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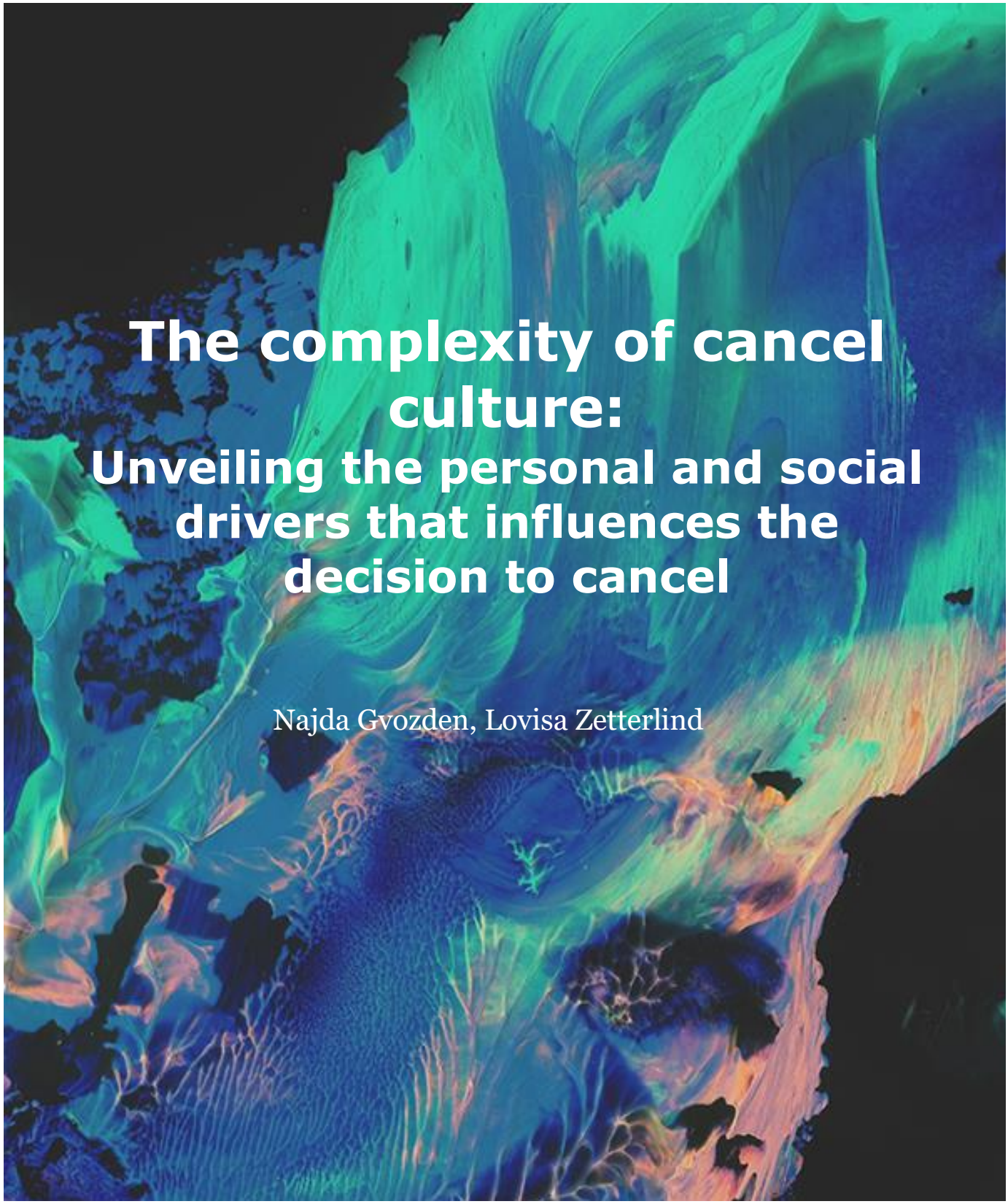

The complexity of cancel culture:
Unveiling the personal and social drivers that influences the decision to cancel

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Abstract

The rise of social media has emerged the social phenomena called cancel culture, where individuals hold influencers and endorsed brands accountable for perceived immoral actions. Cancel culture originates from a desire for social justice, where the consequences of those cancelled could be temporary and long-lasting reputational damage. The behavior to cancel is individually complex and has many different drivers influencing the performance of behavior.

Despite its significant impact, cancel culture within research is just in its early stage and has received limited research from a qualitative perspective. Previous studies have researched cancel culture through the perspective of consumer power, celebrity transgressions, psychological drivers, and social identity. Moreover, previous research has studied the intended behavior to cancel, not the actual performance to cancel. There still remains a research gap in understanding the personal and social drivers that influence the process to cancel an influencer and endorsed brand. By this, it led us to our research question: "*What are the personal and social drivers that could influence the behavior to engage in cancel culture?".* With an aim to provide a deeper understanding of the complex phenomena of cancel culture between consumers, influencers and the endorsed brands. By examining drivers such as norms, beliefs, values and traits our study seeks to shed light on the drivers and how they influence the behavior of cancel culture.

The findings revealed an interesting insight from the consumer perspective. An actual cancellation has a higher chance of occurring if the influencer's action is perceived to cross an moral barrier of a follower. However, our study found that subjectivity increases complexity of the behavior as every individual has their own moral barrier. For example, if the action is perceived to clash with the followers' personal beliefs and values, cancellation might occur, however another individual might not perceive the action to cross their moral barrier. Moreover, our study found that the desire of social belongingness and social acceptance has a significant role when making a decision to cancel. From our study we have revealed that cancel culture is both an individual and social phenomenon, where the influence of one's own personal drivers is just as influential as the social influence. More specifically, followers' idea of their self-concept is just as influential as the pressure from their social environment. In conclusion, personal and social drivers influence the decision to cancel an influencer and endorsed brands. However, as subjectivity matters, these personal and social drivers influence the process differently for each individual. From a managerial perspective, our findings could contribute to influencer marketing strategies trying to improve their selection process or response strategy if an cancellation would occur.

Keywords: cancel culture, social media, canceled influencers, influencer marketing, social norms, moral transgression, social justice, social identity theory, theory of planned behavior

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1. Introduction

In the introductory chapter we will bring up the background of the rise of social media. Then we will continue to present concepts that will help to explain the complex social phenomena of cancel culture. Lastly, we will introduce the problem discussion, research gap, purpose and research question.

1.1 Background

In this postmodernist society, the traditional authorities no longer have exclusive power in deciding what is the truth. The court is not necessarily the one who decides the punishment when an attempt of canceling is made, rather it is individuals who do hold this kind of power, to cancel someone (Mueller 2021, p.10-11). The rise of social media has changed the power balance by providing platforms allowing ordinary people that have not had a voice before to be more influential and powerful. Today, social media is often used as a platform for activism and advocating for social justice (Bouvier & Machin, 2021, p.397). Furthermore, people can now leverage networked collectivity and easily demand accountability (Clark, 2020, p.91).

This increased power enables everyone to be heard and call out controversial or perceived misbehavior (Saldanha et al., 2020, p.6) which has led to the rise of the phenomenon of cancel culture (Saldanha et al., 2020, p.10). Cancel culture is now a powerful tool that has the capability to destroy the reputation of public figures and organizations. The increased power of anyone to be heard and call out for any perceived misbehavior can affect social media influencers, who have over the past years become a growing marketing tool for companies. If an influencer crosses a moral barrier and creates a perceived misbehavior from their followers a negative attitude and perception towards influencers could occur which could later affect the endorsed brands (Kintu & Ben-Slimane, 2020, p.265). However, even though companies might be at risk if an influencer gets canceled, they are a powerful marketing tool as influencers are individuals who have become famous through their content creation on social media and have a strong established relationship between the influencer and their followers. This relationship is created through authentic topics and shared interests, which creates a strong connection between them (Arora et al., 2019, p.87). However, a potential perceived misbehavior is shaped due to a lot of reasons where for example norms have a significant impact on consumers' perception and attitudes towards influencers and brands (Varnum, 2019, p. 211). Therefore, a mismatch between norms and values could lead to a negative perception towards the influencer or brand (Norris, 2021). However, norms are constantly changing due to fluctuations in societal levels of innovation and risky behavior (Varnum, 2019, p.211). Hence, what individuals perceive as “wrong” or “unacceptable” behavior is highly affected by how close the individual's values align with the group's dominant culture, including social norms (Norris 2021, p.147).

The attitude and perception towards a brand or influencer could also affect each other where a negative attitude towards an influencer can spill over to the brand and vice versa. Moreover, when a brand or influencer acts in a way that is perceived as misbehavior or goes against the social norms, both parties risk being associated with that behavior even though they may not be involved (Kintu & Ben-Slimane, 2020, p.266). Consumers' perceptions towards influencers or brands are highly influenced by what is socially acceptable in society or not. Furthermore,

this is the case for cancel culture, when brands and influencers act in a way that goes against social norms and risk becoming canceled.

Social media influencer Margaux Dietz caused a storm of criticism and anger with a YouTube video she made with her five-year-old son, in which they poked and laughed at a sleeping man outside her apartment door (Karlsson, 2022). The storm of criticism led to several companies ending their collaborative partnerships with the influencer Margaux Dietz. Activewear brand Stronger was the first to break ties with the influencer, they published a story on Instagram " As we already mentioned, our values are of the utmost importance to us, and therefore we do not see how we can continue to collaborate with Margaux" (Palmström, 2022). Companies such as Mionetto, Lumene, and Elixir Pharma have chosen to end their partnerships with Dietz (Palmström, 2022), as a strategy to make a point and stand by their brand values. The storm of criticism and companies ending partnerships are part of the culture. There are many other examples where influencers have gotten themselves into a storm of criticism. Paolo Roberto is a Swedish public profile, author, and entrepreneur (Bonnierfakta, n.d). In May 2020 Roberto was arrested for buying sex from prostitutes in Stockholm. After the arrest, there was a criticism storm both in the media, but as well in real life. His action caused him to lose the respect of his companies, there were a few ICA shops that stopped selling his brand, and TV shows withdrew contracts that he had (Granlund & Ek, 2020).

Another example is Pontus Rasmusson, a Swedish YouTuber seen as a children's idol and influencer who has recently had a few critical storms. Rasmusson was a Youtuber for six years before Youtube made the decision to shut down his Youtube page due to violating the policy regarding sexualization of children. The decision was made after Rasmusson made videos talking about sex inappropriately to younger children viewing his platform, but he has allegedly also tricked younger people on money on different occasions (Palmström, 2022). The examples mentioned above are only some examples where an influencer has been canceled , which shows the power cancel culture holds in today's society. This attempt to cancel happens frequently in today's society and as a result of social media, it can happen very quickly, going from being loved one day to being hated and losing collaborations the next. Hence, influencers and endorsed brands face severe consequences if an attempt to cancel is made, creating challenges for marketers as they risk being canceled if they collaborate with an influencer that is canceled.

Whether an individual would participate in cancel culture depends on different factors. However, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavior control are closely related to people's intentions to partake in canceled culture (Tandoc et al., 2022). From an historical perspective, Norris (2021) study revealed that in post-industrial societies, countries like the US, Sweden, and the UK where people are generally liberal, right-wing scholars often perceive that they often face criticism. On the other hand, in countries with more traditional values such as Nigeria, the left-wing scholars perceived that they are negatively affected by the cancel culture. Tandoc et al. (2022) study showed that the participants did not only view cancel culture as people partaking in public shaming on social media, but they also viewed it as their perception of the imbalance of power and social justice.

1.2 Definitions of concepts

1.2.1 Cancel culture

Historically, "to cancel an individual, place, or thing" is a term phenomenon that originates in queer communities of color and refers to the act of publicly calling out someone for a scandal or problematic beliefs. Cancel culture holds different definitions where Mueller (2021, p.1) defines cancel culture as "*the withdrawal of support for individuals who have acted in a way deemed to be unacceptable or problematic related to social media, viewership, or the purchase of products or services".* It is a type of public shaming that takes place primarily at social media platforms (Velasco, 2020, p.1). This act means that this individual is no longer supported or should no longer be engaged with (Clark, 2020, p.2). Cancel culture gained popularity on Twitter, where individuals in different contexts explained misconduct, controversial statements, and moreover scandal actions from celebrities. The term is initially from Black Twitter, a social media community that transformed cancel culture (Clark, 2020).

This increase in cancel culture on social media is due to a belief in moral righteousness combined with aggressive online behavior. It has become a more significant societal trend, where individuals turn to cancel culture to discredit individuals who they perceive as morally wrong (Chiou, 2020, p. 298). Furthermore, Tandoc et al. (2022) characterizes cancel culture as including publicly shaming a specific target on social media, which is done or supported by a group of people that seeks to hold the target accountable for behavior that is perceived as "socially incorrect" or "unacceptable". ". Why people choose to cancel varies, but most commonly, it happens when public figures or brands have transgressed in terms of controversial behavior and what the public sees as unacceptable behavior (Saldanha et al., 2022, p.2).

Furthermore, it can happen both in the present and the past as people may criticize and attempt to cancel a public figure for past actions which can create attention on social media, and the public figure risks being canceled for things they did a long time ago (Saldanha et al., 2022, p.2). Additionally, Chiou (2020) argues that the logic behind cancel culture is the belief in a certain type of moral superiority where people believe it is justified to condemn those they perceive as morally deficient and worthy of criticism.

Before the rise of the internet, there were predictions that consumers would gain more power in the digital age. These predictions were based on the internet's growing popularity (Labrecque et al., 2013, p.257) Furthermore, with the rise of social media, these predictions were once again reinforced and became much stronger. In other words, consumers gain more power as technological advancements occur (Labrecque et al., 2013, p.257). This could occur due to the increase in the social media landscape that has created connectivity that enables consumers to create content and strengthen their voices regarding opinions worldwide, to anyone interested to listen (Labrecque et al., 2013, p.258). Moreover, traditional media can still shape public opinions. Yet, social media have increased people's power, leading them to more easily affect the narrative and demand accountability in a way that was not possible before. In turn, brands and public figures are now more vulnerable to the consequences of cancel culture (Saldanha et al., 2022).

Previous research on cancel culture has discussed both positive and negative aspects of cancel culture. For example, Mueller (2021) argues that it can be valuable for democracy as it can expose misbehavior and hold people accountable, but that it has the possibility to suppress

people's views and opinions in terms of being afraid to get canceled (Mueller, 2021). Additionally, allowance for anyone to express opinions and demand change on social media have been beneficial in terms of framing social issues. Yet, according to studies, cancel culture can also be problematic as people may be too quick to criticize or punish individuals or institutions (Clark, 2020).

If an endorsed brand or endorsed celebrity commits a moral transgression it can affect both parties negatively (Cocker et al., p.1844) which might cause feelings of betrayal, leading to that these negative emotions can spill-over, and one party can be found "guilty by association". (Reinikainen et al., 2021, p.6). There are different ways for influencers and brands to avoid transgression. For example, it has been known for a long time that it is crucial to employ strategies to align personal values with the brands to develop and maintain strong relationships between customers and brands (Gutman, 1982).The human moral compass is constructed of numerous perspectives that impact our understanding of ourselves and those around us while values act as emotional and cognitive frameworks making us empirically explore these perspectives (Hitlin, 2007, p.251). The relationship between influencer and followers are significant to protect both influencers and brands, as a strong relationship can minimize the risk of influencer and brand avoidance in relation to transgressions (Pradhan et al., 2022, p.38). If consumers' values align with a brand, it can lead to greater consumer identification with the brand. A strong consumer identification can result in greater brand commitment and positive WOM (Tuškej et al., 2013).

However, as people expect brands and influencers to sustain ethical standards, negative moral emotions can develop towards the influencer or brand if they are perceived to be violated and contrary to their values (Kavaliauskė & Simonavičiūtė, 2015). Also, in terms of endorsement such violations can cause these negative emotions to spill over towards one of the parties. (Reinikainen et al., 2021, p.6) To cope with this behavior, people may avoid the brand or influencer and circulating negative word of mouth (Kavaliauskė & Simonavičiūtė, 2015).

1.2.2 Self branding of influencers

Personal branding, or in marketing terms, self-branding, is a process where individuals create a unique public image with the purpose of achieving commercial success and recognition (Khedher, 2014, p. 30). This identity of self-branding becomes similar to commercially branded products. Successful self-branding proposes a unique selling statement and strong identity that appeals to and meets the needs of their target audiences on their social media channels (Khamis et al., 2016, p.191). Self-branding is a complex process and is closely intertwined with the branding concept of marketing. However, the complexity of self-branding involves ignorance of practical and ethical challenges. The idea of self-branding raises practical and ethical issues. Moreover, it might raise concerns regarding the credibility of self-branding since it becomes a must for influencers (Khamis et al., 2016, p.192)

Self-branding through social media allows the influencer to gain attention and create a narrative that resonates with their followers or potential followers. This narrative and attention have the potential to bring fame, as their audience might find the influencer inspirational, relatable or educational. Similar to companies and their brand image, influencers' narrative captures attention and stands out in the crowded landscape on social media. This creates a collaborative and interactive environment on their channels since it provides the followers to engage through shares, comments and likes (Khamis et al., 2016. p.194). As mentioned before, this is similar to when companies are constructing a product-like identity and trying to catch the attention and

engagement of their target segment to achieve economic gain (Page, 2013, p.181). The self-branding narrative, compared to a product-identity narrative, is that the human brand can bring its followers into account. Influencers can create a strong self-branding narrative by building their own brand identity and lending their names profitably to companies for influencer marketing (Khamis et al., 2016. p.194)

1.2.3 Influencer marketing as a marketing strategy for companies

There is no clear definition of influencers. However, in research, they are described as someone that through their social media presence could shape the behaviors and attitudes of their audiences, such as followers (Freberg et al., 2011, p.90-92). Moreover, previous research states that influencers have four similar characteristics. Firstly, the characteristics consist of their opinions being well respected by their followers. Secondly, influencers are active and constantly engaged in the social media community and environment. Thirdly, they make some kind of contribution to the social media community that their followers see as valuable. Lastly, their followers perceive them to have a good taste of their choice of a topic within the social media community (Hor-Meyll, & Pessôa, 2014) In today's social media climate, influencers are seen as opinion leaders who use their platform to endorse brands (Sánchez et al., 2021, p. 2).

