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Distancing From Dirt

A Qualitative Study on How Cancel Culture Has Become a Resource for Identity
Construction in an Online Setting

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Abstract

Title: Distancing From Dirt: A Qualitative Study on How Cancel Culture Has Become a Resource for Identity Construction in an Online Setting

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Thesis Purpose: With this research we aim to understand the dynamics of consumers' use of cancel culture as a resource for their identity construction online.

Theoretical Framework: Theories included were surrounding framing, morality, consumers as moral protagonists, purity and dirt as well as distaste and symbolic violence. These theories were selected to aid with the analysis of the empirical material and to add new insight to the concept of identity construction by negatively distancing from brands.

Methodology: This study was conducted with a foundation of a relativist and social constructivist worldview. The research design used is qualitative and the netnography was conducted with an inductive approach. For the analysis, the method of content analysis was used to unfold underlying codes and patterns in the empirical material.

Main Findings: This research found that consumers use cancel culture as a resource for identity construction in an online setting. By analysing the empirical material it was found that the constant use of viscous, satirical, emotional and political framing is a way for consumers to negatively distance themselves from brands and other consumers in order to build on their identities.

Implications: This study has contributed with theoretical implications to the field of identity construction, by introducing cancel culture as a new form of negatively distancing from brands. It has also contributed with practical implications by raising the problematic aspects of cancel culture brands need to be considerate to.

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1.0 Introduction and Problematization

"I'm a black, Muslim woman, and because of social media, marginalised people like myself can express ourselves in a way that was not possible before. That means racist, sexist, and bigoted behaviour or remarks don't fly like they used to."

The following statement made by writer Essayist Sarah Hagi (BBC, 2020) demonstrates how social media has become a public sphere where anyone can get their voice heard and that unethical behaviour is nothing that could easily pass by. As a consequence of the past year of social isolation, online interaction has increased even further, which has sparked the cultural impact the internet has on society (Bakhtiari, 2020). This has opened up the possibility and increase in constructing an identity online rather than offline. Today's digital era has made it easier to find like-minded individuals with the help of the internet, which is also why consumers use social media to engage with groups sharing collective beliefs. Chat rooms, social media, newsgroups and other online formats are used by consumers today to build communities, share ideas and reach out to other consumers that are perceived as more objective sources of information (Kozinets, 2002). Besides connecting with other consumers, social media is also used by consumers to create value around brands as part of brand publics (Arvidsson & Caliendo, 2016). Brand publics are associations developed on social media and are created when a crowd is given a direction or purpose, such as a scandal surrounding a brand, hence drawing the connection to cancel culture. By choosing to participate in these mediations, it can be argued that consumers are trying to maintain or build on their individual identity by publicly voicing their thoughts and opinions. Brand publics and identity construction online can further be applied to the concept of cancel culture, as it is a phenomenon solely occurring online, bringing groups of people together arguing for and against social and political causes in connection to brands and people.

“Calling out” refers to the act of cancelling, which can be described as withdrawing support for a person or a company due to their behaviour or views, mainly occurring on social media (Bakhtiari, 2020). Cancel culture has intertwined consumers sharing the same values and opinions and has for the last few years continued to grow as a trend on the internet, united and

favoured by younger generations, who argue that this can be used as a tool to fight social injustice whilst becoming a non-personable topic among others (Bakhtiari, 2020). A factor also contributing to the growth of the phenomenon is the increase in scepticism among consumers towards brands, which also creates an incentive for companies to keep their reputation clean and stay authentic. Therefore, many brands are actively working on being more transparent to attract consumers and assist them in their identity construction by providing their brand as a building block (Klasson, 2017). However, even the smallest misstep today might jeopardize the brand if they end up as the latest case in cancel culture.

Cancel culture comes with countless unanswered questions and these questions deserve to be dealt with since, as already mentioned, consumers are becoming more politically and socially conscious. The problematic aspect can be related to the empirical mystery of cancel culture, and how this action is used by consumers as a way for them to construct an identity by symbolically distancing themselves from brands that have been scandalised. In other words, consumers try to get away from what they consider to be disordered and immoral by separating themselves from symbolic entities engaging in such activities. With the help of the internet and the support of each other, consumers have the determination to raise their voices, share their opinions and call brands and people out on social media platforms (Bakhtiari, 2020). It is therefore essential to understand both individual and social identities as these constantly influence consumer behaviour (Champniss, Wilson & Macdonald, 2015), which can be of help when clarifying the practice of calling out brands and the reasons behind the rapid growth of the phenomenon.

1.1 Research Question and Purpose

The following research aims to see how identity construction online is fostered by the new phenomenon cancel culture, more specifically how cancel culture can be an expression of a moralised marketplace where consumers may use the scandalisation of brands to build their own moral identities. This research further aims to explore how engaging in cancel culture can be considered as a way to construct an identity from a negative standpoint. Consumer identity construction is not a new topic, however, cancel culture as a phenomena comes with countless unanswered questions. These questions deserve to be researched as consumers are becoming

more woke, and with this new trend and the platforms available, they have the power to greatly impact both brands and other consumers (Bakhtiari, 2020). To fully understand this trend and for companies to be able to protect themselves and be prepared, it is first and foremost vital to understand their consumers, what they are capable of, and be able to predict and prevent getting cancelled. The reason to pursue and conduct this research on the following topic is the relevance and necessity of gaining a deeper understanding of identity construction online in the context of the growing phenomenon cancel culture. Our aim is to advance existing knowledge on cancel culture related to consumers' identity construction online. In order to further investigate this research phenomenon, the following research question was constructed: *How can cancel culture become a resource for identity construction in an online setting?*

1.2 Literature review

To further position this study in context, a review of previous research focused on consumer identity construction will be discussed in the following section. The discussion will be separated into offline and online, as well as individual and social identity construction, to get a clear picture of how it has evolved. As digital platforms play such a big role in people's lives today, conducting research observing identity construction online has become increasingly more common which has been reconceptualized to fit the digital era and how it affects brands. In addition, previous research has focused on identity construction from a positive aspect, indicating the use of narratives to build on an identity, which will be further addressed in the literature review. The literature review will then be followed by this study's limitations and aimed contributions.

1.1.2 Creating an Identity Offline

The marketplace has turned into an arena of symbolic consumption, and several scholars have conceptualized individual identity construction as a symbolic project (Belk, 1988; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Belk (1988) has drawn upon concepts such as how consumers use symbolic consumption to form their identity outwards in order to gain a certain status by

consuming the 'right' brands by the extension of self. Through symbolic consumption, consumers seek to make their values and beliefs tangible, which demonstrates the materialistic goods as extensions of the self that is later communicated through a personal and group-level identity (Belk, 1988). In turn, these consumed possessions of the self provide collective identities and a sense of community qualities to group cooperation, harmony and spirit. In addition to constructing identities offline, Thompson and Haytko (1997) have talked about how consumers may attain interpretive/identity positions by relating to fashion as a field in different ways. This occurs when ridiculing fashion as a field of superficiality through countervailing discourses; thus identity constructions are continuously defined and refined, as social relations are negotiated. Similarly, the authors Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) suggest how identity can be built by consumers engaging in symbolic consumption in an offline setting through market-mediated narratives, which are often symbolic meanings that are generated by brands. Consumers can then use these meanings for both their individual identity as well as their social identity, which is what Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) explored and coined as 'self and social symbolism'. Therefore, building an identity in this sense makes it evident that consumers' individual self-identity is interconnected with the development of collective social identity because self-identity is constructed upon social interaction with others where the self is embedded in social practices (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

Other scholars who have agreed on consumption being closely linked to identity is Anderson (1997), who states that "consumption is now inseparable from identity" (cited in Schau, 2018, p. 30), which is why it is vital to understand the close relation of the two phenomena. In previous research, Klasson (2017) illustrates two perspectives on how the postmodern consumer creates their identity in the marketplace today. Firstly, it is through bricolage, where the consumer is referred to as the "unruly bricoleur" who resists established practices and approved behaviour by re-using market symbols. Additionally, constructing identity can happen through community-based practices, which are practices organized around market mediated resources and products which considers consumers as a collective group. These so-called communities differ based on different intentions among consumers, and brand communities are one of these (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). This marketplace consumption community yields consumer engagement where brands are the focal point, and thereby, they are interpreted as something

created in a positive environment. In other words, consumers who are a part of these communities support brands and do not withstand them, partaking in an experience that is engineered into a pleasure manifesto, unlike the identity construction that is built through negative emotions when cancelling brands (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001).

1.1.2.1 Social identity Construction Offline

In previous studies, an important aspect to include related to consumer identity construction has not only been the individual perspective but also how consumers act in relation to others. According to Schau (2018), social identity is intersubjective, which refers to how it consists of both internal as well as external identification. Internal identification reflects how the individual thinks of themselves, whilst external identification regards the social surrounding and how others think of them. Today the marketplace plays such a big role in the lives of every consumer by creating social roles for the individuals, leading to a constant dialogue between the internal and external identification. This has not always been the case, as in the modern times, the individual was considered to be primary and a pre-social being whilst relations were considered secondary (Cova, 1997). However, with postmodernity came postmodern communities that were held together through moral beliefs, senses of injustice, shared emotions, and consumption practices (Cova, 1997; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). It is therefore critical for marketers to be able to comprehend how consumers take use of the marketplace to construct their identities and the role the symbolic meanings of brands play in this act. As discussed earlier, the process of identity construction has become more complex and contradictory compared to modern times, where it is no longer based on such a simple title as one's profession but created through symbolic consumption, amongst other things (Cova, 1997). The role of brands in this sense has grown to become much more important, and the authentic brand symbols they have created (Klasson, 2017). Products today are no longer simply bought for their utilitarian functions, but more likely through the symbolic meaning, it can provide the consumer with (Klasson, 2017; Cova, 1997) which can also be considered one of the many reasons why consumption practices are now occurring more than ever online.

Studies surrounding the topic of social identity have both been studied within very defined topics such as how queer people use their creative language to protect their threatened identity (Jenkins et. al., 2019) and in a broader sense on how consumers function as a part of a community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2011; Martínez-López, Anaya-Sánchez, Aguilar-Illescas & Molinillo, 2016; Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004; Cheung & Lee, 2010; Kozinets, 1999). The concept of brand communities has for a long time been used to get an understanding of how consumers create value around different brands in an online setting. Brand communities is defined by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001, p. 412) as a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand”, in other words, brand communities emerge within traditional communities however surrounding a brand (Martínez-López et. al., 2016; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2011). Consumers belonging to these communities, the members, have a shared interest in a specific brand which evolves into two types of relationships, consumer-brand relationships and consumer-consumer relationships (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Martínez-López et. al., 2016).

1.1.3 Identity Construction Online

1.1.3.1 Social Identity Construction Online

The concept of brand communities has for a long time been used to get an understanding of how consumers create value around different brands, and in today’s digital era, the concept is applied in research concerning both offline as well as online settings. Hence, online communities have become fundamental when studying social identity construction online. Studies of these types of communities online, so called virtual communities, can be traced back to Wellman and Gulia (1999), who discussed whether or not it is actually possible to find a community and true connection online. Virtual communities and its features have then further been studied from different perspectives (Dholakia et al., 2004; Kozinets, 1999). In 1999 Kozinets (1999) introduced the term “Virtual communities of consumption”, which is a subgroup of virtual communities and is explicitly centered around consumption-related interests. In other words, these communities are described as “affiliative groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of

activities” (Kozinets, 1999, p. 3). Furthermore, Kozinets (1999) identifies different member types and how they usually progress from being an “outsider” browsing on the internet to eventually becoming an “insider” when discovering groups with similar consumption activities. Years later, the authors Dholakia et al. (2004, p. 242) defined virtual communities as “consumer groups of varying sizes that meet and interact online for the sake of achieving personal as well as shared goals of their members” in their study of consumer participation in network- and small-group-based virtual communities. The aim was to find the motivational antecedents and mediators for participation, and the study showed that the type of virtual community affected whether consumers chose to participate or not, as well as the strengths of consumers' impact on social identity and group norms. The common denominator of these previous studies is that they build on social identity theories, such as the social identity theory introduced by Tajfel and Turner (1979) as well as the social influence theory by Kelman (Dholakia et. al, 2004). Furthermore, theories such as “SIDE” (social identity of deindividuation), We-intention and I-intention and the social influence theory have been used to explore the various topics (Cheung & Lee, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2019; Dhokalia et. al, 2004) such as how subjective norm and social identity determines the collective intention to use a social networking site (Cheung & Lee, 2010). Following this stream, consumers’ participation online have incited motivational focuses to perform identity construction in which consumers themselves choose how and how not to display their identities to others.

