show "The 100" 'cancelled' the producer of the TV show Jason Rothenberg because of his decision about one of the significant characters that the fans particularly liked. This example shows how fans transformed into anti-fans and 'haters' when some actions do not correlate with their desires and personal vision. However, by linking this to DaBaby's case, same with "Breaking Bad", anti-fans may have arisen from the fans and joined cancellation of the artist since they have been more inclined towards liberal values that were discussed in the first section. Nevertheless, DaBaby's anti-fans are meant to be the outsiders that represent different community opposing to his fans that may dislike DaBaby's genre and art. However, it will be also relevant to investigate if some of DaBaby's anti-fans emerged from the inside fan community.

Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this study is to understand the patterns of thinking and decision-making process of the individuals who were accusing DaBaby on Twitter after his homophobic statements and who were considered as "fans". As it was mentioned in the work written by Schreier (2013), quantitative analysis is suitable to identify the relation between one element and another, whereas qualitative analysis fits better for the studies that try to come to the understanding of the phenomena uncovering the meaning of the desirable social construct. Therefore, qualitative analysis was chosen to be the essential and prime method for this particular study.

The method

Going further, in order to make the research meaningful, twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews of approximately 45-60 minutes were conducted on DaBaby's fans and anti-fans. This particular type of research was needed to study the perception of artist's cancelation as the phenomenon. Singular textual analysis of tweets or comments will not facilitate the in-depth understanding of the reasons for an individual to perceive the case in the certain way. Similarly, other methods like focus groups or ethnographic research are more suitable for an experiment or for a community observation, whereas this research is rather more aimed at ideological reasoning or individualistic perception to construct a pattern than proving or identifying psychological phenomenon. Therefore, in-depth semi-structured interviews are more suitable for the purpose of identifying the differences in perception between opposing communities. Also, it was necessary to analyze these interviews to make a further comparison between the responses of two different sub-groups. After the data is collected, the analysis will take place. Qualitative Content Analysis and, particularly, Thematic Analysis were chosen as the main analytical tool.

Sampling strategy

Since twelve semi-structured interviews will be conducted, it was necessary to make the sample as representative as possible to ensure high validity of the research due to the limited quantity of interviews. As mentioned in the study conducted by Suri (2011), there are various types of sampling strategies that are suitable for the qualitative study. For instance, homogenous sampling is beneficial to avoid deviant responses by concentrating on multiple similar aspects of the group to have an ability for sample representativeness (Suri, 2011). On the other hand, this specific deviation from other respondents may result in low reliability of the study since various topics may be inclusive and homogenous sampling may harm the depth of the results. Besides, purposeful random sampling may also be used to achieve credible responses and support the reliability as the subjectivity is vastly reduced, however, this technique is risky to an extent where the researcher limits him/herself in the received information and may avoid rich and important data that may bring relevant insights (Suri, 2011). Also, Suri (2011) identified another sampling technique that is widely used by researchers.

Convenience sampling is a strategy that is very common and most convenient for the researchers as it gives the freedom to select and build a sample based on the researcher's own criterion and needs, nevertheless, this type of sampling strategy is vague and may often disregard the researcher's own biases, thus, the process of this sampling and the criteria should be transparent and clearly objected (Suri, 2011).

This specific study operated and designed a sample with the help of convenience sampling. It was expected to gather the equal amount of both males and females representing both fans and anti-fans. Nonetheless, the response rate contrasted from this purpose, therefore, the equal gender representation was not met. Five males and one female were gathered for the fan group, and six females were gathered for the anti-fan group. It was also observed that male representatives of anti-fan group were not replying to the messages where female representatives of fan group were leaving the messages unseen except for one participant which was further interviewed. This observation can already provide an intriguing insight regarding the dissimilarities of two groups and their perception of the phenomenon which can further compliment the societal and academic relevance, nevertheless, this will be discussed in the next chapter. It is important to mention the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants to dissimilate the disadvantages of convenience sampling and to elaborate on pre-existing biases.

The criterion for selecting specific respondents was generally based on concepts discussed in the previous theoretical framework chapter such as 'fans' and 'anti-fans'. As was already elaborated, fans are representatives of the community supporting DaBaby as an artist, whereas anti-fans are the ones agitating against the artist for different reasons. Despite considering fans and anti-fans communities as radically 'pro' or 'against' DaBaby, Bartfeld (2021) identified that fan loyalty does not have to imply full commitment, parallelly, an anti-fan attitude doesn't always translate the roots of a specific 'hating' community. Therefore, the inclusion of fans was based on one of three factors such as: following of an official DaBaby account, following of an online community page, or supporting comments under fan posts. Whereas anti-fan inclusion criteria consisted of open accusations against the artist's Rolling Loud speech and non-existing online connections like following of the artist's official or fan pages.

Recruitment strategy

It was suggested to search for DaBaby's fans through the public Instagram pages of DaBaby's fans and invite participants with negative attitude towards the artist by reaching them on Twitter. The strategy of finding anti-fan representatives implied searching for the participants using hashtags on Twitter like #DaBaby, #homophobic, #rollingloud, #LGBTQ. After finding the appropriate accounts that participated in the counterspeech agaist DaBaby, their Instagram accounts were identified to reach them and invite for the interviews since Instagram was considered to be more of a conversational platform for individuals where it was more appropriate reach unfamiliar people.

Besides, for both communities reaching out via email was also used as a method when the chosen individuals did not reply conventionally. Nonetheless, other social media platforms like Reddit were searched through with the same hashtags and strategy because Reddit allowed direct messaging in comparison with Twitter.

The recruitment process went accordingly to the pre-established plan where fans were mainly gathered from the fan page communities on Instagram whereas proclaimed anti-fans were gathered based on their responses on Twitter. All six participants from the anti-fan community subgroup stated their negative opinion regarding DaBaby on Twitter. From the second subgroup perspective, four participants were following DaBaby's fan page group where two were exclusively following DaBaby's official Instagram page which was also included in the sampling criteria. It can be claimed that the response rate was high since out of twenty initial private messages ten participants responded with eight positive replies. Further ten messages received four positive replies which was enough for the aimed sample group.

Operationalization

All the concepts that were discussed in the theoretical framework chapter were also operationalized and presented as these concepts are central to identifying the themes and, further, elaborating on them. As it was mentioned earlier, the purpose of the research is to identify the motives and decision-making process of the ones that share offensive statements towards the artist and the ones who are believed to be his supporters. Therefore, the research embraced both theory-driven and data-driven approaches. It was necessary to construct the emerging themes from the responses of the participants and come to an understanding of these themes, however, the preexisting literature and concepts assisted in constructing the coherent interview guide that was based on the existing concepts that reclassified into the themes of the interview guide. Therefore, this study started from the deductive approach and further retrained into the inductive.

The interview guide was divided into sections reflecting one concept at time. Moreover, it was expected to construct one interview guide for both sub-groups that would concentrate on the situation and concepts as a whole to receive different perspectives on the same topics. The interview guide and the interviews themselves were semi-structured as the interview guide had to focus on the main questions emerging from the topics but the specific word selection and various examples that were present during the interviews were not predetermined to make the interview more natural.

Hereby, the theoretical framework chapter reflected on the concepts such as cancel culture, doxing, hate speech, fans, and anti-fans. Alongside these major concepts, other sub-concepts emerged that interconnected the main theories. These sub-concepts are attention economy and counterspeech. To construct a meaningful interview guide, it was essential to be reminded of the research question. The leading research question of the study is "How do DaBaby's fans and anti-fans differ in their perception of the artist's cancelation after his homophobic statements towards the LGBTQ+

community?". Coming from that, it was essential to derive the opinion of the participants regarding the controversial topics that were not evidently presented as something positive or negative.