Collaboration between brands and influencers has increased significantly with the rise of social media. Influencers have established a reputation and name for themselves in a particular category on social media. Brands have recognized the value of influencers as a marketing tool to reach their target audience. Moreover, companies align with influencers within the same category to effectively promote their products (Sánchez et al., 2021, p. 2). From the influencer perspective, collaborations between them and brands benefit them with engagement on social media, enhancing reputation and building a bigger follower base and social media presence (Sánchez et al., p.2).

Before the rise of influencers on social media, the social media platform was once seen as a way for companies together with influencers, to create and share content without the need to pay for their services. As it was a new strategy, both influencers and companies saw it as a win-win situation. Influencers would get free clothes, make-up and trips while the endorsed brands would get exposure on the influencers' big platforms. This resulted in a cost-efficient strategy for brands where they generated organic targeted content for social media (Samuel, 2017). One example of organic content is any free content that is shared by influencers on social media platforms such as Instagram, Youtube, Tiktok, and Snapchat. The organic content could be posts, videos, stories, and other formats (Zelefsky, 2022) Moreover, organic content contributes to interactions between influencers and followers since the content is seen by a portion of an influencer's followers. During the rise, it has also changed how consumers perceive and interact with brands and products (Leung et al., 2022, p.248.). Research discusses that the rise of social media has strengthened consumers around the world, giving them power by providing them with a voice, the ability to express their opinion with a feeling of involvement in movements that strive for social justice (Bouvier & Machin, 2021).

There has been an ongoing complex process of changes within social media and influencer marketing during the recent years. The outbreak of Covid-19 globally resulted in substantial transformations in society. The pandemic caused disruptions to supply chains, shortages of workers, economic difficulties, and lockdowns (Geyser, 2023). The importance of social media as a marketing tool has increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has driven consumers towards greater online behavior activity, and social media's influence is

expected to rise globally (Mason et al., 2021). individuals creating online content were stuck at home during the pandemic, resulting in more than 50 million people around the world today labeling themselves to be content creators or influencers (Yec, 2022).

With transformations and changed environments, it has been difficult for businesses to adjust to these changes. Brands feared that influencer marketing, along with all forms of marketing, would decline during Covid-19. However, there has been a rise in popularity since 2020 (Geyser, 2023). There have been requirements for new innovative and efficient methods to attract and connect with consumers. Moreover, there has been an increase in influencer marketing during covid-19 since the strategy helps companies to differentiate and reach their target market (Geyser, 2023). The increase in influencer marketing enabled brands and consumers to interact more on social media platforms (Francisco et al., 2021, p.30).

Over the last year, we have seen a significant economic decline, compounded by rising inflation rates which have made it challenging for individuals to keep their usual living standard. Brands are struggling to maintain and attract consumers, moreover, retain market share (Geyser, 2023). According to Influencer Marketing Hub, brands that are succeeding understand the crucial role of influencer marketing and the importance of allocating more resources toward it. Marketers are investing more in influencer marketing. Moreover, there is an expected rise in the market size of influencer marketing, where there was exponential growth in 2022 with a reach of a market size worth $16.4 billion. However, there is a continuous expected rise in the industry, with a prediction of a 29% increase in 2023, reaching an estimated market size of $21.1 billion (Geyser, 2023).

1.2.4 Values, beliefs and norms

Norms and social norms are terms that have many different definitions and meanings. The concept of norms originates from the early days of Aristotle and has throughout the years developed into different conceptions of what norms and social norms are (Legros & Cislaghi, 2019, p.62-80). Cialdini and Trost (1998, p.152) defines social norms as *"rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide or constrain social behaviors without the force of law".* Where the term is considered and understood by others as there are unwritten rules shared by members within a society (Legros & Cislaghi, 2019). In other words, these unwritten rules could be seen as an informal guide of social norms on how individuals should behave in certain situations. Moreover, these unwritten laws usually tend to put social pressure on individuals to perform a certain behavior to match with the society's expectations (Dempsey et al., 2018, p.2-3). Social norms according to previous research could be understood as beliefs or emotions. Researchers have also discussed that norms are not created by the individual rather they are pre-existing and shaped by individuals who are confronted by them and end up following them (Legros & Cislaghi, 2019).

Researchers have also stated that norms are not created by the individual, it is much rather that they are pre-existing and shaped by individuals who are confronted by them, who end up following them (Legros & Cislaghi, 2019). As mentioned earlier, each society can have their own set of unwritten rules, and an individual could break the unwritten rules in their society, but not in another (Cialdini & Trost, 1998, p.152). From a cancel culture perspective, which in today's environment involves calling out individuals whose behaviors or actions seem to be perceived as unacceptable in society. Furthermore, cancel culture could be seen as a modern example of how social norms operate within a society or societal groups.

The term belief is widely brought up during this thesis and refers to the attitude of being true or false. According to philosophers, the term belief is used to describes a mental state about the world or situation. This mental state could be reality, however, it could be mistaken for reality. Beliefs come from past experiences and as we grow up, we form beliefs from those around us where individuals could either reject them or follow them (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019)

Values are also an important concept that will be brought up frequently in our study. Schwartz (1994, p.88) defines values as *"desirable goals, varying in importance in people's life".* Furthermore, values act like a guide when making choices and evaluate behavior, people and events (Collins et al., 2007, p.558). Furthermore, they are abstract and can be applied in different specific situations. Values and behavior are correlated but it is commonly believed that values influence behavior indirectly in which individual beliefs are a mediated more specific factor in determining the behavior as values are highly related with beliefs (Collins et al., 2007, p.559). Throughout our thesis we are using terms which have complex definitions that could be subject to everyone in particular and closely intertwined. Therefore, we have constructed a table with the most frequently used terms, and how they are connected to.

Term	**Connection between terms**
Social norms	Social pressure from others to perform a certain attitude, perceived expectations, behavior **Can be connected to beliefs and emotions.**
Norm	What is acceptable in society, laws. Can vary between cultures and social groups. **Can be connected to beliefs and emotions.**
Values	Personal values: beliefs and principles that are accordingly to an individual Cultural values: Shared beliefs or principles of a culture or society.
Beliefs	Personal beliefs, interpersonal beliefs, cultural beliefs, religious beliefs. **Could be connected to norms.**

Table 1. Terms and connections

1.3 Problem discussion

Before formulating a research question, there is a need to understand which areas have been studied so far about cancel culture.

As social media platforms allow ordinary people to have a voice and call out controversial and unacceptable behavior, the power balance has changed, now everyone has a voice and can be influential (Saldanha et al., 2022). Thus, ordinary people can now leverage networked collectivity and easily demand accountability from brands and public figures (Clark, 2020). Most commonly, public persons get canceled due to sexism, racism, homophobia or bullying (Mueller, 2021). Hence, the underlying logic that drives cancel culture is that it is justifiable to condemn a brand or influencer perceived as immoral and worthy of criticism (Chiou, 2020). Groups of people who attempt to cancel someone often seek an apology and accountability from the one they perceive as having committed an immoral, unethical, or illegal activity. Furthermore, this is done by civil society, where they often use informal social pressures to hold powerful people accountable by harming reputations, destroying careers, shutting them out from social media, and may even developing grounds for legal prosecutions (Norris, 2021, p.146).

Cancel culture can deconstruct the reputation of every public person or brand at any moment, making everyone vulnerable (Mueller, 2021). The consequences of being canceled can be temporary, including public shaming and being condemned. In contrast, more permanent and severe consequences can result in financial loss, canceled contracts, reputation damage and harm to brand positioning (Saldanha et al, 2022). Brands must be careful in all their activities, including their collaborations with influencers as there is a risk of being found "guilty by association" if the endorsed influencers get canceled (Reinikainen et al, 2021, p.6).

Moreover, in today's society all influencers and brands are more vulnerable, it can go from being loved from one day and hated the day after. Despite the fact that the outcomes of cancel culture can have severe effects on brands and public figures, researchers and practitioners have not paid that much attention to this phenomenon (Abbasi et al., 2022). The negative aspects of consumer behavior plays a significant role in the decision-making process related to canceled culture. However, it is remarkable how little is known regarding the triggers and conditions that impact people's behavior and transactions (Abbasi et al., 2022). Furthermore, cancel culture and other types of digital vigilantism keep increasing, stressing the need for further understanding of the underlying drivers of cancel culture. This is needed to offer a comprehensive account of the complex nature of human behavior in the digital space as well as in the physical world (Chiou, 2020). Hence, as cancel culture goes beyond just public shaming on social media, there is a strong need for a deeper understanding of the social context and motivations that drives cancel culture (Chiou, 2020).

1.4 Research Gap

Previous research has examined the social phenomena cancel culture from various perspectives. However, researchers continue to stress the importance of examining factors that influence the phenomena of cancel culture. Previous literature has studied how consumer power might influence cancel culture (Saldanha et al., 2022) from a perspective of attachment. Saldanha uses attachment theory to study which factors of attachment styles influence the performance to

cancel and what potential outcome is. Saldanha et al. (2022) suggest that future research could examine empirically consumers own perceptions and decision-making towards cancellation.

Moreover, authors such as Harwood (2020) examine the influence of social groups on beliefs, norms and values. Where the author uses social identity theory to explain intergroup discrimination and how individuals desire to be included in a group with similar values and beliefs. The author continues to explain that one group asserts its dominance to increase their own positivism, which creates a strong bond of identification within a specific group. Cancel culture could be seen as a group behavior from this research, to distinguish between the canceled group, and the group who wants to cancel due to mismatch of values, beliefs or norms.

Other research made by Cocker et al. (2021) has examined which imposed challenges are presented by celebrity endorsers' transgressions. The authors examine different types of celebrity endorsements that society has perceived as transgressive and why they are perceived as negative. There are suggestions in future research for examining how an individual's perception might change if their social environment on social media expresses negatively towards an endorser that has done a transgression.

Chiou (2020) has examined psychological factors that shape young people's attitude towards the role of social justice within cancel culture. The authors explain that cancel culture is a way to promote social justice, however it might lead to public shaming an injustice of those being canceled wrongly. The author suggests that there is necessary for more research examining the impact of moral cognition and evaluation behaviors that are perceived as violent.

Other research has let us know that cancel culture regarding social media is still in its early stage. Tandoc et al. (2020) have analyzed the motivations and definitions in regard to cancel culture in Singapore. They have used the theory of planned behavior where they concluded that attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control was positively related to the intent to cancel an individual. It is important to highlight that their study examined intended behavior to engage in cancel culture rather than actual behavior. The authors suggest that there should be future research examining other factors that influences intended behavior to cancel but also to investigate factors that influences the performance of actual behavior to cancel an individual.

Mueller (2021) studied physiological predictors of behaviors in terms of cancel culture. The authors found an association between understanding another individual's character before making a judgment with an intent to see if they learn from their mistakes if they are forgiven. The authors have also found that individuals that engage in cancel culture often do so with the intent of seeking an apology and evaluating if the action is perceived as unethical, illegal or immoral. The authors suggest that there is a need for future research using a qualitative research approach studying immoral, illegal or unethical acts.

These articles support our research topic as they are exploring various aspects of cancel culture and what drives canceling to occur. However, there are gaps left to fill. Our research gap is therefore to fill the personal and social environment perspective from a qualitative research method. All research mentioned above and in section 2.5 literature review will help to contribute to our research. For example, the personal and social perspective could be shaped by social pressure and how one's self-concept influences the process of engaging in cancel culture (Harwood, 2020). Moreover, what shapes perception and how it might influence the performance of cancelling someone (Saldanha et al., 2022). It would be interesting to fill out a research gap explaining how these personal and social drivers might impact the decision to

cancel an individual. As Tandoc et al. (2020) has analyzed motivations and definitions in terms of canceling in Singapore, it would be interesting combining personal and social drivers to understand, not only intended behavior, but extending the research to actual behavior to cancel an individual in Sweden.

1.5 Research question and purpose

By examining the extensive literature and research concerning cancel culture from a consumer perspective within influencer marketing, authors have stressed the importance of understanding that in today's social media climate, consumers possess greater power than ever before where they want to share their own voice and opinions (Saldanha et al., 2022, p.2). Many studies are quantitative in nature and authors address that there is a need for a more in-depth understanding of the complex correlation between consumer, influencer, and brand. Our scope of study is on the micro level where our research is based on individuals and one-on-one interactions.

Recognizing people's motivations, thoughts and feelings in such scenarios can potentially lead to a greater understanding of why or why not individuals would engage in cancel culture. We are examining personal and social factors, such as norms, values, beliefs to see if, how these factors influence the performance of cancel culture behaviors. Our study will be based from a Swedish context where we will interview individuals living in northern Sweden. As there is limited research on cancel culture from a consumer-influencer-endorsed brand perspective, this study represents the first attempt in Sweden (to our knowledge) to address this topic.

This leads us to our research question:

What are the personal and social drivers that could influence the behavior to engage in cancel culture?

With this research question, we are examining individual factors that are social and personal, with the intent to find a contribution to why and if, how does the individual proceed to engage in cancel culture. Moreover, factors such as morality, beliefs, social norms and traits are being examined to see how it might shape attitudes or behaviors in terms of cancel culture. Our research question was made to better understand the complexity of cancel culture as a phenomena and which factors drive it from a consumer perspective.

Research question:	What are the personal and social drivers that could influence the behavior to engage in cancel culture?
Main purpose:	to investigate whether intended behavior towards cancellation becomes actual behavior to cancel, and if so, how?”
Sub-purpose:	investigate whether an intended behavior of canceling transforms towards an actual behavior.

Table 2. Summary of research questions and purposes.

1.6 Delimitations

The delimitations include the characteristics that limit the scope and acknowledge boundaries of the study which are within the author's control. In line with our research question, the focus of this study is on cancel culture, more specifically how social and personal factors might affect people to engage in cancel culture. As cancel culture is a very complex social phenomena that is underexplored there are a great number of areas that we will not cover that can affect our research question. The research is mainly empirical driven as there is a limited amount of research regarding this subject.

In order to answer or research questions there is a need to get deep insights of participants' perceptions, feelings, attitudes, experiences, values and beliefs. Therefore, the research will adopt a qualitative approach as it will allow us to gain a deep understanding of the complex phenomenon of cancel culture. However, qualitative methods are based on a specific group of people that have their own unique characteristics which makes that this approach will not achieve generalization to the same extent as quantitative methods.

Individuals' perceptions and attitudes are highly subjective and are influenced by various factors such as origin, age, culture, religion, sex and political ideologies among other factors. Thus, all these factors have important implications in terms of exploring the complex social phenomena of canceled culture. However, as there are endless areas that can affect our research, we have chosen to only interview Swedish individuals due to geographic proximity as well as narrow down the scope in order to be able to provide deeper insights of the topic. Furthermore, the participants chosen are in similar ages since cancel culture mostly takes part on social media nowadays which leads us to choose digital natives as they use social media frequently which may provide better insights than those that do not use social media. Also, two of the participants are female and three are males as it may be more valuable to get insights from more than one sex.

Moreover, social and personal factors are very broad which includes several characteristics. Thus, this research will mainly focus on moral values and beliefs, social norms, physical traits and the effect of social groups to explore the perceptions and attitudes that may lead to that they participate in a culture. Also, the study is based on existing theories and concepts that will limit and reflect the scope of the study.

2. Theoretical framework

Together with social identity theory, self-congruity and planned behavior theory we will try to analyze and give an understanding of the complexity of cancel culture. Influencers and endorsed brands influence a group of people, where everyone gets influenced in different ways, and there are many factors within that which plays a significant role, such as social identity, values and morality. In some cases, influencers and endorsed brands are not aware of these factors and cross a line which could end up with canceling the influencer or endorsed brand.

2.1 Moral reasoning and transgressions

Moral reasoning involves the cognitive process an individual goes through to make a moral decision based on one's own perception of morality (Long et al., 2006; Han,1999; Hodge, 1989; Kohlberg, 1976). People engage in moral reasoning to create justifications for their own actions and meanwhile interpret and evaluate the misbehavior committed by others (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.116).

Wang and Kim (2019) examined the mediating effect of moral reasoning strategies and moderating role of fan identification in the context of endorsed influencers transgression and how in turn it affects brands. They found that the severity of the transgression had a significant impact on the interpretation of the accused transgressive behavior. Furthermore, when the transgression is perceived more severely, violating one's integrity and compromises their own moral standards, it creates a negative attitude in which they often find it hard to justify the celebrity's behavior. (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.116). Thus, the more the perceived transgression contradicts the individual's beliefs, values and moral standard, the greater is the likelihood of forming a negative perception and attitude towards the celebrity.

However, this moral reasoning process can create a dilemma if an individual has a strong and emotional relation with the celebrity (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.116) or endorsed brand **(**Hur et al., 2018, p.279**)** where the individual evaluates their own moral principles with their attachment with the celebrity that is accused of "misbehavior" (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.116). In such dilemmas where people are found to face a psychologically uncomfortable situation, they are motivated to minimize the dissonance and reach consonance (Hur et al., 2018, p.279). Moreover, if an individual feels a strong identification to a celebrity it may lead to cognitive bias which enables them to resist the information that goes against their values and beliefs (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.116). Hence, it is a great chance that these individuals engage in moral rationalization, in that they try to overlook the transgression and justify their support for the public figures' transgression. However, if the individual does not feel a high level of identification, it is more likely that they evaluate this negative information in an objective way as there is not an emotional and strong relationship (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.120).

Cognitive dissonance happens when individuals are confronted with facts that contradict their values, beliefs and ideas in which they will try to find ways to reduce this comfort (Festinger 1957, cited in Yahaya & Sukmayadi, 2020, p.482). Furthermore, individuals have the tendency to create a new cognition or belief to ease the conflict they feel which is often what the individual wants to believe instead of what is the truth. As cognitive dissonance creates a lot of emotional turbulence, individuals commonly change their attitudes for their own emotional and psychological comfort (Yahaya & Sukmayadi, 2020, p.482). Moreover, the individuals seek actively to escape the situation that increases the dissonance. Some individuals try to solve the

dissonance, which can be a transgression from a public figure by stopping supporting the person while some individuals by using moral reasoning strategies may continue to support the public figure (Hur et al., 2018, p.279). If the behavior of the public person contradicts the individual's beliefs and values too much they may be less inclined to justify or forgive the behavior that is not aligned with their moral framework (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.116).

