

# THE ETHICS OF CANCEL CULTURE AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY: NAVIGATING JUSTICE, FORGIVENESS, AND REDEMPTION

Dr. Sooraj Kumar Maurya\* and Dr. Aditya Kumar Gupta\*\*

## Abstract

The digital age has empowered collective social media users to practice public accountability through a phenomenon called cancel culture. The social practice of cancel culture serves to elevate the voices of marginalized groups & to pursue local justice; however, it posits several perplexing moral dilemmas. The ethical issues surrounding cancel culture raise concerns about public justice standards, forgiveness practices, proportional reactions, and questions about personal growth and redemption. This article looks at cancel culture's ethical implications to determine if it provides growth and change opportunities or only promotes absolute punishment. The mechanisms of social media cancel culture are evaluated to determine their effects on both individual targets and general social principles. This article investigates the psychological factors behind public shaming and the social media platform's duties to control this behavior. The proposed framework addresses responsible public accountability by developing a balance between justice and compassion while enabling both the identification of accountability and transformative potential in social and personal development. The framework serves to direct public communication in online spaces and help users maintain productive dialogue.

**Keywords:** Cancel culture; Public accountability; Social media ethics; Forgiveness and redemption; Digital justice.

\*Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Zakir Husain Delhi College (Evening), University of Delhi, New Delhi

\*\*Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi, New Delhi.

## Introduction

In a digital society, cancel culture functions as a significant force which causes individuals and entities to receive public condemnation following controversial conduct (Ng, 2020). The digital spread of information across social media platforms, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, makes cancel culture distinctive from traditional public accountability methods, which have existed long before. Through social media platforms, people can quickly mobilize large-scale reactions that build “crowdsourced justice” by encouraging mass condemnation of individuals or groups (Romano, 2020). The quick accessibility of public scrutiny amplifies minority voices while making collective hostility toward specific incidents more profound. The ethical tension between enforcing accountability and the need for compassion emerges as the critical problem within the social phenomenon called cancel culture. Through democratic participation on social media, anyone can join such public discussions, but these networks commonly lack the deep analytical techniques that formal legal systems and ethical frameworks use (Murumaa-Mengel & Lott, 2023). The distinction between productive criticism and aggressive public shaming becomes less clear during each online confrontation. This makes people question the justice and appropriateness of these responses. The rapid speed of cancel culture prioritizes punishment rather than conversation while providing few channels for people to show remorse seek forgiveness, or pursue redress (Ng, 2020). Through their social media exposure and visibility, people can suffer major personal and professional setbacks that surpass the limits of their original actions.

The core issue remains how to combine responsible oversight with empathetic measures between individuals and societies. The conflict between cancel culture and compassion arises when cancel culture seeks punishment for wrongdoing and compassion pushes for recognizing the complexities which led to the actions plus offering ways for personal development. It becomes incredibly challenging to handle negotiating this tension because transgressions often encounter personal and communal trauma perspectives (Ng, 2020). From an ethical viewpoint, personal development stands as fundamental dignity, so responses based on compassion attempt to allow people to learn from their mistakes (Norris, 2020). This approach matches ethical theories that support human development as a base of human dignity.

The essential question about cancel culture concerns whether it provides redemption opportunities for those who transgress. The

traditional framework for justice promotes redemption through rehabilitation alongside societal reintegration, while cancel culture causes permanent labelling that sticks to people's past behaviour (Traversa et al., 2023). The inability to grant forgiveness generates feelings of social cutoff, emotional damage,, and endless penalties. The ethical perspectives within restorative justice systems emphasize approaches which combine personal growth with empathetic accountability (Norris, 2020). The rapid development of public opinion within cancel culture restricts opportunities for redemptive narratives because sentiments coalesce swiftly around precise actions or statements.

Social media's role in propagating cancel culture promotes reflection on how platforms should manage or stop this malicious phenomenon. The programming codes used by social media platforms amplify rage by promoting specific content which matches prevailing public opinions while strengthening polarizing perspectives (Roose, 2020). This sensationalized environment allows reactions to escalate and create distorted public understanding of people and events,, fueling demands for cancellation while suppressing important conversations. The structures & characteristics of platforms extensively influence cancel culture dynamics,, generating ethical challenges related to digital space management & governance. The emergence of cancel culture represents a multifaceted and varied merger of societal responsibility and technological ethics, raising fundamental questions regarding ethical fairness during digital communication. The ongoing examination of how online criticism functions alongside redemption prospects, and methods to achieve forgiveness while upholding accountability, constitutes essential elements for creating positive digital interaction practices.

## 2. Roots of Public Shaming and Accountability

For generations, public shaming has existed as a means through which communities maintain social standards and prevent unwanted actions. Throughout history,, public punishment, and shaming practices, operated as primary mechanisms to sustain social order in communities. European local communities used stocks and pillories during the medieval period to physically punish people who angered the group (Spierenburg, 2008). These devices acted as town square installations that trapped people in place for lengthy periods, which resulted in public humiliation through verbal attacks alongside potential physical violence inflicted by passersby (Beccaria,

1986). Social groups used these collective accountability practices to demonstrate the social consequences of disobeying established norms.

Additional social exile practices showcased the principle of public accountability throughout history. The moral transgressors of Puritan New England often received public punishment through banishment or shame-themed scarlet letter apparel, similar to Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (Foucault, 1977). These punitive methods aimed to punish wrongdoing and prevent future wrongdoing as they strengthened shared moral codes throughout the community. The community used these disciplinary methods to hold individuals accountable through communal assessment, as they publicly displayed examples of moral correction through shameful methods. The current digital practices which operate as part of cancel culture replicate historical public shaming procedures through technology-enabled widespread broadcasting and instant communication channels. People utilize social media sites, Twitter and Instagram, to disseminate their criticism and reach thousands of others, according to Ng (2020). The distribution of a solitary tweet or post through social media enables its reach at a million scale,, leading to intense public pressure for accountability. The digital age has transformed personal accountability into public condemnation through community-oriented actions because multiple individuals now participate in virtual ostracism simultaneously (Norris, 2023).