It was established in the theoretical framework that concepts like cancel culture and hate speech may be subjective based on the interpretation of these concepts by people with different values and perceptions, whereas doxing is a more complicated phenomenon, nevertheless, may also be interpreted differently due to its variations and possible benefits like uncovering deception or wrongdoing. Fans and anti-fans are the driving force of that subjectivity as they encounter hate speech and apply counterspeech that seems reasonable to them. Nonetheless, despite the subjectivity of driving concepts, there is also an invisible force which is attention economy making various parties, including artists, fans, anti-fans, and media platforms, benefit from cancel culture and offensive actions. Thus, it was relevant to translate the topics and questions through the neutral tone to get the most honest reasoning of the participants. It was suggested to divide the interview guide into 4 major sections following each other. These themes were *Background, Cancel Culture Actors, Cancel Culture Actions,* and *Cancel Culture Ethics* (See Appendix 1)*.* The theme *Cancel Culture Actors* elaborated on sub-themes which were 'supporting fans', 'fair prosecutors', and 'the role of platforms' making the interviewees present their perspective on each side and who was "right" in the conflict. Furthermore, *Cancel Culture Actions* brought different perspectives on applied techniques used by each side and included sub-themes which were 'hate speech', 'counterspeech', and 'counterspeech as doxing'. Lastly, the major theme *Cancel Culture Ethics* asked the participants to reflect on the ethical side of cancel culture aside of their opinion about the phenomenon and to suggest their recommendations on the future development of cancel culture by incorporating 'attention economy', 'societies', and 'future development' as sub-themes. After the retrieved and analyzed responses, it was possible to understand how representatives of both communities perceived cancel culture, DaBaby's case, the main conflict, and their opponents.

Interviews

The mean time of the interviews was 50 minutes which fitted the desired time frame of 45-60 minutes. All interviews followed the pre-designed interview guide with pre-established topics that emerged from the theoretical framework chapter. However, it should be also mentioned that, regarding the principles of semi-structured interviews, each interview consisted of additional questions relevant to the research. These questions were either the restructured versions of the original questions to fit the context of the interview better or completely new questions that also fitted the predesigned topics but assisted on elaboration of the themes further. On the other hand, due to the established time frame, responses, and the dynamic of respondents some original questions were either skipped or changed to emerged questions to get the most reliable and informative insights possible. For instance, in the second fan interview with "Jake", the participant mentioned the example of Kanye West cancelation and said that Kanye's cancelation was fair since he offended the nation

whereas cancelation of DaBaby's wasn't fair since he referred to personal tastes, it was more reasonable to ask about the participant's views on the differences between the nation and individual characteristics rather than asking why he supports DaBaby since the purpose of the research to understand the reasoning behind cancelations. Nonetheless, most of the interviews followed the original script of the interview guide with minor deviations from the themes.

To make the further explanation of the results obvious to the reader, pseudonyms that refer to active participants are the following. Fan group: Paul, Jake, Zack, Alex, Jason, Joella; anti-fan group: Shaylee, Liza, Andrea, Maria, Anna, Inness.

The analysis

After the interviews were recoded, the analytical process started. As it was mentioned before, the analysis followed the structure of Thematic Analysis. This means that the interviews were analyzed from the perspective of identifying the patterns to understand the ideas of different responses regarding the chosen issue. This study followed the steps of Thematic Analysis that was discussed in the work of Boeije (2010). The analysis consisted of 3 major steps which were open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, whereas open coding refers to the action where the researcher codes all the information line by line to capture all the micro-elements of data, then axial coding step refers to the process where grouped codes from the open coding step are being identified and ran through the document repetitively, and, lastly, the selective coding process refers to identifying major themes and reviewing the document from the essential beginning to check if the constructed codebook represents the data sufficiently (Boeije, 2010). The analysis process of open coding was performed only on the respondents' answers to the questions since the preexisting questions have already been assigned to the theme. The outsider questions were also not the part of the research process as the topics discussed would also be elaborated in responses. Moreover, by including the questions into the analysis, the research is risking being unreliable since the strength and relevancy of various codes may be disrupted or overestimated which can lead to false interpretation of participants' reasoning. Besides, it was expected that after the analysis it would be possible to come to two distinct codebooks for both subgroups. However, even during the process of data gathering it was witnessed that both groups reflected similarly to the questions that were asked. There were evident differences in the participants' claims, but both subgroups presented close understanding and reasoning. After few documents were analyzed, it was decided to construct one codebook for the themes discussed in the interviews since the participants mainly discussed similar things but from different perspective and opinions. Therefore, it will be possible to witness one final codebook of the themes. This specific research proceeded with an open coding step suing sentence-by-sentence coding instead of line-by-line since the responses were chaotic and lacked in grammatical structure and order, therefore, line-by-line coding was meaningless and could lead to unreliable results. Atlas.ti was the main tool for all the steps

of the Thematic Analysis and Trint was used to make the transcripts of interviews and export them into Atlas.ti.

Ethical considerations

Due to the purpose of the research, several specific ethical considerations had to also be discussed. Considering DaBaby being an artist that regularly uses explicit form of expression in his songs, it was decided not to include individuals that did not reach the age of 18 in the sampling criteria. Besides, the interview guide includes comments and/or tweets that may be consisted of images or phrases that could be interpreted as offensive or upsetting by various individuals. Therefore, it was suggested to avoid inviting minor participants to be the part of the research as several representatives of this group of people could be vulnerable to aggressive expression. Moreover, it is not guaranteed that individuals that reached the age of eighteen are not getting emotional or hurt after witnessing offensive comments. Therefore, it was decided to warn the participants of potentially upsetting content before the start of the interview to avoid any unpleasant consequences. Thus, aside of the warning, general participant consent has been presented before the start of the interview stating that the participation is totally anonymous and voluntary, that the audio recording of the interview would be made, and that the participant was free to stop the interview at any point.

Chapter 4: Analysis & Results

Codes and themes

The data brought rich and insightful results that emerged from the Thematic Analysis. As was mentioned in the Research Design, the analysis was done in three phases including initial coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This section will elaborate on all stages of analysis and will bring the final codebook which includes the Themes that was discovered based on the participants' responses.

Thus, the initial coding resulted in 321 emerged codes (see Appendix 2). As was mentioned in the Research Design chapter, the process was executed on the sentence-to-sentence basis. Meaning that only coherent and final replicas were coded. Also, considering Trint, the program for interview transcription, several replicas could be misunderstood even after the manual edits. Besides, few replicas that saved the original wording could be perceived as meaningless. Therefore, these phrases, that were perceived as meaningless, were ignored, and not included in the coding procedure. Moreover, the Thematic analysis implies coding everything that is available and prescribing the meaning to it. However, this analysis tried not to prescribe neutral meaning to sentences to compliment the purpose of the research. For instance, the replica "That's not fair" were not coded from the linguistic perspective as "Transmitting unfairness", rather linked it to the context of the particular topic of discussion and assigned it to the "Unfairness with being offended" code. The difficulty in this coding process was the quantity of data which affected the interpretation of codes. That means that respondents may have discussed the same topic using different words or phrases which made it harder to define them with the same codes. This tendency leaded to more existing initial codes representing the same meaning which could possibly disserve the analysis. Therefore, it was important to pay attention to similar codes, and either merging them or deleting the less representative code.

Similarly, to explain the logic behind the coding process, the examples will be presented further. This quote was mentioned by Jake: "And this is, this is for me, this is not acceptable because the guy like the artist was doing like really, really long trip to this point". In the context of conversation, Jake reflected on unfairness of cancel culture and disagreed with people who decided to cancel the artist that worked hard to get to the point where he/she was. Therefore, to make the meaningful connection to the context of the quotation, this replica was coded as "Impressive career that was unfairly ruined" and "Disagreement with cancel culture". Further replica that Jake stated: "And only because somebody got offended" was coded as "Unfairness in being offended" and "Easy to get offended" since the participant previously mentioned that everyone is being offended by a not constructive reason, and the claim continues this previously mentioned topic.