Although there are different types of moral reasoning strategies, including moral rationalization and moral decoupling (Hur et al., 2018, p.278) , we are not going to examine specific strategies. Instead, we will use the basic idea of how people might reason, evaluate and justify actions regarding influencers and endorsed brands' transgressions to analyze and support our findings. As earlier mentioned, the logic behind cancel culture are beliefs in a certain type of moral superiority where people believe it is justified to condemn those they perceive as morally wrong and deserving of the criticism it causes (Chiou, 2020, p.297). Furthermore, a deeper understanding of how individuals morally reason and justify influencers and endorsed brands can help explain and provide valuable insights of the complex phenomena of cancel culture. Understanding moral reasoning and how transgressions of influencers influence individuals attitudes could help to explain one part of the complexity of cancel culture, how individuals form attitudes due to moral reasoning. For example, a negative perception could form a negative attitude if an individual has a moral judgment toward an influencer who crossed an moral barrier.

2.1.1 Endorsed influencer transgressions

At some occasions, endorsed celebrities may commit actions that both the public and endorsed brand perceives as "wrong" or "misbehavior", and when this behavior gets the attention of the media, it can harm consumers perceptions and attitudes of the endorsed brand. (Carrillat et al., 2014, p.1025). Prior research has mainly focused on celebrity endorsement, and the positive aspects of social media influencer endorsement. However, Cocker et al. (2021) have studied the risk and social media endorsements holds, when and why their behavior can be seen as transgressive and in turn how consumers respond to such behavior.

Previous research has shown that moral transgressions committed by either the endorsed influencer or endorsed brand can have a negative effect on the other party. Hence, one of the parties' risks being found "guilty by association" as these negative feelings can transfer, leading to that negative attitude towards one of the parties and lead to that consumers form a negative attitude (Cocker et al., 2021). Reinikainen et al. (2021) introduced a new concept called "influencer betrayal" which is a feeling of betrayal of a social media influencer that may impact the follower-influencer relationship negatively. Moreover, they found that influencer betrayal not only affects the influencer-follower relationship negatively, individuals' negative emotions caused by the betrayal can spill over to the brand, thus affecting the brand and consumers relationship negatively as well.

Lee and Kwak (2016) examined the effect transgressions made by endorsed public figures have on the associated endorsed brand through examining the moral reasoning process as a psychological mechanism. Furthermore, the authors found that the severity of the transgression made by an endorsed celebrity highly influences the evaluation of the endorsed brand. Hence, the likelihood of forming a negative attitude towards an endorsed brand is greater when the transgression is perceived as more severe than if the transgression is perceived as minor. (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.115). Furthermore, when the transgression made by an endorsed celebrity is

perceived severely, it is likely that the negative attitude towards the endorsed brand transfer which can lead to decreased purchase intention and risk harm to the brand image.

Kintu and Slimane (2020) examined the scandal-spillover effect an social media influencer can have on a brand whom they are associated with ,which may be triggered by transgressions or misbehavior, more specifically how brands can respond to these influencer triggered scandals. Pradhan et al. (2022) research showed that when celebrities and brands behave in matters that people perceive are morally transgressive or wrong, even though gen z will express anger towards both parties, the anger will be deeper towards the endorsed brand. From this, we see a relevance of understanding the concept of endorsed influencer transgressions and how it could influence the individual. The individual perception could be harmed if an endorsed influencer performs a behavior that is perceived to be morally wrong. This in turn, could create a negative attitude towards the endorsed brand.

2.2 Social identity theory

According to Tajfel and Turner (1985, cited in Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p.20) social identity theory states that individuals have the tendency to divide themselves into different social groups based on categories such as gender, age, religion and work. Social identity is also known as social identification and refers to an individual's own perception of belongingness towards a certain group of people (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p.20). Individuals create their own definition of themselves based on both social and personal factors. According to previous research, people choose to put themselves into social groups to gain some kind of sense of belongingness and acceptance within their social environment (Harwood, 2020, p.1). When a person feels like they belong to a certain group, the person often seeks to gain positive feelings from that group, which could be achieved through viewing that group more positively than other groups (Harwood, 2020, p.1). Moreover, this leads to people viewing their own group positively and other groups negatively. This behavior is brought from trying to achieve positive feelings towards their own group membership. Studies have covered this complex behavior, where the process of liking oneself, and the group they belong to and criticizing other groups, leads to some kind of prejudice and discrimination towards the members of another group (Harwood, 2020, p.2).

Social identity theory connected to cancel culture is relevant for us to examine since it could help to explain the complex social behavior in terms of cancel culture. From what we have previously stated regarding social identity theory it involves individuals who could identify themselves to certain groups seeking, in our case, to cancel, individuals who do not share similar beliefs or values. This could be seen from the perception of canceled influencers, in an cancel culture environment, the influencer who gets targeted for cancellation may appear to belong in a different social group that holds different values or beliefs, that are not similar to the group of people who are actively canceling them due to their own ideology. As discussed previously, in terms of cancel culture, the act of canceling occurs when beliefs or values do not align with individuals in two groups, and is a way for the group who is canceling the other group to assert its dominance and increase their own positivism.

This positivism creates a strong bond of identification between individuals within the canceling group, and studies have analyzed that the strong bond of identification has a greater influence of shaping each individual member's self-concept, which could result with even more intolerance towards the canceled group (Harwood, 2020, p.2). Therefore, the use of social identity theory is relevant for our study examining canceled influencers and the endorsed brand since it could contribute to the complex cancel behavior of individuals who do not align with

consumers (or in this case a particular group) values or beliefs. Moreover, as groups compare themselves in a positive manner to other groups, to maintain a positive self-image it comes down to the fact that these social identities affect how we see ourselves and how we interact with others.

Additionally, the influence of a group's opinions can also affect the communication within a group, whether an individual will openly express their opinions or not. In terms of moral issues, the individuals in the group who hold the opinions of the majority may be more likely to openly express and defend their perspectives as they feel like they will get collective affirmation. In contrast, people who hold minority views within that group are most likely more reluctant to express their beliefs, opinions and attitudes as they fear violating group norms and risk social isolation. (Norris, 2021, p.152).

Hence, the people sharing the majority's view might intentionally make the effort to convince others to agree with their opinions. Thus, it can create unintentionally pressure on the individuals that do not hold the same view and in an attempt to avoid conflicts and disapproval they may feel compelled to adopt the majority's view (Norris, 2021, p.152). Furthermore, those who do not have strong opinions in the matter may adopt and follow the opinions of the majority in the group. From a perspective of culture, the social group could have a large influence on individuals' opinions and behavior. For example, if an individual shares similar values and beliefs as the social group, there will not be any disapproval. However, if the individual's own values and beliefs belong to a minority, they might be hesitant to share their own thoughts due to the social group's norms. This explains why social identity theory is relevant for our study since it helps us to understand how social pressure in terms of performing a certain behavior according to specific norms and values, influences an overall attitude and behavior.

2.1.2 Self-congruity concept

Self-congruity can be referred to as a physiological process involving consumers comparing their self-concept with their perception of a brand image, including the brand-personality or brand-user image. The level of self-congruity is determined by the extent consumers identify with a brand in which the congruence is high when the two match and low when they do not (Sirgy, 2017, p.198). In self-congruity theory, the behavior of consumers is influenced by the self-concept which they compare with the perceptions they have on a company's image. Previous studies have shown that consumers tend to have a much more positive attitude towards brands that align with their own identities (Ma, 2020, p.360). According to Johnson et al. (2011) the consumer sees the brand identity as a reflection of self. Moreover, consumers see an association between the brand and its attributes, where they compare it with their own identity.

It all comes down to the consumer's own self-concept. To gain a strong relationship between a consumer and brand, consumers own self-concept and perception of brands characteristics must match. The greater a brand reflects consumers' self, the stronger personal connection will be created from consumers towards the brand (Kressmann, 2006, p.957). Moreover, self-concept is also shaped by the individual's own self-esteem. Where individuals might enhance themselves and try to pursue their ideal self-image with specific products or brands (Kressmann, 2006, p.957). The consumer self-concept can be divided into four characteristics that reflect the evaluation of the relative attractiveness of a brand-user image or brand personality. These dimensions are the actual self-image, ideal-self-image, social self-image and ideal social self-image (Sirgy, 2017,p.199). The actual self refers to an individual's perception of themselves as "me as I am", where attributes are represented by an image reflecting an

individual's personal identity. The “ideal self” describes how an individual wants to perceive themselves as “the perfect me”, or what they would like to become. Consumers' beliefs of how others perceive them can be referred to as “social self-image” whereas ideal social-self-image is how they want others to perceive them (Sirgy, 2017 p.199).

Self-congruity theory is relevant to explain how consumers connect with brands and how their self-concept plays a role in this relation. According to theory, consumers tend to have a more positive attitude towards brands that align with their own identities, moreover consumers are more likely to support a brand that reflects their own self-concept. This behavior can be connected to the complex cancel culture behavior, because if an influencer and its endorsed brand gets canceled, the cancellation could be explained by their beliefs or actions not aligning with the self-concept of the consumers that are canceling them. But from another perspective, an influencer or endorsed brand that aligns well with the self-concept of their consumers, might avoid being canceled despite actions.

2.3 Planned behavior theory

Originally the theory of planned behavior (TPB) was used to predict intention to engage in a certain behavior. Moreover, researchers wanted to explain different types of behaviors and that individuals have the ability to self-control those behaviors. The theory of planned behavior is an extension of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) theory of reasoned action (Bosnjak et al., 2020, p. 353). Theory of planned behavior is relevant for our study since it seeks to predict human behavior which gives us an opportunity to examine and predict human behavior in terms of cancel culture. Furthermore, to distinguish which factors affect intended behavior, if consumers want to cancel the endorsed brand or not, as a result of actual behavior.

Human behavior is constructed by three kinds of considerations according to TPB; (1) Behavioral beliefs - which are human beliefs regarding potential consequences of behavior. (2) Normative beliefs - which are human beliefs regarding normative expectations of other human beings. (3) Control beliefs - which are human beliefs regarding factors that might reduce the performance of the behavior. Human behavior is constructed by three kinds of considerations according to TPB; (1) Behavioral beliefs - which are human beliefs regarding potential consequences of behavior. (2) Normative beliefs - which are human beliefs regarding normative expectations of other human beings. (3) Control beliefs - which are human beliefs regarding factors that might reduce the performance of the behavior (Bosnjak et al., 2020, p,353). These three considerations will produce different outcomes of attitudes toward the behavior. This means that (1) Behavioral beliefs will form either a favorable or unfavorable attitude. (2) Normative beliefs will show perceived social pressure (3) Control beliefs show behavioral control or self-efficiency. The original theory has a general rule that argues for the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm, the higher possibility it is for perceived control, moreover, which leads to a higher intention for the individual to perform the behavior in mind (Bosnjak, et al., 2020, p.353).

Moreover, subjective norms, attitudes, and behavioral control are factors that explain which behavioral intention the individual has. From the theory of planned behavior, subjective norms are explained to reflect an individual's perception of social pressure. For example, an individual's behavior is influenced by the way they perceive how others feel about the behavior. For example, if individuals perceive how others approve or disapprove of their behavior will determine the probability of someone intending to demonstrate that type of behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

Moreover, individuals' favorable or unfavorable perceptions of a particular behavior form the attitude toward the behavior. The research argues that attitudes that are more positive towards a behavior give a stronger reason for an individual to go forward with it (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

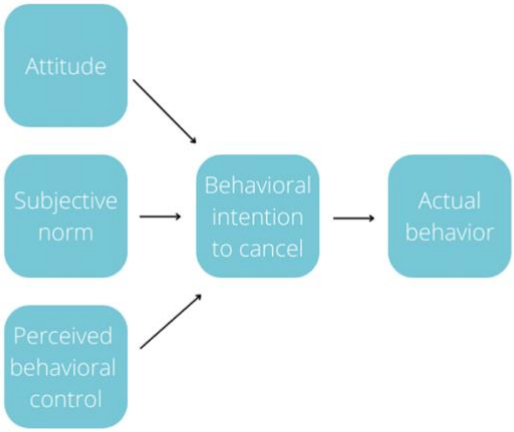


Fig.1 The theory of planned behavior with the context of cancel culture

The theory of planned behavior is rather rational and the rationality aspect is one of the main criticisms of the theory (Chetioui et al., 2019, p.363). Moreover, the reason for the criticism is that the factors considered, such as beliefs and attitudes are rational. The theory does not consider affective and cognitive factors when predicting human behavior. Those factors include emotions and feelings associated with a particular behavior. Previous research stresses the importance of integrating affective or cognitive variables to explain other areas of prediction of behaviors (Chetioui et al., 2019, p.363). Therefore, we will implement other theories later on in our conceptual framework that will extend the theory of planned behavior to the extent where we could examine the potential behavior of cancel culture and its effect on influencer-endorsed brands.

The theory of planned behavior is relevant to add in terms of cancel culture to understand the intention to participate in cancel culture. To predict human behavior in the context of cancel culture, the theory analyzed subjective norms, attitudes, and behavioral control. From a cancel culture perspective, there could occur some kind of social pressure to participate in the culture, which could be seen as subjective norms. The attitude towards the specific behavior could either be unfavorable or favorable, where the attitude could influence individuals' intention to participate. Moreover, it is important to analyze the possible ability to participate in cancel culture, which is behavioral control. These factors are important in understanding the intention to participate in a cancel culture behavior. But as previously mentioned, the planned behavior has some limitations in the original model, which is to predict the effects of feelings or emotions. We see an opportunity to identify new factors, for example social identity, values, beliefs, emotions and feelings, that could influence individuals' decision to engage in cancel culture behavior by extending the theory to the extent we can understand human behavior in terms of cancel culture.

2.3.1 Attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control

An individual's attitude is based on beliefs and values, moreover, influenced by various environmental factors. Understanding which factors and how these influence attitudes help predict behavioral outcomes (Holland et al., 2012, p.356). According to previous research,

individuals' attitudes will affect their behavior if the attitude is based on an association with high certainty, based on their experiences, and is well-defined. Therefore, attitude will have a bigger influence on behavior if all these factors are present. Moreover, if the attitude is positive, it will most likely lead to positive behavior and the other way around (Cacioppo & Bernston, 1994). From this we have constructed an iceberg model with the context of cancel culture, where underlying components could trigger visible components of cancel culture.

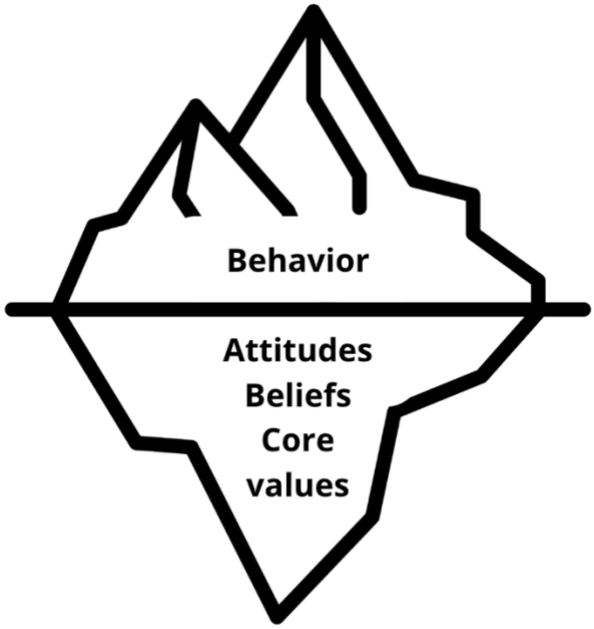


Fig.2 Iceberg model (Edward T. Hall 1976)

The iceberg model was developed by Edward T. Hall to explain human behavior and psychology. According to the theory, Hall (1976) compares human behavior to an iceberg, where the behavior only shows a small portion above the surface and below the surface there is a much deeper, unseen portion that explains the behavior from a more complex perception (Hall, 1976). As human behavior is complex, the iceberg explains that the visible surface of knowledge and attitude can be changed. However, most of the hidden surface that is the driver of the behavior is much harder to change, such as beliefs, values and personality (Hall, 1976). The use of the iceberg model might help us to analyze which factors form attitudes and if they can change, but also to see hidden components of the respondents' attitudes that might cancel cultural behavior.

Attitude towards brands or influencers can be a major factor of predicting the behavior of consumers, whether their intent will be to cancel or not. Cancel culture often is driven by a negative attitude towards individuals who are to become canceled, and as mentioned previously in our thesis, cancel culture is often a behavior performed collectively by a group of individuals. This negative attitude is often performed by the group of people willing to cancel someone. For example, if an individual makes a sexist statement, there might be a group with a shared negative attitude towards that individual. With the rise of social media and consumers have with their increased power to share their opinions and feelings, cancel culture is often driven by this rise. Individuals address their opinions and feelings with a certain attitude. If a consumer

has a negative attitude towards an influencer or endorsed brand, there is an increased chance of negative attitude to spread and influence others on social media.

Subjective norms refer to an individuals' perception of approval or support by a group of people for a particular behavior (Ham et al., 2015, p. 740). The influential group of people put social pressure on the individual to behave in a certain way in order to align with the group's beliefs. According to previous research, attitudes have a higher chance of influencing behavior compared to subjective norms (Ham et al., 2015, p. 740). Cancel culture and subjective norms could be connected through social pressure of performing a certain behavior accordingly to beliefs, attitudes, and values. From the subjective norm perspective, social pressure might come from an influential group. This influential group from a cancel culture perspective might come from a larger social environment community.
Perceived behavioral control refers to the perception of one's own ability and feeling of control over the situation. The situation in this case could be every event throughout a lifetime (Ham et al., 2015, p.740). Analyzing perceived behavioral control can be useful to understand individual behavior in terms of canceled culture. An example could be that cancel culture in many cases puts social pressure on an individual to perform a certain behavior due to beliefs or values, the individual's own perceived behavioral control might influence whether to perform the desired behavior. A strong perceived behavioral control might result in a less likelihood to participate in canceled culture. Perceived behavioral control, according to theory, is the driver between an individual's intended behavior and actual behavior. The greater the perceived behavioral control, the higher likeness it is for an individual to perform the intended behavior (Tornikoski & Maalaoui, p.424, p. 2019).