Through enhanced amplification capabilities, the digital age has made shaming collectivities more potent. Before the digital era, public shaming stayed within community boundaries because physical distance restricted the spread of punishment, according to Spierenburg (2008). Nowadays, social media enables instant global broadcasting,, dramatically increasing the number of people participating in judgment activities. According to Foucault (1977), public punishments during traditional times operated in specific communities through ritualistic events, reinforcing local norms. Digital shaming differs from traditional public punishment because it enables worldwideworldwideworldwide judgment of actions without defining the underlying aspects of specific situations (Ng, 2020). Digital shaming produces amplified effects from individual actions because the quick escalations create disproportionately intense outcomes.

Technology enables the transition from institutional accountability toward community-based enforcement of social norms without central governing bodies (Zimmer, 2010). Traditional systems maintained punishment authority through official institutions such as courts

and community councils, which provided structured proportional retributive mechanisms (Beccaria, 1986). Digital cancel culture operates without formal regulation or central oversight, making ordinary users able to serve as judges for the determination of justice through methods that skip established procedures for due process. The community-led destructive power has abandoned traditional institutional barriers to judgment, resulting in public justice that often operates without limitations.

Public accountability has experienced a digital transformation that converted institutional oversight into social collective oversight. The social media platforms Facebook, Twitter and TikTok serve as communication tools while developing an environment that displays public moral violations for community scrutiny and potential repercussions (Norris, 2023). The algorithms that leverage engagement patterns enable emotions and controversy to drive posts toward more user interactions,, resulting in highly noticeable digital shaming incidents and their strong societal impact (Roose, 2020). The ability of digital communities to define their moral standards through public accountability marks a significant change from traditional centralized authority control of social norms.

These changes generate substantial impacts that combine constructive elements with detrimental aspects. Through accountability, democratization, marginalized groups acquire enhanced inclusion power while traditional institutions fail to recognize specific people for responsibility (Zimmer, 2010). The decentralized reactive aspect of digital shaming frequently leads to unjustified consequences because people receive punishment before proper considerations occur or redemption can happen. The Public shaming through digital means exhibits dual characteristics, which requires society to develop strategies and technoques that looks into the benefits of community-held power while maintaining fairness and protective measures for individuals. Technology-driven public shaming practices have changed from traditional localized corporal punishment to modern global digital condemnation,, showing technology's powerful influence on social responsibilities. Traditional shaming methods operate within defined geographic areas and institutional controls, while digital shaming lacks spatial bounds along with institutional regulation instead to transform public accountability into an uncontrolled community-based power. interestingly, this digital emergence of public shaming has proven both empowering yet need a normative or moral assessments of its fairness & proportional impact on community condemnations.

### 3. Social Media's Role in Modern Cancel Culture

Through social media platforms, individuals can form collective actions to target those whose comments or behaviors are perceived as harmful or offensive. This cultural movement uses viral call-outs alongside boycotts and collective shaming to strengthen public hatred while creating pressure for punished individuals and entities. A solitary tweet, video or post can start a viral call-out that rapidly draws widespread attention, leading to immediate public reactions. Through these call-outs, followers acquire information while simultaneously being empowered to join the act of condemnation, which spreads throughout the online space. Public figures and corporations frequently face boycott campaigns when corresponding to public outrage since supporters use these tactics to encourage customers to discontinue product purchases and dispossession of support from specific individuals. The unified social media action transforms platforms into vehicles for producing detrimental economic and reputational effects.

Rich sociological and human behavioural elements contribute to the existence of cancel culture. The feeling of outrage is the most potent trigger for social shaming because it causes intense emotional reactions to perceived unjust treatment that compels people to act (Ng, 2020). Widespread outrage resulting from moral panic will drive numerous individuals to support each other even though they lack understanding of incident details or context (Crockett, 2017). Social media outrage grows intensely because people embrace moral absolutism, which demands categorical condemnation of perceived immoral behavior. This black-and-white approach provides no space for subtle interpretations,, resulting in sharp reactions that may sometimes be excessive. The psychological pattern known as Groupthink drives people to accept the prevailing beliefs of their peer group because they prioritize social cohesion. Groupthink pushes users toward support of predominant digital narratives even though their initial stance was more understanding (Suhay et al., 2018).

The digital environment enhances the effects of cancellation culture through intensified mechanisms. The tendency toward echo chambers and confirmation bias becomes particularly strong on social media because platforms establish match-matching networks between users who share similar viewpoints (Del Vicario et al., 2016). These echo chambers repeatedly expose users to similar opinions, leading, to increased outrage and ultimately resulting in a

more extreme response to the cancellation target. The interpretive tendency of confirmation bias solidifies chosen beliefs while reinforcing them in this manner. Users interpret new information in a way that supports their existing position when they observe that others within their network endorse that particular condemnation (Tucker et al., 2018).

Social media algorithms lead to the spread of controversial content while fueling outrage, thus becoming fundamental elements in the generation of cancel culture behaviour. Social media platforms deliberately show content that makes users stay longer through posts that provoke outrage and shock because these emotional responses create high engagement, according to Roose (2020). The platforms grant preferential placement to controversial content because users tend to express engagement through commenting, sharing, and liking that content, prompting the platform to display the content more frequently. The interaction generates an automated chain where fury-filled posts receive greater visibility, resulting in rapid and broad dissemination (Tufekci, 2017). Twitter, and Facebook, become a primary destination for fast-paced public censorship because algorithms automatically boost emotionally intense posts until they reach maximum visibility.

These algorithms perform functions that extend past basic content display because they create biases that favour specific viewpoints over others. The algorithm provides prominent placement to tweets that critique public figures, triggering, adverse public reactions and aggravating backlash against them. The engagement levels of forgiveness-oriented content, and balanced perspectives, tend to be lower, reducing their visibility on social media platforms. Through selective amplification methods, public understanding becomes distorted as pervasive narratives acquire a false universal level of agreement (Jang & Kim, 2013). There is a lack of moderation from and on social media platforms, which allows cancellers to create overwhelming opposition for their targets, who receive minimal defence opportunities.