Nevertheless, here it is also important to reflect on the positionality of the researcher to avoid the any biases. This study exists from the perspective that the researcher was already exposed to cancel culture and interested in the phenomenon. However, the quotes were coded exceptionally from

the perspective of the participants and their own reasoning regarding the topic. Thus, every quotation that presented positive or negative view on the issue was coded accordingly. The codes that further merged into themes represented participants' point of view and haven't been affected by researcher's own relation to the phenomenon. Nonetheless, this aspect must be kept in mind, and understanding of participants' answers is still subjective and depends on the researcher.

After the initial codes were gathered, the axial coding step had to be performed further. Since the initial coding process resulted in a large number of codes, the main difficulty was to structure them accurately to come up with precise grouped codes based on the meaning. Nevertheless, despite the quantity, it was possible to come up with twenty grouped codes reflecting the context that would further be used as themes (see Appendix 3). The purpose of axial coding is to check whether the constructed codes/topics represent the dataset and other fallacies of analysis do not emerge.

The main difference between initial and axial coding in the process itself is that the axial coding takes a more general approach towards the analysis. During this step of analysis interview questions were also included in the analysis process since the analysis has taken a paragraph-to-paragraph approach. As for this analysis, the purpose was to determine which codes/themes can be applied to dataset the most. These codes/themes that would be applied to the dataset the most would further be perceived as leading themes, and other codes/themes would be linked as sub-themes to leading themes. The decision whether which sub-theme to link with which leading theme depends on their connectivity from the perspective of data analysis. In other words, which themes were most applied together to one quotation.

After the process of axial coding, the most prevailing and representative themes were identified. The next and final step of the analysis, selective coding, referred to the process of assigning the sub-themes to leading themes and prescribing a meaning to them. After this process was completed, it was possible to come up with the codebook including the major themes that were discussed in the interview. The result of this process can be seen below in Table 1.

Ambiguity	DaBaby's acquisitions	Cancel culture's effectiveness	Ethical & Moral considerations
Cancelations phenomenon	*Values*	*Hurt feelings*	*Hurtful doxing*
Hate & Counter speech	*Offensive behavior*	*Fans & Anti-fans*	*Social Media regulations*
Different opinions	*Inclusion & Exclusion*	*Social justice*	*Art vs Personality*
Societal influence		*Unfairness*	*Wrongdoing*
		Financial benefit	

Table 1: Selective & Axial codes

As it is seen, 4 major themes that were brought by the participants during the interviews were identified. These themes are *Ambiguity (4 sub-themes), DaBaby's acquisitions (3 sub-themes), Cancel culture's effectiveness (5 sub-themes),* and *Ethical & Moral considerations (4 sub-themes).* The theme Ambiguity refers to non-objectivity of the case, meaning that the participants' referred to specific topics, including cancel culture, as subjective to label as negative or positive. DaBaby's acquisitions refer to the reasons why DaBaby (and other similar artists) were canceled. Cancel culture's effectiveness referred to the relevancy of the phenomenon, its actors, its advantages, and disadvantages. And, lastly, Ethical & Moral considerations discussed the most controversial aspects of the study where all the participants gave their own answer towards the ethical side of cancelation and its satellite media cases.

As was discussed earlier in this section, it was surprising that both subgroups reflected the same reasoning and touched the same topics. It shows that regardless of the differences in their opinions and values, the community reflects the same way and thinks in the same direction regarding the issue. Nevertheless, the diversity of the participants' views regarding the identified leading themes will be further discussed in the next section in a greater detail.

Ambiguity

As presented, the ambiguity theme uncovers the subjectivity and controversy of cancel culture, at least from the participants' perspectives. The most important finding here is that this theme is the only theme where all the participants regardless of the sample group reflected similarly. Generally speaking, every participant said that there was always a controversy in cancel culture, and it was difficult to come to an objective answer to every case. Each interviewee stated "Well, it depends" at least once. Of course, there were participants from each side that completely agreed with cancel culture, or other phenomenon, or disagreed. Nonetheless, there was not a topic of discussion where

each participant didn't doubt. On the other hand, participants had their explicit and specific opinion about particular case of DaBaby's cancelation, but this will be discussed later.

As speaking from the perspective of the first sub-theme "cancelations phenomenon", most of 'fans' disagreed with cancel culture but reflected on its necessity for severe cases that didn't include celebrities. For instance, Jason initially stated that he disagrees with cancel culture as the phenomenon as it serves the political purposes of societal control. Nevertheless, he further admitted that cancelations should exist but should address more influential political figures rather than the celebrities since they are not essential force driving the societal development. The participant transmitted the same message from the Norris (2023) theory regarding the societal values where in a more conservative world cancel culture is executed differently and this phenomenon is mainly a product of liberal values. On the other hand, Jason also couldn't clearly state his opinion regarding the execution of cancel culture since the severity and the techniques should depend on the case and it is not possible to come up with a universal punishment or consequences. Also, other 'fans' couldn't agree or disagree whether the individual who translated offensive statements should either be supported or canceled. The participant Zack mentioned that there are artists or celebrities that should face consequences that cross the line, nevertheless, this line can vary, and everyone relies on their own beliefs regarding this line, but he personally doesn't think that DaBaby's cancelation was fair.

Similarly, 'anti-fans' that participated in cancelations also couldn't say whether cancelation is appropriate in every case. By comparing their claims to 'fans' claims, the main difference is that 'anti-fans' mostly agreed with cancel culture as it serves liberal and tolerant values, but at the same time they admit that cancelation may evolve unfairly and raise more problems than benefits. For example, Shaylee, despite stating her opinion on Twitter, sees the disadvantages in cancel culture and that the extent of cancelation should vary from case to case, nevertheless, she admits that some cancelations may be taken too far. Also, Anna has stated the problems of anti-Semitism and homophobia should be addressed but at the same time she doesn't think that cancel culture can influence long-term since the reputation will be restored. Anna elaborates this with an example of Travis Scott and his cancelation which leaded after the death of few people during his live performance. The participant claimed that people that faced the painful consequences after the concert will never forget the Travis Scott controversy, but other 99.99% of people will forget. Liza, for example, discussed the precedent with J. K. Rowling and explained her reasoning from the perspective of values and the times she grew up with. Therefore, the ambiguity of cancel culture from the perspective of 'anti-fans' is that cancel culture is needed but at the same time cancel culture may not always serve as the perfect source to facilitate social justice.

There were two participants that fell out of the general group reasoning regarding cancel culture. Joella, despite considering herself as DaBaby's supporter, agreed that cancel culture towards the artist was fair, and that cancel culture has dealt with other severe cases like Kanye West, but she would still listen to their music. Also, the participant Inness posted negative comment about DaBaby

on Twitter, but she currently regrets her decision, and she thinks that, in most cases similar to DaBaby, cancelation of artists, in the way it is currently shaped, is not fair. This may suggest a broader scale of ambiguity where the personas representing their 'fan' or 'anti-fan' communities present ambivalent opinions inherent to the opposing subgroup. However, most participants representing each group fall under basic assumption: 'fans' are against, and 'anti-fans' are pro cancel culture. Nevertheless, both groups agreed that cancel culture may be helpful in a different from and that every case should be critically analyzed before executing a particular decision. This reasoning supports the previously mentioned theory of Garcia (2021) which states that cancel culture fights injustice but must be critically assessed before making any decision.