2.4 Conceptual framework

Previous research has analyzed behavior intent (Tandoc et al., 2022) rather than actual behavior. The researchers state that there is a possibility that other drivers are influencing behavioral intent and actual behavior (Tandoc et al., 2022). The theory of planned behavior explains behavioral intent that is driven by various drivers such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Moreover, previous research has examined from the lens of social identity theory how individuals participate in canceling culture, and how subjective norms and social identity might influence their behavior (Dholakia et al., 2004, p. 242). Therefore, social identity theory could help to explain the non-rational perspective of the theory of planned behavior, where social identity theory instead explains how social pressure, emotions, feelings, identity, and traits might influence the performance of actual behavior to cancel.

The conceptual framework for this study has been developed through the theory of planned behavior together with the concepts of social identity theory and self-congruity concept. These three theories together are seen through the lens of the iceberg model to help explain the complex phenomena of cancel culture from human psychological drivers. Theoretical and empirical findings of cancel culture have evolved over the years, and as cancel culture is seen as a complex phenomenon there are many drivers involved to understand actual behavior of cancel culture. In section 1.1 we discuss the background of culture and in section 2 we are using relevant theories that will help to explain and clarify human behavior. From a theoretical perspective, TPB will clarify how the participants in our study make decisions about their behavior in regard to canceling culture, moreover, explain which drivers influence their decision making. Furthermore, social identity theory will help to clarify the role of individual behaviors and attitudes in terms of shaping one's group identity. The conceptual framework is seen through the lens of the iceberg model since cancel culture could be seen as human behavior

that is visible by the performance of an actual behavior, however, according to the iceberg model the behavior above the surface of an individual is a small part of the iceberg that is visible (Hall, 1976). Moreover, below the surface there is a much more complex hidden part that provides a complex perspective that could clarify and explain human behavior towards culture (Hall, 1976).

Section 2.3 provides an explanation why there are limitations of TPB and why it is important for our study to incorporate psychological drivers when predicting human behavior. Attitudes and beliefs are seen to be rational factors (Chetioui et al., 2019, p.363), therefore we have chosen to incorporate emotions and feelings that are associated in a certain behavior, in terms of our study that certain behavior is canceling an individual (influencer) or endorsed brand. For our study, it is crucial to incorporate social identity theory and self-congruity as it helps to explain values, emotions, feelings, social identity, norms and beliefs in a much more irrational manner. As cancel culture is a complex phenomenon, we chose to incorporate the iceberg model as seen in section 2.3.1 as it helps explain hidden and underlying drivers that drive attitudes, which in turn drives behaviors in terms of cancel culture. The extension of TPB enhances the ability to predict intended behavior and actual behavior from different perspectives and drivers. As previous research (Tandoc et al., 2022) has explained that there are possibilities for other drivers to influence the performance of behavioral intent or actual behavior, therefore, our conceptual framework includes an *"unknown driver to actual behavior"* which we will find through our empirical findings in section 5 and discuss its influence in section 7.

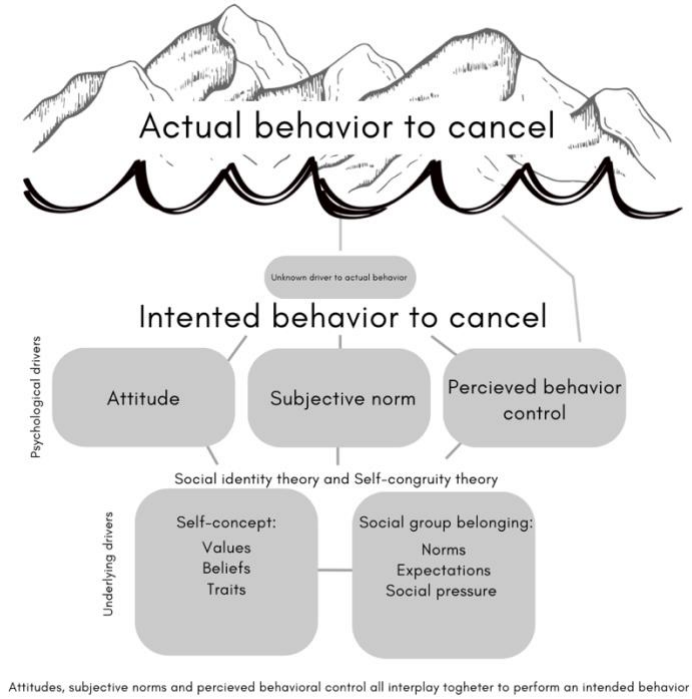


Fig. 3 Conceptual framework explaining actual behavior with an unknown driver.

2.5 Literature review

Author(s)	Purpose	Theoretical framework	Methodology	Findings	Future research
Saldanha, N. Mulye, R. and Rahman, K. 2022. Cancel culture and the consumer: A strategic marketing perspective. *Journal of strategic marketing.* pp.1–16.	Examine cancel culture between consumers and celebrity endorsers. Discusses how power dynamics have changed due to the rise of social media, where consumers possess greater power than before to cancel someone.	Relationship theory Attachment theory		Consumers with a strong emotional attachment will less likely engage in canceling towards the endorsed brand. Brand attachment declines if there is a lack of warmth or competence.	Empirically study consumer perceptions towards the performance of canceling.
Tandoc, E.C. Tan Hui Ru, B. Lee Huei, G. Min Qi Charlyn, N. Chua, R.A.Goh, Z.H. (2022). CancelCulture: Examining definitions and motivations. *New media & society.*	Examine underlying drivers , such as attitudes and intentions of engaging in cancel culture.	Theory of planned behavior	Mixed method, both quantitative and qualitative. Exploratory and sequential research design. In-depth interviews and online surveys.	Individuals' intention to engage in cancel culture is influenced by their subjective norms, attitude and perceived behavioral control.	Examine other factors that influence intended behavior, but to also examine factors that influence actual behavior to cancel someone.
Reinikainen, H., Tan, T.M., Luoma-aho, V. and Salo, J. (2021). Making and breaking relationships on social media: the impacts of brand and influencer	Examine the relationship between consumer, influencer and brand from a transgression. Investigate a potential spill-over effect.	Parasocial relationship theory	Quantitative research method.	An influencer betrayal, transgression, will negatively affect the parasocial relationship. If a brand commits a transgression it will affect the brand attitude. Furthermore,	Use larger sample sizes with other concepts such as self-congruity of individuals with social media influencers.

betrayals. *Technological forecasting & social change*. 171, p.120990.				this might cause a spill-over effect both on the influencer and brand.	
Mueller, T.S. (2021). Blame, then shame? Psychological predictors in cancel culture behavior. *The Social science journal (Fort Collins)*	Analyze the social phenomena of cancel culture through analyzing the psychological behaviors that are associated with cancel culture.	Network analysis.	Mixed approach, both qualitative and quantitative. Personal interviews and surveys.	The authors found an association between understanding another individual's character before making a judgment with an intent to see if they learn from their mistakes if they are forgiven. The authors have also found that individuals that engage in cancel culture often do so with the intent of seeking an apology and evaluating if the action is perceived as unethical, illegal or immoral.	The authors suggest that there is a need for future research using a qualitative research approach studying immoral, illegal or unethical acts.
Arias, E. (2019). How Does Media Influence Social Norms? Experimental Evidence on the Role of Common Knowledge. Political science	Explore how social media influences beliefs, attitudes and behaviors through the perspective on an individual and societal norms.	Social learning theory	Quantitative	Public information does not always have a strong impact on attitudes. Social interactions might have a larger impact in shaping norms.	Explore interaction between individual beliefs to understand social mechanisms. This could help explain the process of shaping

research and methods. 7(3), pp.561–578					attitudes and norms.

3. Scientific methodology

In this chapter, we will explain our research philosophy and address scientific methodology: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Moreover, we will elaborate on our research approach, discuss our pre-understandings and how we have gathered our literature during our study.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge. The research philosophy a researcher adopts is based on assumptions about their worldview which will influence their research strategy and strategies. The choice of research philosophy concerns important assumptions of the researcher's worldview hence these assumptions form all parts of the research (Saunders, 2019, p.159.). The practical concerns might shape the philosophy but how the researcher views the relationship between knowledge and its development will hold the most prominent influence (Saunders, 2019, p.102). There are three main components concerning research philosophy which are ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Saunders, 2019, p.133). Ontology concerns assumptions about reality whereas epistemology regards how knowledge is produced (Saunders, 2019, p.133). Moreover, there are axiology concerns, values and ethics (Saunders, 2019, p.134.).

One thing to consider is how objectivism and subjectivism influences the research philosophy. Subjectivism explains that multiple realities could exist and that it is influenced by humanities and arts. These realities are created and shaped by people's own interpretations and perceptions (Saunders, 2019, p. 134). Our study includes a subjective perspective as we as researchers are trying to understand perspectives and narratives from different viewpoints. We as researchers also must acknowledge and reflect our own personal values into our research as we are currently living and experiencing a cancel culture era on social media. This must be considered in our analysis and discussion, where we must reflect upon our own values before drawing a conclusion. On the other hand, objectivism is influenced by the opposite, natural sciences. Objectivism concerns that a social reality exists of individuals' own interpretations (Saunders, 2019, p. 135). Subjectivism is often from a qualitative research method, and as we are doing qualitative research with interviews (Saunders, 2019, p. 135), we will try to understand the social phenomena of cancel culture through exploring the dynamic behavior of cancel culture.

Within business and management research, there are five paradigms' researchers need to be aware of since it provides a wider perspective of the research but also helps researchers to reflect and critically consider methodological choices. The first paradigm, positivism is often in a quantitative nature seeking to apply scientific principles to examine phenomena. Moreover, researchers have the belief and intent that through observation and measurement of an objective gain new knowledge regarding social phenomena. The result from a positivist perspective is often done from an objective manner with generalizations (Saunders, 2019, p.145). The second paradigm is critical realism which refers to explaining what individuals experience through deeply analyzing underlying structures of those realities (Saunders, 2019, p.146). The third paradigm is interpretivism which is the most relevant for our qualitative research method as it prioritizes analyzing an individual's own beliefs and motivations to understand a specific social phenomenon, in our case cancel culture. The interpretivist paradigm believes that each individual has their own experience that is shaped by cultural factors and circumstances (Saunders, 2019, p.149). From our qualitative research method, an interpretivism paradigm will help us to shape our research with multiple interpretations and a unique depth. However, as the

paradigm is heaving subjectivistic (Saunders, 2019, p.149), we as researchers must recognize our own beliefs and values during the research process and how it might influence materials. Postmodernism is the fourth paradigm that concerns to highlight the power of relations and how language influences thinking, and questions accepted ways of thinking (Saunders, 2019, p. 149). Where the last paradigm pragmatism concerns only concepts that support a specific action. Pragmatism holds both an objective and subjective point of view in such a way that theories, ideas, hypotheses and findings have a perspective of a practical thought of action (Saunders, 2019, p.151).

3.2 Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Saunders, 2019, p.134), or “being” (Marsh & Furlong, 2002, p.18). It is related to whether there is a "real" world independent of our knowledge of it (Marsh & Furlong, 2002 p.18). Concepts are created to represent phenomena from the real world in their actual form. In other words, the definition of a concept should not only give a general explanation of the term, rather a better understanding of the underlying reality of the concept (Mahoney & Goertz, 2012). Ontology can be described as an individual's interpretation of what constitutes a fact, shaping their system of belief. Which concerns if social entities should be viewed as either objective or subjective, as explained by Marsh and Furlong (2002, p. 19). Ontology can be divided into two components which are objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders, 2019, p.133). Objectivism describes that social entities exist to external actors (Saunders, 2019, p.135). Furthermore, objectivism signifies that there is only one view of reality, and that social reality is external to researchers' reach (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.47). From this standpoint, it is crucial to study social phenomena objectively, independent from the interpretations and perspectives of social actors (Saunders, 2019) From a subjectivist perspective, social phenomena are developed through the perceptions and subsequent actions of social actors (Saunders, 2019, p.137) Constructionism/subjectivism indicates that social phenomena exist due to social actors and their actions in which social reality is seen as highly subjective (Bryman & Bell, p. 21)

In a qualitative approach, research forms a discussion that focuses on semantics which refers to the meaning of concepts. The qualitative approach aims to define features of a given entity specifically (Mahoney & Goertz, 2012). Compared to a quantitative approach where the researchers are less concerned with the semantics of concept, instead discussions are mainly around measurement and data. However, from a quantitative approach perspective researchers focus on measuring the concept through composed numerical data that are correlated. The quantitative approach aims to with data scores collected through measurement models to represent the concept for different cases (Mahoney & Goertz, 2012).

This research will take on the subjectivist standpoint of ontology. We argue for an subjectivist standpoint of ontology in our proposed research since subjectivism allows us to understand individuals perceptions and behaviors. Through a subjectivist perspective, we will be able to understand and examine individual interpretations and experiences regarding culture, moreover, a concrete example is if a brand continues to collaborate with an influencer that has been canceled by society. Our qualitative research using a subjectivist standpoint of ontology will provide us with an understanding of perception and reaction between consumers and brands during an canceled culture era. This perception would be difficult to capture using a quantitative method with an objective perspective. We also argue that the objective perspective gives a limited understanding of the study of social phenomena.

Through a subjectivist standpoint of ontology, we could possibly capture the complex social phenomena environment that ranges from different individual and societal factors. Therefore, we believe that this study from an objective manner would be difficult to analyze with the research standpoint we have. By embracing subjectivity, we as researchers could gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and nuances of cancel culture as a social phenomenon to address our research problem. As we are studying the concept "canceled" influencer that is shaped by emotions and opinions through actions of a community. The concept is naturally subjective. This research has a view that reality is subjective and could differ from individual to individual (Scotland, 2012). Therefore, our ontological position of interpretivism is relativism. According to the relativism viewpoint, there are as many realities as individuals since our realities are mediated by our senses (Frowe, 2001, p.185).

3.3 Epistemology

The research ontological position reflects a researcher's perspective on the fundamental nature of the world. In contrast, the epistemological position reflects their view on what can be known about the world and how this knowledge can be acquired. In other words, epistemology can be seen as a theory of knowledge (Marsh & Furlong, 2002, p.18-19). It questions what is or should be considered as knowledge in a distinct topic and how we produce knowledge (Marsh & Furlong, 2002, p.18)

In the positivist approach, the researcher is seen as independent and not influenced by the research subject. Furthermore, using the positive approach, the researcher will most likely develop hypotheses based on existing theories and test them by collecting factual data (Saunders, 2019, p.135). In this approach, the focus lies more on facts whereas the researcher's values do not influence research (Saunders, 2019, p.130). From an interpretivist perspective, researchers view the world as constructed through social and discursive practices. Thus, retract the idea that the world has an objective existence that is independent of human knowledge (Marsh & Furlong, 2002, p.26). Interpretivism highlights the need for researchers to understand the differences between humans in their roles as social actors, and to interpret the social world around them by their meanings and actions (Saunders, 2019, p.148-149). This requires researchers to adopt an empathetic stance and enter the social world of their research subjects to understand their perspectives (Saunders, 2019, p.149).

In our research, we will take an epistemological approach to interpretive subjectivism. Interpretive epistemology is rooted in experiences and phenomena in the actual world, and is one of subjectivism (Saunders, 2019, p. 135-144). We acknowledge our own perspective and biases when analyzing and shaping our understanding of the phenomena cancel culture between consumer, influencer and brand to an epistemological approach to interpretive subjectivism.

3.4 Axiology

The term axiology is originally from Greek roots which refer to the meaning of worth and value, in logic and theory (Hart, 1971). Axiology is concerned with addressing the values and ideals that are good for both society and individuals (Biedenbach & Jacobson, 2016, p. 140). For researchers to make decisions regarding research methods without impacting the process with their values and influence the research process, Axiology is essential to be aware of. In this way, researchers can make decisions and ensure to not introduce bias or other issues. Furthermore, Axiology provides knowledge regarding researchers' values and how they might impact their research which will increase the credibility of research findings. By being aware of our values and awareness of axiology, we as researchers could identify potential conflicts that could undermine the honesty of our research. Moreover, we as researchers can take steps

to reduce the potential impact of our values and beliefs such as involving other individuals' perspectives in the research.

3.5 Research approach

The research approach in a study describes the relationship between research and theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.11). Furthermore, the most common approaches in research methodology are deductive, inductive, and abductive approaches (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.11). There are three fundamental reasons why it is important to choose the right approach for theory development. Firstly, it allows researchers to make informed decisions concerning the research design. Also, it enables researchers to identify research strategies and choose methods that are the most suitable as well as identify those that are not appropriate. Lastly, when researchers are aware of the different types of research traditions it makes it possible to adapt the research design which considers constraints (Saunders, 2019, p.157).

Deduction is a scientific approach that seeks to explain causal relationships between concepts and variables by developing a theory and hypothesizing and then testing these propositions which is most likely done through quantitative data. Additionally, generalizing findings by carefully selecting and sampling a sufficient size of approach. The deductive approach emphasizes structure, quantification, generalizability, and testable hypotheses, and is usually underpinned by the positivist research philosophy (Saunders, 2019, p.153-154). Instead of developing hypotheses and testing theory as in the deductive approach, the induction approach seeks to generate theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.13), and starts with collecting data, and analyzing data in order to develop a theory (Saunders, 2019, p.160).

Furthermore, the induction approach most likely uses interpretivism and subjectivism paradigms (Saunders, 2019, p.155). Traditionally in natural sciences, the deduction approach has been used, but social science researchers have criticized the limitations of deduction in terms of lacking an understanding of how humans interpret their social world. In contrast, the inductive approach concentrates on acquiring a deep understanding of human behavior and experiences. Furthermore, the inductive approach can provide a more realistic and nuanced understanding of human behavior and social phenomena (Saunders, 2019, p.118). As the inductive approach allows for a deeper understanding of how humans interpret their social world, it is often useful in the social sciences. Also, this approach is considered more flexible than deductive research as it allows for alternative explanations of phenomena (Saunders, 2019, p.119).