Using algorithms to fuel cancel culture creates substantial ethical concerns about how social media operators should manage their responsibilities. Promoting outrage-induced content positions platforms as integral shapers of public discussions beyond their essential facilitation role. The rise of ethical standards in social media has prompted companies to create guidelines limiting harmful content amplification and to update algorithms emphasising contextual accuracy instead of emotional impact (Suhay et al., 2018).

Implementing platform algorithmic change requires recognizing how outrage-driven algorithms impact social interactions and public discourse because they harm community dialogue and individual health (Ng, 2020).

These digital dynamics reveal how difficult it is to understand cancel culture as a public accountability mechanism properly. The combination of algorithm influence and groupthink behaviour causes unpredictable and disproportionate outcomes in cancel culture, even though supporters claim it functions as a tool for power-checking and marginal voices to expose misconduct, according to Crockett (2017). The sophistication of social media requires users and online platforms to actively study how the amplification of outrage works while developing equilibrium-based accountability systems that oppose punitive strategies. The distinctive composition of social media platforms, and their algorithm-based operations serves as the foundation for the evolution and the enhancement of cancel culture. The combination of viral call-outs with collective shaming and boycotts leads to fast-growing public attacks, which gain momentum through psychological elements such as outrage while being driven by moral absolutist thinking and groupthink behaviour. Digital echo chambers and confirmation bias enhance these phenomena through their emphasis on content that produces intense emotional responses that strengthen socially polarized views. The ongoing impact of cancel culture demands analysis of social media's role in enabling these behaviours while requiring new methods to address the problems generated by algorithm-driven outrage in online environments.

#### 4. Ethical Dimensions of Cancel Culture

The phenomenon of cancel culture destabilizes ethical boundaries between justice principles and perspectives on forgiveness, privacy rights, and personal development. Through public accountability, this format creates debates about whether responses to alleged misconduct are balanced and fair. The ethical consequences of digital justice through cancel culture clash with traditional beliefs about forgiveness and redemption alongside individual rights for personal growth and privacy protection.

##### *4.1 Accountability and Justice*

The primary ethical logic that upholds cancel culture supports people's need to face consequences for their harmful activities when



legal systems prove inadequate. The public views cancel culture as “digital justice” after official institutions prove inadequate for handling sexual harassment complaints alongside racial discrimination cases and other forms of victimization (Zimmer, 2015). For instance, the #MeToo & #BlackLivesMatter movements have demonstrated as to how social media enables individuals to vocalize their experiences of injustice, effectively creating community-based accountability systems. Despite its limitations, cancel culture offers corrective power to address cases where typical legal enforcement systems are unavailable or do not generate satisfactory results.

The moral grounds defining accountability within cancel culture present multiple layers of complexity. Youth Panel will evaluate gender and age injustice in social media justice. Many cases of public shaming result in permanent consequences that damage a person’s reputation, professional opportunities, and private relationships despite minor initial offenses or extended durations since the harmful actions (Ng, 2020). The lack of structured evaluation processes in cancel culture creates fairness issues because these systems lack the evidence assessment procedures and defense opportunities found in typical legal frameworks (Velasco, 2020). The absence of safeguards leads to excessive consequences for individuals, damaging the ethical framework of justice because it disrupts its essential role as a balanced reaction to transgressions.

The concept of fairness succumbs to challenge when cancel culture delivers inconsistent treatment between its targets. Public figures usually face significant public outrage, although many others seem immune from it because of their fame or their ability to capture media attention (Crockett, 2017). The inconsistent way cancellation occurs presumably bases itself on societal hate more than it does on rational practices of justice. Public accountability through digital platforms demonstrates low transparency because punishment scales align with the amount of outrage generated instead of basing punishment on harm analysis, according to Eve Ng (2020).

#### *4.2 Forgiveness and Redemption*

The practice of forgiveness functions as a core fundamental value throughout both philosophical thought and religious teachings (Norris, 2020). The ethical approach based on restorative justice principles enables people to make repentance through redemption procedures (Walker, 2006). The lack of forgiveness mechanisms in cancel culture generates scepticism about granting new chances for society involvement to those who received the cancellation. The critics

of cancel culture state that forgiveness becomes challenging to grant despite genuine remorse and rectifying efforts by individuals (Ng, 2020). The ongoing stigma public figures face after apologizing shows that cancel culture values punishment above potential redemption for those facing cancellation. The case of Kevin Hart with cancel culture in 2018 reveals that public figures often remain trapped by their past actions even as they try to mend their relationships. The homophobic tweets that Hart had previously apologized for brought him renewed criticism, which forced his withdrawal from hosting responsibilities at the Oscars. The drawbacks of cancel culture emerge when past mistakes block the acceptance of current efforts for personal growth and change.

The ethical value of redemption indicates that that society must grant people space to prove they have grown. However, it is assumed that forgiveness creates a harmonious and growing environment for communities because accepting mistakes leads to constructive individual development. The single-minded pursuit of punishment through cancel culture results in ongoing public labelling of individuals with previous offences. The unintended aftermaths of cancel culture affect moral forgiveness beliefs and individual development goals, raising fundamental concerns regarding its social effects.

### *4.3 Right to Personal Growth and Learning*

The ethical framework of cancel culture must prioritize its impact on people's power to develop as individuals while gaining knowledge from past mistakes. According to Ethical frameworks,, people must be permitted to evolve their way of thinking if their previous actions no longer represent their current beliefs (Crockett, 2017). The institutional nature of cancel culture disavows change acknowledgement because its singular focus on public condemnation makes it hard for people to prove their growth as individuals.