It was also seen that the predetermined theory regarding hate speech and counterspeech can be applied to practice. For instance, both subgroups mainly agreed that hate speech has to be regulated, nevertheless, hate speech may be perceived differently and several participants from both subgroups supported the theory that counterspeech may also be perceived as hate speech, as well as cancel culture may take the role of both but "it depends" (English, 2021). The participants also transmitted Mathew's et. al. (2019) ideas that counterspeech should include patient language and positive tone when presenting factual arguments. To test what is perceived as hate speech by various participants, Picture 1 and Picture 2 were used.

> "If Gay community can cancel da baby why can't straight ppl cancel lil nas ?"
>
> Thatssssss the question fr
>
> 3:42 PM · 04/08/2021 from Earth
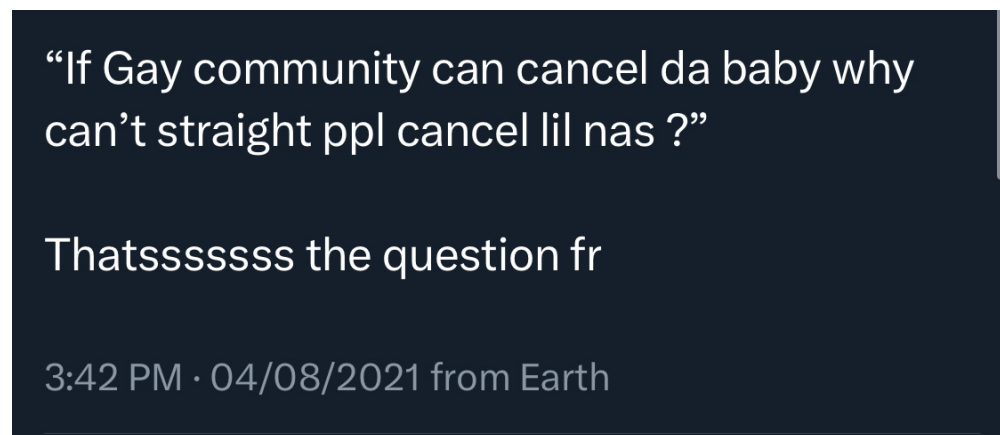
Picture 1: Hate speech example

Picture 2: Counterspeech example

The most interesting finding is that most of participants from both subgroups couldn't clearly define which tweet is hate speech or counterspeech. Mostly, the participants agreed that Picture 2 was more likely to be perceived as counterspeech, but they also stated that this tweet was also provocative and can be labeled as hate speech. Besides, it was difficult for most of the participants to define Picture 1 as unconditional hate speech. Again, it could be considered differently. Also, the sub-group was also not a leading factor whether the participant saw Picture 1 and Picture 2 as universal hate speech or counterspeech. Paul, who considered himself as DaBaby's fan, reflected that Picture 1 can be perceived as hate speech, where Shaylee, who perceived DaBaby negatively, referred to Picture 1 as a fair question. From this observation it can be identified that the perceived hate speech and counterspeech don't have a strong relation with fan and anti-fan perspective. It is exclusively subjective and depends on the personal background of an individual reflecting on the message. This finding contradicts with previously mentioned theory that the perception of offensive language might relate to individual's positioning regarding the canceled celebrity. Nevertheless, Jason and Jake, who followed DaBaby's fan page, perceived Picture 2 as hate speech, whereas Andrea inclined towards labeling Picture 1 as hate speech.

As a conclusion to this section, it can be mentioned that ambiguity may not only be considered as one of the leading themes in the codebook, but also a central independent concept that can also facilitate further researches on cancel culture as even the harshest participants of this study could not ignore positive and negative aspects of the precedent and reflected critically on the phenomenon.

DaBaby's acquisitions

The participant Paul stated that DaBaby's homophobic statements transmitted on stage were expectable from the artist since it has been possible to understand the image and views of the rapper based on the topics covered in his lyrics such as crimes, luxury life and indiscreet sexual behavior. This topic of DaBaby's image was imperceptibly discussed in most of the interviews. 'Anti-fans', such as Liza & Anna explained the motive towards cancelling DaBaby is that the rapper's narratives do not align with current societal trends and movements that gained popularity and strength within the

modern society. Therefore, when such artist that does not promote the prevailing values and further goes against these values has a high chance of being canceled even if it may be considered as irrational. By elaborating on the previous theme, it is seen that the participants understand why the artist is being canceled but agree that it may be overestimated. Nevertheless, as was already mentioned, Jason alongside Alex and Jake also agreed that cancelation of artists depends on the values system and supported the views of Norris (2023) that liberal and conservative values are the driving force in cancel culture's destiny. The participants reflected that the division between Western and Eastern parts of the world exists and that cancel culture is also evident from the Eastern side, but it is executed and performed in a different way. 'Anti-fans', despite leaning towards a liberal political standpoint, also agree that people of different values might perceive cancel culture in their own way. By coming back to the previously mentioned Kanye West's case, Jack, which initially stated that he disapproves cancel culture, stated that Kanye West has offended Jews where DaBaby has offended LGBTQ+ community, and in his opinion offending nation is much more severe compared to a social minority. After the most obvious question regarding the perception of values has followed, Jack stated that he values national categorization more than individualistic. Further, Jack took his words back regarding the reasons for cancelations and said that even Kanye West should not has been canceled for his behavior.

Gopal, Velasquez & Wu (2022) in their article discussed the longevity of artists' cancelation based on various factors. It was mentioned that the artists that perform in hip-hop genre recover longer from cancelations compared to pop or K-pop artists (Gopal, Velasquez & Wu, 2022). From the perspective of values, it is suggested that the artists analyze their audience and genre to understand what can be said and what should better be avoided, since the perceived 'anti-fans' with diverse social and political values may also be inclined towards listening to your music, and, therefore, accuse you of inappropriate behavior which might result in a severe backlash.

Further, one of the topics that was widely discussed by the participants related to the offensive behavior of DaBaby. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the interviews, not only DaBaby's case can fall under this discussion, but other artists and cancelations, in general, bind together. All 'fans', except for Joella, claimed that if somebody got offended by an artist, the best possible way is to cut themselves from an artist rather than cutting the artist from the society. Meaning that: "if you were offended, then just stop listening to the artist yourself", the supporters stated. As was discussed in the previous section, supporters agree that specific celebrities and/or individuals may translate offensive reasoning and, therefore, offend the listener. Nonetheless, from the 'fan' reasoning, the best possible way to solve the issue is to avoid the interaction with an offender. From the 'fan' perspective, offensive behavior is purely subjective, and cancelation of the artist is not fair in this case since cancel culture performs the role of an ultimate judge without asking everyone's opinion. Similar ideas were presented by Velasco (2020) where the author argued regarding the privilege that cancel culture has

managed to obtain. Thus, 'fans' do not understand the representatives from an opposing side in the case of DaBaby's cancelation and generally in cancel culture as a phenomenon.

The most evident difference between the two subgroups in this case is that, as was also mentioned earlier, 'anti-fans' may also not consider every cancelation case as well-grounded, nevertheless, they totally understand people who engage in the movement. For instance, Maria reflected that, in her opinion, cancelation is fair and justified until it crosses the limits of adequacy. Meaning that cancelation can be performed until the uncontrolled hate speech and other hurtful and indecorous types of behavior are not representing the case. On the other hand, Maria also agreed with Ghaffari (2022) that the offensive behavior is influenced by the stereotypical way of thinking, and that by disconnecting from the offender and not engaging in the movements that fight injustice it wouldn't be possible to dissimilate the quantity of offensive tendency further, but she also respected everyone's decision. Also, Maria mentioned that even if the person radically stands with the cancelation movement and engages in cases that, in her opinion, are not that critical, she understands where the person comes from and admires the effort to apply counterspeech if this person was offended. This reasoning contradicts with 'fans' where the participants haven't perceived this intention is fair. Besides, another interesting finding here is that Joella, who identified herself as a fan, is more inclined towards an 'anti-fan' reasoning. Joella has not been offended by Kanye West and she continues listening to the artist, but she also understands individuals that got offended and took a stand against the rapper.