1.1.3.2 Individual Identity Construction Online

In today's digital age and with the increase of social media, the relationships between consumers have become more fleeting and less structured, leading to difficulties arguing for it as communitarian (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016), which is why it is also significant to consider the individual identity construction in an online setting. This can be explored by studying the concept of brand publics (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Klasson, 2017). The concept of community has mainly been used to describe different forms of social interactions, whilst the concept of publics has developed with a focus on mediation. In other words, “publics are artifacts of mediation” (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016, p.730), meaning that they are born and fostered by the media or media devices and they last as long as the media

device operates. The role of social media is increasingly facilitating interactions between consumer-consumer-brand relationships, and this is what brand publics specifically highlight. Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016, p. 216) state that “the concept of brand public looks on community as part of a social-media-based consumer culture where publicity rather than identity has become a core value” which is why the following concept is so important to explore further in regards to cancel culture, to achieve a deeper understanding whether consumers actually fight for the cause, if they just do it for publicity or if it is a way for them to build on their identities. There are three aspects to differ between brand communities and brand publics, the first one being that brand publics are social formations not based on interactions with other members, but rather on a common focus of mediation and interest (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). The second way to differentiate between brand publics and brand communities is that members of a brand public consider mediation to be more important than communication when it comes to messages. For brand public members it is more important to get their own message across, by for example retweeting posts, rather than communicating with the members and responding to the messages to have a conversation. Lastly, the brand public members do not develop a collective identity around the brand, but use it as a medium for their own identity construction and publicity (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). For the sake of this research it is meaningful to differentiate between brand publics and brand communities, as based on the previously mentioned differences, it is possible to determine that the individuals researched and observed in this study have clear features of brand public members. They seemingly do not have any shared rituals but instead they gather around and focus on a specific case, expressing their opinions, not necessarily as a part of a group but as a part of their individual identity construction, to make themselves heard and show the public where they stand.

When it comes to constructing the individual identity online, previous research has further focused on self-related image sharing which includes images of the self-related to consumption in a digital environment, and the implications of self-in-culture and culture-in-self. In the digital world, Belk (2013) concludes that there are five ways that the extended self can be modified through co-construction of the self and that it occurs more online than offline, where the main idea is that consumers’ identity construction is assisted by others in an active way. This is also strengthened by Charles Cooley (1904;1964) who states that consumers’ self-presentation is

interpreted and then reflected back to them by things that come across in daily life. Likewise, Zhao (2005) suggests that consumers use more resources online that are available for self-presentation, making it possible to telecopresent others, which means that digital platforms provide more information about oneself online than offline. Moreover, findings have shown that this leads to higher engagement in self-disclosure among consumers, the providing of more self-narratives, consequently ending up with multiple selves of identities (Zhao, 2005). Thus, technological infrastructure equips consumers to reflect their own identity with consumption through others and renders an architecture of participation that has resulted in an unimaginable consumer empowerment (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009; Constantinides & Fountain, 2008).

1.1.4 Critique and Conclusion

In regards to cancel culture, previous studies have primarily focused on social media platforms, as these online platforms have been the main reason it has rapidly spread and become a global phenomenon. Twitter has been the biggest social media portal with research focus within this topic, and research related to the platform's potential to support social justice (Bouvier, 2020) or consumer behaviour in relation to cancel culture (Velasco, 2021) has been conducted. The general conclusions that have been drawn related to cancel culture are that at the moment it occurs to have many positive attributes such as raising awareness of deep-rooted issues in society, however only to a certain extent, as when it goes too far the conversations are no longer focusing on the actual issues but rather on demonising the individual or brand (Bouvier, 2020; Velasco, 2021). Therefore, this research intends to bridge the gap by studying how consumers use cancel culture as a resource for constructing their identity, which will be demonstrated by the analysis of two cancel culture cases.

Additionally, earlier mentioned identity construction conceptualisations (Belk, 1988, 2013, 2015; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Zhao, 2005) have not only implied how identity construction can be built symbolically but also that most of them have been done so from a positive aspect, in which consumers have used brands as a way to build on their identities leaving out any negative association with the consumed brands. Hence, leaving a notion of unknown ground to further observe how consumers can negatively distance themselves through cancelling brands to create

an identity, on social media platforms. Consequently, this has led to an absence in previous research in terms of grasping how consumers publicly use social media to call out brands and people where the 'cancelled' is categorized as unethical and disordered to a society that is otherwise ordered and controlled (Douglas, 1966; Denegri-Knott & Parsons, 2014). Hence, it is important to throw light on how consumers build on their identities by removing negative associations.

This study is going to introduce cancel culture as a new empirical phenomenon used as a means for identity construction online. As already established, prior literature has mainly focused on the positive impacts and narratives brands can provide the consumers with, which then can be used to shed light on the good attributes they want to display. With cancel culture consumers do have the option to publicly show support for what they believe is right. However, consumers also want to publicly show what they disagree with by calling out brands and their supportive consumers as a response to what they believe to be immoral. This is what is going to be explored in the following study with the help of several theories surrounding the moral consumer, dirt and pollution as well as disgust and framing.

1.3 Aimed Contribution

With this research we aim to understand the dynamics of consumers' use of cancel culture as a resource for their identity construction online. We will draw upon theories such as framing, purity and dirt, as well as morality to argue for how cancel culture has become a resource for identity construction in an online setting. There are several perspectives relevant for this study which have already been used in studies related to identity construction. However, there is nothing to be found linking the phenomenon cancel culture together with previously mentioned perspectives and identity construction which we aim to contribute with by studying this theoretical gap. Primarily this study aims to contribute to the field of consumer culture theory by approaching the new empirical phenomenon cancel culture as a contemporary way of identity construction in a negative sense. Related to this, the identity construction takes form by consumers distancing themselves from brands that are considered to be dirty or have taken actions initiating distaste, in order to keep their own identities clean. The aim with this study is

also to provide managerial contributions, based on the need of knowledge and understanding of how cancel culture affects brands which may help brands to deal with the consequences of being called out on social media. As previously mentioned, earlier studies have shown that social media can be used to maintain social justice and also how consumers behave in relation to bringing brands accountable for their mistakes (Bouvier, 2020; Velasco, 2021). For these reasons, it can possibly benefit both managers as well as companies to know how to deal with this type of uprising of negative critique and cancelling that may cause harm to a brand.

1.4 Limitations

This research studies the relatively novel phenomenon ‘cancel culture’, which refers to how consumers withdraw support for brands and people by publicly announcing it online. There is not much prior research made related to cancel culture which can create limitations as to what is known about the phenomenon. The focus in this study will specifically target two brands in order to reveal underlying intentions and relations to identity construction in the scene of cancel culture. Furthermore, time restriction has added limitations on the amount of research that was able to be conducted. Today there are endless cases of cancel culture, and given more time in this study, more thorough research would have been possible to conduct including several different perspectives and supplementary methods in the analysis. However, regardless of the previously mentioned limitation of widening our understanding, it was possible to achieve deeper meanings in our research by selecting two strong representational brands surrounding differentiating values.

2.0 Theory

This section highlights the theories that are used as the base of this research. The theoretical framework within this research first covers the theory of framing by Goffman (1974) and how consumers can influence other individuals through framing brands as something dirty. Secondly, the concept of consumers as moral protagonists will be introduced followed by the theory of purity and dirt by Douglas (1966) which will also constitute a great deal of this study as consumers build their identities when categorizing certain brands as dirt and pollution which reproduces underlying structural norms and ideologies in society. Finally, this chapter will present how consumers build their identities based on distaste as well as how dirt can also be used as a productive object. These consumer theories will complete each other in this study and provide a useful perspective in order to understand how consumers build on their identities when calling out brands in an online setting. Lastly, this chapter will provide a conceptual framework reasoning for why these theories are relevant together and in this research.

2.1 Framing Brands Into Dirt

As this study aims to investigate how calling out brands can be used as a resource for identity construction online, it is important to first include the theory of framing by Goffman (1974), as it can aid in understanding the frames that consumers use in a social environment in order to define reality allowing them to make sense of objects and events. Goffman's (1974, p. 10) definition of 'frame' is that it follows established principles of organisation and then controls both the subjective commitment and the events of the individual within a specific situation in question. Moreover, frames are considered to be products of a larger culture which is shared by all those individuals within the culture and how their presentation of the public self is presented Goffman (1974). According to Goffman (1974, p. 8), framing explains the background parties' desire to make interpretations of the ongoing conversation and answers the question of: "What is it that's going on here?" and refers to a relational depth of meaning. Although the concept of frames is somewhat complex to interpret, based on the fact that an individual is likely to obtain many frameworks or none at all, a frame helps to describe the context or setting of a certain event.

Furthermore, social construction has a meaningful part in how frames work as expectations based on personal meanings, which can facilitate an individual's interpretation and comprehension of events and objects (Goffman, 1974). Therefore, frames are based on collective construction that are expressed in discourse where a particular social group can constitute their culture's central elements. However, because the meanings in many situations of an event can be unclear, this uncertainty will be converted into a feeling of doubtfulness. In these situations of ambiguity of how events are to be framed, individuals may act on wrong premises instead of halting and try to understand what is actually happening (Goffman, 1974). Related to this type of situation, there is a risk of rumors spreading as an explanation of acting on wrong premises. There is also the likelihood of specific contexts providing incorrect interpretations, based on the scarce amount of information that is available in framings, especially those that are misguided.

Nevertheless, Goffman (1974) reveals several examples of how framing is done in everyday life, which displays how individuals systematically transform activities and signal these transformations to others, where the framing activities are meaningful for the individual. Therefore, individuals use frames not only to organise meanings but also to involve other participants where they will both obtain a feeling of what is going on and to some extent become impulsively involved, caught up, engrossed or committed. Lastly, these frames can then intentionally be created by individuals to culturally construct a social reality (Goffman, 1974). Related to this study, this can be done when consumers try to frame brands into something dirty, which can consequently influence the audience's attitudes towards a targeted brand within the act of cancel culture.

2.2 Consumers as Moral Protagonists

Brand communities have, in previous research, shown that community members draw upon a massive amount of moralistic distinctions, such as posing supporters of a competing brand as less enlightened and more status-conscious. These various ways of being morally reprobate are based on values and norms that are viewed as sacrosanct. Thus, morality plays a big part in society by providing, captivating and engaging demonstrations of a system that entails abstract

moral beliefs and connects with concerns and interests of everyday life belonging to a given social group (Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler, 2010). Therefore, this conceptualization is vital to apply in this study as it may reveal those hidden moral beliefs that belong to certain social groups. In the novel phenomenon cancel culture, brands are being called out by consumers on social media as they undertake the role of moral protagonists. The concept of consumers acting as moral protagonists coined by Luedicke et al. (2010) needs to be further explored as a part of a moral perspective on identity construction. Luedicke et al. (2010, p. 1018) define the moral protagonist as someone who “wishes to reach ultimate ‘good,’” as they believe that “he must achieve that end by means of the ‘good’ life. Good deeds always yield good ends.”. This means that protagonists aim to attain higher rewards through spiritual regeneration to affirm their audience. These good deeds, in which protagonists wish to partake in brands’ narratives, entail certain values and meanings based on underlying ideological schisms. Therefore, these brands allow consumers in particular marketplace resources to engage in moralistic identity work, which may be seen in cases of cancel culture when certain consumers step into the moralistic protagonist role acting according to a brand’s values and meanings.

According to Luedicke et al. (2010), brands can mediate moral conflict, which evokes tensions of ideologies and myths. Additionally, an interaction between an antagonist and a moral protagonist takes place when these respective parties act upon opposing moral beliefs. Thus, consumption-mediated modes and identity goals of distinction are part of invoking a moralistic dichotomy between the moral order’s proponents and the ones who would undermine these galvanizing ideas and normative values (Luedicke et al., 2010). Furthermore, this entails a contribution to the process of identity construction that is based on the internal perspective of morality, both on an individual and collective level, which in turn can be related to this study when studying how consumers turn into moral protagonists when calling out brands. Luedicke et al. (2010) developed a model to describe how the consumer’s identity evolves through moral protagonism, and it is based on two elements: ideological and mythic resources. These elements work by shaping consumers’ identity where consumption is seen as moral protagonism, in which these consumers, who are advocating the brand, reach conflict with those who are not alienated with their moralism. Moral protagonists go on to defend values and meanings related to specific brands for which they have enthusiasm for and will, therefore “invoke a historically established,

countervailing set of ideological meanings to portray these condemnations” (Luedicke et al., 2010, p. 28). These opposing views that are rooted in narrative structures are relevant for this study in terms of how consumers may use moral protagonism to build their identity when defending or attacking brands online.

2.3 Purity and Dirt

In the process of consumers constructing identity online, the previous study by Ludicke et al. (2010) have shown that there are clear indicators that consumers symbolically engage in identity work through moral aspects in relation to brands. By doing so, the consumers are transforming symbolic boundaries by trying to organize the symbolic chaos and distance themselves from the symbolic dirt. However, to understand the real meaning of where the symbolically moral identity work derives from, there is a need to dig deeper into the seminal pollution theory by Mary Douglas (1966).

Douglas (1966) states that according to Durkheim and le Bon the existence of “crowd minded” communities in which the community expresses certain values can be linked to how consumers may build their identities together with others like-minded belonging to the same group. However, this results in a dominance of the collective crowd, as the individual's conscious personality is overflowed, leading to a crowd behaviour viewed as emotional and intellectually weak (Douglas, 1966). Moreover, there are individuals who are sacred and others who are profane in the community, which according to Douglas (1966), is a ‘separation ritual’ that consumers engage in to stay clean from contagious characters. This view of desire to separate the sacred from the profane can be observed in how people express their different identities in relation to categorisations i.e. female/male where clear distinctions are made in order to stay clean. The idea of dirt can be viewed differently depending on contrasting behaviour in the world which explains how each community entails distinct identities (Douglas, 1966). However, there is still a mutual understanding of what is right or wrong regarding specific behaviours. Likewise, cultural categories are a public matter as it “mediates the experiences of individuals and provides basic categories in which ideas and values are tidily ordered” (Douglas, 1966 p. 49). This can be visible on social media, where consumers express their values publicly as a way to show that

order needs to be restored after a brand has caused dirt. Furthermore, the pollution ideas work on society through instrumental and expressive levels; the first level is about people who try to influence others' behaviours where beliefs are reinforced through social pressures. The second level describes how people have a goal to restore the order of society when dangers threaten transgressors, which in turn is motivated by fear of dirt and pollution (Douglas, 1966). Many of these 'dirt' ideas are symbolically rooted in parts of society, mirroring hierarchy that can be applied to a larger social system. Therefore, it becomes vital to understand how the control of dirt symbolically helps with identity work. Likewise, a study according to Ulver (2019) presents how the transformation of markets by consumers' social identity work can occur both intentionally and unintentionally. This includes symbolic boundaries and meanings embedded in consumers' social identity work and their social surroundings. Consumers have the ability to expand the market by attracting new consumers by continuously promoting a culture, with the intention of confirming their own identities (Ulver, 2019).