The abductive approach combines both the induction and abductive approach whereas it starts with recognizing a surprising fact and after that develop a plausible theory to examine the occurrence of this fact (Saunders, 2019, p.155). Furthermore, abduction involves utilizing data to explore a phenomenon, uncover patterns and themes, and either create a new theory or revise an existing one. Next, this theory is tested, which may implicate collecting more data (Saunders, 2019, p.160). Also, this approach is flexible, which implies that several research philosophies can be used, the most common ones being pragmatism, postmodernism and critical realism (Saunders, 2019, p.156). We are not going to develop and test hypotheses nor gather quantitative data to explain causal relationships and test the validity of as in the deductive approach. Instead, as we want to get a more in-depth understanding of how consumers behave and perceive brands that collaborate with “canceled” influencers, the inductive approach concentrates on acquiring a deep understanding of human behavior and experiences (Saunders,

2019, p.118). Therefore, it will be appropriate as we are going to conduct interviews to get a more in-depth understanding of how consumers behave and perceive brands that collaborate with “canceled” influencers. Also, as we have chosen to use the qualitative approach in which we will conduct interviews, hence collecting qualitative data which is done in the inductive approach.

3.6 Pre-Understandings

Pre-understanding or preconceptions are important when setting an objective in research which means that the researchers are somewhat familiar of the knowledge within the field since before (Seldén, 2005). Preconceptions are hard to avoid in research, this is especially the case in qualitative research because the researcher most commonly gathers data through interviews when they interact, observe participants and is the one that interprets the data (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2022, p.396). Moreover, one’s pre-understanding provides a base of the field being explored where further research adds to this understanding (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2022, p.397)

Even though it is important to have some pre-understanding, researchers have also viewed it as a source of biases such as prejudices that can have a negative effect on producing valid and reliable knowledge (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2022, p.396). The background such as the specific society, culture and religion that are formed by one's upbringing, education and work highly affect the researchers pre-understanding and pre-conceptions. However, as pre-understanding is highly affected by others it can lead to prejudice about reality and may hinder the researcher to provide valid and reliable knowledge (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2022, p.397).

We are two international business students majoring in marketing and possessing prior knowledge of influencer marketing and other relevant fields to the subject. Additionally, we both are very interested and know about the phenomena of cancel culture since before. These pre-understandings have been valuable for us to find relevant literature, decide theories and recognize important areas for our study. Thus, we have our own assumptions and beliefs of what is important to include in our study. However, we acknowledge that our history and surrounding social environment affect how we perceive canceled culture which in turn can affect our research. As cancel culture and pre-understandings in general are highly influencer by one's background and social environment, we know that our own beliefs and assumptions can create potential bias. To minimize the risk of potential bias, we have done an extensive review of literature and theories to gather information from different perspectives and criticize our own pre-conceptions and pre-understanding.

As authors we must acknowledge our own knowledge of influencer marketing to avoid any potential biases that could arise later on in the thesis. We are exposed to influencers and influencer marketing on a daily basis. One of the authors have had an internship and worked with influencer marketing, therefore, our knowledge prior to the study has to be acknowledged to minimize any potential impact of our thesis.

3.7 Literature search

After identifying parts of our research topic, we started to search for literature to support our thoughts and ideas. One example of a definition of literature search. In which a literature search could be seen as a systematic process to identify an existing body of knowledge in terms of a

specific topic (Collis & Hussey, 2021, p.76). According to Collins & Hussey (2021) the purpose of a literature search is to find relevant pieces of literature. By this, researchers will be able to read more about the subject but also find methodologies in previous research (Collis & Hussey, 2021, p. 76). By doing a literature search, we as researchers will be aware of previous topics within the chosen phenomena and identify potential gaps to fill out.

The literature used in our research is mainly from Umeå University's own database, but we have also used google scholar to find relevant articles. However, articles we found in google scholar were later searched for in Umeå universities database to see whether the thesis found in google scholar was peer reviewed or not. We searched in a database with formed keywords we found associated with our research topic. Keywords are an efficient way for software and search engines to identify literature in databases (Collis & Hussey, 2021, p. 78). We have throughout our thesis gradually found and formed new keywords for our literature search.

Our knowledge and information regarding our research topic was gathered through keywords such as *"cancel culture" "social media" "canceled influencers" "social norms" "moral transgression" "self-concept" "social justice" "values and beliefs" "consumer behavior".* These are a few of our keywords that we kept a repetitive search for to stay updated on published literature with a similar area of interest.

To increase the credibility of our research we have been critical towards our chosen literature sources. The sources chosen for our study have been obtained by Umeå University's own database and Google Scholar. Peer-reviewed journals and business articles that are usually cited and referred to in research. We have done this to ensure that our research, especially theoretical framework, are based on sources that are credible, reliable and valid within academics.

4. Research methodology

Throughout this chapter we will discuss our research method and explain our reasoning behind our chosen research design. Furthermore, we will explain which approach we have chosen for collecting empirical data as well as our sampling method. Moreover, we are explaining and justifying the reasoning behind the chosen qualitative thematic analysis method. Lastly, we are acknowledging our ethical considerations and truth criteria.

4.1 Research design

Gratton and Jones (2010, p.4) defines research as "a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge" (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p.4). Additionally, research should contribute to existing knowledge regarding a topic by solving a research problem or making an innovative contribution (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p.4). The purpose of the research design is to ensure that the research question(s) are addressed effectively and successfully (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p.4). The research question will guide the decision of research strategy, collection techniques, analysis procedures as well as the time limit for the research. Hence, the choice of research design will be the general plan in how to address the research questions which should include specific objectives derived from the research question. (Saunders et al., 2009, p.138). Moreover, the research design should provide a clearly defined plan of how the data is gathered and interpreted (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p.4).

According to previous research, when new studies are conducted, researchers have to analyze their knowledge, perspectives, and theoretical framework before bringing it to new research (Creswell 2014). Creswell (2014) suggests that we as researchers must deliberate which strategies to use and which will extend as methods. There must be a critical viewpoint of every researcher's perspective regarding data collection and information analysis (Vogt et al., 2012, p.3). Furthermore, one perspective could be looked into from different viewpoints, and our perception of bias has to be brought to light before making a statement. Our perception of bias will affect our choice of research design approach and the tools we will measure our collected data. Moreover, the research design covers purposes, intentions, aims, and plans where time and research availability are considered (Hakim, 2000, p.2). The research design will contribute to efficiency through a structured plan displaying our ideas and major parts of the research trying to address the research problem.

The three most common research approaches researchers use when conducting a study are;(1) Qualitative, (2) quantitative, and (3) mixed methods (Williams, 2007, p. 65). Furthermore, the research approach one chooses might depend on which method the researcher is most familiar with. On some occasions, it can be hard to choose which method one should go for. However, it is important for researchers to distinguish a difference between methods and research designs, moreover, to understand the different perspectives and outcomes each research approach has. Firstly, the quantitative research approach and the way data is measured produces quantifiable

values (Kothari, 2004, p.5). In other words, a quantitative method contains data from empirical observations where the outcome tends to not be in-depth observations (Asenahabi, 2019, p.79)

Qualitative research approach, compared to quantitative, analyses and describes an event from a natural context perspective. Researchers are through a subjective lens investigating a specific behavior to explain it in depth. Moreover, qualitative data are not grounded on statistical data, rather qualitative data. This compared to the quantitative approach, where the variables are under control by the researcher, qualitative researchers use ethnographic or anthropological methods when they are examining and analyzing the participants (Lowhorn, 2007, p.2). Additionally, the term "quantitative" is mainly used to explain different types of data collection techniques such as questionnaires, or data analysis procedures such as graphs or statistics that will generate or utilize numerical data (Saunders et al.,2009, p.152). From a qualitative perspective, researchers explain a particular situation from a context of a particular group of people, instead of using a sample of a population to describe a whole phenomenon.

To further distinguish the difference between those two, a quantitative approach validates a theory with an experimental study, to analyze results numerically. In contrast, a qualitative approach tries to form a theory that could explain the behavior observed (Lowhorn, 2007, p.3). Qualitative research approach has an interpretivist and constructivist paradigm reasoning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). We as researchers are trying to understand our research subject in terms of how cancel culture in influencer marketing might impact companies rather than predicting outcomes. As we are doing qualitative research, we are prioritizing individuals' life experiences, however this approach is sensitive to biases of both us as researchers, but also our participants. Compared to a quantitative approach, qualitative approach builds its holistic approach from the participants perspective and is brought from an inductive reasoning. Compared to quantitative that has deductive reasoning (Williams, 2007, p. 67).

To give an example, from quantitative perspective conclusions are made through statistically collected data regarding a population where the researchers are studying a representative sample of that particular population (Lownhorn, 2007, p.1; Zikmund, 2001). The population in terms of a quantitative study is well described where the population consists of the entire group one is studying. Moreover, the population might be both broad or narrow, but as long as each person being studied aligns with the description of the population, it doesn't matter whether it's broad or narrow (Lowhorn, 2007, p.1). A representative sample from the population is conducted since researchers can't include a whole population in their study often due to resource constraints. Statistically the sample will be identical to the population if the researchers conduct it correctly (Lowhorn, 2007, p.1).

We will use a qualitative research approach to examine the personal and social drivers that drive an individual to engage in canceled culture. Quantitative data will not be the best option for us as we want to get a deeper, more in depth understanding of the participants thoughts, feelings, perception and experiences in order to be able to answer the research question. Therefore, we will use a qualitative approach as it will allow us to get a broader understanding of the complexity and subjectiveness of cancel culture. In this way, through analyzing each individual and understanding their reasoning from a cancel culture context we could get an in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon. Our participants might have different perceptions of cancel culture, and behave differently due to the complexity of human nature. Additionally, research on cancel culture is mostly quantitative in nature and researchers are stressing the need for examining cancel culture with a qualitative approach. This is needed in order to get a broader understanding of the complexity of cancel culture, and why people choose to cancel.

4.2 Data collection

There are two main types of data in research which is primary data and secondary data. Primary data are new data collected for the specific research problem and purpose of the study. (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p.593). When collecting new data it adds to the existent knowledge which then becomes secondary data (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p.594). A main advantage of primary data collection is that the information gathered is specific and tailored with the objective of the research and enables researchers to have control of the participants. However, collecting primary data through interviews can be time consuming and expensive (Hox & Boeije, 2005 p.594). Secondary data mainly include quantitative data that are collected from existing sources such as publications and databases (Saunders et al., 2003, p.268). The main advantage with secondary data is that it could be less time-consuming and less expensive than collecting primary data. However, a disadvantage of secondary research is that the data is collected for other research problems and other objectives which may not be fully appropriate for the specific study (Saunders et al., 2003, p.268).

After considering both the advantages and disadvantages of primary and secondary data collection, we have chosen primary data as the main source of data for our study. Our thesis aims to get a deeper understanding of the personal drivers for individuals to engage in cancel culture. Secondary data will also be used for our study. Hence, there is a need to understand the participants feelings, emotions, perceptions and experiences which can be done through primary data, and in our case through in depth interviews. Additionally, as mentioned in the research gap, research about cancel culture is still at its early stage. Hence, this study is empirical driven which makes it important to gather new primary data to examine the complex phenomenon of cancel culture.

The next step will be to decide upon the most suitable primary data collection for our thesis. The objective with interviews is to explore people's opinions, perceptions, experiences, beliefs and motivations related to certain topics. In cases where there is not that much known about the topic, interviews are often appropriate as well as in cases where it is needed for a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the subject (Gill et al., 2008, p.292). Our thesis is qualitative and focuses on gaining an in depth-understanding and exploring pw.

There are three main ways to conduct interviews which are structured interviews, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Gill et al., 2008, p.291). Structured interviews contain predetermined questions with little or no variation whereas there is not much space for follow-up questions. This interview approach is limited to the participants responses, thus may not allow for in depth information and are not appropriate in complex topics (Gill et al., 2008, p.291). Therefore, as this research will explore people's thoughts, feelings, beliefs etc, this approach will not be used as it will not provide sufficient in-depth information and understanding. In interpretivist studies, the most commonly used is unstructured and semi-structured interviews instead of structured interviews that often include yes and no questions (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 133). The unstructured interviews include open-ended questions allowing for a more discussion context between the respondent and researcher. In contrast, semi-structured interviews are positioned somewhere in the middle of structured and unstructured interviews (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 133).

Another approach to consider is focus groups which include guiding and monitoring group discussions in relation to a specific topic which are recorded by the researcher. They are used to generate information on collective views and what the underlying meaning behind these

views is (Gill et al., 2008, p.292). Even though focus groups can be appropriate to use to better understand participants' experiences and beliefs (Gill et al., 2008, p.292), we will not use this method as the participants may be influenced by each other. If we use focus groups, it may lead to biased information and lead to that the answers may not be the same as if they would answer individually without hearing and being influenced by other participants. Cancel culture is a somewhat sensitive, controversial topic and a recently new phenomenon that people may have very different opinions and knowledge of since before. Therefore, hearing other respondents talking about canceling culture can affect people's view and perspectives which will hinder us from gaining high quality data and a comprehensive understanding.

4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews (SSI) are suitable in cases where the aim of the research is to get a deeper understanding of the participant's perspective instead of a more general understanding of the phenomenon (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021, p.1360). Therefore, we will conduct semi-structured interviews as it will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of cancel culture to answer complex social behaviors. The semi-structured interview begins with open-ended questions that act as a guide of the topics discussed and meanwhile open up for further questions based on respondent's answers (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.133-134).

In our case, semi-structured interviews are better than unstructured interviews since the data can be compared in a more structured way as it ensures that all topics are discussed in every interview (Collis and Hussey 2014, p. 136). Furthermore, this approach will follow a structure but at the same time allow for flexibility which is important in our topic as we want to identify patterns and at the same time gain an in-depth understanding of cancel culture to be able to identify the impact it has on brands influencer marketing.

Another advantage of conducting semi-structured interviews is that it allows the interviews to be focused but also to give us the autonomy to explore relevant notions that may arise during the interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021, p.1360), which can result in further understanding of cancel culture and the participants' perspectives. In this way, we can ask the participants "why" and "how" which can result in more in-depth information and allowance for details. Furthermore, asking these types of follow-up questions are important to understand what individuals think, behave, and feel about cancel culture which can provide in depth and sufficient information that can make us understand how influencer marketing affects brands in relation to cancel culture.

Moreover, collecting primary data through semi-structured interviews will enable us to gain important insights from the participants and be able to have a holistic view of the topic through face-to face interactions. Additionally, this data collection approach will enable us to come up with further questions during the interviews which will provide opportunities for us to capture information that would not be captured through an unstructured or structured interview approach.

4.2.2 Interview guide

As researchers we must consider our questions to be relevant, not too complex and within a relevant time frame. For our semi-structured (SSI) interviews we have conducted an interview guide with the purpose of covering all topics to obtain information needed and to keep a

structure throughout the interview. With an interview guide we minimize the risk of getting exposure to data that might not be relevant for our research.

The guide will provide discussions regarding issues within influencer marketing and increasing trend of cancel culture, with a consumer perspective on brands and influencer collaborations. As we chose semi-structured interviews, we have to consider our questions to be open-ended, concrete and short, but also clear to get the most satisfactory answers. In this way, our participants will be able to express their opinions with their own words and raise points they think are relevant to the topic. Even though we have a clear structure of our interview, we as researchers are aware that each interview will proceed in different manners around the participants' own reflections and thoughts. Previous researchers stated that semi-structured interviews are favorable since the method is proven to be both flexible and adaptable (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2955). As our topic of cancel culture from a consumer perspective is quite complex, the semi-structured interview will be a good choice of method due to its adaptability with open-ended questions. Where we see semi-structured as an advantageous method since research states that SSI has been found to be successful as open-ended questions enable the interview to improvise and if needed, implement follow-up questions that are based on the respondent's responses (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2955). By this, we will be able to cover consumers' expressions and thoughts on the complex concept of cancel culture within influencer marketing and how it might impact those endorsed brands. Moreover, to do so, we have constructed questions based on our theoretical background. We want to keep a good structure with clear questions for the respondent, therefore, we have divided our questions into ten themes. As our research is on consumers' perspective on cancel culture within influencer marketing, and how it might impact the endorsed brands, we want to go in-dept of the respondents' thoughts, emotions and values to cover the complex environment of cancel culture. Our interview starts off with an introductory theme, letting the respondent present themselves and with some warm-up questions to see how much they know about culture and influencer marketing with a general and broad question. The introductory theme will provide an opportunity to initiate a positive contact between us and the respondent, before asking more exploratory questions.

The six other themes after introduction are (2) influencer marketing; (3) transgression and betrayal of influencer; (4) cancel culture; (5) self-congruity; (5) spill-over effect on endorsed brand. Our themes (2)-(5) are for us to understand the respondent’s perspective regarding cancel culture within influencer marketing and if, by how much, they contribute to it, and if, how much, are they affected by it to pinpoint potential drivers of the behavior. The 6th theme is a way for us to understand the potential effect it has on brands, and if so, both from a positive and negative perspective (Appendix 1.) Our interview will be presented in two languages, both English and Swedish (Appendix 1 and 2). The reason for a Swedish interview is due to convenience for our respondents for them to express themselves and not be limited by the English language.

4.3 Data sampling

As our qualitative research is investigating a real-life social phenomenon of cancel culture, we must have a good understanding of sampling strategies to design a credible qualitative study (Devers & Frankel, 2000, p.263). Moreover, data sampling is done for research purposes through selecting a suitable population to investigate the research appropriately (Devers & Frankel, 2000, p.263). Below we will express the different sampling methods available and which one we will use for our study.