Gray (2003) has written that anti-fans may be more knowledgeable and argumentized in the topic in comparison to fans. Despite the anti-fan participants that tweeted negative statements about DaBaby, there were no participants that clearly disliked the rapper and considered themselves as detractors or "haters". They disagreed with the artist and wished him to face consequences, but they do not necessarily have something against his art (however, this topic will be discussed in the last section). Nonetheless, it has to be reflected that in this particular case all the participants showed a well-applied argumentation and knowledge of the precedent which also states about the popularity of the movement. There were cases where both sub-groups implemented the similar type of reasoning. For instance, Paul and Zack agreed that artists, especially that work on commercial music, must be inclusive and tolerate specific societal vectors of development. It was shown that almost 70% of the participants agreed that these homophobic statements may have offended some of DaBaby's fans. However, the difference is that Zack concluded that it is unavoidable, and somebody will always be excluded, whereas 'anti-fans' promoted that artists should always be mindful of their audience.

Cancel culture's effectiveness

The next theme that was discussed by the participants is cancel culture's effectiveness. All interviews touched this, perhaps, the most essential topic which uncovered the opinion about the cancel culture's relevancy and the benefiters from this phenomenon. Looking ahead, despite the

preexisting theory about the benefits, advantages, and disadvantages, even after the analytical process, it is still hard to somehow categorize the movement as the opinions are evidently different and, sometimes, contradict each other. Everyone has their own perception of its phenomenon and its relevancy. Similarly, not all the participants could clearly state the objective benefiters of cancel culture, and, even the ones who had a more specific answer, still mentioned that there are many sides that could have possibly win from cancelations.

Mueller (2021) reflected that cancel culture serves moral justice and calls for accountability when various individuals crossed the lines of permissibility. Nonetheless, most of the 'fans' haven't replied positively to the question regarding the correlation between cancel culture and social justice especially if the canceled person was acting accordingly to the law. Moreover, Inness, that tweeted negative comment about DaBaby but further changed her mind, stated that social justice cannot be defined in a one universal way and throughout the interview reflected on several topics. For example, if cancelation was successful, then other people that enjoy listening to the artists would have been left without their favorite songs, but vast majority of these people don't have relation to the canceled person, therefore, the participant haven't perceived this as social justice. On the other hand, Liza claimed that people who were mentioned by DaBaby also didn't deserve to be discriminated. Nevertheless, Inness also stated that people might make mistake, but people also change, thus, when cancel culture is being fully executed, the person suffers existential consequences for his career without any chance to fix his/her mistakes. Nonetheless, the participant discussed that people may apologize and the extent of the apology has to be proportionally influential to the extent of cancelation. Meaning that the harder an individual was canceled, the harder he/she has to do to recover the reputation. From Inness' perspective, the 'ideal' justice and cancel culture should be retransmitted into a "warning system", meaning that before attempting to cancel the artist, the individual has to be receiving warnings from the community rather than hate speech and financial difficulties. It is seen that most of the 'anti-fans' are perceiving cancel culture as an attempt to reach the social justice but, as mentioned in the ambiguity section, they are admitting that the system is not deprived from imperfections. However, that was Jake's answer to the last question consisting possible recommendations to improve cancel culture: "It would be beneficial to cancel themselves". Notably, 50% of the 'fans' called to cancel the cancel culture meaning that the participants called to dissimilate the phenomenon in the way it is currently shaped.

Also, participants partially agreed with the theories brought by Trottier (2019) and Bayer & Bard (2020) that social media benefits from cancel culture as it leads to passionate discussions and increased online engagement. Nonetheless, most of the participants mentioned that other actors participating in cancel culture may be more benefitting or, at least, share the benefits equally with unidentified final benefiter. The most surprising here is that the participants mostly underestimated the presence of attention economy in the case of DaBaby and other artists meaning that the rapper didn't profit was his cancelation and attention towards him. Interviewees believed that it is possible for

artists to acquire short- or long-term benefit, but it is impossible to predict where the cancelation leads the artist. It can backlash severely, and the artist will not achieve the imagined success. Therefore, the participants disagree that artists purposefully may provoke the negative wave of attention which partially contradicts the previously established theories of Gopal, Velasquez & Wu (2022) and Tufekci (2013) that artists exploit the media ecology.

Similarly to the sub-theme social justice, hurt feelings was also an ambiguous topic of discussion, nevertheless, here, the difference between the sample groups is more evident as it may be connected to previously discussed topic of offensive behavior. By looking at Jack's and Jason's responses, it is seen that the participants disregard such concept as hurt feelings. Both participants perceive the act of being offended at a specific media persona as a personal choice and the individuals' weakness. Moreover, the 'fans' do not consider artists as influential persona's to actively take a stand against. 'Anti-fans', in their turn take a more liberal and tolerant approach to people that might have been hurt by the comments. 'Anti-fans', including Inness who stands in between, claim that artists have responsibilities and teenagers are idolizing them which may negatively affect their mental state and lead to distorted understanding of the society. Thereby, Maria stated that individual's freedom ends where another's freedom starts. Thus, the participant reflected that an individual has a fair right to be hurt and further defend him/herself. This also supports the previously mentioned claims and theories regarding the perception of cancel culture: 'fans' do not see a value in cutting individual from the medium since it is irrational, whereas 'anti-fans' promote the idea of accountability and responsibility since the rights of others are being violated.

Regarding the positioning of fans and anti-fans, it was shown that participants representing the 'anti-fan' community were more also more liberal and tolerant towards individuals who support DaBaby compared to 'fans' that mostly criticized individuals who take a stand against DaBaby. For instance, Anna discussed that everyone has a right to transmit their opinion, and especially if the artist is being canceled, it is obvious that fans that are willing to see the continuation of DaBaby's career would take a stand and support their artist. Despite Zack, Jack, Jason, and Alex that may understand the reason why individuals cancelling DaBaby but mostly disagree rather than agree with the reasons predefined in their mind, Paul and Joella inclined more towards subjectivity and perceived both supporters and anti-fans as equal in their actions. Nonetheless, both subgroups did not have a crucial problem with people who disagreed with their views. For instance, Andrea, Shaylee, and Anna, who represent the 'anti-fan' sample group, reflected that they didn't experience a difficulty or tension while discussing the precedent with individuals who were not sharing their views. Zack, despite the participant's negative opinion regarding cancel culture, also don't face any difficulties in interacting with the person of a different standpoint.

By coming back to the literature, it was stated in the article written by Hermes & Stoete (2019) that fans and anti-fans may co-exist in one ecosystem. The examples of Inness and Joella show that fans and anti-fans may emerge from both communities, and it doesn't necessarily mean that these

personas contradicting each other. It was investigated that 'fan' representatives contradict each other within their own group, similarly as 'anti-fans' may have diverse views that do not align each other. Therefore, this relation compliments the literature, and the conclusion may be drawn that the reality is more complicated than just two opposing communities: there definitely are radical fans and anti-fans, nevertheless, every individual has his/her own opinion regarding the precedent, and there may be large amount of factors, characteristics, and sub-groups to define each individual, but it is definitely not possible to simply categorize and/or label a person as a supporting fan or as an ardent anti-fan.