The practice of permanent punishment for past actions that occurred long ago creates doubts about how fair the severity of sanctions should be. The argument against cancel culture points to human identity development because people can evolve their viewpoints throughout life. The social consequences of cancel culture block people from progress because public shaming and exclusion isolate them from society. Free cancellations prevent the ability for personal growth, according to Norris (2020), because these practices refuse to provide constructive environments for

understanding mistakes. The failure of cancel culture to distinguish between serious and minor offenses triggers substantial ethical problems about blanket condemnations of people for their alleged errors. Many people endure public criticism because of their actions from when they were younger, even though they lacked social awareness (Roose, 2020). The absence of differentiation in cancellation practices undermines the ethical framework underlying cancel culture when it disregards natural personal development to impose everlasting punitive measures.

#### *4.4 Privacy, Public Image, and Consequences of Digital Punishment*

The public disclosure of private lives through online channels within cancel culture creates serious ethical problems for personal privacy and individual rights. Digital information about people reveals their private aspects because this data spreads quickly through digital channels for manipulation. Through cancel culture, private issues emerge into public accessibility, creating enduring adverse effects on personal professional identity, emotional state, and romantic dynamics. The invasion of personal privacy during public accountability exposes an ethical dilemma resulting from inappropriate exposure of private behaviours. The experience of being publicly shamed produces serious mental health effects, which trigger anxiety alongside depression and social isolation. The experience of being cancelled leads to lasting self-esteem damage since the negative incident overshadows all other life aspects, thus destroying a person's sense of personal identity. The ethical concerns surrounding these outcomes grow more apparent because they penalize people beyond the initial behavioural or verbal actions that made them a target of public criticism.

The lasting damage to reputation caused by ethical breaches is against the principle of proportionality. Economic losses stemming from cancel culture negatively impact people's employment prospects, personal relationships, and future business possibilities (Ng, 2020). The losses of professional roles and denied career opportunities stemming from past behaviour limit individual growth potential for reintegration. These outcomes generate moral dilemmas because they indicate that cancel culture emphasises rapid retribution instead of complete remediation and forgiveness. The moral dimensions of cancel culture demonstrate critical difficulties in striking an equilibrium between justice delivery, forgiveness releases, and individual advancement alongside privacy protection.

The rightful navigation of digital punishment requires society to grasp public accountability's restrictions & the importance of showing compassion and using proportional responses.

## 5. Cancel Culture in Action

Cancel culture creates widespread consequences that affect celebrity figures, prominent people desiring rehabilitation, and individual members of society. Examining actual events demonstrates the behavioural intricacies of cancel culture while providing information about how society views justice & practices redemption and forgiveness.

### *5.1. A Public Figure Facing Backlash for Past Controversial Statements*

The decision to cancel Kevin Hart highlights how public personas can face severe consequences because of their previous remarks. The resurgence of homophobic tweets from Hart's past caused him to lose his role as the 2018 Oscars host when critics widely criticized his past comments. Despite his previous apologies for those comments, the public required additional accountability from Hart. He refused to apologize again after claiming to have shifted following his initial remarks before he left his hosting position to prevent controversy (Ng, 2020). The public remained unimpressed by his later apology, which led to widespread debate about the effects of cancel culture on society. The adverse reaction Hart received highlighted both the standards of proportional response and ethical responsibility measurement. The public controversy over his offensive comments faced criticism because people disagreed on balancing his past acknowledgements of wrongdoing with his current progress but still considered his previous statements harmful. This case demonstrates the difficulty of deciding when accountability reaches appropriate sufficiency levels while showing whether multiple apologies eliminate public moral condemnation. Public accountability in modern times does not match the actual situation because people frequently become identified through their worst behaviour from the past. However, it fails to represent their current self (Ng, 2020).

### *5.2. An Individual Who Has Attempted to Make Amends*

The YouTube influencer and beauty vlogger Laura Lee is a noteworthy

example demonstrating the complexities of public accountability. The digital controversy 2018 ended Lee's show when sponsors and fans attacked her after discovering old racially charged tweets (Williams, 2018). Throughout her emotional video apology, she accepted responsibility while embracing several steps to mitigate the controversy, such as dedicating money to racial justice campaigns and pursuing education about privilege and race issues (Norris, 2020). The apology that Ferguson issued to restore her public image did not change many fans' minds because they saw her apology as fake and accused her of apologizing to save her professional career. How society responded to Lee's redemption attempt reveals their beliefs about forgiving individuals in cancel culture contexts. The public received Lee's attempts to show sincere development and penance poorly because critics doubted the trustworthiness of paid public apologies (Norris, 2023). The case illustrates how people encounter barriers to obtaining forgiveness throughout the cancel culture framework because their attempts at reconciliation frequently appear inadequate and dishonest to observers. However, the absence of mechanisms for recognizing personal growth in cancel culture makes it hard for individuals to overcome past mistakes and reenter society. The way people view an individual pursuing transformation demonstrates how challenging it is to move past judgment even though they try hard to show progress.

### *5.3. A Less-Known Individual Affected by Viral Backlash*

The consequences of cancel culture attacks towards private citizens become especially concerning through the "Central Park Karen" incident involving Amy Cooper, who became known worldwideworldwide after her viral video exposure in 2020. The video captured Cooper calling the police against a Black man who watched birds in Central Park while she lied about him threatening her. The video showed how racial biases influence threat perception and spread throughout social media, forcing Cooper into significant losses. The incident led to her job termination and legal punishment while simultaneously making her a racial profiling emblem (Ng, 2020). The public apology Cooper made did not shield her from severe criticism by the public as her actions received broad condemnation that continues to harm her career and personal life. This particular instance demonstrates that cancel culture creates serious ethical dilemmas when it focuses on regular individuals whose work is performed outside the public eye. Since

private individuals do not have celebrity-grade access to publicists and platforms, they find it challenging to handle public backlash effectively. Cooper's one major mistake in the digital world resulted in her enduring negative consequences throughout her life. The critics opine that Cooper's harmful actions need accountability but condemn the excessive punishment, which includes severe damage to her professional future and her reputation (Crockett, 2017). The case demonstrates difficulties with maintaining fairness in cancel culture toward everyday people while showing the ethical issues that emerge when we try to enforce public accountability over lengthy periods.