According to Douglas (1966) there are pollution rules which are created to uphold a moral code within the local community. These pollution beliefs provide a social order through a supportive system of morality where there are consequences, such as impersonal punishment, for wrongdoings if not following the moral codes. There are four stages in the cycle of the pollution beliefs that can guide and sustain the moral code; *(i)* When there occurs a morally ill-defined situation, with a help of providing a pollution belief, it can determine what happens afterwards, depending if violation has been evident or not; *(ii)* When there are moral principles coming into conflict, practically applying a pollution rule can further help the reduction of confusion by offering a focus for concern; *(iii)* Apparent actions that are considered morally wrong which do not produce moral indignation, belief in the damaging outcomes of a pollution can lead to an effect of irritating the seriousness of the crime, consequently leads to worsen the public opinion on the right side; *(iv)* Lastly, when the previously mentioned moral indignation is not upheld by practical punishments, pollution beliefs can supply a discouragement to those who do wrong. This pollution belief framework of the four central stages is going to help explain how dirt generates anxiety, thus mobilizing people in a collective to recreate order to a system that has become unstable. In this way, Douglas's theory is useful as those consumers who call out brands

on a microlevel are supposedly mirroring structures in a much broader sense based on a macro level.

2.4 Dirt as a Productive Object

As previously mentioned, dirt and pollution causes a mobilization of consumers to repossess cleanness to their everyday life and stabilize order in society's disorders. However, disorder does not necessarily suggest that there is a problem but it can also potentially act as a resource of new thinking and become creative instead of only destructive (Denegri-Knott & Parsons, 2014). Therefore, one last conceptualization of disorder will be applicable to this study as it helps us understand how new phenomena can grow from existing disorders, such as in the case of cancel culture.

Disorder is usually seen as something that spoils the pattern but also “provides the material of pattern”, to reach an order (Douglas, 1966, p. 95). According to Denegri-Knott & Parsons (2014), this new material of patterns and the ideas of what things are, requires space or existing relationship between people due to undermining an existing order. Moreover, disorderly things that still have not been categorized by consumers, on a cultural and individual level, can potentially lead to the discovery and creation of things that are yet to be understood. Hence, disorder enriches consumers with possibilities to interrogate and learn an existing cultural order and experiment with another way of ordering objects symbolically (Denegri-Knott & Parsons, 2014), consequently reaching a state of cultural creativity and innovation. However, disorders can be dealt with differently as some are not acted upon but rather tolerated based on that the ordering itself can become too unappealing and taxing to undertake. In terms of cancel culture this may be an explanation to why some choose not to partake in calling out brands and how it may affect their identity construction, as it also can be a stressful process of coming to the realisation that a brand that has caused disorder might not align with one's identity anymore. This comprehension can also implicate, as anticipated, that consumers decide to partake in calling out brands as the disorder is too unclean to ignore. The handling of disorder is initially controlled and ordered in communities that are more mature, meaning that there are stronger orderings of categories within the community that are visible (Denegri-Knott & Parsons, 2014). In other

words, the purification of disorders, as well as the categorisation of the sacred and profane, can be used when trying to get a deeper understanding of actions taken by consumers' partaking in cancel culture.

2.5 The Distinction of Taste

When it comes to the construction of a digital identity, not only is it important to share it publicly for others to see but also to share it in relation to others. In regards to cancel culture, consumers choose to either take a stance and support a cancelled brand, or they choose to distance themselves and disagree with a brand's actions and decisions. This research aims to find out how and why consumers feel the need to voice their opinion so loudly and if this is a way for them to sustain or strengthen their own identities. Therefore one important theory to incorporate, which is also going to aid in this study's analysis, is Bourdieu's theory on taste distinction.

According to Bourdieu (1984), the social class hierarchy can be viewed as a multidimensional social space where social groups are positioned and compared between themselves as well as defined based on the amount of capital they have acquired. Economic, social and cultural are the three types of capital, the resources, used as measurements for social status in different ways. What is important to highlight in this context, in relation to consumption and social groups, is that consumers that belong to the same social group, in other words, consumers sharing the same social space, tend to create feelings of collective affinities or indifference and share the same taste across other forms of symbolic practices. This can also be referred to as the habitus, which consists in "the set of unifying principles which underlie such tastes and give them a particular social logic which derives from, while also organizing and articulating, the position which a particular group occupies in social space" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 42). However, this position in society is always relative to the positions occupied by other social groups. The following concepts can be visible and exemplified in the context of cancel culture, where different social groups try to defend and argue for what they think is right compared to other social groups claiming something different, where they are grouped according to what they believe is morally right, what they consider to be dirty and clean. This can further be explored with the concept of taste, which according to Bourdieu (1984, p. 188), is "practical affirmation of an inevitable

difference”. Taste, or so-called manifested preferences, can also be considered to be the individual’s habitus extended to cultural objects, leading to rejection of other tastes as wrong and unnatural, which further takes shape as distaste. In other words, taste is subjective and whenever it needs to be justified, it is with a purely negative connotation, by the refusal of other tastes. This refusal can then take place by expressing disgust and distaste, which is provoked by the intolerance and horror of the taste of other consumers. Studies have shown that the stronger a subject is favored by consumers with low cultural capital, the more it will be refused by the consumers with high cultural capital. These refusals are expressed as distaste and thereafter, consumers try to find social groups with a shared taste where they strengthen their habitus and share what they believe to be morally right. However, a way to express distaste can be through symbolic violence. According to Bourdieu (1984) the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her involvement is what can be defined as symbolic violence. This can be further be related to the case of cancel culture where consumers are getting involved in a situation they consider to be morally wrong. Symbolic violence is often used to highlight the power differences between social groups, where it can be utilised as a way to gain dominance in the given situation, which potentially could be evident in the case of cancel culture.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

As previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to determine the dynamics of consumers' use of cancel culture as a resource for their identity construction online. The following theories have therefore been chosen to complement each other with the aim to reach a better understanding of consumer behaviour in the context of cancel culture. The selection of theories for the conceptual framework in this study, have all been included to explain the consumer behaviour in relation to cancel culture. Firstly, the theory on framing is included to understand how consumers systematically go forward with canceling brands and their supporters. With the help of framing, consumers are able to make sense of objects and situations, categorising them to create a social reality. In the case of cancel culture, consumers are specifically highlighting what they consider to be wrong and right, which is why it is important to complete the framing with other theories helping to understand how and why they do so. By including the theory of consumers as moral protagonists we will be able to analyse the consumers’ actions related to cancelling and how it

shows morality play between two opposing sides. To accompany the perspective of the moral protagonist, Douglas' (1966) theory on purity and dirt is considered to be relevant as it aids to explain and analyse the symbolical dirt, what is morally ill-defined, and how consumers react when they are put in a situation where it affects them. This theory is further complemented with the theory on dirt as a productive order to be able to conclude whether cancel culture can be considered a resource of new thinking rather than being purely destructive. As this research studies consumer behaviour, it is also essential to include theories that could be used in regards to how consumers express themselves, and the actions they take which is why the theory on distaste and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984) have been considered important to complete the framework.

3.0 Method

In the following section, the methods used in this research will be presented and accounted for. The method section will therefore begin by briefly introducing the scientific approach as well as why this research is regarded as a part of qualitative studies. This is followed by presenting netnography, the brand cases and the collection of the empirical material, ending with an elaboration on content analysis, ethics and quality in qualitative research and limitations for the methodology.

3.1 Scientific Approach

This study draws attention to individual interpretations, different perspectives, and the value of these two, which aligns with a relativist ontology together with a social constructivist epistemology. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson and Jaspersen (2018) it is possible to view reality from a number of perspectives in a relativist ontology, therefore no single truth truly exists. In this research it was apparent in the different cases, where different nuances of identity construction are evident (see section 3.4). Furthermore, Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) state that the social constructivist perspective has a goal to expand the knowledge of a certain situation, as many aspects of ‘societal reality’ are based on people’s external and objective factors. In regard to this, the social constructivist perspective has an epistemology that considers different constructions and meanings of people depending on their individual and collective experience and how they communicate with each other. Aligned with these scientific stances, this study has included various perspectives based on individuals’ differences which confirms what Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) describes as something that does not objectively form the truth. Instead, this results in generating new theories over time by meanings that are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. The aim of this chosen epistemology is to hopefully achieve a deeper understanding of the complexity of human behaviour from a sociological perspective, not just recognize individual identity related to cancel culture as a whole but also its components within the phenomenon.

3.2 Qualitative Studies

A qualitative approach was chosen as the most appropriate based on this study's scientific approach. The qualitative selection validates the purpose of the research, which is to obtain a deeper understanding of how consumers construct their identity by distancing themselves from brands in the act of cancel culture. Moreover, the characteristics of a qualitative method is the generating of rich data concerning a certain phenomenon (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018), thus making it satisfactory for this study as it aims to contribute with deep knowledge and not to conclude generalisations. Another important and relevant aspect of choosing a qualitative instead of a quantitative approach is that researchers are arguably more visible (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). This is certainly true because our voice as researchers have pervaded throughout the whole study and in particular in the inductive coding where the empirical material is guided by our own interpretations. Conducting research in this way, where rich material is gathered, has also shown that adding one's own interpretations have been vital in purpose for the data to generate a substantial amount of meanings as possible (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Furthermore, as this study permeates on an inductive approach based on the coding, it contributes with an easily used and systematic set of formulas which results in valid and reliable findings (Thomas, 2006). This approach allows the research's findings to transpire the frequent or significant themes that are ingrained in the raw data whilst not having restraints regarding structured methodologies compared to deductive analysis, where key themes are often blocked out. However, an abductive approach in qualitative studies is often used and described as an alteration between empirical material and theory to ultimately reach a conclusion (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). It can therefore be argued that this study naturally also to a certain extent, includes an abductive approach based on the fact that some theories are more present compared to others in regards to generating a conclusion.

3.3 Netnography

As mentioned, when studying consumer behaviour and their process of sense-making, emotions, and feelings, it is argued and motivated that a qualitative method is the most widely used (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). With an accelerated rate, consumers are using social media

platforms to engage in different types of ways to interact with each other. Therefore it creates a motivation to research social behaviour online as this naturally gives an opportunity to capture the expressions of consumers. For years, researchers wrote about a need for ethnographic research technologies to be adapted for emerging cultures and communities in online settings, which is how netnography developed (Kozinets, 2002). As hinted, the methodology used in this research is netnography, which can simply be described as an ethnography on the Internet (Kozinets, 2002). This methodology is used to specifically study communities and cultures developing online, through computer-mediated communications, which is why it is considered to be the most relevant method for this study and to answer this research question. Furthermore, netnography is applicable in both the case of cancel culture as well as identity construction online due to the fact that both of these concepts are based on communication in an online setting, where consumers can meet and debate about issues surrounding their own identities and values. The data for this study has been collected from comments on Facebook posts, which makes netnography even more relevant since netnography uses information that can be found publicly online in forums to understand and analyse the decisions and needs influencing online consumer groups (Kozinets, 2002). In addition, netnography is both unobtrusive as well as a naturalistic research method, hence making it acceptable for consumer behaviour research and has the advantage of allowing for continuing access to informants and information (Kozinets, 2002). Lastly, one of the many strengths of netnography is how it is specifically tied to particular online consumer groups and the depth of their online communication, which will contribute to a deeper understanding and more thorough answer to our research question.

3.4 Selection of Brand Cases

In order to gain a better understanding of the different ways consumers construct their identities symbolically, it is important to review real-life and current cancel culture cases to build on the theoretical aspects. For this reason, the brands Oatly and DisneyPlus were selected to exemplify two strong cases of cancel culture that indicated strong relevance for the posed research question in this study. The choice of these specific brands were based on the publicity they gained and how they were trending on social media due to consumers raising their voices to cancel them. In addition, to reach saturation in the research it was necessary to choose brands where

differentiating values are challenged, hence Oatly was picked due to environmental questions being raised while DisneyPlus was chosen to analyse the discussion of humanitarian values. In order to understand the reason behind the cancellation of these brands and the public outburst, the next chapter will summarise the events.

3.4.1 DisneyPlus and Gina Carano

The first chosen case is related to the brand DisneyPlus and the cancellation of both the company as well as actress Gina Carano. Lately, DisneyPlus has been under the fire and highly criticized by media for firing the actress Gina Carano from “The Mandalorian” show, as a consequence of not wanting to be associated with her anti-Semitic and transphobic comments on social media (Suciu, 2021). The statements made by Gina Carano were posted on her Instagram account, in her stories, concerning similarities between being Jewish during the Holocaust and a conservative in America (Rodriguez, 2021). In return to DisneyPlus firing Gina Carano, fans and supporters of the actress fired back at DisneyPlus by calling out the company using the hashtag #CancelDisneyPlus on Twitter, resulting in a continued hashtag trend on Facebook (Spellberg, 2021). This specific case was chosen because it is highly current, and the hashtag spread wildly online. By following the hashtag #DisneyPlus, it is evident that individuals have strong opinions which they have been expressing openly on Facebook, regarding both DisneyPlus and Gina Carano, making it possible to find rich empirical data aligned with the aim of this study.