Ethical & Moral considerations

The last theme that was derived from the interviews discusses the ethical side of the phenomenon and how these controversies should be addressed. Although it was decided to make it a separate section, it closely intertwines with the ambiguity theme. The division of these themes was performed since the Ambiguity theme has directed mostly at heterogeneity of opinions regarding cancel culture, whereas this topic will discuss different perceptions of morality when addressing cancel culture. Therefore, the context of both themes is different.

One of the most controversial topics that was both discussed in the literature and during the interviews is doxing. The theory elaborated on the fact that doxing considered illegal and should be regulated (Bei Li, 2018). On the other hand, Douglas (2016) tried to argue whether doxing can be justified and concluded that doxing can be tolerated if it leads to positive outcomes such as uncovering the wrongdoing. From the perspective of participants, everyone argued that doxing is a hurtful act, and, despite the necessity, private information is still private information that shouldn't be violated. After this type of general responses, the following question was asked: "Imagine if DaBaby's private conversation on WhatsApp consisting of homophobic statements was leaked, would you agree with this since it would help justify his cancelation, or would you see this as inappropriate act?". The difference in both sub-groups is that, surprisingly, despite their liberal values, some 'anti-fans' saw how this act can benefit DaBaby's cancelation. For instance, Liza stated that the act of leaking DaBaby's messages may benefit the process, nevertheless, it depends on who leaked the information, like if this was a random person, then it can be tolerated, but the participant also argued that this act is still violation of privacy and cannot be treated with ovation. Maria shared this opinion. From the 'fan' perspective, every participant perceived this act as negative, and other 'anti-fans' like Anna and Shaylee were on the same side. Therefore, it can be claimed that some of the participants, mainly from the 'anti-fan' group reflected the Douglas' (2016) argumentation.

Also, it was mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter that private information leakage can be perceived differently in various cases. For instance, do paparazzi shots count as doxing? The results showed that the perception of this issue does not depend on the sample group and the opinion about particular act exclusively individualistic. For instance, Jason stated that when somebody is in public and is doing something, it cannot be considered as private information, whereas Andrea

considered this as doxing as neither the artist nor his/her management shared the information about the public appearance. Therefore, the perception of doxing varies, and this independent topic has to be studied further outside of the direct cancel culture context.

Another topic that became visible after the analysis of the interviews is wrongdoing. The most prevailing finding here is that both sub-groups had their own perception of right and wrong. This also interconnect with "offensive behavior" topic from "DaBaby's acquisitions" theme. As was mentioned, 'fans' and 'anti-fans' perceived differently what is offensive and relevant from the perspective of values. Here, it is possible to elaborate that 'fans' mostly haven't found that translating the opinion, even if it contradicts the current societal reasoning, is bad, but at the same time the participants reflected that free speech doesn't exist and that the powers that oversee regulations are more connected to wrongdoing. 'Anti-fans', in turn, also mostly see the fallacy in free speech, but they perceive offensive behavior as wrongdoing more compared to inexistent free speech as it is required to regulate unpleasant information that could possibly damage the society. This supports the previously mentioned claims of Enarsson & Lindgren (2019) that when something online is being deleted and another party is disagreeing with the decision, it leads to more sensitive debates and difficulties.

By elaborating on this topic of free speech and the extent of morally acceptable acts of regulations, it can be mentioned that both subgroups agree that regulations are executed for the purpose of representing current social dynamics. Therefore, if specific comment or act in an online environment doesn't correlate with currently valuable trends, it will be deleted. For instance, Jason referred to social media as an instrument for powers to feasibly translate their message to the society and that it is ethically incorrect to limit online comments. Similarly, Alex perceived social media regulations as agenda setting but reflected that it is common practice and the best way to make the difference is to be aware of it and critically reflect upon. This can add a valuable insight to the previously mentioned theories of Banks (2010) as each country has their own political (and not only political) agenda, therefore, it is difficult for each country to come to mutual regulations as the requirements would contradict. On the other hand, 'anti-fans', despite they agree with these theories, they find this tendency as morally acceptable as these regulations mostly address harmful actions online and serve for the public good. Nevertheless, participants like Inness, from the 'anti-fan' group, couldn't consider these regulations as a source of societal good since it is ethically incorrect to limit individuals with different views but supports the fact that these regulations also limit explicit messages consisting of inadequate content.

The last sub-theme that can be discussed is "art vs personality" meaning that to what extent the artists that were canceled should be connected to their music. This topic was also discussed with the participants since the music is being affected if the artist is canceled. It is possible to claim that both subgroups translated different opinions internally. Meaning that participants of one subgroup may had different opinions within their own group. Nonetheless, it is also evident that 'fans' mostly

disconnected music and personality and didn't perceive listening to music as supporting of artist's views. For instance, as was previously discussed, Joella disagrees with Kanye West's statements but classifies herself as a hard enjoyer of his music. Moreover, Alex mentioned that if person dislikes the personality but prefers his music, then it should be accepted and respected. Nevertheless, Alex also stated that he believes personality and music are interconnected in the sense that a person with a specific character will write music according to his personality. Similarly to 'fans', Maria stated that she believes that the artist and his/her music are related to each other, therefore, if you disagree with individual's values, especially if you were offended, you should stop supporting the person by listening to his music, whereas Andrea claimed that personality and music are disconnected.

Thereby, it is difficult to claim that the participants provided a specific distinction regarding the ethical side of enjoying canceled artist's music. Nonetheless, 'anti-fans' were more inclined towards the reasoning of disconnection from the artist's art.

The summary

After the in-depth discussion of the prevalent themes, it will be possible to answer the primary Research Question brought earlier in the paper which is: "How do DaBaby's fans and anti-fans differ in their perception of the artist's cancelation after his homophobic statements towards the LGBTQ+ community?".

As was already mentioned, the theme ambiguity is the most relevant and uniting concept of the whole study since it has been derived that all the participants raised controversy and couldn't clearly reflect similarly on all the topics. It was identified that the interviewees couldn't refer to cancelation as a phenomenon, and to DaBaby's case particularly, that cancelation and supporting concepts are purely destructive or exceptionally necessary. It was seen that participants with various opinions, which could be either pro or against cancel culture, saw the benefits of the phenomenon alongside possible downturns which could possibly outsource the benefits. The main difference between the two camps is that 'fans' were leaning towards highlighting the downturns more whereas 'anti-fans' reflected on the benefits as prevailing good of cancel culture. It was also seen that despite minor in-group deviations, mostly, both subgroups had mirroring perspectives on hate speech and counterspeech where 'fans' could perceive the pre-claimed counterspeech tweet as hate speech and didn't recognize hate speech in the pre-claimed hate speech tweet, and 'anti-fans' also could not clearly detect hate speech but agreed that the tweet in Picture 2 was more likely to be recognized as counterspeech.

Besides, the participants were different in their values regarding what should be prosecuted and what should be left the way it was. From the perspective of most 'fans', the cases that are currently dealt with the help of cancel culture are unfair and that cancel culture, if it may even exist, should be retransformed, and pay attention to more severe cases which don't correlate with homophobia. 'Anti-fans', in turn, value liberalism and tolerance more, therefore, in their perspective,

cancel culture that deals with cases such as DaBaby's is necessary and should be evolving further. Also, most of the 'fans' didn't relate to the offensive behavior concept as they believe that, in the case of artists, being offended and ruining individual's career should be labeled as wrongdoing as the victim can disconnect him/herself from the artist, whereas 'anti-fan' group perceived offensive behavior of the artist as relevant enough for the artist to experience consequences. Nevertheless, most of the participants without the group division agreed that the world has reshaped with the help of social media and societal trends, and that some percentage of fans of any commercial artist would get offended if the artist translated negativity towards them, therefore, current artist have to be inclusive and, at least, keep the neutrality.