## 6. Reflections on Public Attitudes Toward Justice, Redemption, and Forgiveness in Cancel Culture

The discussed cases demonstrate intricate public beliefs about justice and redemption processes alongside forgiveness practices under cancel culture scenarios. The public monitors celebrities indefinitely for their past misdeeds independent of their personal development and prior expressions of regret. The external response to Laura Lee's redemption attempt shows how doubtful society remains about pursuers of redemption as their gestures to make amends face scrutiny for insufficiency or untruthfulness. In Amy Cooper's case, cancel culture's corrosive impact manifests incredibly severely for private citizens because those without public resources find it nearly impossible to emerge from viral backlash. There is evidence that cancel culture seeks retribution above redemption, undermining, accepted values of forgiveness and self-development. The ethical redemption process requires structured learning opportunities after making mistakes, but the unstructured pathways in cancel culture prevent this development. The consequences linked to cancel culture have been examined regarding public accountability because they frequently result in unusually severe punishments that surpass the original conduct (Murumaa-Mengel & Lott, 2023).

Cancel culture leads to contradictory effects on people who are disposable, especially public personalities and social influencers, and ordinary society members, because it creates a dispute between upholding justice and showing mercy. Digital platforms enable marginalized audiences to claim justice through their democratic capabilities, yet their punishment amplification leads to enduring harm, mainly affecting those who cannot pay for defense systems. The observed cases highlight the necessity for public accountability, which

acknowledges both correct harm resolution and ethical redemption and forgiveness for achieving personal and social recovery. Social media platforms function as fundamental influence factors of cancel culture because they allow its formation yet also serve as its regulators. The infrastructure facilities that Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram deliver allow users to raise dissent, maintain accountability, and take part in collective action (Ng, 2020). Furthermore, social media platforms must fulfill their ethical duties to safeguard users from harassment and reduce mob mentality while maintaining a balance between promoting accountability and preserving individual dignity. The way outrage spreads through cancel culture, and its potential risks of unfair justice, demands that platforms implement systems focused on fairness while reducing potential damage.

The core design of social media systems promotes user engagement by elevating content that fuels emotional reactions such as anger and outrage because such participatory reactions generate higher interaction metrics (Roose, 2020). The automated prioritization techniques of platforms worsen cancel culture by increasing the visibility of harmful content while promoting widespread condemnation of individuals and groups. Social media companies must perform complete social impact evaluations on their algorithms since responsibility includes more than just content hosting. The algorithms designed by Crockett (2017) to emphasize outrage-driven content threaten to turn virtual distances into perpetual spaces of dispute and condemnation. The combination of these factors leads users to experience “moral panic”, which warps their understanding of events, so behaviours move towards fueling cancel culture instead of developing meaningful dialogue (Crockett, 2017).

The ethical principles of social media companies compel them to act against the dangers of cancel culture within their platforms. The moral standards that guide platform actions require companies to maintain First Amendment freedom alongside responsibilities for protecting users from threats such as online group harassment and psychological damage (Velasco, 2020). The indiscriminate practice of harassment within cancel culture leads to significant mental health issues such as anxiety depression, and social withdrawal for all participants. The ethical duty of platform facilitators requires them to establish rules that prevent digital harm and stop harassment from occurring on their platforms. The effort to tackle these problems becomes apparent when we see Twitter implement reply restrictions and Instagram provide post-comment management filters, according to Norris (2023).

Platforms must implement content moderation policies to decrease the negative consequences of cancel culture. The inconsistent application of platform-banning rules remains a concern for online content moderation since platforms struggle to enforce basic guidelines due to the vast content volume. At the same time, information spreads quickly (Zimmer, 2015). Digital platforms require more substantial clarification and preemptive moderation rules specifically addressing cancel culture dynamics. The platform management expert Eve Ng (2020) recommends updating content moderation algorithms to reduce harmful mob-driven content that unfairly attacks specific individuals automatically. The adoption of specific policies would assist in reducing the rapid escalation of criticism that leads to mass condemnation and harassment throughout many instances of cancel culture. Social media platforms' algorithmic structure and architecture represent a vital area where responsibility must be addressed. The algorithms,, through their content recommendation systems,, push material that generates strong adverse reactions,, allowing cancel culture to expand its reach (Roose, 2020). Adjusting algorithmic systems by platforms toward supporting diverse perspectives alongside informative content represents a possible solution to combat this problem. The analysis of algorithms by Tufekci (2017) suggests that system transparency enables users to follow content selection mechanics, spot biases, and avoid filter bubbles that escalate divisive conversations. When platforms display their algorithms to users, they create opportunities for better awareness and reflective behaviors among them.

Social media platforms should introduce features that encourage users to slow their public condemnation and then develop a perspective for online discussions. Social media networks should introduce waits known as "cooling-off" periods, that must be respected before users can publicly spread content. Studies by Del Vicario et al. (2016) indicate that keeping a short interval before posting content decreases impulsive, angry, or outraged communication. Users should have temporary intervals that serve as thought periods to understand their impact before they add to cancel culture. The added feature would help users develop a reflective approach to their accountability duties to hold meaningful discussions instead of giving impulsive negative responses. Moreover, the transparent methods of content moderation consists a strategy for developing responsible and fair online discussions. And, understanding moderation decision processes and policy enforcement protocols enables user platform trust in the approach to managing controversial content (Fazio,



2020). Facebook and Twitter have released transparency reports for moderating content, which describe how they enact community guidelines enforcement but require further improvement. The transparency reports of platforms can achieve better development by including thorough descriptions of their moderation decisions for major cancel culture incidents while addressing both ethical elements and preventing inappropriate moderation actions.

The platforms should integrate educational features that teach respectful interaction despite user disagreement or public criticism. The development of digital literacy combined with ethical engagement is a vital approach to creating a healthy digital environment, according to Norris (2020). Social media platforms should build interface systems that display prompts to users,, motivating them toward empathic discourse,, especially while discussing touchy subjects or providing public evaluations. The introduction of behavioural prompts would assist in diminishing groupthink behaviour because users would reflect better about their actions and practice fairness and compassion online.