3.4.2 Oatly and BlackStone

At the end of last year 2020 Oatly started getting backlash from consumers worldwide after the truth went out that the private equity firm BlackStone had been investing in them. BlackStone is a company that has been linked to Amazon deforestation, which consequently led to disloyalty by Oatly as this opposed many of the values their consumers stand for (Spencer, 2020). Furthermore, this public knowledge became widespread news online where consumers almost immediately began to call out and distance themselves from a brand they no longer wanted to be associated with. To further understand why this investment with BlackStone was perceived as a major mistake from Oatly, it is important to know that one of Oatly’s most important values is

environmental issues and they have one of the lowest environmental impacts by producing plant-based products (Oatly, 2020). Although Oatly publically reached out to consumers to provide them with an explanation on what the decision was based on, which was to become a game changer in green food alternatives and impacting those companies' mentalities to go for green options, consumers were still not content about the choice, leading to a trend of cancelling Oatly. The motivation behind choosing this case was due to the richness of data available related to consumers speaking up and distancing themselves from the brand on social media.

3.4.3 Selection of Online Platform

As previously mentioned, this study has been conducted by analysing data collected from Facebook posts. As the internet creates a place for individuals to freely express themselves in today's digital society, the decision to study an online platform was made in order to retrieve relevant data (Kozinet, 2002). Facebook was chosen as it aligned with the aim of investigating consumers' identity work as a part of an online phenomenon, as it is used by consumers to express and share their thoughts (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016). Likewise Kozinet (2002) states that there are certain suitable criteria, which the researcher can use for investigation when observing online interactions. This study achieves these criteria by selecting Facebook with higher 'traffic' regarding postings where many of these posts entail descriptively or detailed rich data, as well as between-member interactions that is required by this study's research question. Furthermore, there were three main reasons for choosing to analyse comments on Facebook instead of Twitter. Firstly being that Facebook is ranked the highest used social media platform globally (Statista, 2021). Secondly, the comment section is used as a valuable tool for debate, giving an opportunity to find rich data when researching social behaviour (Settanni, 2018). Lastly, when commenting on Facebook the user does not have a word limit compared to Twitter, where the tweets can be maximum of 280 characters long (BBC, 2017). This was considered to be an important factor in the decision to choose Facebook as this allows individuals to express themselves more freely, and this opens up for more expressive dialogues with other individuals with an interest in the subject.

3.4.4 Selection of Empirical Material

According to Kozinets (2002) there are two important elements involved in the data collection process which are the data that is directly copied from the posts, the comments of the community members, as well as how the data is processed and inscribed regarding the observation of meanings and interactions. By choosing the platform Facebook in this research, which entails investigating comments posted by the social media community members, it was possible to capture rich and descriptive content based on the member's possibility of posting detailed and personal expressions. In order to achieve an answer to the stated research question, rich data was required to be collected for us as researchers to initiate deep meaning. Furthermore, as the data is easy to obtain and often plentiful, it is important to take into consideration which data to save and pursue with, such as by classifying the comments broadly as on-topic and off-topic (Kozinets, 2002). The preference of choosing this type of data was based on comparing other examples of collected data, i.e. surveys which usually entails short answers and therefore does not generate the same richness of content from social media platforms. Compared to surveys, which usually generated short answers this type of data (from Facebook) was therefore preferred. In preparation for capturing an immensity of relevance when assessing comments and posts on Facebook, there were four criteria which helped guide the selection of the empirical material. (i) The comments retrieved from the posts should initially entail expressions in either Swedish or English which had a link to the cancelling of the brand cases Oatly/BlackStone and DisneyPlus/Gina Carano. (ii) The posts related to the case of Oatly should be posted on the brand's official Facebook page, and when typing in 'BlackStone', the post should rank highest in the result according to Facebook's algorithms. (iii) The post related to the cancel culture case of the brand DisneyPlus should rank the highest in the search result, according to Facebook's algorithms, when typing in #CancelDisneyPlus. (iv) The post related to both brand cases regarding cancel culture should be posted approximately at the same time when the canceling among the consumers began.

DisneyPlus

Post 1 #CancelDisneyPlus by public Facebook page Amelia White: 11 February 2021, 1,400 likes, 1,107 comments. 69 shares.

(See Appendix A)

Oatly

Post 1 by Oatly's official Facebook page: 3 September 2020, 425 likes, 409 comments, 38 shares.

Post 2 Oatly's original post shared by a member of Facebook: 3 September 2020, 49 likes, 49 comments.

(See Appendix B and C)

Furthermore, Oatly's original post was shared a total of 38 times by other Facebook members; however 37 of the shared posts did not include any comments and were therefore not a part of the analysis. However, all the comments retrieved from the selected posts were initially regarded as relevant for the purpose of this study and its aim, and have successfully provided an overall idea of the different ways consumers use negative distancing from brands as a way to build their identities. In addition, there were certain comments selected to exemplify the findings in the analysis and considered to be most representative for the aim of this study and research question. The following chapter 3.5 will further elaborate on the selection of comments.

3.5 Method of Analysis

The data will be analysed with the help of content analysis, to unfold underlying codes and patterns in the empirical material we have gathered from the previously mentioned Facebook posts. Content analysis is a commonly used method when analysing texts and when interrogating data that is structured by concepts and ideas (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) argue that content analysis can be used for theory building which aligns with our inductive approach and our research question. Furthermore, all research requires condensation and reduction of future data usage as the analysis starts in the sampling (Bengtsson, 2016). With the help of the four stages of the categorisation framework introduced by Bengtsson (2016) the codes will be created inductively with an iterative process.

The first stage of the framework is the de-contextualisation which is where the researcher familiarises with the data to get an understanding of the context as a whole (Bengtsson, 2016), as

in a qualitative analysis the data always arrives jumbled up (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018). In this research the following step included reading through the comments while trying to find recurring patterns and clear arrangements. This is the part of the process where the empirical material is selected after first defining the meaning units, which in this study are all the comments including replies, memes and GIFs. In this study the collected data made up a total of 198 pages of text, which was read through several times to familiarise ourselves with the content and to find recurring patterns. The second stage is re-contextualisation which refers to looking through all the material to make sure everything has been recorded and to guarantee no critical information has been left unnoticed. What we did in the second stage was that we carefully read through all the collected data and with the research question as our guideline, we picked out the empirical material fit for the study. To make sure everything was recorded and to make the process as smooth as possible, all the empirical material that was considered relevant was moved to the software MAXQDA. The third stage is the categorisation where the codes are identified. Here again MAXQDA was used to aid the coding process which helped us categorise the data thoroughly. In this study the codes have been created inductively as they were determined based on recurring patterns in the comment section. The process of creating initial codes should be as open as possible to make sure no relevant information is missed, therefore coding is very broad and quite spontaneous according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018). This is where the analysis took a step forward, from solely reproducing what was said to interpreting it. During the process of creating the initial codes, it was for the purpose of this research extremely important to look beyond the written words and find a deeper meaning to get an understanding of how the consumers are using the cases and the negative cancelling as a resource for their identity construction. After reading through both of the cases we were able to identify the following 14 initial codes; (1) *Threatening*, (2) *Judging*, (3) *Degrading*, (4) *Accusing*, (5) *Confidence*, (6) *Mockery*, (7) *Absurdity*, (8) *Patronising*, (9) *Sarcasm*, (10) *Political Polarisation*, (11) *Environmentally Conscious*, (12) *Defensiveness*, (13) *Disappointment* and (14) *Encouragement*. These codes were chosen based on the language used, the meaning behind the words as well as the tone of voice. With the help of these initial codes we were able to find four underlying themes which were the following; (1) *Negative dominance*, (2) *Unreasonable Allegations* (3) *Brand-Consumer Relationship* and (4) *Moral beliefs*. A detailed example of the coding can be found in the appendix (see Appendix D) and the themes have been defined below.

Negative Dominance - *Including Threatening, Judging, Degrading, Accusing and Confidence*

This theme was determined based on the negative, hard language that was used when arguing for what the individual believed to be right. The comments were often considered disrespectful with a nasty tone.

Unreasonable Allegations - *Including Mockery, Absurdity, Sarcasm and Patronizing*

The comments included unrealistic scenarios, where the other person was made fun of by making them look less intelligent and misinterpreting their words.

Brand-Consumer Relationship - *Including Defensiveness, Disappointment and Encouragement*

These are comments where consumers are expressing their personal feelings with use of emotional statements. This includes how they have personally been insulted as well as how they directly encourage the brand.

Moral Beliefs - *Including Political Polarisation and Environmentally Conscious*

The comments entailed arrogant statements in relation to personal values, including clearly stated political opinions and thoughts on environmental issues.

After creating the following four themes, we were then able to choose certain quotes in the empirical material that would aid in the analysis and create a clear structure in the form of four ways framing is used as a way to take a distance from the dirty brands, as a part of consumers' identity construction.

3.6 Ethics and Quality

3.6.1 Ethics in Netnography

For a long time, the research ethics related to netnography has been a debated topic (Kozinet, 2002). Kozinet (2002) emphasises on two questions which researchers should consider to ask when committing to implementing a netnographic study and these are: "Are online forums to be

considered a private or a public site?” and next, “What constitutes informed consent in cyberspace?” (p. 65). Moreover, due to the absence of participants’ informed consent in netnographic studies, ethics has become a discussed issue, contrary to for example face-to-face methods such as interviews where mutual consent is agreed on (Kozinet, 2002). Likewise, the authors Eysenbach and Till (2001) argue that the difficulty for the netnographic researcher is to decide whether the subjects that are observed by the hidden observer, have given permission to be included in the study. However, it is concluded that if individuals choose to post material on public spaces, it can be regarded as a consent (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). Additionally, Bertilsson (2014) described that informed consent is not always necessary if the research is conducted in an online context and in the public space. For example, if an online forum does not require registration or membership, it is considered to be public (Bertilsson, 2014). As this study is investigating consumers’ expressions on brand’s official Facebook accounts together with posts made by other consumers, there is in fact a requirement to sign for registration or membership in order to access the information in the online platform. Although, in this study it can be argued that some of the material posted on Facebook is not considered to be informed consent due to the fact that some posts do require a registration. Nevertheless, this has been an important aspect to us as researchers, to respect and protect the research subjects which consequently resulted in not using any names in the analysis.

3.6.2 Criteria in Quality

In qualitative research there are four criterias that can be measured in order to reach trustworthiness and convince the audience that the study is credited enough to pay attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In contrast to current qualitative studies, traditional qualitative criteria, such as generalisability, reliability and validity which can also be used as measurements in quantitative research, solely focus on one single truth or reality. These measurements are therefore not appropriate in a qualitative study where the social constructivist ontology is that reality has many truths related to people’s different meanings and constructions based on their individual and collective experience which aligns with the aim of this study. Hence, the following four qualitative criteria, introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), have been applied to this study:

Credibility, which is the first criterion, refers to the richness of the gathered empirical material and that the analysed empirical material entails a great amount of transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, we have achieved credibility by selecting specific brands that have received a lot of media attention related to cancel culture. This has further generated much information available on the internet, where consumers have publicly expressed their opinions and thoughts related to the cases on various social media platforms. Based on the wide recognition of the studied cases of cancel culture, all comments in the relevant and chosen Facebook posts were reviewed, which also unfolded how much richness was available in the empirical material. Additionally, regarding the aspect of transparency, it has been reached by the thorough presentation of this study's analysis process which is described in section 3.4.4 and 3.5.

The second criterion, transferability, concerns the ability to present a thick description of the analysis of unit or case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the authors state this is somewhat unclear of what thick description really is, purposeful sampling is one aspect which enables rich description. In order to achieve a rich description in this study, we have not just provided a description of the behaviour and experiences related to the brands but also illustrated a plentiful presentation of the brands' context related to cancel culture in the method section. It can be argued that transferability can be challenging to achieve with the same result if using different methods. However, as the pattern in the analysis was very clear, we could see this being applicable in other similar cases within cancel culture, studying identity construction and brands in a similar setting.

Dependability, which is the third criterion, relies on the ability of the study to be credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in other words it needs to be credible in order to be dependable. This can be achieved through an investigation by a third party (audit trail) who is following the research and also critiquing the process of it. Although there was no third party involved in this study, it can be argued that dependability has been achieved through this study's description of rich empirical material gathered together with relevant theories. Moreover, the comments presented in the analysis have been extracted from Facebook without any alterations where the context around them have been explicated thoroughly without any third-party needed. As

researchers it has been important for us to secure inter-subjectivity of this study's data in order to ensure dependability, where we have continuously undergone reflective thoughts concerning the research process, which according to Korstjens and Moser (2018) is important as it enables any third party to study the transparency of this study's research process.

The last criterion, confirmability, concerns the level of dependability and how statements used in a study are confirmed by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, this technique was not relevant as this study did not entail any direct consent by the participants. Nevertheless, according to Heide and Simonsson (2014) this could be solved through a triangulation of methods to achieve a credible study. Related to this research, triangulation was not used in the same way although both brands' backgrounds were thoroughly presented in the analysis to hopefully create a better understanding of the different identity constructions, which could possibly lead to the reader grasping more perspectives related to identity construction. Regarding the two final criteria, dependability and confirmability, according to the recommendations by Lincoln and Guba (1985), they might not be achieved in the exact way. However, we believe that these criteria are reached through the gathered empirical material which has not been edited but rather kept in its original shape, and also through providing a rich description to the reader. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) states that dependability and confirmability regards the validations of a researcher's analysis, conclusions and the overall material. In contrast, Heide and Simonsson (2014) argue that there are various opinions about the validation where for example, some insist that a respondents' validation is about getting as near as possible to the truth. In regards to this, we do not aim to come closer to one truth but instead aim to find several. In this study, we adopt a social constructionist ontology, which is why these two criteria are not crucial for our purpose. Therefore, we acknowledge this research as trustworthy.