Furthermore, 'fans' agreed that social justice doesn't have an objective definition and it is hard to imagine cancel culture as asocial justice as by complimenting one subgroup, other people are inclined for struggling. Nonetheless, as was mentioned earlier, it was also a matter of personal perspective as not all 'anti-fans' could also clearly connect cancel culture with social justice. Nevertheless, it was also evident that 'fans' mostly perceived hurt feelings of victims as weakness and that individuals have to deal with their disagreements themselves whereas 'anti-fans' state that everyone has a right to protect their feelings and comeback to the artist. However, regardless of these dissimilarities, both subgroups didn't have a problem with people translating the opposing views and had respectful relation towards them. Moreover, the findings supported the literature that it is difficult to draw the line where an individual can either be perceived as a supporter or an anti-fan; it may be difficult to distinguish both concepts when the person is not radically for or against the artist. Besides, the participants disagreed with the theory that artist may usually benefit from cancel culture.

One of the most intriguing findings is that 'anti-fans', despite perceiving doxing as negative, agreed that doxing may be beneficial for the cancelation process and the society since it may support the allegations against the artist even if it is ethically incorrect. Therefore, 'anti-fans' claimed that the community is the only winning party when doxing is applied to support the allegations since the community's purpose if fulfilled. Adding up to that, 'anti-fans' noted social media regulations are necessary to control the content and to facilitate the societal good. However, 'fans' perceived both as exceptionally negative acts and highlighted that cancel culture, alongside the social media regulations, are used as a tool of liberal powers to spread the message across the society which is morally wrong but cannot be challenged. Nonetheless, both subgroups showed that the perception of ethical consideration whether art and personality are connected doesn't depend on preexisting prejudices towards the artist and/or cancel culture. This topic is exclusively subjective and cannot be attached to one direction of reasoning.

After everything that was mentioned, it is feasible to state that fans and anti-fans are different in their perception of cancel culture, DaBaby's case, and other surrounding concepts. It was identified that fans are more conservative and anti-fans are liberal. Therefore, as was also mentioned by Norris (2023), despite the similarities in reasoning, logic, and, sometimes, similar views, liberal

representatives detach themselves from conservatism, whereas conservatism representatives claim that liberal representatives suppress their opinion. This particular study on DaBaby's case of cancel culture shows that since the phenomenon mostly represents liberalism, conservators despise its existence (Norris, 2023). It is hard to generalize whether all participants were either liberal or conservative, but various 'fans' and 'anti-fans' stated their political standpoint during the interviews. The findings and theory compliment this distinction between the communities. However, as said, both subgroups may sometimes agree with each other and reflect the same perception of a particular concept or case just with different seasoning that matches their values and views. This also shows that ambiguity is the central theme in answering the research question. Ambivalent perspective on DaBaby's cancelation and on cancel culture as a phenomenon unites both subgroups where each discussed theme presents the ambiguity. It is also worth mentioning that the prevailing quantity of 'fans' are males whereas all 'anti-fan' were females. Despite this study is concentrated around fans, anti-fans, and their perception of DaBaby, it can be suggested to conduct independent research that could specifically target gender differences in perception of cancel culture and political views.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Research Question

After the previous chapter reflected on the results and findings of the analysis, the primary research question was addressed. Thereby, it is possible to conclude that there are evident dissimilarities between fans & anti-fans in their perception of DaBaby's cancelation. Fans were mostly against this particular cancelation as they didn't find DaBaby's claims from Rolling Loud 2021 stage offensive enough to be fairly executed. Despite anti-fans perceived this cancelation as fair, it was identified that anti-fans were not radically against the rapper and didn't find artist's reputation as permanently damaged. However, fans did find cancel culture a necessary phenomenon for specific cases which were debated by the participants. Similarly, anti-fans criticized cancel culture for its destructive aspects that were also evaluated in the theoretical framework chapter. Therefore, by elaborating outside of DaBaby's case, cancel culture, in the definition that was presented earlier, does have a reason to exist and both subgroups reflected on the issue respectively to their views and values which were either liberal or conservative.

Nevertheless, by coming back to the central topic of the research, it can be claimed that fans mostly defend their favorite artists whereas anti-fans disregarded him as a persona. Despite minor in-group deviations where fans accepted the acquisitions against the rapper and anti-fans stopped listening to DaBaby after his homophobic statements, it is shown that fans, due to their nature discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, are more inclined towards defending their artists since their image and art resonate with their personality. Similarly, when anti-fans were asked what they would do if their favorite artist got in the spotlight of controversy, their first reaction was that they wouldn't have believed it in the first place, and further they would either do nothing or try defending them. Also, considering that fans representing DaBaby's side are mostly males where anti-fans are females, this insight gives a direction for managers and artists to analyze their segment and the audience in the most precise details to understand which community group to mobilize in the case of controversy and which audience to appeal to after the reputational damage.

Societal and academic relevance

By coming back to the introduction chapter, it is also possible to reflect on the societal and academic relevance of the research. After the study was conducted, and necessary conclusions were drawn, it is shown that the paper is relevant for further research and elaborated phenomenon understanding.

Speaking from the perspective of societal relevance, cancel culture, in a modern definition, is a not yet explored field which has to be evaluated on advantages and disadvantages to evolve. It was seen that both subgroups presented their own opinion regarding the phenomenon effectiveness. As was discussed, ambiguity surrounds the issue as cancel culture should be evaluated including all the aspects starting from the moral norms protection and ending at implementing cancelations where it

actually matters. For now, it wasn't feasible to provide a specific answer whether which side of the phenomenon is prevailing but showed that each perspective has a reason to exist. Regarding that, it is seen that the reasoning towards the issue and DaBaby's cancelation is justified, and every participant provided supporting statements and insights to their claims. Each group has valid and explained reasons to follow their opinions and views by reflecting on the societal development and possible consequences. Despite the existing contradictions in each interview conducted, it can be shown that participants managed to defend their position by referencing their claims to existing facts and to their own knowledge and experience. Therefore, to come to a mutual understanding and positive development of cancel culture, it is essential to consider both perspectives and visions, otherwise, the heated tension would continue further. Besides, despite cancel culture being a popular movement, it was identified that the participants representing the anti-fan community of this research presented their argumentations towards their participation in cancel culture. Similarly to fans' reasoned decision not to engage in the movement, the anti-fan motivation is based on values and personal desire to bring justice to the society by making the artist face the consequences. Also, the anti-fan participants were not personally offended by the rapper but took a stand to defend and support the oppressed side of the community. Therefore, it can be claimed that both sub-groups had valid motivation to either engage or not engage in cancel culture by providing relevant reasons to their actions.

Also, by reflecting on the academic side of the relevancy, this research contributed to the fan and anti-fan studies that were earlier discussed. It was reflected that it is more difficult to factually define each subgroup. As notion fan refers to a person that passionately follows the celebrity, and anti-fan is a person who disregards the particular individual, it can be suggested to refer to these subgroups as defenders and detractors as the levels of engagement and interest are vague. Thus, it can be claimed that defenders and detractors may emerge from the same community, but each distinct individual has their own authentic relation to the artist, therefore, more factors to define the subgroups have to be applied further. In addition, this paper discussed the insights that could assist professionals in the music industry such as managers, agencies, and labels in their artists' relations. By identifying that people bringing profit to the artist may also not represent the most prevailing segment of the audience, their existence should also be accounted and, therefore, the popular artist's audience cannot be considered as homogeneous. Hence, this study gives advice to professionals to keep track of the audience and, thus, avoid the unsolicited conflicts with the community that is also represented. Besides, by understanding the audience, their needs, preferences, and reasons why the music is being listened to, it will be easier to identify how to address the issue and reduce the number of detractors that may not have been necessarily hurt in the case of backlash by communicating the appropriate message. Lastly, this study reflected on the preexisting concepts and added more context to the theory. As for hate speech and doxing, it is suggested to apply counterspeech theory to address the issue more coherently, and it was also presented that various types doxing, and their justifiability, may be perceived differently by the audience. Thus, to identify the necessity of different types of regulations

and how these methods will be perceived by the society, this topic may also be researched further outside of the cancel culture context as a central theme. Additionally, the study presents Ambiguity as an emerged concept which is suggested to be implemented to the future studies to address the phenomenon further, nevertheless, this will be discussed in the next section.