4.3.1 Data selection and sampling method

According to research, sampling in qualitative research is done through non-probability sampling methods. Quantitative research approaches are using probability sampling, which is done by taking a small sample of a population that will represent the population with identical characteristics. However, as we are doing qualitative research non-probability sampling is done through a specific population to investigate a certain phenomenon, where the total population is unknown. Moreover, there are four types of non-probability sampling; (1) convenience sampling; (2) purposive sampling; (3) snowball sampling; (4) theoretical sampling (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013, p.124)

Convenience sampling according to research is the most common form of sampling method. This type of sampling method is done through individuals being invited to participate in the research since they are available regarding the location, time and willingness. Since the convenience sampling method is based on convenience, it's fast and a simple way to achieve a sample size needed for a study. However, researchers must consider limitations for each method. A critical point of view of convenience sampling is that the data could be either over-representing a particular group within a population, or the data could be under-representing. Which could lead to difficulties for researchers to a generalization of their findings onto a bigger population (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013, p.124). Purposive sampling is also a sampling strategy that is common within qualitative studies. Moreover, researchers have a pre-selected criteria of participants that could fit the research question. This strategy is according to literature referred to as "judgment sampling" since it requires respondents that have experience of a particular topic and provides information-rich cases for an in depth-study (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013, p. 124). Within purposive sampling, there are two categories. (1) *quota sampling* where researchers choose participants based on characteristics that are important for the study and which the participants need to have. Moreover, the characteristics might be regarding gender, age, education, profession, etc. It's different from purposive sampling since it is more specific regarding characteristics in regard to sizes of the sub-samples of each prescribed quota. 2) *Maximum phenomena variation sampling* is used with the intention to ensure a full range of the phenomena investigated by researchers. Researchers that choose this type of sampling method are focusing on individuals of generations, time-periods, or contexts. (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013, p.124). (3) snowball sampling method is used through some kind of chain referral sampling. Such that the researchers gather information from a few people and depend on those individuals to gather more information from the few people's friends, relatives, or significant contacts. According to the literature, this strategy is efficient when researchers are trying to find "hidden populations". Which means individuals in a population that researchers can't conveniently reach. According to Green & Thorogood (2009), this strategy could be used when sampling for drug-users. In other words, researchers can find stigmatized individuals for sensitive or complex studies. Theoretical sampling is used from a grounded theory perspective research where the researchers start off with a smaller sample and towards the end moves to a larger heterogeneous sample (Creswell, 2014).

Our study is driven by a purposive sampling strategy where we have decided which characteristics our participants should have in order to contribute relevant information to our study. This information will include these individuals' certain characteristics or experiences that fit our study, moreover we will focus on a relatively small sample. To extend our purposive sampling strategy, we will within purposively sampling strategy, use a maximum phenomenon variation sampling to ensure that our respondents that are within a specific context, that is cancel culture, and generation, which is Gen Z, to express their thoughts on cancel culture within

influencer marketing and how it might impact them, but also endorsed brands. We view our participants as individuals who can express their own experiences, values, and beliefs, moreover, reflect on those thoughts, and give us different opinions. For example, as we are investigating the rising trend of cancel culture, our participants must be within a relevant generation, such as Gen Z, that is within this rising trend, to get appropriate perspectives. Through inclusion criteria, we have identified characteristics that our participants must possess.

4.3.2 Sample size

We had a total of five individual in-depth interviews where we used the questions from the interview guide (see Appendix.1). The choice of interviewing a few individuals was to gather rich data regarding their opinions, experiences and attitudes towards the complex phenomena of cancel culture. We proceeded to have face-to-face and zoom interviews with the respondents.

As Bell & Bryman (2007, p.69) suggests, respondents should be kept anonymous; there is no sensitive information that could reveal the identity of our respondents. In order to keep track of the respondents we used fictional initials for each quote of their answers see table 3 below. As we are doing qualitative research, there are no overall formal criteria when determining the sample size. In other words, there are no criteria stating whether the sample size is right or wrong. As mentioned, it's the richness of our data collected that matters more than the number of respondents (Tuckett, 2004).

Respondent	Length of interview
P	1h 20 min
V	59 min
M	1h 25min
J	1h
A	52 min

After the fifth interview, we achieved data saturation of our sample size where our respondents' answers tended to overlap across topics, which indicates that the data became much richer and more saturated. We saw linkages between subjective norms, social identification and self-concept at an early stage in our interviews.

4.4 Analyze of collected data

There are different types of data analysis to adopt in qualitative research that are suitable depending on the types of research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) describe thematic analysis as *"a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data".* We have chosen the thematic approach as it is well suited with the qualitative approach in terms

of analyzing qualitative data and at the same time it allows for flexibility and simplicity, and provides several analytics options (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This method is useful in terms of summarizing main characteristics of a large body of data as well as offering a thick description of the data set. Also, highlight similarities and differences across the data set, generate unanticipated insights and allow for both social and psychological interpretations of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, as our study focuses on the personal and social drivers for individuals to engage in cancel culture, thematic analysis is going to be used to analyze the qualitative data gained by the interviews.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.82) argue that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. When coding, it is important to consider what constitutes a pattern or theme as well as the required size of the theme. This pertains to the prevalence of a specific theme in terms of space within each data set and across the entire data set. More appearance of the theme across the data set does not have to mean greater significance of the theme, thus, there is no definitive threshold for the proportion of the data set that must show evidence of the theme to make it qualified as a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.83).

4.4.1 Data coding and theme generation

In terms of data coding and theme generation we followed Braun and Clarke (2006) guide. The six-step guide will analyze the data with an intention to identify patterns that potentially help to answer our research question. The first step was data *familiarization* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87), we had our interviews held in Swedish. The transcribed text was both done in English and Swedish with the help of Word's dictation function. The dictation function takes audio from a microphone and converts it into text. In case of errors, we re-listened to the audio and changed any errors. Moreover, the English audio was compared with the Swedish one for greater accurateness.

The second step *initial code generation* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.88), in this step, we generated a list of ideas through our segments of coding. We did the coding manually where we highlighted and wrote notes in the transcript, we analyzed that we found to be potential patterns. The third step is *theme search* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.89), which includes structuring codes in a systematic manner into themes where we could recognize and analyze the relationship between those two, and the other themes.

The fourth step *theme review* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91), lets us critically review our themes. This stage shaped our themes more specifically and narrowed it down, as some of the themes were too broad. The fifth step *theme defining* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92) is where we define our themes and naming them. We identified the core of each theme and made up a narrative of each theme explaining the data. We tried to keep our themes separate to minimize overlapping, however, they had overlapping elements that were hard to avoid as our research is complex and drivers are dependent on each other. The last step *producing the report* at this stage, we have finished themes that cover the essence of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93). Moreover, we were able to connect the quotes from our respondents to our own analysis and theory.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Researchers must consider ethical issues that might arise during the thesis. Our thesis is qualitative and includes semi-structured interviews with human participants; ethical considerations are especially important in this case since we are working with other people and analyzing their experiences and real-life situations (Saunders et al, 2019, p. 208). We must ensure that the interaction between us and our respondents have an ethical consideration of ethical issues, for example informed consent and confidentiality. Our interviews could lead to our respondents' expressing thoughts or emotions that might reveal sensitive information. Therefore, we constructed interviews respectfully in regard to our participants, so that our data is of high quality for us to analyze, discuss and draw relevant conclusions from respondents answers from an theoretical perspective. As our qualitative study involves semi-structured interviews, spontaneous follow-up questions might occur to an extent. This could create an ethical dilemma (Kallio et al., 2016, p.2962). Therefore, we will carefully examine that the follow up question does not in any way cause harm for the participant before asking the question.

Our semi-structured interviews were audiotaped for the purpose of transcribing, we will inform each participant of this and ask for consent. As we must consider anonymity and confidentiality, each participant did not reveal their name or identity in terms of data collection or further analysis. Before our interviews, we must consider informed consent, to protect each participant's interest and clarify the intention of our research as researchers (Bell & Bryman, 2007, p. 68). We will inform our participants that the interview could be withdrawn any second if they do not want to participate anymore. We will also inform the participants that this research is done with the intention of academic purposes. Moreover, potential quotes will be used to analyze, discuss and present arguments that will help to answer our research question.

We will further inform each participant of the fact that our thesis will be available for the public. We will provide them with information to ensure their safety in terms of their information. As mentioned previously, in terms of ethical consideration we will keep a high level of confidentiality and privacy of their information, such as experiences, emotions, beliefs or opinions of our research area, cancel culture. The audio recordings from interviews will be stored securely, and only held with the intent of transcription to deliver high quality data. The audio recordings will be removed after the thesis is submitted. We as authors have to acknowledge the importance of research transparency. To increase transparency and honesty we will be open in terms of our research methods, data and analysis.

As our thesis might involve names of specific influencers, we inform our respondents that their own opinions and thoughts regarding influencers are only their own opinions and thoughts, not statements.

4.6 Truth criteria

In this section, the truth criteria will be discussed to show that the quality requirements have been fulfilled in this study.

To minimize the likelihood of research biases, there are especially two emphases on the design that research have to consider which are reliability and validity (Saunders et al., 2003, p.156). Furthermore, (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p.31) discuss that it is required that reliability and validity is included in the findings in all scientific and academic fields. According to Saunders

et al., (2003, p.156), reliability refers to how the data collection methods or analyze procedures generate consistent findings.

In the same way that it is important with validity and reliability in quantitative research, it is crucial in qualitative research as well. Even though there are different perspectives to address the quality or rigor depending on the type of quality or rigor, the research must demonstrate "truth value". (Erlingsson &Brysiewicz, 2013, p.97). Since the ontological, epistemological and theoretical assumptions in qualitative research differ from those in quantitative research, it should be judged on its own terms. Thus, in order to evaluate the trustworthiness of a qualitative research it needs its own evaluation criteria. (Yilmaz, 2013, p.120). Furthermore, rigor and validity are the quantitative perspective whereas credibility and trustworthiness are the qualitative perspective (Cope, 2014, p.89). Since the ontological, epistemological and theoretical assumptions differ from them, quantitative research needs to be judged on its own terms. Furthermore, there should be an alternative set of criteria that are based on qualitative concepts instead of validity and reliability in order to judge the trustworthiness of qualitative research which needs its own criteria for evaluation. However, there is some criticism in regard to the truth criteria in the qualitative approach. According to (Cope, 2014, p.89), qualitative research is commonly criticized for its lack of scientific rigor because of that they are "*subjective, anecdotal, subject to researcher bias, and lacks generalizability by producing large quantities of detailed information about a single unique phenomenon or setting*".

Cope (2014) has suggested five criteria of trustworthiness that we will use to evaluate the quality and trustworthiness of the study. These criterias include credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity will be explained below.

In qualitative research, credibility refers to the truth of the data or participants' perspectives and how the researcher interprets and represents them (Cope, 2014, p.89). As we chose to conduct the interviews in Swedish and then translate the answers to English, there is a possibility of translation issues. Thus, to prevent translation issues, we asked the participants to explain and repeat their answers in order to prevent misunderstandings, and to achieve more credibility. Furthermore, the risk of personal bias has to be considered as we have some pre-understandings of the topic which can affect the interpretation of the participants' responses. Hence, we asked the participants to explain in their own words, give examples and describe their feelings in order to reduce the possibility of misinterpreting the information to reach more objectivity.

Dependability in qualitative research pertains to the consistency and stability of the obtained data over similar conditions. Furthermore, the study could research dependability If the findings of the study could be replicated with similar participants in similar conditions. (Cope 2014, p.89). To provide more dependability we have throughout our research we have aimed to provide a detailed understanding of the decisions we made during the research process. However, some specific decisions of the study might affect the replicability of the study as our study is unique and especially as this study is one of the early contributions to the research of cancel culture. Moreover, even though it is possible to conduct a similar study with similar decisions, the interpretation of the empirical study could lead to completely different conclusions in similar future research.

Confirmability refers to the ability of the research to show that the data accurately reflect the participants' responses rather than the researchers' biases or perspectives (Cope, 2014, p.89). As earlier mentioned, when discussing credibility, there is a possibility that there may be a biased view because of translation issues and to personal bias that might have affected the

interpretation of the findings. However, to establish confirmability in our study we focused on interpreting the transcribed data in a precise way which was supported by identifying recurring patterns from the participants' answers. Additionally, we supported the empirical findings with quotations from the interviews which were then based on analysis and interpretations to reach greater transparency.

Transferability regards that the findings can be implemented to other groups or settings (Cope, 2014, p.98). Our goal was not to generalize a population, it was to get a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, thoughts, emotions and perceptions to be able to answer the research question. As we have examined, cancel culture based on a specific sample size that all had some pre knowledge of the subject which makes the empirical findings contextual. However, we have discussed the important role specific factors and culture plays in cancel culture which enables researchers to make judgments of the transferability of the findings.

Authenticity's purpose is to reveal the ability and to the extent the researcher expresses the feelings and emotions of the participants in a faithful manner (Cope, 2014, p.98). In order to ensure authenticity, we have during our interviews asked our participants follow -up questions such as “how did that make you feel”. Additionally, our studies are highly correlated with the feelings of individuals which means that we have frequently asked questions to understand the feelings as well as observing the participants body language, tone and reactions. Thus, this has been done to ensure high authenticity.

5. Empirical findings

In this chapter, empirical findings, we will present the empirical data of our semi-structured interviews through a thematic analysis. Below, we have sections addressing our chosen themes that we discovered through our study. Each section includes a description of the theme and our findings of this study are supported with quotations from our participants' interviews.

5.1 Perception and attitude of influencers

This particular theme made it clear for us that the perception consumers have of influencers could potentially have both positive and negative effects on endorsed brands. The positive side is that through influencer promotions, consumers get inspiration from relatable content, which could lead to an increased interest in the endorsed brand. Based on our respondents, consumers follow influencers they can relate to, trust, and agree with. Moreover, this relatedness, trust and agreement could increase loyalty for endorsed brands. However, our respondents made it clear that if their perception of an influencer is that they are not genuine about their promotions, they can decrease their credibility which could potentially negatively affect the endorsed brands. The question "*What is good and bad with influencer marketing"* gave us interesting answers regarding the respondents first perception of influencer marketing, which could provide a first perspective of their attitude towards influencers and endorsed brands.

> *"I think it's good, you get inspiration for different products and services. But i think it is really bad if an influencer is not genuine with what they say, and say things just for the money, for example if they say that the product is good, even though you might not really think so"*
> ***Respondent V.***

The respondents' perception of influencers varied, moreover, we saw a similarity with inspiration of products and services. However, statements regarding the importance of influencers having to be genuine were repeated through different respondents' answers. This importance of being genuine could spiral down to endorsed brand values compared to the influencer values. This mix up of values and beliefs could potentially harm the genuine factor of promoting a brand.

> *"The downside, could be that influencers are human beings where endorsed brands could mix up them with their own market values. Influencers are individuals of themselves. For example, Margaux Dietz is seen as a marketing tool rather than a private individual with her own opinions and values. Margaux can't always follow and be an ambassador of the endorsed brands values in all situations"*
> **Respondent P.**

As the respondents get inspired, influenced on perception and purchasing behavior, influencers must be genuine in their promotions. If they are not genuine, it could potentially harm the perception of credibility. This followed up with a mismatch of endorsed brand values and influencers values could further harm the authenticity. Our respondents state that for an influencer to maintain trust and authenticity of their followers, they must be genuine and align with values and beliefs of the endorsed brands. However, values and beliefs will be discussed

more in section *5.2 values, beliefs and morality.* Respondent P expresses that Dietz is seen as a marketing tool with her own opinions and values. This could be seen from a subject perspective where Dietz might say a statement some people agree with, while others do not.

As mentioned previously, our respondents expressed concerns regarding how well they perceive an influencer to be credible. There were repeated statements where the respondents expressed that they do not believe all influencers to be trustworthy or to have knowledge to understand the products they are promoting, or the endorsed brand they are promoting. When we asked the question *"Do you think all influencers are credible?"* where we saw similarities in answers. Respondents stated that some influencers do not understand the endorsed brands values or beliefs, which could result in influencers to be seen as unprofessional and their promotions to be manipulative.

> *"I believe that a few influencers understand the product they are marketing. However, in terms of how they promote the product or endorsed brands, I do not believe them to always be credible. When it comes to influencers doing some kind of critical thinking of the product or endorsed brand, I doubt they do proper research for every promotion."*
> ***Respondent P.***

Respondent P expresses concerns regarding the credibility of influencers to promote products or services from an unbiased and knowledgeable perspective. As the respondent is stating the doubt of influencers to do research of the endorsed brand or product for every collaboration, the respondent is indicating that they might not have a deep understanding of the product or service, which can make them less credible of the things they are promoting. Respondent P is clear with the statement that he doubts that they do proper research for each promotion, however, it could be seen from the other way around where companies could choose an influencer due to their niche or specialty, where companies might do proper research and educate influencers on the company and collaboration. However, the thought of influencers not doing proper research could come from a mass overload of collaborations from an influencer that does not go align with the follower's perception of that influencer.

> *"I feel that some influencers are more credible if they promote products, they use themselves. For example, influencers have promoted cosmetic surgery in Turkey, and there is a documentary about cosmetic surgery in Turkey that shows the darker side of those promotions. Influencers might not be satisfied with the surgery but still promotes the product/service. There are a lot of these types of promotions of influencers for a certain group, influencers that have participated in Paradise Hotel. This group does not feel credible due to their type of follower base and amount of followers, and it feels like they are focused on only making money, not if the product/service is right. On the other perspective, someone like Matilda Djerf has more to say since she only promotes product that matches her influencer brand"*
> ***Respondent M.***

The perception of credibility is related to that influencers who promote products they use themselves, are perceived to be more credible. As the respondent's state that there are a few groups of influencers who promote services or products that could be potentially harmful, just to make money decreases the credibility of those promotions. On the other hand, the respondent states that when an influencer promotes products that align with their personal brand, there is a

higher credibility towards the influencer and endorsed brand. It is worth mentioning that the respondents concern is influenced by the documentary *Priset vi betalar* (SVT, 2022) where former participants of Paradise Hotel and influencers express concerns regarding the cosmetic surgery and that they have promoted a service they do not fully agree with.