As previously mentioned, this study has been conducted inductively which entails a broad spectrum of interpretation and subjectivity, and therefore it is vital to think about the role as a researcher when collecting data and how the research process can be affected (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). To be aware of the subjectiveness by using a critical mindset when analysing the data can enhance the transparency of the study. Alvesson and Sköldberg (cited in Easterby-Smith et al., 2018, p. 347) define reflexivity as "the way different kinds of linguistic, social, political and

theoretical elements are woven together in the process of knowledge development, during 8 which empirical material is constructed, interpreted and written”. For us as researchers to be as reflexive as possible, being aware and having an understanding of how our own personal characteristics may influence the interpretation of the research process, has been a continuous reminder which entails being self-critical. Furthermore, to minimize the subjectivity of the interpretation we have been coding the data both separately and together, in order to create a discussion of possible interpretations whilst at the same time reaching a mutual understanding regarding the inductive codes.

3.7 Limitations of the Applied Method

As social media is accessible to everyone, including us as researchers, it brings the advantage of providing rich empirical data as it opens up for self-expression in today’s society (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). However, the choice of gathering data solely from online platforms also entails limitations to exactly what is going on, in terms of reactions such as facial expressions, that could be caught offline in interviews and focus groups. In cases of netnography it is also crucial for the researcher to have great interpretive skills (Kozinets, 2002), as unlike interviews, it is not possible to pose questions nor to get information beyond what is written on the platform. Furthermore, regardless of how good the researcher is at interpreting the material, it is still not possible to know whether the data is interpreted correctly or not. In regard to the direction of this research, which aims to investigate how cancel culture can be used as a resource for identity construction in an online setting, the decision was made to solely analyse comments on social media as individuals use these platforms to freely and explicitly express their opinions and thoughts.

4.0 Analysis

This section will include the analysis of the collected empirical material with the help of the theories introduced in chapter 3.0. The analysis will be divided according to the findings related to identity construction, where the themes identified in the coding will lead this chapter with the help of a content analysis. We have found four ways in which consumers discursively build moral identity by presenting their position towards consumers and brands and distancing themselves from current events: Firstly, we look into how identity construction is built through viscous framing and satirical framing. This will be followed by analysing emotional framing as well as political framing. The aim with this analysis is to further determine the different ways on how cancel culture has become, and can be used, as a resource for identity construction in an online setting.

4.1 Vicious Framing

The most prominent and identified theme in both cases, Oatly/Blackstone and DisneyPlus/Gina Carano, was related to consumers expressing their opinions in a negative and dominant sense. This theme, negative dominance, often reflects expressions of offensive language and centers around consumers confidently threatening, judging, degrading or accusing those who support both Oatly and Gina Carano, which leads to brands and their supporters falling prey to vicious framing. Therefore consumers use symbolic violence and this cruel framing to prevail in society and appear as the ‘good individuals’ whilst by framing supporters of immoral brands, their own identity would be built as morally sound (Luedicke et al., 2010). Additionally, not only was distancing from the actual phenomenon a way to build identity but also to distance or critique consumers supporting the brands’ actions of sacking people. This framing is characterised by the brutality of individuals’ expressions with a strong ill-will towards those who they considered to be unethical. However, in order to illustrate the complexity of meanings involved in how consumers use vicious framing to cancel immoral brands and their supporters online, two discursive practices were prominent which are presented in the following sub themes: ‘Intimidating Opponents’ and ‘Ruling Through Confidence’.

4.1.1 Intimidating Opponents

There was an immense amount of evidence among the comments of the selected posts that consumers used a threatening and degrading tone of voice towards Oatly and their supporters, for collaborating with BlackStone, as well as towards Gina for making anti-Semitic statements. This generated plenty of criticism among consumers and was directed to the previously mentioned brands. Hence, it consequently led to consumers using these negative statements, entailing a degrading and threatening tone, to frame the opponents as dirty and despicable, and to appear superior as a way to build on their individual identities. The following quote is an answer to agreeing with other consumers' comments about how conservative media is misbehaving. This is something that the individual makes fun of by targeting certain consumers in a degrading manner, who seemingly hold conservative values, with an emphasis on that DisneyPlus is acquainted with conservative media's outburst and for teaming up with Gina Carano:

“exactly. They know conservative media is cheap garbage. Disney knows these clowns will be back after they throw their temper tantrum.”

This quote exemplifies the use of degrading parables and humiliating content towards conservative media for going against the choice DisneyPlus made when firing Gina Carano for her unethical statements. Furthermore, the commentator indicates that consumers with conservative values are reacting in “temper tantrum” which means an emotional outburst. As the individual uses a degrading tone to frame conservatives as clowns and emotionally unstable, there is a non-physical violence engraved in the comment, which makes the individual appear as someone better than the other social group, which are the conservatives and Gina Carano. According to Bourdieu (1984), symbolic violence is used among consumers to differentiate power differences in social groups which is noticeable in this quote as the individual is framing the opponents as a subordinate group by expressing that the conservative media are “cheap garbage.” At the same time, the individual also indicates a type of superiority by expressing disgust towards the conservative media. Hence, the individual uses vicious framing as a resource to build on their identity by using degrading discourses towards other consumers they consider to be dirty. Additionally, this social group distinction of mentioning the conservative media being

“cheap garbage” can also be explained by how conceptual frames structure individuals’ perceptions in it (Goffman, 1974). The conceptual frames entail subjective values, which is noticeable in the above mentioned comment that entail strong and humiliating feelings towards the conservative media. There may be an attempt to influence the audience by framing a certain brand as garbage and can be identified as a resource to construct an identity outwards to the public as someone who is better than those that belong to the conservative media and Gina Carano. Likewise, the following quote entails viscous framing in the same degrading way, however with the brand Oatly and indirectly aimed towards it: *“Buy valios oat drink or make your own. Oatly is one big joke”*. In this comment the consumer is making fun of Oatly by calling the brand a big joke, as a response to the collaboration with BlackStone. Just like the previous DisneyPlus quote regarding humiliating the conservative media for being on Gina Carano’s side when DisneyPlus fired the actress, the Oatly consumer displays a superior role when framing the oat milk brand as a joke and that it is easily replaceable by buying other brands instead.

In addition to viciously framing brands and their supporters who are considered to be wrong and dirty, there also seemed to be much use of a threatening tone. These comments entailed the use of swear words, and the individuals were not afraid to show where they stand and who they support. This is evident in the following quote where the individual is answering many of those consumers who have shown support towards Gina Carano:

*“She compared the left to the Nazis. And don't, *for one fucking second* presume to tell me they do operate out of mostly the same playbook.”*

This quote maneuvers a clear sign of the individual viscously framing those consumers who support Gina Carano’s unethical statement, with a threatening tone. This is evident by the hard language used as “for one fucking second” together with that the individual might do harm by using a threatening tone of voice. Moreover, this is targeted towards those consumers who support Gina Carano where the individual is telling them off to not state otherwise to what is obvious, where the individual is seemingly infuriated by the comparison between being a leftist and a Nazi. Once again, the individual’s appearance of superiority and dominance is shown by

the deliberate use of frightening expressions towards those with opposing opinions of DisneyPlus for firing Gina Carano. Although the individual did not answer any member of Facebook specifically, the previous comment seemed targeted towards those who publicly expressed and showed support to Gina by agreeing with her statements, which is also obvious in one of the following quote where the individual is agreeing with the actress' comparison for the left being the same as the Nazis: *“What *is* germane to the discussion is that she's right: the left *are* indistinguishable from Nazis.”*

Another consumer used swear words to appear in the same hostile and intimidating manner as the commentator who was against Gina Carano, however, this time focusing more on humiliating the actress' supporters: *“To kick and scream like a baby when your punished for your own actions? Gtfoh”*. Using a hostile language towards those of opposite opinions may be used as a framing strategy to socially influence other consumers' perceptions of the case between DisneyPlus and Gina Carano. In turn the framing reinforces the commentator's individual identity as being a better person in society by praising a certain brand (DisneyPlus) that has made a morally correct decision to fire someone going against the social order. Concretely, Goffman (1974) argues how our actions are interpreted by other people and gives a certain impression to create action among them. This is further evident in the quote above as the commentator strategically uses threatening words like “Gtfoh” (get the f*ck out of here) and humiliation in a seemingly attempt to influence others. Thus, the individual is reinforcing the identity of being a correct and moral consumer when cancelling Gina Carano for her unethical statements, in the same sense DisneyPlus withdrew support from the actress by firing her. Moreover, this is also evident in the Oatly case among the consumers who build their identity by viciously framing when using a threatening and intimidating tone towards the opponents:

“Every time I see that Oatly's products are used in a café, I tell the owners that the company is now partly owned by Blackstone, which here in Berlin drives out tenants. Not exactly a popular company here. So far, 8 out of 11 cafés have stopped using your products due to this. I will continue with this until all cafés have switched to green alternatives that deserve the name or you have found another investor. ”

Unlike other threatening-charged quotes, there is an absence of swear words in this comment. However, there is an attempt to frighten Oatly that the individual is going to cafés to spread the word about the collaboration with BlackStone, who is accused of being a part of the housing crisis in Berlin, which is not popular in that area. The individual further continues to threaten Oatly to continue spreading the bad news to cafés by giving the brand an ultimatum to find another investor or otherwise the negative withdrawal will continue and be spread to other consumers. Therefore, by intimidating opponents with the help of vicious framing of dirty brands and their supporters, these consumers are building on their individual identity by presenting themselves as morally good consumers.

4.1.2 Ruling Through Confidence

The second way that is evident where consumers are viciously framing dirty brands and their supporters is by expressing statements indicating how others have done wrong as well as confidently judging the brands Oatly and Gina Carano for their immoral actions. Ruling through confidence is therefore an action taken by moral protagonists who confidently accuse and judge immoral brands and their supporters, and is characterised by their statements entailing strong facts which indicates a belief in others guilt of being immoral. In a conversation around Oatly's choice to collaborate with BlackStone, the following individual continues to engage in throwing accusations towards the brand which entails statements that are expressed in a way that seems reliable, even if it might entail false facts:

“It is nice to be able to eat and drink plenty of your products, but now you are wasting nature's resources as rainforest is being devastated at a fast pace by your owners. Since my initial post, there are over 14,000 football pitches. You can twist and turn as much as you want on your marketing but the fact remains. You are owned by a company that clears rainforest. It is not sustainable to clear rainforest.”

The individual acknowledges what BlackStone does by accusingly pointing out how it contributes to deforestation and further implies how this collaboration with Oatly is not sustainable and goes against Oatly's values. In doing so, the consumers make use of framing by

confidently and publicly accusing the brand. There are no responses of Oatly's supporters who come in conflict in this particular conversation, however the brand themselves are answering the moral protagonist by stating that they include their environmental imprint on their product packages. The brand further continues to defend its choice of letting BlackStone invest in them by explaining that they are going to change its way of thinking about sustainability. Although, another individual also confidently express themselves similarly to the individual in the previous quote, as a way to frame Oatly as dirty and immoral:

“Ok we know your "intentions", why do you not say outright what Blackstone does so that those who come across only your post know what applies? A google on "blackstone" and "deforestation", "climate crisis", "housing crisis", "low pay labor" and also "defeat democratic candidates" and then it is undeniably Blackstone that will change you and not the other way around.”

Both quotes entail conclusions drawn in a confident and accusing way, related to the consequences based on the collaboration with a brand that systematically engages in unethical actions, for example, through “deforestation” and “housing crisis”. It can be argued that the individual is viciously framing Oatly by making the conclusion that the brand is falling for BlackStone's facade by investing in a green company. However, Oatly is perceived to be a villain which Goffman (1974) states is a way to portray a certain picture to the public with the aim to influence other consumers whilst in reality, the brand is disguised as something else when nobody else is watching. Moreover, by explicitly pointing out the unethical actions BlackStone is partaking in, the commentator is strategically framing Oatly as an immoral brand and its supporters as antagonists by blackpainting the opponents, which indicates that the opponents of the moral protagonist are viewed as non-environmental friendly consumers (Luedicke et al., 2010). The commentator's statements of how bad the brand Oatly is further generates a resource for identity construction in which the individual publicly appears as the more responsible consumer and moral protagonist. This type of framing by judging and accusing those who are immoral is also evident in the case of DisneyPlus where the moral protagonists attack supporters of Gina Carano, which the following quote exemplifies:

“She signed a contract. She acted outside of the contract. She was warned. She continued. She was fired. Simple as that. You want to praise her and elevate her? Will you raise your children to think this way as well? That there’s no consequence for your actions? To break contracts because you just wanna”

This quote signifies that the individual is pressing that the immoral statements, made by Gina Carano, are morally despicable acts for breaking contracts and betraying an agreement with DisneyPlus, which needs to have consequences. The individual confidently lines up all the facts related to what Gina Carano did and what would happen as a result of those actions. Moreover, by stating “simple as that”, and accusing those supporters of the actress by shaming them and questioning their ability to raise their children if they agree with what Gina did. Furthermore, in this quote, accusing is the main tone of voice where the belief of Gina being held accountable for her actions seems like the most rational and moral way to go according to the individual and DisneyPlus. However, a more prominent example of an individual using accusations towards Oatly is noted in the following quote:

"You insult your customers' intelligence when you think they'll buy your defense that you 1) have let Blackstone enter Oatly with a conscious aim to influence them in a positive direction and 2) will be able to influence this huge company at all to become more environmentally conscious and humane. Do you even believe in this yourself? I honestly do not know who is most naive, you or those who buy your defense and continue to buy products from Oatly."