The dynamic of cancel culture receives its main origins from how social media platforms operate today. The role of mass communication and public discourse platforms requires them to protect their users from harm while maintaining free expression licenses, and developing protocols to stop harassment by mobs and prevent unconsidered actions that could be perceived as punishment. Combining content moderation systems with algorithm understanding, temporary breaks, and improved digital literacy education from platforms fosters constructive public accountability processes. The digital environment can promote responsible accountability by allowing social media companies to focus on fair discourse alongside user protection from destructive harm.

## 7. Balancing Accountability with Compassion and Growth: An Ethical Analysis

The intersection of accountability alongside compassion together with growth possibilities creates ethical challenges within the phenomenon of cancel culture. The objective behind cancel culture is to hold people responsible but the approach sometimes leads to harsh responses instead of developing restorative practices. The need for fair accountability demands a method which balances punishment according to specific circumstances while allowing redemption opportunities.

### *7.1 Principles of Fair Accountability*

The response to detected misconduct needs to follow these guidelines: maintain proportionality through assessment of the offense and provide a focal point derived from established benchmarks. These principles assert that the maximum penalty should correspond with both the degree & scope of the infraction. Moreover, the application of unjustly harsh punishment for minor misconduct, along with everlasting condemnation of previous wrongdoings, contravenes ethical requirements for fair justice systems. The practice of proportionality brings constructive accountability, which upholds community standards through responses that do not cause unnecessary harm to personal lives.

The evaluation process for fair accountability depends on understanding the complete situation. The absence of age, intention and personal development analysis since the offense results in responses that fail to account for human complexity (Velasco, 2020). The education system is often more appropriate than harsh punishment for ignorant comments, but juveniles and those experiencing duress require less punitive measures for their actions. The evaluation of complete case circumstances enables us to detect hidden psychological reasons and life experience which permits customized reaction strategies (Murumaa-Mengel & Lott, 2023). The implementation of a variable approach remains crucial because fixed judgments eliminate consideration of human uniqueness in each situation. The practice of canceling people removes dimensional understanding as it promotes absolute judgments which may not correspond to different circumstances. Society becomes better equipped to establish ethical methods of accountability when it analyzes scenarios independently, thus creating customized responses for justice and personal growth (Norris 2020).

### *7.2 Integrating Compassion into Accountability*

The moral accountability necessitates the inclusion of compassionate aspects which provide avenues toward forgiveness and redemption.

Moreover, the traditional justice systems understand the importance of allowing individuals to make changes by expressing regret through amends; hence, cancel culture would benefit from these principles. Public accountability grows more effective when compassion enters the system because it creates an environment that offers support for development instead of endless judgment.

Accountability practices that use compassion focus on developing

better behaviors and truthful actions. This method supports a transition process toward trust restoration, which requires visible steps showing commitment to amend mistaken deeds. According to Norris (2020) society should provide chances for performers to exhibit deep remorse along with their willingness to progress while accepting their transformational work. The demonstration of genuine change through active participation in corrective actions and community service can be observed in public statements combined with educational or community initiatives (Murumaa-Mengel & Lott, 2023). The evaluation of genuine remorse depends on how sincerely the person conducts themselves because this establishes their real level of regret. Using this model fulfills the principles of restorative justice which support restoration rather than punitive measures. The process of forgiveness produces multiple positive effects because it enables both redeemers and their communities to create shared progress through mutual advancement. The establishment of structured paths for redemption transforms cancel culture into an entity that maintains accountability standards while permitting people to reconnect productively with society according to Velasco (2020).

### *7.3 Balancing Harm and Justice*

Accountability remains necessary yet some of the destructive impacts from cancel culture end up surpassing the acquisition of justice. The psychological consequences of being cancelled produce strong, long-term effects which damage the mental well-being of wellbeing those who experience them. The perpetuation of public shaming on social media platforms results in anxiety and depression, together with social isolation, when people face ostracism because of losing their community networks (Traversa et al., 2023). The psychological damage caused by cancel culture triggers moral questions about how the aim of responsibility and social enhancement matches the extensive private sacrifices. Social ostracism emerges frequently from cancel culture practices because it deteriorates people's feelings of belonging, which worsens their psychological condition. The author Velasco demonstrates that others excluding someone results in feelings of being worthless and a sense of detachment that inhibits the individual from growing. This form of social isolation produces distinct ethical problems because justice systems based on inclusion and personal growth would work toward enabling people to rejoin society. When permanent social and professional banishment denies

people the opportunity to develop into productive social members (Norris, 2020). The adverse effects of cancel culture sometimes surpass the goals of justice, leading to moral dilemmas about the compatibility between such punitive measures and social values. Its common practice of social shunning and platform blocking bars people from demonstrating progress and seeking forgiveness. The lack of reformation opportunities within cancel culture creates resentment instead of responsibility among those targeted for cancellation because they perceive an unfair justice process without chances to improve themselves.

The balanced practice of cancel culture should preserve the requirement of exposing wrongdoing along with providing opportunities for individual development. The primary aim of addressing wrongful behaviour should include performance improvement strategies instead of solely punitive approaches while supporting people to learn valuable lessons from their mistakes. This methodology upholds virtue ethics since it teaches people how to develop their virtues while learning from mistakes instead of being condemned. When society creates nurturing surroundings for development it protects ethical principles that respect both compassion and forgiveness which leads individuals toward positive change. The ethical guideline to handle cancel culture's accountability demands consists of fair accountability mechanisms alongside possibilities for redemption alongside harm reduction through considered punishment levels. The judging process must employ proportionality and individual context analysis for accountability procedures alongside compassion mechanisms for genuine remorseful behavior transformation. A balanced approach to cancel culture management will assist justice systems while safeguarding mental wellbeing and social access for individuals across digital platforms that create an ethical and humane online environment.