> *"I think that there are a few influencers that are too greedy and do promotions depending on how much they get paid, even if they do not stand behind the product/service. That is not good if they have a younger follower base that blindly trusts their influencer. I think they have the responsibility of choosing collaborations they believe in and stand behind."*
> ***Respondent J.***

This respondent continues with the discussion of making money, instead of prioritizing credibility. The expression of concern of prioritizing money over credibility is a repetitive pattern from the respondents. Respondent J has a similar argument as respondent M, where credibility is crucial for collaborations to become successful, but some influencers prioritize money instead. As we want a deeper understanding of the perception of influencers, and different kinds of influencers, we continued the interview by asking them what their perception of a *"good"* or *"bad"* influencer is. It is important to understand their perception of a "good" or "bad" influencer since it provides us with insight on how they view different influencers and what factors our respondents think of when they are forming opinions regarding influencers and endorsed brands. We started of asking *"Can you name and give an example of a good influencer?"*

> *"Hmm.. I would say Sandra Lindahl. She feels genuine and authentic. I follow her on both Youtube and instagram. She is not as big as the influencer Bianca Ingrosso, and if I compare those two, Sandra can say what she thinks about and does not care about how she looks. Which for me is genuine and authentic."*
> ***Respondent V.***

> *"Linn Ahlborg, she is a good influencer." I believe that she comes across as a genuine influencer and she has her own clothing brand that she wears everyday, not only to promote them, but because she actually likes her own brand. Her posts are repetitive and me as a follower could easily recognize her content without knowing that she posted it, and that is because she is always real and genuine in her posts."*
> ***Respondent P.***

> *" I would say Markus Brown. Previously, I have followed and unfollowed many influencers, and the ones I still follow are the ones I believe are genuinely authentic and I like as a person. To be authentic and genuine means a lot to me, since I don't want to follow someone who is fake or involved in a scandal. I also would say to an influencer called Kenza, the reason I follow her is not* ***because*** *of her promotions, since they are always make-up related, but more how she is* ***as*** *a person, and she seems genuine to me."*
> ***Respondent J.***

The respondents argue that a good influencer must be genuine, transparent and authentic. The respondents are repetitive with the argument that genuineness comes from influencers who use

their own products, speak their mind and are transparent. For example, Sandra Lindahl is perceived as genuine since she is a forward person who speaks her mind, while Linn Ahlborg is perceived to be genuine since she markets her own products and uses them herselves on a daily basis. Moreover, Markus Brown is seen as a genuine and trustworthy influencer since he is honest. These arguments and statements gave us a perception of what factors the respondents prioritize when they choose to like an influencer. To get an understanding on which factors they consider when they think of an bad influencer, we continued to ask the question *"Can you name and give an example of an bad influencer?"*

> *"An influencer, who in my opinion is bad due to expressing herself a bit clumsily, is Hanna Friberg. It has to do with conversations that involve food and such where she previously has encouraged her followers to eat little less. But I think anyone can express themselves a bit weird sometimes, however, I think with Hanna it has happened repeatedly."*
> ***Respondent V.***

> *"I would say Pontus Ramusson, I percieve him to be a liar, bad influencer, very bad at communicating in his posts, he also posts inappropriate content and can't stand for what he posts. Myself and many others have a very negative image of him due to this. I avoid him and actively choose to not follow him because of these bad and inappropriate behaviors."*
> ***Respondent P.***

> *"Margaux Dietz, I would never follow her because she does many dumb things, repeatedly. Margaux has a lot of controversies behind her and I believe that her values and the way she wants others to perceive her is not thought-out. I do not want to follow an influencer who posts content without thinking twice before posting it, especially if you have such a large follower base. You have to take some kind of responsibility for what you post since you influence a lot of individuals. She has released controversial children's books and partied with a politician Ebba Busch Tor who I completely disagree with. I've also heard that she seems nice on social media, but is not nice in real life".*
> ***Respondent M.***

> *"Alice Stenlöf once lied about her day, where she claimed that she woke up super early, at 5am to exercise when it was not true. This created some kind of skewed perception of her reality for her followers. I think that she tried to portray some false reality. But another example that is more serious than Alice is Andrew Tate who expresses himself in both sexist and racist ways."*
> ***Respondent A.***

Our respondents perceive a bad influencer to be inappropriate, liar, and not transparent. Our respondents continue to argue for a bad influencer to be inconsistent with their values. This perception of bad influencers could damage their or endorsed brands reputations or as we previously discussed, credibility towards them and endorsed brands. This could lead to followers unfollowing them, and if they appear in a scandal, it could potentially lead to canceling them due to this negative perception. We continued to ask our respondents *"Have you ever had a bad experience of an influencer that made you change your perception of them?"* to see if a changed perception occurred, and whether it was positive or negative.

> *"I must say Margaux Dietz. Her situation changed my perception of her negatively. That time when she posted a video on her youtube of a man that obviously was not feeling well and her child poked on the man. Her and her team previewed the video so many times and still chose to post it on youtube for several hundreds thousands of followers to watch. Previously, I felt that Margaux was genuine, but that action made me lose it for her."*
> ***Respondant V.***

> *"It would say Margaux Dietz. I used to have a really good image of Margaux before, she felt stable. But after that Youtube video i got a totally different image of her. She is supposed to act like an adult with a family and children, so you would think that she knows how to be responsible. And that youtube video made me reconsider my image of her, that she is not the things i thought before. So yes, my perception changed a lot. Through that action she showed immature behavior. "Sad."*
> ***Respondant P.***

> ***"****Kanye West, I like him and his music, however he has said a lot of controversial stuff. Lots of racist and anti-sematic things that made me change my perception of him."*
> ***Respondant M.***

The negatively changed perception could lead to consequences for the influencer but also endorsed brands. In the case of Margaux Dietz, we saw similarities from respondents' answers that their perception changed negatively due to her decision to publish that youtube video. This negative perception would at least do potentially damage to her personal image or brand, but additionally to brands that are associated with her. Kanye West controversial statements could damage his reputation, but the endorsed brands could face criticism if they collaborate with him.

5.2 Values, beliefs and morality

The second theme of our findings are values, beliefs and morality due to our respondents repeatedly addressing them as important factors to consider regarding followers' perception of influencer and endorsed brands, but also decision to support influencers and endorsed brands. Cancel culture could occur when influencers or endorsed companies do not align with their followers or consumers values, or somehow violate their moral standards.
Through this section we wanted to highlight the outcome if an influencer or endorsed brand contradicts values, beliefs or morals and if, how it leads to cancellation of influencers or endorsed brands. We first started off by asking *"Do you consider that influencers' own values should reflect the endorsed brands?"*

> *"Yes, I believe that their values should match. For example, Shein uses child labor and poor working conditions, so let's say that Bianca Ingrosso would collaborate with Shein, it would make no sense since she does not stand for anything that Shein does. It is extremely important that those kinds of values are matched and that influencers are aware of which companies are better, or which companies are worse."*
> ***Respondent V.***

"Yes, I think it's important. For example, a follower follows an influencer for a specific reason. If they are fashion orientated, a follower follows them for their style. Therefore, it becomes natural that the influencers values should match the endorsed brand to satisfy and reassure the follower. This increases the credibility of the collaboration."
Respondent P.

These two quotes put together shows that values are important, especially that the values should make sense for the followers and consumers. If an influencer collaborates with a company that does not make sense from this perspective of values, it could confuse the follower and decrease the authenticity of the influencer or endorsed brand. Influencers and endorsed brands should consider values, beliefs and morality to not cross a line that could potentially damage their reputation among their followers or consumers. Before jumping into the depth of cancel culture, we wanted to know their perception of it and which factors trigger them to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand by asking *"What do you know about cancel culture and how should you describe it? What do you think about it?"*

"I think it's an unnecessary thing. I think that people should have more compassion, everyone can make mistakes. Just because one person makes one mistake, I do not think everyone should turn against that person. And that is what canceling culture is, many people going against one person. No, I do not support it and I do not believe it's a good method."
Respondent V.

"In my opinion, cancel culture comes from a good democratic perspective. For me, it is essential that people feel the right and freedom to distance themselves from influencer or endorsed brands. I think cancel culture has always been here, individuals have had the right and freedom to express themselves, but now it's acquired a term: cancel culture. The term is not new, it just has a bigger new meaning. I think it should exist, it is crazy if it did not exist."
Respondent P.

"I believe that there are different levels of cancel culture. I think it depends on how canceled an influencer is. I think it depends on what they have done and if they continue to do bad things, they are more likely to actually become canceled. For example, if someone has committed a crime or said something sexist, anti semitic, homophobic or racist then it's something many people can't support from a moral perspective and they will become canceled."
Respondent M.

The respondents had different perceptions of cancel culture and whether it's good or bad. It's fair to say that the varying opinions of cancel culture describes the complexity of it. Some may think that it's necessary and a way for individuals to speak their opinions, others think it's unfair to target people for their mistakes. As we believe that values, beliefs and morality are factors that significantly impact if cancel culture is a potential outcome, we want to dive deeper into the depths of cancel culture to understand which factors affect what and how.

5.2.1 Depth of cancel culture

Previously, we have seen that our respondents believe that the canceling happens in different levels and depends on what the influencer or endorsed brand has done. In this section, we will cover the depths of cancel culture and try to extend the complex thinking of values, beliefs and morality from the consumer perspective. We start off this section by asking *"can you give us an example of a situation where you would actively avoid a company?"*

> *"I do not buy anything fast-fashion anymore. From two perspectives, my own wallet but also quality and working conditions. If I found out anything negative about a company, for example poor working conditions, I would be affected and not shop there anymore due to my own values."*
> ***Respondent V.***

This quote from respondent V shows that they are aware of their own values, and if a brand would do something that crosses the line of their values, respondent V would not support them anymore. We continue deep into the feelings of betrayal, factors that might trigger cancel to occur by asking *"If an influencer did something that felt like a betrayal, would you forgive them?"*

> *"It depends on what has been done. If influencers expressed political statements that I do not align with, I would not forgive them. But from another perspective, if Alex and Sigge would collaborate with a company, for example casino advertisements, which I do not align with, I would not feel like it is a betrayal due to the long relation I have with them. I have followed them for so long and my general idea of them is good. I think it has to be something big and political for me to cancel someone, but also my general idea of them."*
> ***Respondent M.***

> *"I believe it depends on a lot of things, i think we all have boundaries that should never be crossed such as rape or murder. Those cases could never be forgiven. I believe that there is a gray area on what is acceptable or not and we as individuals evaluate each situation or action done by influencers or endorsed brands, individually."*
> ***Respondent J.***

> *"I think it all depends on what the influencer or endorsed brand has done. An example is Paolo Roberto, I would never forgive the actions he did and an aftermath is that I wouldn't support the endorsed brands anymore if they continued to work with him. But another example, Hanna Friberg addresses herself a bit clumsily sometimes and said that if you cut apple slices it will make you feel less hungry. I would not care about that statement, however with Paolo Roberto he crossed clear boundaries."*
> ***Respondent V.***

The depth of cancel culture lies in many different levels of complex psychology of individual and group behavior. Our respondents state similarities that it depends on what the influencer or endorsed brand has done. The complexity lies in that everyone has their own boundaries and lines that should not be crossed. However, we see a similarity in morals, an action that is normally perceived morally wrong by society, is an action that could trigger an canceling of influencer or endorsed brand.

5.3 Identity

Through the interviews it was evident that the extent the participants felt that they identified with influencers and brands determined how influenced they were by them. If the participant felt like they could relate and identify to an influencer they were more likely to listen to that influencer and buy the products, they promoted. However, despite the differences, most of the respondents stated that they did not believe that they are the right target group if their identities do not match. Based on the interviews it is important for the participants to be able to identify with an influencer or brand to get influenced and buy the products promoted or offered.

The answers varied in terms of what were the main important factors that made the respondents feel like they identify or not identify with an influencer. However, similarity of values, lifestyle, interest and personality was repeatedly mentioned as main factors affecting the level of identification.

> *"I relate to Jenna because it feels like we have the same view, she is down to earth, had a ordinary job, we both like working out and I can personally relate to her"*
> ***Respondent V***

> *"If an influencer does not align with my personal values, style and the way they act. For example, I do not feel like I have so much in common with an influencer that has participated in the reality show Paradise Hotel, even though I watch the program because I feel like we have different lifestyles and perhaps values and do not thrive to be like that person. In contrast to the influencers I have followed for a long time as their lifestyles are more similar to mine and seem cozy and fun."*
> ***Respondent M***

> *"If they have decent opinions, have something to contribute with that is interesting, funny or educational, I also identify very much with influencers that have similar interests and lifestyles as me such as sport"*
> ***Respondent A***

> *"Matilda Djerf, I relate to her a lot as she is Swedish, is inclusive in her content and own brand which I think is good."*
> ***Respondent M***

> *"He have the same interest as me and are very calm, genuine and transparent"*
> ***Respondent J***

> *"Even Though we have very different personalities and completely different lives, I still relate to him a lot as he has given good running advice which I relate to very much. "*
> ***Respondent P***

The respondents answered regarding the reasons for following or not following varied but the similarity of lifestyle and interests as well of the match of values was repeatedly mentioned as an important factor. Furthermore, three of the respondents mentioned that they did not identify themselves with paradise hotel participants, especially due to lifestyle and values as they seemed fake and often have what they perceived as *"bad values".*

Most of the participants had some idea of the concept of *"brand identity"* and *"influencer identity".* The values and what they stand for define the perception and acceptance of the brand, and taking distance from things they do not want to be associated or identified with further strengthens their identity and values. When asking the question *"Are you aware of the concept of brand Identity?"* and *"How would you describe it?".*

> *"It depends on what one values and wants to be identified with. If a company's target group is younger people, they may want to be identified as a modern company and a more classic brand may not want to use influencers that do not match them. For example, a football brand expressed that they did not want to be seen or be sponsored in Qatar V, in that way they make a statement that conveys that they do not want to be identified due to their attitude towards feminisms etc."*
> ***Respondent A***

> "I believe that SAS works strongly with their identity. I have a positive perception of their last campaign called we are travelers. I like how they execute their services and has created a strong scandinavian identity. Regardless if you are from scandinavia our not, during the flight with SAS you will experience scandinavia in the cabin. They offer passengers scandinavian products, everything from Danish beer to Swedish whiskey. From this perspective I think that SAS identity is strong and clear."
> ***Respondent P***

> *"Yes, I am somewhat aware, but for example Skims have an identity who is very inclusive with different body types, some models are skinnier and some bigger, they nisch towards body types. Or for example Hookah, that identification with runners. "*
> ***Respondent V***

> *"Yes, a little, maybe if they identify themselves as a sport brand, or luxurious for example,"*
> ***Respondent J***

Even though the respondents described and perceived brand identity in different ways, we can recognize a pattern that values and the type of brand such as sport, luxurious or fashion affect the way the identity of the brand is viewed. The respondents' knowledge of brand identity varied, they generally knew more about brand identity than influencer identity, respondent P

gave a very clear example where he could clearly see how SAS are perceived and how they want to be identified. However, when asking *"are you aware of influencer identities?"* and *"how would you describe it?".* The answers were shorter, and some participants had a harder time explaining it.

> *"They are also private persons, so of course they have their own identity. However, if I should differentiate an influencer in a way that she or he has an identity, it is a grey area as they are too similar sometimes. "*
> ***Respondent P***

> *"For me, it feels like they just are themselves, I do not know if they have any strategy. I more feel like they do collaborations with those they like, and self want to be associated with or use rather than a strategy they use."*
> ***Respondent M***

> *"I think the main thing is who they want to reach and their values" It may be easier for an influencer to take a distance to things, and they might gain new followers. For example, if an influencer would publicly take distance or boycott a brand that would never collaborate with from the beginning. it would not be as strong a statement as if an influencer that actually collaborated with that brand would do this. Because in that case they really make a strong statement as they collaborate and get an income from that brand."*
> ***Respondent A***

> *"Nothing I really think about but it depends a bit, for example Linda Marie stands for that everybody is different and is very inclusive while Lovisa Worge's identity is more black and white, perfectionist etc."*
> ***Respondent V***

It is evident that the identity of influencers is mainly perceived as who they are as a person and what they stand for. Most of the respondents expressed that the things they are interested in, values and what they want to associate with is due to who the influencers are as a person. However, respondent P indicates that the line between the identity of an influencer and the private person is blurry and can be hard to differentiate. The perceived identity of an influencer seems to affect the credibility of that influencer depending on the situation as respondent A stated.

When asking *"what are your attitude towards influencers and brands that do not have a similar identity as you?"* The attitude towards influencers or brands that the respondents felt like they did not identify themselves with was not always negative; rather it was a question of being the wrong target group or having different lifestyles or interests.

> *"It is all about preferences, if it is something that does not match my preferences, I would not follow the influencer or buy the brands products but I do not have larger opinions about it"*
> ***Respondent J***

> *"It is not that I would not buy their products or services, I would probably try them. Everyone may probably buy something that do not feel like*

"themselves" which are natural, but I do often not think about and do not see it as a problem"
Respondent P

"I try to be more aware of everything I buy, especially this past year. If I do not do something that I like 100%, I will not buy it."
Respondent V

Most respondents implies that if they do not identify with a brand or influencer the attitude would not be negative as it was just a mis-match between the brand and person's preferences, lifestyle. However, many of the respondents have during the interviews expressed that brands such as Shein may be their target group but as the personal values are different, especially working conditions and sustainability it will create a negative attitude.

"Then I feel like I am probably not their target group, I buy products that I like and perhaps not that much on their values. But I am probably Shein's target group but I will not buy from them and perceive them negatively as they have poor working conditions and bad values in how they treat their workers and how they produce their clothes. So Shein is a brand I actively distance myself from"
Respondent M

So, as this quote combined with what the respondents have expressed during the interview implies that if the identity differs in terms of a person's interests or preferences it will not necessarily create a negative attitude towards the brand or influencer. However, if it is a mis-match between people's personal values and beliefs, it will most likely have a greater negative impact on brands and influencers.

The question *"do you think brands and influencers need to have similar identities or traits?"* all the answers from the respondents highlight the importance of similar identities.

"I think it helps very much, for example it feels like Bianca Ingrosso and Gina Tricot do not match and then I think "why do they have her as a model, not only due to the debate, but also because of her age and style".
Respondent M

"I believe they need to have similar identities and traits. If one does not understand the product, you will not be able to sell it, I would not be a perfect marketer for a car brand as I do not have a driver license". So I think it is important with similar identities and values for collaborations to succeed"
Respondent P

"Yes, It should go hand in hand, it should not feel like a complete opposite that goes against each other. What the organization stands for should the ones who engages with them stand for as well, otherwise it is like the company pay someone that do not stand for the same things, which is very strange."
Respondent A

Based on these quotes, the respondents' thoughts and feelings it is a strong need for brands and influencers identities to match when collaborating. The perception of the influencer will impact

the perception of the brand and the other way around. If the two parties do not align it can lead to changing attitudes and less credibility.