As evident in previous quotes, this individual appears to be confident by pointing out facts in a corrective manner, together with accusations where the consumer accuses Oatly for lying to the public with their defense regarding the BlackStone collaboration. Moreover, the individual does not solely accuse the brand but also those consumers who they believe are naive enough to continue with supporting the brand instead of withdrawing their support. In relation to constructing an identity online when calling out Oatly’s supporters the commentator is expressing distaste towards people who are naive enough to continue buying their products. Therefore, the refusal of not supporting the brand by withstanding from buying any product from Oatly again, the commentator expresses a rejection through distaste accompanied by indignant

remarks regarding the corresponding tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Bourdieu (1984) the refusal to understand other consumers' tastes and by responding with distaste and disgust, has a common feature which includes methods used by seduction where the spectator is framing others through judging. Consequently consumers use a mastering of suppression techniques, i.e. intimidation through degrading, by blackpainting dirty brands, and in this way, they appear more superior to the public.

4.2 Satirical Framing

In relation to the second theme, unreasonable allegations, there were very similar patterns found in both cases. The common component of the comments was the use of an excessively condescending tone towards those consumers with disagreeing opinions related to the case. The comments were mainly expressed in a sense to make other consumers feel small and to be perceived as less intelligent, which is why the comments under this theme were considered as allegations. Furthermore, whether the comments were mocking, patronising or sarcastic they all included a teasing, condescending tone towards both of the brands and other consumers. These comments often included unrealistic scenarios which were drawn to an extent where it eventually became absurd, hence observed to be unreasonable, which is how the topic satirical framing was established. As it is not always easy to define moral situations, directly choosing to accuse Oatly, DisneyPlus or Gina Carano as well as other consumers of taking their side, can be a way to express both one's concern as well as opinion regarding the case. As indicated so far, there are often more than one view of what particular action is correct depending on the consumer's own moral judgement. Thus, consumers may use symbolic violence and pollution rules to create social order and uphold the moral code. By using satirical discourses, such as unreasonable allegations, consumers are able to frame what they consider to be immoral and dirty. How satirical framing can be considered a resource for identity construction will be further explored in the following chapter by taking a closer look at the empirical material where consumers set out to defend a moral code by using sarcastic discourses and superior arrogance to come across as morally sound.

4.2.1 Sarcastic Discourses

Within the theme of unreasonable allegations, there were a considerable amount of comments written with a ridicule tone, where the consumer writing the comment with the help of absurd scenarios and sarcasm made an attempt to highlight the two sides, specifically pointing out why the side they considered to be immoral was unreasonable.

“In just the minute this post takes to read, an area as large as 30 football fields has been razed. You have jumped into bed with one of the world's biggest environmental criminals with the excuse that you will try to influence them. Do you realize how transparent it sounds? Do you think Hjärt & Lungfonden would raise capital from Philip Morris?”

In the quote above the commentator starts by stating a fact related to how fast nature is destroyed and then continues to accuse Oatly for jumping in bed with BlackStone, who, according to the commentator is the “world’s biggest environmental criminals”. As priorly mentioned, Douglas (1966) talks about the concept of pollution rules in relation to moral codes, and how these so called pollution beliefs can uphold the given moral code. Pollution beliefs can both provide impersonal punishments for wrongdoings as well as aid to uphold the moral code, and there are four ways on how it can be done. Firstly, if the situation is considered to be morally ill-defined, which in this case the consumers choosing to cancel Oatly firmly believes, a pollution belief can aid by providing a certain rule which will help to determine whether an infraction has taken place. The commentator states that “In just the minute this post takes to read, an area as large as 30 football fields has been razed.” which can arguably be analysed as if the commentator is trying to show and prove how Oatly has already caused damage by their actions. Furthermore, the commentator does not only accuse Oatly for letting BlackStone invest in their company, but also exemplifies an absurd scenario of how a heart and lung-fund would raise capital from the multinational tobacco corporation Philip Morris. By laying down this argument, the commentator is seemingly trying to clear up any confusion there might be for consumers siding with Oatly and redirect them to the good side. By trying to differentiate between the following two sides in a way to clarify which side is morally appropriate, the consumer is, with the help of framing, trying to demonstrate which side is morally ill-defined. These discourses were also

present in the case of DisneyPlus and Gina Carano, which can be exemplified in the following quote:

“Maybe Trump can buy an island and they can all move with him to their own little special society where people can say cruel, racist things with no consequences. It'll be glorious. They'll be so happy!”

The above-mentioned quotation is another example of how consumers take extreme measures to prove their point and publicly share their opinion. Once again, it is visible how the commentator, with this absurd scenario and satirical tone, is trying to distance themselves from consumers displaying conservative values by criticising how Gina Carano got fired. By taking it to this extent it is clear that the commentator is perceiving both the brand and the consumers siding with Gina Carano, as wrong and immoral. By stating an absurd and sarcastic joke the commentator is trying to show how opposing consumers holding conservative values are acting tastelessly and metaphorically paints a scenario for them on how to be removed from society as a way to remain social order. Moreover, this act could be a sign of how the commentator still needs to shape their own identity by creating a gap between the social groups, which in this case would be the two political groups, the ones holding conservative values and consumers opposing those values and opinions. The commentator is doing so by, with the help of the absurd discourses, making sure to share opinions that an infraction has indeed taken place.

The second way of trying to uphold a moral code is by using the pollution rule to minimise confusion and focusing on the most vital facts to simplify the case and get rid of concerns. In the following comment, satirical discourses are evidently visible as the consumer is sarcastically stating how ‘companies they destroy the world should acquire morality instead of profit interest’:

"That Oatly thinks we should spend our time until .. venture capitalist companies that destroy the world should acquire morality instead of profit interest ..? That it is possible to "redirect" money or companies from "bad" to "good" through investments .. Do you want us to believe that? It is that lie that sustains the world as it is."

Furthermore, the consumer is explicitly phrasing the words “good” and “bad” in relation to the company, referring to how BlackStone at the moment can be considered a bad company and that investing in Oatly will not make them good. The consumer is also drawing upon morality, again referring to how BlackStone, rather than acting according to what can be considered to be morally correct, they act according to what is going to give them the highest profit. Based on the choice of words and the absurdity that can be read latently, the consumer is clearly trying to frame BlackStone and Oatly as bad by pointing out what is right and what is wrong. Hence, this can be shown as another example of how the consumer is framing the company as dirty to defend what they believe to be morally right and this way uphold the moral code.

4.2.2 Superior Arrogance

In relation to the theme of unreasonable allegations, besides sarcastic discourses, the use of superior arrogance could also be identified with comments clearly mocking both the brands as well as the consumers. These types of comments were also mainly written with a patronising tone, showing signs of symbolic violence as the commentators took a dominant position, minimising the consumers and the brands.

“Their customer base is one that questions society and its norms! Do they SERIOUSLY believe that we do not question everything their PR department says? In the end, Oatly is just a company, and ALL they care about is money and growth.”

The comment above exemplifies this very well as it is written with a very condescending and mocking tone, where the commentator is basically asking Oatly what they thought when they went into business with BlackStone. According to the commentator, Oatly’s decision made no sense which is why the questions are asked rhetorically in a patronising manner. This quote exemplifies the third way of attempting to uphold a moral code, which is based on how morally wrong actions fail to produce moral indignation and can trigger the seriousness on the side of those thinking to be morally correct. This evidently led to consumers that considered what the brands were doing to be immoral to speak up. Furthermore, as a consequence of being provoked

by the brand's wrongdoings it resulted, amongst others, in patronising and mocking comments. In this case, the majority of the consumers believed Oatly to be in deep waters when signing the deal with BlackStone, which already is an issue, but a lot of consumers are also upset about the fact that they believe Oatly is acting dishonest, like hypocrites and that they are only putting on a face for the media rather than telling the truth. This can be exemplified in the following quote: *"Oatly please. Do you really believe in this yourself? In bed with the enemy? They are using you to greenash their image, that is all."* Once again, the commentator is asking rhetorical questions with a very patronising tone, as if Oatly would not have any idea in regards to the decision they have made. The same analysis can be applied to the case of DisneyPlus and Gina Carano, however the mocking was mostly expressed towards other consumers rather than towards the brands.

The following quote will aid to contextualise the situation, to see the interaction between two rivaling consumers. In the comment the consumer is defending Gina Carano and what she posted on social media, which has been said to include anti-Semitic comments. Furthermore, the consumer is also patronising the next commentator by stating *"And your unwillingness to see that truth means that you, sir, are part of the problem."*

"But if you actually take the time to read Gina's post you'll see she never made a comparison of the treatment of Jews to the treatment of Republicans only. She simply points out that the Nazi's plan was to make the country hate a certain group of people simply due to their beliefs. And that is exactly what our country is doing now. Her post was about combatting divisiveness. And your unwillingness to see that truth means that you, sir, are part of the problem."

The next quote has been written as a response to the above mentioned comment. What both of these comments have in common is that the consumers are trying to minimise each other, by using a superior and arrogant tone. In the response below the consumer is also drawing upon past events to build on an argument on how ridiculous the first comment sounds.

"You probably didn't have a problem with Trump banning Muslims from entering the country or describing Mexicans as rapists or when he implemented a policy of systemic torture against

Central American children, but you want to pretend that everyone is being extra mean to you.

You're just illustrating why conservatives are facing a backlash in the free market of ideas.

Nobody is getting fired for being conservative, unless you equate being conservative to being an asshole. It's not like Gina was fired for her views on tax policy”

The comment is referring to the arguments related to how Gina Carano was allegedly fired by DisneyPlus based on her political views. However, rather than presenting the argument as a factual statement, the commentator chose to instead call Gina Carano an “asshole” followed by “It's not like Gina was fired for her views on tax policy” which clearly is mocking others who do not share this opinion. Furthermore, rather than presenting relevant and factual arguments, the commentators seemingly misinterpreted the words of others, creating scenarios by undermining consumers that were not agreeing with them, which can be seen in the following comment: *“You can tell yourself that she was fired for being a conservative if that makes you feel better”*. Once again, the tone is extremely patronising as the individual is writing that consumers are free to believe whatever they want, however clearly not meaning it. The individual who wrote the previously mentioned comment is drawing upon moralistic distinctions, such as portraying the other consumers with opposing opinions as less enlightened, to morally reprobate in the sense of taking a distance from norms and values that are viewed as sacrosanct. Therefore, it can be argued that the commentator is taking the role as a moral protagonist to fight for the ultimate good.

This can also be further related to the fourth and final way of how the created pollution beliefs can uphold the moral code. The fourth way is also related to the moral indignation, the anger towards what is perceived to be unfair, and relates to when the situation is not reinforced by practical sanctions, the pollution beliefs voiced among consumers might discourage wrongdoers (which in this case would be the cancelled brands) from taking further action. This can be exemplified in how the consumers are trying to push for guilt, accuse and patronise Oatly's actions. However, in this case the chances of Oatly returning the investment to BlackStone is not going to happen, but it does not stop the consumers from trying and distancing publically. In conclusion, all these pollution beliefs are reflecting one's moral values, which will always be harder to change than the pollution beliefs. Consumers are trying to advocate for what they

believe to be morally correct with the help of satirical discourses and by acting superior. By publicly announcing their opinion and standing up against the brand, they want to uphold the moral codes based on their moral values and in this way build on their identities by blaming and distancing themselves from both Oatly and BlackStone as well as DisneyPlus and Gina Carano.

4.3 Emotional Framing

In relation to advocating for what consumers believe to be morally proper, and in accordance with their own moral beliefs, they have also taken this chance to not only push the brand away but to express their personal feelings about their relationship with it. These are comments defending the brands' actions, comments praising and encouraging Oatly to keep working for a better world, DisneyPlus for firing Gina Carano and Gina Carano for telling her opinions, but also comments filled with disappointment towards them. In cases of cancel culture and the act of calling out brands, there is always going to be two sides to the story. Consumers will make a conscious choice on whether to side with the brand and their actions or not, and then proceed to act accordingly. Some consumers decide to jump on the bandwagon and forcefully clean up the dirt whilst others decide to encounter the criticism with a calmer approach as they might feel more sensitive towards the topic and have a closer relationship with the brand. Although the discussion throughout the case of DisneyPlus and Gina Carano overall had a very negative and accusing tone, there were comments which entailed hinting expressions of consumers feeling closer to the brand by defending them in a virtuous manner. Hence, the theme discussed in the following part of the analysis is brand-consumer relationship, which took form in framing by expressing emotions and will be exemplified with quotes from the empirical material.

4.3.1 Disappointment

The first emotion that was clearly evident, however mainly in the case of Oatly and BlackStone, was the feeling of disappointment towards Oatly as a brand. Compared to DisneyPlus it seemed like the consumers felt more personally engaged with Oatly, and therefore reacted by addressing Oatly directly and more personally. By doing so the consumers made it very clear that they have framed the brand as dirt and would distance themselves from the brand as well as their products.