## 8. Proposing a Framework for Ethical Public Accountability

An ethical framework for public accountability in cancel culture needs to adopt principles of justice along with proportional measures and restorative justice practices. This framework enables social media users and platforms to work towards a responsible system that promotes growth and empathy instead of relying on punitive actions through context analysis of individual cases along with digital literacy development and fostering constructive dialogue.

### *8.1 Building a Responsible Public Accountability Model*

Public accountability needs an ethical model which bases itself on principles of justice and proportionality as well as restorative justice approaches. In order to achieve justice through cancel culture both fairness principles and administrative due process standards must protect people by taking into account complete understanding of their actions. Public accountability requires proportional consequences that match the extent of caused harm. The application of severe punishments following modest rule violations results in enduring social rejection that raises important ethical issues about justice in cancel culture (Johnson & Kelly, 2020).

To create a fair accountability model it is essential to examine performance within its contextual framework and an individual's personal life experiences. The examination of personal life events alongside current age and deliberate choices along with historical behavior changes allows for an aware response that balances consequences. Public figures who committed errors during their early life should receive separate consideration compared to repeat offenders of harmful conduct (Norris 2020). The restorative justice approach supports this method of contextual analysis because it focuses on healing damages while promoting rehabilitation instead of punishment alone. The model must include dialogue sessions with the involved parties to allow people to confess their remorse while providing compensation and initiatives for taking responsibility. The creation of structured reconciliation platforms allows the model to use public accountability for progressive societal evolution rather than social exclusion while supporting key ethical principles of fairness and compassion (Ng, 2020).

### *8.2 Educating for Digital Literacy and Ethical Social Media Use*

Digital literacy combined with critical thinking help establish an equitable approach to handle interactions in social media applications. A digital literacy education program would teach users how to assess information critically and help them develop responsible online engagement through recognizing misinformation and making sound judgments about content. Digital literacy enables users to recognize differences between factual information and opinions while assessing source credibility which reduces their tendency to make hurried reactions in the context of cancel culture.

Education about human relationships on social media platforms can develop users to become both ethically-minded

digital participants and empathetic online communicators. The combination of education through courses and workshops and access to related online resources teaches users ethical online practices alongside empathetic habits of communication so they handle disagreements through thoughtful means rather than emotional responses. Educational programs provide users with knowledge about the long-term features of cancel culture while showing how each social media action impacts genuine people navigating daily challenges (Murumaa-Mengel & Lott, 2023). Digital literacy initiatives create a learning environment that develops sympathy along with analysis skills to decrease mob-like tendencies and boost considerate internet actions. Educational institutions together with social media platforms should implement collaborative programs for early digital literacy instruction by including these courses across academic programs. The initiatives would include lessons about responsible sharing with instructions for source evaluation and psychological insights into community shame effects. Importantly, the effectiveness of educational programs may enhance empathy & ethical decision-making abilities provides evidence that users benefit from mastering digital literacy skills to handle or tackle cancel culture's ethical challenges (Crockett, 2017).

### *8.3 Encouraging Constructive Dialogue and Reconciliation*

The development of constructive dialogue and social media reconciliation leads to an ethical foundation of public accountability. The features of social platforms must enable deep consideration and prevent users from making quick judgments. The presence of moderated discussion forums with trained moderators enables users to share their perspectives while promoting balanced discussion between members. The work of moderators entails setting conversation direction towards understanding as they maintain both respectfully and constructively managed discussions (Tufekci 2017).

The implementation of time delays before potential inflammatory postings enables users to think before they engage with cancel culture activities. The cooling-off feature in social media platforms lowers reactionary input by allowing users to evaluate their responses first according to Del Vicario et al. (2016). The system requires activation for all posts and comments or shares whenever they include material about public figures or controversial matters. The controlled speed of impulsive reactions on social media platforms creates an

environment which produces more reflective and less emotionally charged online social interactions.

The implementation of tools that prompt users to assess verbal effects can help social media platforms develop a more compassionate digital environment. The social media platforms need to promote active listening and reflective empathy among users when they participate in heated online discussions. The practice of empathy allows users to mend relationships through acknowledgment and apology which enables them to restore their reputation within supportive surroundings (Norris, 2020). The practice of constructive dialogue enables ethical public accountability through its essential component of redemption. Digital platforms can use discussion spaces to enable individuals to display their remorse and absorb feedback while discussing their misconduct thus turning condemnation culture into constructive development opportunities. The approach follows principles of restorative justice by emphasizing repair and reconciliation instead of retribution to promote both community reintegration of individuals and social harmony.

### 9. The Digital Divide: Barriers to Marginalized Voices in Cancel Culture

Digital platforms which enable cancel culture visibility do not provide all members from marginalized communities' equal digital access to participate in that social phenomenon. Digital platforms including Twitter Instagram and Facebook made communication more accessible yet they still don't prevent structural barriers that stop specific population groups from accessing online public spaces. The fundamental problem is the digital divide that exists because certain groups lack equal opportunities to access digital networks and technology. People from disadvantaged communities and rural regions and third world countries experience major hurdles when attempting to use the internet. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) produced a report indicating that 3 billion people lack internet access worldwide and most of these individuals belong to underprivileged communities. These people face severe limitations in their ability to participate in cancel culture because their digital exclusion prevents them from participating in public dialogue despite being at high risk for needing this forum.

Moreover, digital literacy alongside Internet access establish the conditions necessary for someone to participate effectively in cancel culture. Social media platforms remain inaccessible to marginalized

populations located in underserved communities because they either lack digital skills or adequate resources for engagement. The intricate online communication system demands digital literacy because users need expertise in understanding the operations of algorithmic systems while learning about false information detection techniques and effective campaign creation on social media. The digital literacy gap produces added social isolation towards people who experience economic along with social or political marginalization. People from these communities who access such platforms lack the necessary competences to capitalize on the tools' complete functionality.