Limitations and suggestions

After the conclusions of the analysis are drawn, it is valuable to reflect on the possible limitations of the study, and how future research may advance the results. The first limitation that is possible to address is that the sample size of the participants is not wide enough to generalize the results towards the population. Although it is not possible to conduct thousands of the interviews, the sample size could be enlarged to at least 50 active interviews. This will make the research more applicable to the population's dynamic. Moreover, the results of the enhanced study may be even more elaborative on the preexisting findings, bring new insights, or contradict with the outcomes of this study.

Besides, this research only studied qualitative perception of particular sub-groups towards the phenomenon and reflected on the discussed topics where these subgroups differ. This study doesn't claim if there is an evident correlation between fans, anti-fans, type of statements, and cancel culture. Therefore, to make the analysis full and understand the full picture of fan relation to the artist's backlash, it can be suggested to follow the quantitative vector of cancel culture studies which was presented in the study by Gopal, Velasquez, & Wu (2022).

Also, as it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the research was executed by one individual that was pre-exposed to cancel culture and the topic without an academical context. The process of sample gathering could be affected by the researcher's communication and critical thinking abilities. Besides, the interview process and further analysis of the data is purely dependent on the researcher's skills and subjective interpretation of the codes and themes. To dissimilate the extent of potential biases and affected subject's responses it can be suggested to conduct the same study including multiple researchers that have been already involved in the academic analysis of the phenomenon. This will also help to avoid individual subjectivity that would enhance reliability.

Nevertheless, the major suggestion that could be provided relying on this research is to include Ambiguity as a concept to address cancel culture as it was carried out that this aspect unites the participants and reflects the current positioning of the phenomenon.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Dear participant, thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in this study. The purpose of the research is to understand the differences in perception of DaBaby's cancelation.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, my questions will be related to your own perception of the precedent.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will make an audio recording of the interview

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. I will not use your name or other identifying information such as age, gender, online nicknames or avatars in the study. To participants in the study will only be referred to with artificial pseudonyms.

You are always free not to answer any particular question or stop participating at any point.

Your participation in this study will take approximately from 45 to 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.
During the interview, your personal opinion about the topic will be collected and analyzed further.

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or if you are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish 521335ky@eur.nl

Do you agree to give your personal consent and are you satisfied with previously mentioned terms and conditions?

Before we start, it is important to mention that the interview might include the content consisting of upsetting words. If you are not willing to see this type of content, you can inform the researcher about that.

1. **Background**
   1. In your own terms, how would you describe yourself?
   2. Do you listen to music?
   3. If yes, which genres you prefer?
   4. Can you consider yourself as a fan of artists that you like?
   5. Have you ever heard of such movement as cancel culture?
   6. Have your favorite artists ever been canceled?
   7. Have your heard about DaBaby and him being canceled?
   8. What do you think of it?

2. **Cancel Culture Actors**

   Supporting fans
   1. Considering DaBaby's claims, what do you think of him being supported? (Is it ethically correct to support the artist after such claims?)
   2. Have you ever had discussions with people who defended DaBaby? What can you tell about this experience?
   3. What drives you as a defender? or What drives you to act against DaBaby?
   4. (If anti-fan is being interviewed) Would you defend your (previously mentioned favorite) artist if he/she behave similarly to DaBaby?

   Fair prosecutors
   1. (If fan is being interviewed) Would you have similar reaction to the artist that you dislike if he/she performed similarly to DaBaby?
   2. Why do you think people actively take a stand against the artists who cross the moral norms?
   3. Do you consider cancel culture supporters as supporters of social justice? Why?

   The role of platforms
   1. Do you think platforms like Twitter facilitate cancel culture? If yes, in which way they do so? If no, then explain why?
   2. Do you think it is right that platforms limit free speech for the society's good? If yes (no), please explain why?
   3. Who is the final benefiter of cancel culture in your opinion? Why?

3. **Cancel Culture Actions**

   Hate speech
   1. What is hate speech in your opinion?
   2. Do you consider this as hate speech (shows the comment hating DaBaby)?

3. What can you tell about your relation to hate speech? (Including moral damage, justification)
4. Do you consider cancel culture as hate speech?
5. Have you heard of counterspeech?

Counterspeech

1. Do you consider this as counterspeech (shows the reply to DaBaby's hate speech)?
2. Do you think these types of responses are justified?
3. What is your opinion about this type of responses? What counterspeech means to you and what it should include?
4. Do you consider cancel culture as counterspeech?

Counterspeech as doxing

1. What is your perspective on private information leakage? What do you consider as private information leakage in the case of celebrities?
2. DaBaby's private videos were leaked, do you think it is right in his case? Why?
3. (If anti-fan is interviewed) What would be your reaction if the similar situation happened to your favorite artist?

4. **Cancel Culture Ethics**

Attention Economy

1. Considering the attention towards cancel culture, what do you think about DaBaby purposefully provoking cancel culture for his commercial benefit?
2. (Considering previous replies) If cancel culture can also be executed in a rude form and hate speech should be regulated, why particular comments like (example) are not getting deleted?
3. By coming back to the question when we talked about media platforms, who is actually benefiting from passionate online discussions?

Reputation

1. How, in our opinion, do several artists may recover their reputation after their cancelation?
2. What would be your perception if DaBaby posts his apologies? Do you think his reputation is permanently ruined?

Future development

1. What would you recommend changing in cancel culture to serve social justice further?
2. Do you have any questions or anything you would like to add as a closing statement?

Thank you for your time! Goodbye!

Appendix 2: Initial coding

> Documents (12)

∨ Codes (321)

A lot of artists that are being disliked	18
A lot of factors influencing cancel culture	36
Accept that your feelings may be hurt	12
Accusing DaBaby	56
Afrobeats	1
Agree with the counterspeech of the tweet	31
Agreeing with DaBaby's actual claims	22
Agreement	42
Agreing with cancel culture	16
AIDS	1
Ambiguity in the case	158
Another artist haven't received positive feedack	11
Apology as an excuse	23
Appreciating DaBaby	16
Arguing	19
Arguments with other people	34
Artist's influence	46
Artists do their job	5
Artists have to be careful	21
Assumptions	18
Attention	44
Avoid conflicts	12
Avoiding DaBaby	6
Being canceled as part of the image	8
Being driven by opinion	38
Being influenced as weakness	2
Being religious	3
Best way is to partially cancel DaBaby	12
Black Lives Matter	8
Blind support	29

Appendix 3: Axial coding

- Documents (12)
- Codes (20)
  - Ambiguity — 263
  - Art vs Personality — 122
  - Cancel culture's effectiveness — 203
  - Cancelations phenomenon — 173
  - DaBaby's acquisitions — 196
  - Different opinions — 89
  - Ethical & Moral considerations — 185
  - Fans & Anti-fans — 123
  - Financial benefit — 107
  - Hate & Counterspeech — 177
  - Hurt feelings — 93
  - Hurtful doxing — 71
  - Inclusion & Exclusion — 73
  - Offensive behavior — 167
  - Social justice — 175
  - Social media regulations — 126
  - Societal influence — 122
  - Unfairness — 145
  - Values — 106
  - Wrongdoing — 91