“Hi Oatly. I have now read your explanation and it makes me sad that you did not take the opportunity to speak straight on the matter, which is that you are just a name now and not your own product but part of Blackstone. Fortunately, there are other great alternatives like coops oat for coffee!”

In the comment above the consumer is expressing how disappointed they are, not only with Oatly’s actions, but also with how they have been communicating with their consumers. According to this commentator Oatly has destroyed their brand name and now only belongs to BlackStone, and specifically highlights that there will be a boycott of the brand’s products by listing another alternative (coops oat). It is evident that Oatly has created a disorder by getting involved with BlackStone and many consumers are reacting with disappointment instead of anger as they might feel that tidying up after the occurring disorder might be too demanding and unappealing for them to undertake (Denegri-Knott & Parsons, 2014). Therefore, they simply leave the matter in Oatly’s hands and buy something else as they want to distance themselves from the disorder and dirt. It is also clear that there are emotions involved, with the consumer explicitly stating how their actions make them sad. Furthermore, the consumer is addressing Oatly directly, as if it would be an acquaintance which also indicates a close relationship with the brand, hence the feeling of betrayal leading to the emotional engagement and disappointment.

4.3.2 Defensiveness and Encouragement

The second type of emotions that was evident and reflected the brand-consumer relationship in both of the cases, were in favor of the brands’ actions. Besides expressing their disappointment, a lot of consumers also publicly shared their encouragement and defended the brands. This also aligns with the analysis of how Oatly’s consumers are so closely engaged with the brand and relate their own identity to the brand’s identity.

“I think Oatly is doing the right thing. The investment is also fully in line with the UN's principles for sustainable investments and its ambitions to help the major asset managers shift

investment focus from, for example, fossil fuels to green and sustainable. If you do not get the big players to redo and do the right thing, there will never be any change.”

In the quote above the consumer is expressing how they believe Oatly did what they should have done, although the decision shocked so many. In line with disordering, it does not only cause negative emotions but it can also enrich consumers by providing them with new possibilities and aid in learning about an existing cultural order which can lead to a state of innovation and cultural creativity (Denegri-Knott & Parsons, 2014). These consumers, and others encouraging the brand, all show support for Oatly and find what they did innovative and better for the future rather than something negative and dirty. Moreover, disorderly things might take time to process, both on an individual level as well as culturally but in the end it will enhance the process of creation and discovery.

“yes she tweeted those things and most people find her take, incorrect and offensive. It is their right to fire anyone who breaches their behavior clause in their contract. Disney values their brand over a contracted employees political rhetoric.”

In the comment above it is clearly evident how the commentator is siding with DisneyPlus when emphasizing the morally correct actions made by the brand, as well as presenting relevant arguments stating that the commentator and the supporters of DisneyPlus are not attacking other consumers or Gina Carano. Furthermore, it is clear on which side of the brand the commentator stands on, however the comment is written in a way where the personal point of view is not stated black and white but rather displaying support towards DisneyPlus. When analysing the comment from this perspective, it can be argued that the commentator has taken the role of a moral protagonist, which is a role consumers adapt when aiming to protect a meaningful brand (Luedicke et. al., 2010). As already mentioned, the moral protagonist is looking to reach the ultimate good, which is why the commentator is enhancing the rights and values of the brand. Any cultural morality play includes a mixture of ideological meanings and mythic structures which then aids to provide the cultural content and present the character types and tensions in the argument. In the previous example the commentator has presented the claim against Gina Carano, followed by a defensive argument supporting DisneyPlus with the aim of taking a stand

for what they believe is morally correct while distancing themselves from what they find to be the non moralistic view of the brand. Consequently, the commentator is trying to transform their moralistic views and mythical beliefs into their own personal narrative for identity construction.

4.4 Political Framing

In the final theme, moral beliefs, there were less similar patterns throughout both brand cases. First and foremost, consumers supporting DisneyPlus' choice to fire Gina Carano did so by throwing dirt towards both the actress and those supporting her, leading to a framing based on their own moral beliefs and values. These political framings entail expressions where Gina Carano is seemingly categorised as dirt for her unethical statements related to politics, correlated to her being a conservative, which the actress herself has explicitly stated to identify as. Whilst with the brand Oatly, there is a different way of using political framing. As evident in the comments, the consumers instead withdrew support from Oatly based on their own morals related to environmental issues/values. In other words, the use of political framing was visible as consumers either divided brands and their supporters into political categories or divided them based on their environmentally conscious standpoint, which is how the two discourses were constructed to further display the different ways of building on identity through individuals' own political standpoint. As previously mentioned, political categorisation was solely done by the consumers in the DisneyPlus case, whilst being environmentally conscious was only evident in the Oatly case, and the reasons for this will be discussed in section 5.0 Discussion.

4.4.1 Political Polarisation

In the case of DisneyPlus, the consumers made statements signifying a disconnection to their identities based on certain values and norms related to the brand Gina Carano, as a result of her immoral actions. Depending on the brand and her supporters morality plays, consumers framed Gina and her supporters by dividing them into political extremes. The following quote concerns an individual expressing disgust towards the dirty statements made by Gina Carano for comparing the lives of the conservatives to the lives of Jews during the Holocaust: *"It's true, we all know that transphobia and antisemitism is a BIG part of being a conservative these days. Way*

to stand up for your shithead value". This quote exemplifies the use of political categorisation and defensiveness, including values that are socially formed based on ideological extremes, which embodies a certain identity according to the political ideology, targeting those consumers who are conservatives, including Gina Carano. The commentator continues to throw shade on Gina Carano acting transphobic and anti-Semitic based on her statements, which can occur when there is a morally ill-defined situation. With the use of words, which indicate that Gina and conservative supporters are engaging in immoral actions by being racist (anti-Semitic), the pollution belief is stated by violating the social order and norms in society that are considered dirty. This way of supplying discouragement among those who do wrong is also visible by the individual's separation of us and them (conservatives and Gina Carano), which reproduces an identity according to the sacred and profane where the individual focuses on throwing dirt on the actress' supporters for being profane. This can further be observed in the following quote:

"For simply being a conservative". It's like you never read what she wrote, or can't understand why a company like Disney wouldn't want to be associated with it. 🙄😏🙄 Conservatives are such dishonest drama queens."

Furthermore, calling out consumers siding with Gina and entailing "shithead value" confirms how consumers use cancel culture to publically distinguish their individual and collective identity as the 'good guys' versus the 'bad guys' which aligns with the separation ritual (Douglas, 1966), an idea essentially used to symbolically classify and clean polluted objects or people. The individual in the quote takes a clear standpoint by outing conservatives for being dishonest and not wanting DisneyPlus to be associated with Gina Carano's statements.

From the light of a different lens the polarisation used by the commentator who forwards different values which all politics embodies, possesses a role as a moral protagonist where the opponent acts upon opposing moral beliefs (Luedicke et al., 2010). Moreover, by stating that conservatives entail immoral values, as exemplified in the quote, the moral protagonist is assigned a role as someone who wishes to reach ultimate good and act accordingly to DisneyPlus based on the brand's moral decision to fire Gina Carano for her racist statements. Partaking in brands' narratives, which entail certain values and meanings based on underlying ideological

schisms, therefore leads to the commentator's confirmation of appearing as a moral protagonist who acts according to the brand's guidelines (Luedicke et al., 2010).

4.4.2 Environmentally Conscious

Another recognised discourse in the theme of moral beliefs, which also differentiates from the case of DisneyPlus, are expressions based on consumers focusing on the subject of environmental and human rights issues and framing brands based on personal values. Therefore this chapter will mostly emphasise how environmentally conscious consumers voice their opinions regarding their ethical awareness and how they evaluate Oatly's decision to cooperate with BlackStone. Many consumers seemed to have a negative tone based on believing Oatly operates on a double standard, thus being framed as hypocrites which is noticed in the following quote:

"It's not about that. It is about a company that advocates ethics and being "right for the earth". If you are so fucking supportive of the environment and say that you are ethically sustainable, it is hypocrisy when you mix with a company that goes against all that."

The commentator is framing Oatly as hypocrites for going against all their values, such as their support for the environment, which leads to a narrative-building where Oatly is the antagonist and the commentator is the moral protagonist. Furthermore, there is clear disapproval towards the brand's true agenda by explicitly stating "it's not about that", in which the commentator is referring back to Oatly's statement about the collaboration with BlackStone and how the plan is to change the big investments companies and not the other way around. By crediting the absence of moral act towards Oatly not being a sustainable brand, the commentator buttresses moralistic claims about how the brand is fooled by thinking they will succeed in obtaining sustainability when in reality, it is not possible. Likewise, in the next quote the individual is framing Oatly as hypocrites when expressing how the brand is going from sustainable to the worse:

"I still think that there is a difference between changing paths and going from sustainable and responsible to the worse. When it's been the whole thing with the brand. It is in principle

impossible to trade everything ethically, then you have to grow your own. But one can do his best



These claims further helps the consumer to strengthen their identity as an environmental activist, who clearly seems indignant by the new narrative Oatly has chosen for its future which is the reason there is cancelling occurring among former followers of the brand who are protecting the meanings and values of sustainability. Moreover, the comment is characterised by confrontations regarding critique of Oatly, and can arguably be considered a moral protagonist protecting the brand and building an individual identity accordingly (Luedicke et al., 2010).

5.0 Discussion

As already stated the aim of this study has been to determine how cancel culture can be used as a resource for identity construction in an online setting. With the help of relevant theories, a thorough netnography as well as a comprehensive analysis, this research has investigated and elaborated on how consumers by cancelling brands, build on their identities in an online setting. A strong focus in this research has been on the topic of framing, and the different ways framing can be used in the concept of cancel culture. The themes that were created during the content analysis further clarified the ways in which framing is used, which are viscously, emotionally, satirically and politically.

5.1 Distancing From Dirt

In this study we chose to examine two different cases to get a broader understanding of the phenomenon cancel culture. One of the cases was regarding DisneyPlus and how they fired Gina Carano for her anti-Semitic comments and the other case was related to how the criticised investment company BlackStone made an investment in the brand Oatly. The main themes in the study, for both cases, were negative dominance and unreasonable allegations which consisted of upset consumers expressing themselves with an anger that was difficult to be left unnoticed by the public. By analysing these themes it became evident how consumers, by framing the brands, wanted to negatively distance themselves from them, their supportive consumers and their products. Therefore, Goffman's (1974) theory on framing was frequently used to assist in interpreting the empirical material which resulted in four emerging framings based on the empirical material which were *vicious framing, satirical framing, emotional framing and political framing*. Firstly, by portraying the brands as something dirty, and by using what we called viscous framing, consumers made it very clear that they did not want to be identified with them by intimidating and confidently ruling over the opponents. By not only framing the brands, but also the consumers who supported them, as something dirty, it can be argued that these consumers wanted to uphold a moral code according to what they believe to be morally right while simultaneously distancing themselves from what is considered morally ill-defined. This became very clear in the second theme, satirical framing, where consumers with the help of

sarcastic discourses and arrogance addressed other consumers directly, to help spread the pollution beliefs and in this way frame the dirty brands, whilst at the same time, part taking in negative distancing. From the perspective of the third theme, emotional framing, it was evident that consumers had differentiating expectations on how the brands were supposed to act, not only depending on their own personal expectations but how close the consumers felt to the brands. The general conclusions that can be drawn from these findings are that a closer and more personal connection to the brand resulted in more emotions shown in the form of disappointment, encouragement as well as defensiveness. Furthermore, the feelings involved were also dependent on the seriousness of the actions that the brands took for the cancellation to occur. Consumers believe that Oatly went against their own principles, DisneyPlus opposed freedom of speech and that Gina Carano went too far by comparing conservative to Jews and the Holocaust. As all cases are considered to be consequential, as they all received a lot of attention, big reactions and strong arguments from the consumers. Lastly, what also became evident in the analysis, under the fourth theme political framing, was that the DisneyPlus case took a turn to a very political debate, as Gina Carano being a self-admitted conservative, was the discussed topic. This type of political polarisation was not visible in the Oatly case, however the focus was rather on current environmental issues, such as global warming. This in turn led to a bigger morality play in the Oatly case, whilst there were expressions concerning more dirt and distaste regarding DisneyPlus and Gina Carano.

5.2 Morality in the Marketplace

As established, the theoretical framework used throughout the study has aided in reaching meaningful conclusions related to identity construction in the concept of cancel culture. Prior literature has mainly focused on the positive aspects of identity construction, such as symbolic consumption with the help of market-mediated narratives (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998) and to construct an identity outwards as an extension of the self (Belk, 1988). With time it became evident to study both individual and social identity construction in an online setting, hence leading to studies on virtual communities (Dholakia et al., 2004; Kozinets, 1999). These virtual communities mainly focus on creating social identity, also in a positive sense which is why it still differs from cancel culture. Furthermore, this led to taking a closer look at brand publics, as they

are developed with a focus on mediation, where consumers create their individual identity surrounding a brand in a positive manner (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016), which also relates to the research more since it concerns the individual consumer in an online setting, reaching out to brands publicly online. However, this study has approached the topic from a negative perspective, relating to how consumers construct their identity whilst taking a distance from brands rather than connecting with them. By developing on the theory of framing (Goffman, 1974), new ways of framing were established by studying how consumers act in the case of cancel culture. This is done either by taking the role as the moral protagonist to advocate for the ultimate good (Luedicke et al., 2010) or by aggressively attacking the brand to get as far away as possible. With the help of the theory on purity and dirt (Douglas, 1966), it was possible to categorise what consumers considered to be morally wrong as dirt, which aided in the explanation of how consumers want to clean or distance themselves. Furthermore, no matter which way consumers choose to distance themselves from the dirt, they do so by framing the immoral brand, which is how cancel culture can be considered a resource for identity construction. By studying the different ways consumers behave related to the phenomena, it became evident how they use discursive framing in a negative manner, to take a distance from the brands that have ended up in critical scrutiny. This further led to the conclusion on how by doing so, consumers are simultaneously working to build or maintain a morally good identity which can be portrayed to the public. Within consumer culture theory the market has shown to support identity construction by enabling identity projects and offering practices deployed by consumers. However, this study has provided evidence on how consumers rather than using the marketplace for props, they instead create and use their own morality play. The morality play is visible throughout the study, whether it is emotional or vicious framing or if the case is related to politics, environmental issues or human rights.