Social media platforms that aim to give voice to marginalized populations actively spread harm by enabling online harassment which leads to doxxing. The online discourse brings dangerous risks and threats coupled with harassment as well as abuse which affect particularly women, the LGBTQ+ community and people of color within these demographics. The fact that social media users can act anonymously enables harassment perpetrators to become more aggressive thus creating an unhealthy digital landscape. Due to their concern about online abuse marginalized communities often choose not to involve themselves in cancellation processes or public dialogue activities. The general fear of being targeted causes many marginalized individuals to withdraw from digital platforms which prevents their voices from reaching several parts of the public sphere.

Marginalized individuals face obstacles due to cancel culture intensification as well as its rapid nature of online reactions. The fast-moving dynamics of cancel culture accelerate through social media algorithms that intensify expressions of outrage which typically denies meaningful discussions. The ability to slow down and handle controversy to gain redemption remains beyond reach for marginalized groups as they lack access to public figures' garments. The public immediately attacks them through harsh condemnation for their smallest mistakes before allowing any possibility of development or personal development. The punitive aspects of cancel culture target marginalized voices heavily and this practice continues to push these voices toward marginalization in the digital public sphere. The same platforms which serve as potential platforms for voice amplification end up silencing speakers through escalated internet shaming practices that block possible redemption and forgiveness.

To examine how different factors of marginalization interact with each other constitutes an essential part of our analysis. Every



marginalized group member who belongs to multiple parts of that identity faces increased challenges when trying to access these digital platforms. Moreover they experience social discrimination from racism sexism and ableism that creates additional barriers for their participation in cancel culture activities. These multiple barriers create an absolute suppression of their voices despite declarations about digital spaces using cancel culture to elevate marginalized voices. Furthermore, digital activists who possess access and literacy skills face challenges when their voices become faint due to the strong filtered nature of social media platforms that suppress authentic marginalized voices. The algorithms operating in social networks choose to surface content that produces powerful emotional reactions though they promote performative activism over meaningful social engagement. The algorithmic filtering system creates a bias that pushes exclusive viral content into prominence rather than supporting community-based activism which might better represent marginalized populations. The algorithmic nature of social media maintains silencing practices that impact communities in need of maximum amplification within empowerment spaces that intend to support them.

The ability to participate in public discussions through cancel culture remains restricted because access is not equally available to all individuals. The combination between digital inequality and resource limitations with harassment encounters and algorithmic preference effects minimizes the potential engagement ability of marginalized people with cancel culture activities. The incomplete promise of empowerment through cancel culture persists due to inequalities that prevent certain voices from being heard in the discussion.

## 10. Conclusion

Modern digital accountability through cancel culture reveals multifaceted ethical dilemmas regarding the treatment of individuals along with considerations of justice and compassion along with proportionalities and redemptive opportunities. The practice of collective accountability through cancel culture helps to give marginal groups power and fights unpopular actions but tends to become purely punitive as it focuses mainly on punishment rather than self-improvement. Through detailed examples together with systemic analysis this piece showcases the supportive elements and drawbacks of cancel culture regarding social transformation.

The noteworthy takeaway from this article demonstrates that public accountability must remain proportional and balanced. The application of cancel culture against individuals who get harsh punishment for minimal or ancient offenses sometimes results in unjustly severe consequences. The mismatch between punishment and wrongdoing leads to prejudicial outcomes that convert accountability responsibilities into eternal consequences. Accountability should be approached with balance by taking into consideration how each case unfolds which includes factors like intentions along with the severity of harm and personal growth investments. The integration of proportionality in accountability measures lets these efforts maintain ethical fairness toward societal rules and personal dignity rights. The practice of cancel culture tends to dismiss both forgiveness and compassion as essential values. The swift and widespread public shaming of our digital age imposes restrictions on people who seek opportunities to apologize and learn from mistakes before changing their ways. The absence of forgiveness space affects both personal growth of individuals as well as the restoration of community wellbeing. According to restorative justice theories alongside other ethical systems accountability should correspond with processes that lead to redemption and personal development. The process of individual remorse demonstration and proactive change encourages society to develop an empathetic environment built for maximizing long-term improvement rather than immediate penalties.

The environment which allows for digital accountability receives considerable influence from social media platforms. Algorithms operated by social media platforms choose to prioritize content which aims to produce anger effects thus triggering more excessive behaviors in cancel culture occurrence. Platforms must fulfill their ethical duties to assess how their algorithms and moderation policies affect society. Digital platforms can establish an environment which unites justice and compassion by implementing modifications that reduce online mobs through time delays and enhanced perspective diversity and enhanced dialogues. These modifications enable fair discussions by reducing impulsive judgment while providing individuals the chance to conduct accountable and beneficial communication.

A transition toward ethical public accountability needs essential educational opportunities which teach digital literacy and empathy to society. By mastering critical thinking alongside ethical digital practices and digital literacy skills users can conduct meaningful

social media interactions while understanding how their actions impact actual human beings. Through an online culture based on empathy users develop better judgment enabling them to abstain from quick reactions which amplify harsh aspects of cancel culture. Such awareness makes people focus on rational criticism instead of negative condemnation during respectful discussions. The ethical challenges of cancel culture require us to develop balanced processes which bring together fairness with emotional support. All members of society need to work together to develop environments that emphasize proportionate accountability while showing empathy toward others. The constructive form of public accountability recognizes that people need opportunities to develop their potential while enabling restoration possibilities together with rational communication. The essential transformation of “cancel culture” into an inclusion-focused social advancement requires society to establish fairness and practices of forgiveness combined with thoughtful criticism. The solution demands shared responsibility because people need to evaluate their digital conduct while platforms need to establish policies supporting fair treatment and society requires acceptance of compassion mixed with redemption principles. Through these practices cancel culture will transition into an ethically accountable version of public responsibility that produces beneficial changes while acknowledging the multifaceted development of people. By evolving these changes the digital environment will develop into a space where responsibility combines with emotional intelligence along with individual self-improvement to create a future based on meaningful ethical connection.

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