5.2 Contribution

As established, not only has this research provided a new perspective to the concept of cancel culture, but also to the stream of consumer culture theory, more specifically contemporary consumer culture and identity construction. As discussed in the literature review, identity construction has primarily been focusing on the positive aspects, how consumers use

consumption to build on their identities by associating with brands with the help of symbolic consumption, narratives, discourses and communities (Klasson, 2017). The aforementioned are all ways of how brands are employed as significant and meaningful symbols for consumers to construct their identity in contemporary consumer culture. This research, however, has contributed novel findings and theoretical implications to a more so-called negative aspect of identity construction. Besides studies conducted on consumer resistance, including boycotts and boycotts (Roux & Izberk-Bilgin, 2018) not much research has been conducted in this specific field, especially from the perspective of identity construction. Hence, using cancel culture as a resource to build an identity, is a contribution to identity construction in the field of consumer culture theory and can even be considered as a new form of consumer resistance. Furthermore, this study has also aimed to provide practical implications and managerial contributions by raising awareness around the global phenomenon cancel culture. It is of great importance that brands today are aware of the power of their consumers and their expectations as they do have the willingness to fight for what they believe to be morally right. Not only does this affect the brands currently in the light of cancel culture, but the consumers also shape and transform the market which is essential for brands to always recognise.

6.0 Conclusion

The following research question is going to be answered in this conclusion: *How can cancel culture become a resource for identity construction in an online setting?* The studied brands related to cancel culture entailed different ways of individual identity construction among consumers where all of them continuously made an attempt to distance themselves from dirt through vicious, satirical, emotional and political framing. Furthermore, the difference in identity construction was based on the level of immoral actions of the brands or the depth of the relationship between the brand and the consumer. The reason behind this might be that both brands and consumers wish to hold a morally sound identity as so many aspects of today's society are moralised. This leads to consumers using cancel culture in online settings for identity construction through displaying their moral positions and purity with the help of the market by relating to certain types of market phenomena. Therefore, it can further be concluded that morality play no longer solely is associated with church but it can also be seen everywhere else, including the marketplace where moral actions yield identity construction through building on or confirming one's existing individual identity. From a larger perspective, this study has evidently shown that consumers' relation to brands are integrated with what they stand for, in other words, consumers use brands for symbolic consumption. The reason for consumers negatively framing and publicly calling out brands they believe to be dirty, aligns with certain value associations they hold which in the case of immoral brands, consumers fight to hold their existing identities by no longer wanting to be associated with their dirt. Thus, brands are consumed according to what they symbolise and consumers use this as a way to build on their individual identities more than ever today, which can also be seen in the use of fashion discourses and how it provides consumers countervailing meanings to build on their identities (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The discursive yet public behaviour of consumers engaging in cancel culture implies how important it is for consumers to hold a morally sound identity as well as for brands to keep themselves pure by not getting dirty through immoral actions. Consumers today are more likely to speak up and call out those who they believe to be immoral, resulting in an increased power that consumers have over brands, as they will often act according to what they believe is morally correct.

6.1 Limitations of the Findings

During the process of conducting this research, there were certain limitations related to the discoveries. First and foremost, the different ways of how identity construction was built were analysed in a digital environment which reached conclusions regarding this context. This means that studying individuals in a physical environment, for example, through interviews, would have given other conclusions related to identity construction. Secondly, the method content analysis used for this study resulted in findings that might have been different if using a different method, for example, through interviews or focus groups where there is a possibility to go even deeper in understanding identity construction with the interviewees. Ultimately, more time on our hands might have yielded the possibility of discovering more nuances of identity construction, by for example analysing more than two cases of cancel culture to create generalisability, as well as by utilising multiple methods instead of one. Nevertheless, as this study does not aim to reach general results, the two cases chosen were considered to be adequate for this study.

6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Although the findings of this research is outplayed in an online context it would be interesting and potentially generate more understanding regarding identity construction in relation to cancelling brands online, if it would be studied in an offline context. For example, future studies can gather consumers who have engaged in cancelling brands online into focus groups, with the aim of asking them if there is a good way of managing distancing from consumers. Questions that may be fruitful related to this may be how brands are handling consumers who cancel them and therefore the research should aim to focus more on the brands' perspectives in the context of cancel culture. Additionally, with supplementary analysis such as a discourse analysis, it would potentially generate the possibility to demonstrate a clearer power structure, which could benefit future studies based on the fact that cancel culture is related to the power consumers hold over brands.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Gina Carano/DisneyPlus

Post 1 by public Facebook page Amalia White:

The image shows a Facebook post by Amalia White from February 11, 2020. The post text reads: "I canceled Disney Plus because they fired actress Gina Carano for simply being a conservative. Conservatives need to create our own social media and entertainment platforms. We also need our own banks, airlines and online shopping outlets. It's the only solution. #StandwithGinaCarano #CancelDisneyPlus". Below the post is a screenshot of a survey on the Disney+ website. The survey lists several reasons for cancellation, with "Other" selected. The "Other" response is: "You canceled Gina Carano so I'm canceling you. You are a bigoted establishment who has a deep hatred for conservatives. Shame on you!". A blue button at the bottom of the survey says "CONTINUE TO CANCEL".

Amalia White
11 February · 🌐

I canceled Disney Plus because they fired actress Gina Carano for simply being a conservative. Conservatives need to create our own social media and entertainment platforms. We also need our own banks, airlines and online shopping outlets. It's the only solution.
[#StandwithGinaCarano](#) [#CancelDisneyPlus](#)

disneyplus.com/cancel-subscription/survey

Disney+ HOME SEARCH WATCHLIST ORIGINALS MOVIES SERIES

- Wanted to temporarily pause my account
- No longer want The Disney Bundle
- Billing confusion
- Watched everything I wanted to
- Had difficulty navigating Disney+
- Too expensive/can no longer afford
- Too much buffering or poor video quality
- Switching to The Disney Bundle
- Other
You canceled Gina Carano so I'm canceling you. You are a bigoted establishment who has a deep hatred for conservatives. Shame on you!

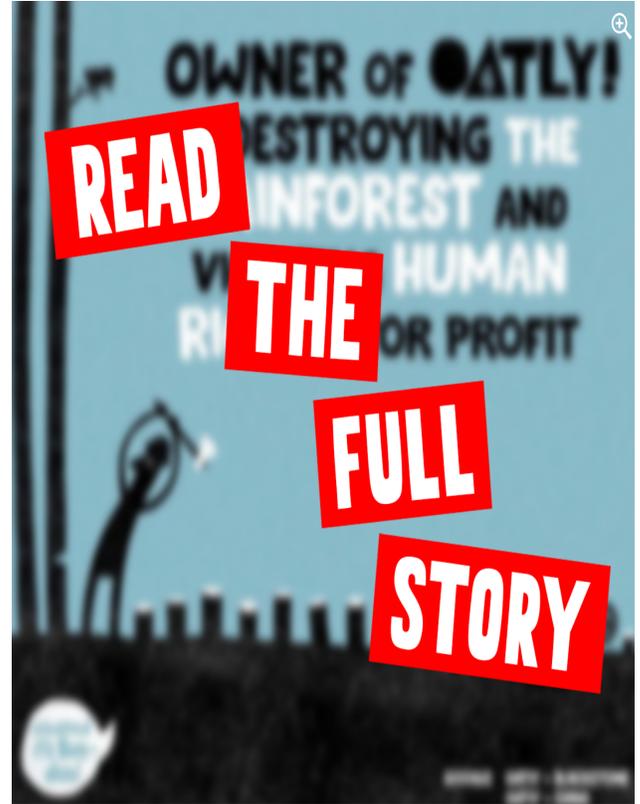
CONTINUE TO CANCEL

Appendix B: Oatly/BlackStone

Post 1 by Oatly on their official Facebook page:

 **Oatly** 4 September 2020 · 🌐

Have you heard the news? Of course you have. In fact you may even have taken the time this week to voice your opinion on a social feed or two in order to relieve some of the disappointment (or excitement?) you felt when learning about one of our new investors, Blackstone. We totally understand. And we think it's time that you get some answers about how your favorite plant-based company in the whole world could let you down so massively. It's just that we don't feel we've let you down. In fact, we are convinced that Blackstone's investment in Oatly will strengthen the global sustainability movement substantially and help us gain ground in dealing with the long-term irreversible effects of climate change. We have never been more determined and dedicated to succeed in our mission of creating long-term societal change for the benefit of the planet than we are right now, which is why you might want to go to oatly.com/changeisnteasy for an honest, uncensored account of where things are really at. **See less**



Appendix C: Oatly/BlackStone

Post 2 by a Facebook member (shared post of Oatly's original post):



Nu har Oatly uttalat sig om Blackstone.

<https://www.facebook.com/1630862710497879/posts/2678546945729445/>



Appendix D: Themes

This table illustrates the process of the creation of the initial codes and underlying themes.

Original comment	Condensed meaning	Initial Code(s)	Theme(s)
<p>“Sad that you have such a poor understanding of the well-founded arguments against but continue to stand firm with a very bad decision. Come on - redo and do the right thing. Keep your fingers crossed that you are making a poodle. Miss your great products!”</p>	The individual clearly thinks Oatly has done wrong but is encouraging them to do right instead.	Encouragement	Brand-Consumer Relationship
<p>“Hi Oatly. I have now read your explanation and I am sorry that you did not take the opportunity to speak straight on the matter which is that you are just a name now and not your own product but part of Blackstone. Fortunately, there are other great alternatives like coops harrow for coffee!”</p>	The brand has failed to live up to the consumer’s expectations which makes the individual sad.	Disappointment	
<p>”Lucasfilm said they fired her bc her post denigrated a group of people bc of their beliefs. Who the hell was denigrated in her post?? No one!</p>	Defending through arguments.	Defensiveness	
<p>“She signed a contract. She acted outside of the contract. She was warned. She continued. She was fired. Simple as that. You want to praise her and elevate her? Will you raise your children to think this was as well? That there’s no consequence for your actions? To break contracts because you just wanna. To kick and scream like a baby when your punished for your own actions? Gtfoh”</p>	Charging the opponent with an offence.	Accusing	Negative dominance
<p>”... You're acting selfish and demonstrating a complete lack of empathy for people that aren't like you. You think everybody else's suffering at conservatives' hands is fake and you equate your own accountability to persecution...”</p>	Gtfoh = get the f*ck out of here. Using hard language with threatening connotations.	Threatening	
	Reaching sensible conclusions about the opponent.	Judging	

<p>”exactly. They know conservative media is cheap garbage. Disney knows these clowns will be back after they throw their temper tantru</p> <p>”Y’all do know free speech goes both ways right? A person can say whatever they want, but that only protects them from the law not other people or businesses.</p>	<p>Putting down the opponent through humiliation.</p> <p>Talking confidently about socialism and about DisneyPlus’ choice to fire Gina.</p>	<p>Degrading</p> <p>Confidence</p>	
<p>“Why do y’all advocate for deregulation at every turn and then cry about how much power these companies have? In every other instance besides y’all being held accountable for the bigoted BS you spew, you say “let the free market decide.” Well, it’s decided. I’m a waitress and hairdresser, and even I know that I can’t go on social media and say things that my employer would disprove of. I know that I could be fired if I say certain things, so I... don’t say them. Conservatives Getting Mad About the Results of a Free Market”</p> <p>“... You probably didn’t have a problem with Trump banning Muslims from entering the country or describing Mexicans as rapists or when he implemented a policy of systemic torture against Central American children, but you want to pretend that everyone is being extra mean to you... Nobody is getting fired for being conservative, unless you equate being conservative to being an asshole. It’s not like Gina was fired for her views on tax policy”</p>	<p>Talking about the contradiction of conservatives and how they are acting in an unreasonable way.</p> <p>Statements about the opponent which seem helpful but actually they are condescending.</p> <p>Making fun of the opponent/conservatives in a cruel way.</p>	<p>Absurdity</p> <p>Patronizing</p> <p>Mockery</p>	<p>Unreasonable allegations</p>
<p>“Y’all say so much how socialism is bad, not realizing that protected speech against others is an authoritarian socialist idea. We live in a free market capitalist society that operates to make profit, if they think what she said</p>	<p>Talking positively about capitalism and indirect negatively about the right-wings.</p>	<p>Political Polarisation</p>	
<p>would hurt their profits or ideals they did the right thing. _(ツ)_/”</p> <p>“I still think that there is a difference between changing paths and going from sustainable and responsible to the worse. When it’s been the whole thing with the brand. It is principally impossible to trade everything ethically, then you have to grow your own. But one can do his best 🙏”</p>	<p>Expressions showing the individual the environmental and sustainability aspect, and that Oatly is going towards the worse.</p>	<p>Environmentally Conscious</p>	<p>Moral Beliefs</p>