Overall, the findings implies that the more one identifies themselves with an influencer or a company, the more likely it is that the person trusts and gets impacted by them. These findings indicate that the perception of an influencer or a brand are very much correlated to their own identity. Furthermore, the lifestyle, interests, values and similar personalities have a huge impact if the person feels like they identify with the influencer or brand. The findings also show that the main reason that the respondents have a bad attitude towards an influencer or brand they do not identify with was due to misalignment of personal values. Moreover, there is a strong need for brands to collaborate with influencers that have similar identification and traits as it will have a huge impact on how the brand is perceived.

5.4 Social pressure and norms

Another theme we identified during the interviews was the impact social pressures and norms have on cancel culture. All the respondents implied that the influence of others is a main characteristic of the cancel culture phenomenon. The behavior to cancel or perception of a canceled influencer or brand was very related with people influencing each other and creating a picture based on others' opinions. However, some of the respondents felt like they got affected by group pressure, what is considered as socially acceptable and what others will think about oneself while others did not feel that way.

> "One can describe it as a group of people going against a person or a brand which create buzz on social media in which everyone should have on opinion on what happened regardless of if they think it is ridiculous, stand behind it or if they believe that person should never be able to express themselves again"
> ***Respondent A***

> "On social media it becomes like a mob that goes against someone and maybe encourages people to go against a specific company or person". The thought behind it is really that a company or person should take responsibility for what they have done that is perceived as wrong".
> ***Respondent J***

These two quotes describe what they know about cancel culture on social media and both respondent A and J talk about how it all comes down to how people influence other people to cancel a person or a brand. Also, through the interviews it is clear that every respondent repeatedly indicates that what drives one to cancel people is based on that people share and post their opinions which leads to a group of people canceling someone.

As we wanted to get deeper into what makes people change their attitude or perception of an influencer we asked *"have you ever had a bad experience with an influencer that made you change your attitude towards them?*" As mentioned previously M talked about that she likes Kanye West and his music but that he has done anti-sematic and racist things that changed the picture of it and she also mentioned that she believes that she thinks that very many people

share her thoughts. However, as we wanted to get a further understanding of her emotions and feelings in this subject a we asked a follow up question "how did you feel when you changed your perception?"

> *"This made me feel like I did not want to follow him or listen to him due to his actions, but one kinda have to do it as he is a bad person"*
> ***Respondent M***

From this answer it is clear that respondent M feels like it is against the social norm to support him and we asked a follow up question "what do you mean with that you must?" to get further insights of what she feels about others' opinions.

> *"I think it can create a lot of debates with friends if I were to defend Kanye West and say that I will continue to listen to his music and support him. Because then I would have to be able to defend him and express that he should not be canceled. Also, I believe he have done wrong as well so I would not be able to defend him"*
> ***Respondent M***

From what respondent M have said it is evident that despite the fact that she likes Kanye and would like to listen to his music she chooses not to as it is very contradictory to her own values and also what the general public thinks. As we want to get to know how much other people affect the behavior to cancel we asked " Have you ever felt affected by other opinions regarding canceled influencers for brands?" The answers varied but most of the respondents expressed that they have been influenced by what others believe.

> *"Yes, I think that everyone thinks is what other posts or talk about, for example there was a debate regarding a collaboration with Gina Tricot and Bianca Ingrosso about body positivity, which I would not even think about if others did not bring it up and then oneself thinks that it is reasonable"*
> ***Respondent M***

> *"Yes I believe one gets more affected than one thinks, one maybe thinks that they are not affected by it and what others think but when a lot of people share their opinions and it becomes a buzz it may impact that I think the same. When you see people write about it over and over again you may unconsciously be affected by it and agree and do not do research on your own. On social media one may be affected more uncounsly but I think I get even more affected if it comes from my friends as I respect their opinions".*
> ***Respondent A***

> *"It is difficult as it is easy to fully believe what other people with similar values and opinions as oneself without reflecting about it oneself. So, it has of course happened but I usually try to reflect about it by myself as well. So, it is hard to not be affected by others but I think it is important to reflect on your own as well".*
> ***Respondent J***

From these quotes it is evident that the respondents get influenced by others at least to some extent and that how affected one might be depends on where the information comes from if it

is on social media or from people you know. However, Respondent J's answers really differed from Respondent M, J and A.

> *No, I would not say so. I do not share the same perspective as others when it comes to others, many people like them and look up to them. As earlier mentioned I do not see them as a occupational group so my opinions of them, if they are positive or negative have been affected by what other thinks about them"*
> ***Respondent P***

Respondent P argues that he is not influenced at all by others. However, this answer is somewhat contradictory to other things he said during the interview such as discussing what he considers morally wrong and right, the influence of politics and his personal values. Furthermore, all of these things are influenced by other people and for an influencer or a brand to be canceled is formed by what others think and posts that then create one 's perception. Moreover, the people he hangs out with, influencers he follows and what he hears from others will be the reason for him hearing about an influencer or brand being canceled, thus others' opinions affect oneself even though it might be unconscious. We also wanted to dive deeper into the impact of others by asking "Can you give an example of when you will avoid a brand?" and the follow up question "Is it any exception where you do not choose to avoid a brand that other people do?".

> *"H&M and Zara are brands that I perceive negatively from the fast fashion perspective, but everyone uses it and promotes their product so even though I know that they have poor working conditions and may not be very sustainable which I do not stand for, I still buy their products. I think that one affects more by the group thinking, if everyone would avoid Zara together and express that they are a bad brand with poor values, then it would be easier to not buy their products. As many people my age buy their clothes and like these brands it is kind of social acceptable and then it feels better to buy their product. However, I see a lot of negative content about Shein on social media and then I feel that I can actively distance myself from them as so many other people do that"*
> ***Respondent M***

> *"Group pressure is what affects me the most if I avoid a brand or not, if everyone distances themselves from it, it is difficult for me to justify why I use those products. If a influencer or brand are very negatively associated and I support them or use the product, people may believe I do not have good values"*
> ***Respondent M***

These two quotes from respondent M conclude that she is very affected by the group pressure and what others will think of her if she goes against what is seen as socially acceptable. Respondent A argues that he does not avoid a brand just because of others. However, we asked a follow question "so other opinions do not affect you?" in which he answered a bit differently

> *"It depends, it can be a difference if it is said on social media or within my friend group. If my whole friend group completely boycott a brand, I may feel*

somewhat ashamed and then I may be affected more without thinking so much about it"
Respondent A

Even Though A stated first that he creates his own opinion he then discusses similar things as respondent M and there is a strong connection that other people's opinions have an important role in shaping one's attitude and opinion. Furthermore, some said that they were not influenced but it is clear that every respondent is influenced by others to some extent. Moreover, group pressure and social norms are a common theme in all the interviews in which some people are affected more than others.

5.5 Company responsibility

The last identified theme is the question of responsibility. We especially wanted to explore in what way companies are affected by canceled culture in relation to influencer marketing. To dig deeper in this, we started to ask the question "How would (if) your feelings and perceptions of a brand change if they collaborate with an influencer that does something you perceive as "bad " or "ethical/morally wrong"?.

"It depends on when it happens, if a brand collaborates with an influencer that has not done something similar before, it is hard to affect them and in that case, they should look over if they should continue the collaboration or not. But it is hard to take a stand before it happens, and brands can sometimes be criticized for collaborating with that influencer but I do not believe they deserve it when it has happened before the collaboration. They cannot control what a person does. "
Respondent A

"If an influencer will do something that I perceive as very bad, there are some gray areas as well but if it was very extreme I would not support that brand anymore".
Respondent J

The other respondents also discussed the responsibility and gave different answers, but we saw similarities in what respondents J and A said when we later on asked if "brands are responsible for their endorsed influencer on social media?"

"No, they do not, you cannot control an employee on a Saturday night for example. But I believe they should be prepared to take responsibility if something happens. They have to understand that they are dealing with a private person, if it has an impact on their service or product, they then should consider taking a standpoint on the problem and look over the responsibility. "
Respondent P

"They have some responsibilities, I believe they have to stand a bit for similar things, like human rights. They have a big responsibility to keep track of who they choose to collaborate with".
Respondent V

> *"Yes, I do. I believe they have responsibilities if an endorsed influencer act in a bad way multiple times or has done such things before the collaboration. But if an influencer from nowhere start to act in a certain way, the brand may not hold the responsibility"* ***Respondent M***

Both respondent V and M argue that brands are responsible for their endorsed influencer whereas respondent P do not share the same view. However, all the respondents describe that the responsibility differs depending on when the perceived misbehavior happened. Both Respondent J and A also discuss that brands have more responsibility before they start the collaboration. They further discuss that the time of the scandal affected if they could forgive the brand or not. Moreover, we recognize that the respondents think that if the brand knew about it since before they have more responsibility and if it has not happened before, they held less responsibility. In order to get a further understanding of how brands should navigate the complexity of influencer marketing in a time where the risk of being canceled are great, the next question was *"how do you think a brands response of a canceled influencer affects your attitude/feeling against the endorsed brand?" "*

> *"It depends on what the influencer have done, I do not think that they have to end the collaboration if the influencer by accident expresses themself in a clumsy way, but I think that they should end the collaboration if the influencer have done something "huge" as the brand then risks being canceled as well. For example, an "huge" thing can be like Paolo Roberto when he committed sexual assault." If for example Paulins collaborated with him and did not end it when this came out, I would never buy their products.*"
> ***Respondent V***

> "It determines a lot, from the moral and ethical perspective, the brand should think of how they respond to that canceled influencer."
> ***Respondent P***

> *It matters very much because an influencer that an influencer gets canceled for something that is perceived as unacceptable or very wrong by the general public and has gotten a lot of attention and the brand chooses to still collaborate or not distance themselves from that person. Then I would probably get a negative attitude towards that brand because then I associate the brand with the behavior of the influencer"*
> ***Respondent M***

These quotes combined with the other respondents clearly show that the response of a brand has a huge impact on how the endorsed brand will be perceived. Furthermore, the reason that the influencer was canceled has a significant impact on the importance of brand response. It seems to be a pattern that it is very important that a brand take distance and end the collaboration if it is something that the general public perceive as ethical or morally wrong. Furthermore, we wanted to extend the previous statements by asking " how do you think that a brand should act if an endorsed influencer gets canceled?"

> *"Take responsibility, and the company should think how this affects and reflects us as a brand, and what it will stand for us in PR. I think that is the most important question. What I would like to see is the brands in that case state that they do not stand for the influencers behavior in question and do*

not respect it. That they do not perceive it as a positive thing and actively take distance, which in that case would be a natural reaction."
Respondent P

"I do not think there's a template that brands can always use. In some cases, the brand may end the collaboration. In other cases, they may continue the collaboration and go out with a public statement to do it a little better at least. Something that really is appreciated by people is honesty, people do not want to be lied for so one appreciates honesty and responsibility. If brands do that and are open and transparent it usually works."
Respondant J

We can see that it is difficult for brands to know how to act in these kinds of scenarios. The answers from the respondents were somewhat different but the brand should take responsibility in some way. All the respondents express that some things made by an influencer are so unacceptable that brands must end the collaboration but that it completely depends on the situation. Furthermore, respondent J expresses that it is important that the brands should think about how it affects them and what they stand for which Respondent A also discusses. Respondent A answer was similar whereas he highlighted the importance for brands to look over their moral standpoints. Moreover, how the brand response to a canceled influencer will have a huge impact on how the brand will be perceived. In most cases, brands can protect their reputation by clearly showing that they do not support the behavior and end the collaboration. However, the result emphasizes the complexity of influencer marketing and that there is no "right" way for brands to act in these situations.

6. Analysis

Throughout Chapter 6, we will link the theoretical and conceptual framework to our empirical findings from Chapter 5. Firstly, we will analyze the congruence between individuals, influencers, and endorsed brands. The desire for group belonging will be analyzed from a social identity perspective, as well as how self-concept and identification influence the relation to each other of self-congruity and social identity. Secondly, we will examine potential triggers of cancel culture from self-congruity theory, social identity theory, and theory of planned behavior to see how subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and attitude later will form the intended behavior to cancel. Lastly, we will analyze how self-congruity, social identity, and TPB interplay together and which drivers influence and increase the performance of actual behavior towards canceling an influencer or endorsed brand.

6.1 Congruence between influencer and follower

Based on the findings, it is evident that the extent the participants' self-concept matches their perception of a brand and influencer have a significant impact on the positive or negative perceptions and attitudes. According to self-congruity theory, people compare their self-concept with their perception of a brand or influencer image (Ma, 2020, p.360). In section 5.3 the participants discussed what made them feel like they identified with an influencer. The traits, beliefs, values and characteristics the participants think is true about themselves determined the level of identification with an influencer or brand. For example, respondent V said that there was a high level of relatedness to Jenna on a personal level due to similar beliefs, values, interests and lifestyle. The perception of respondent V identity matches Jenna, which creates a positive attitude towards her. Furthermore, when the respondents described an influencer they feel like they identify and relate to, we saw similarities in which their self-concept matches the influencer. If a respondent has a high level of self-congruity based on, for example, matched identities, a higher level of congruence happens between them. This high congruence highly affects respondents' attitudes and perceptions of influencers (Sirgy, 1982, p.198).

On the other hand, we found similarities that the attitude did not necessarily need to be negative if the identities did not match completely, or even at all. Nearly all of the respondents discussed that a lower identification did not necessarily shape a negative attitude, rather they felt that they simply were not the right target group. For Example, in section 5.3 respondent P expressed that despite the fact their personalities differ, and their lifestyles are not matching, there was some kind of relatedness as they shared one similar interest which is running. Respondent J had a very good attitude towards Kenza even though they do not share the same characteristics at all, instead he followed her simply because he considered *her as a genuine* person. Nevertheless, the word genuine, was mentioned frequently and seemed to be an important characteristic of an influencer for all the participants. According to Cambridge dictionary (Cambridge dictionary, 2023) genuineness can be defined as *"the quality of being sincere and honest and able to be trusted"*. On the other hand, genuineness is very subjective so even though they all value genuineness, the perception of a genuine person may not mean the same to everyone.

As earlier mentioned, attitudes are based on one's personal beliefs and values as well as the surrounding environment (Holland et al., 2012, p.356). Furthermore, the beliefs one holds can include oneself, others or the world around us which construct the reality or what we believe is the reality (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). For example, respondent M expressed that one of the reasons there was a negative attitude towards Margaux Dietz even before the scandal was due to the fact that she is friends with Ebba Busch Thor who is leader for Krist Demokraterna, which she does not agree with. In relation to the iceberg model, the beliefs, in this case the set of beliefs that shape the political ideology do not match, and as these beliefs construct the values, which guides what she think is "wrong" or "right" do not align, respondent M perceive it as wrong to be friends with Bush Thor which creates a negative attitude towards Dietz. Furthermore, if the participants have an positive or negative attitude towards an influencer differ as these beliefs are based on past-experiences, social norms and opinions of others (Cocker et al., 2021), As norms, beliefs, values all are affected by culture, what is socially acceptable, social groups and the surrounding environment in general, the participants shared multiple beliefs and values as they are from the same country, close in age, and share norms. Moreover, even though the participants attitude necessarily did not have to be negative if their self-concept did not match the influencer or brand, that was mainly the case when it comes down to the part of self-concept that concerns individual traits, hobbies, lifestyles and preferences but when it came down to great differences between beliefs and values, the possibility of a negative attitude was greater.

It was recognized that the more the brand or influencer reflects the participants' self, the stronger the personal connection will be (Kressman, 2006, p.957). Furthermore, there seemed to be a pattern that the stronger the relationship and personal connection the person has with a brand or influencer, the more forgiving and accepting the person was. Respondent A expressed that it would have to be something very extreme for respondent A to stop supporting them as he felt like he had a personal relationship with them and knew them as a person. On the other hand, we saw a pattern that personal values and beliefs, especially what the individuals perceive as "wrong" and "right", most likely created a negative attitude even though they felt like they identified themselves with them on several other aspects.

As earlier mentioned, people engage in moral reasoning to create justifications for their own actions while interpreting and evaluating the misbehavior committed by others (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.116). Furthermore, it was evident that the participants went through this process and that it differed depending on severity of the transgression and relationship with an influencer. If the behavior of the influencer contradicts the individual's beliefs and values too much they were less inclined to justify or forgive the behavior. As mentioned earlier, cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals are confronted with facts that contradict their values, beliefs and ideas, where they will try to find ways to reduce this comfort (Festinger 1957, cited in Yahaya & Sukmayadi, 2020, p.482).

We saw that some try to solve the dissonance by stop supporting the influencer such as respondent M when she stopped supporting Kanye West, or respondent V that stopped supporting Margaux Dietz when she got canceled. On the other hand, in some cases the dissonance may be solved by moral reasoning in terms of finding ways to justify the influencers behavior. For example, both respondent M and A discussed that they feel like they have a long and personal relationship with Alex and Sigge in which they must do something very "extreme" in order for them to cancel them. Even though respondent M does not support casino advertisements, the respondent would still support Alex Sigge if they would collaborate with such a company. Additionally, when Alex got criticism for expressing himself in a "clumsily"

way, respondent A justified his behavior with the explanation that he did not mean what he said and that he is not like that as a person. Thus, instead of solving the dissonance by stopping supporting the influencer, the dissonance is reduced by justifying their behavior. However, there is a possibility that the feeling of strong identification may lead to cognitive bias which enables them to resist the information that goes against their values and beliefs (Wang & Kim 2019, p.116). Hence, it is a great chance that the participants engage in moral rationalization when there is a high identification where they try to overlook the transgression and justify their support for the public figures' transgression. However, even though one may have a strong relationship or identification with an influencer, it can still lead to that they cancel them if the transgression contradicts the participants and values too much. (Wang & Kim, 2019, p.116).

The need for congruence between a person and brand or influencer is crucial but the congruence between a brand and influencer is also of great importance in relation to canceling culture. Based on the findings, a brand risks being canceled if they collaborate with a canceled influencer. All the respondents said that brands cannot completely be responsible for the endorsed influencers actions but that they are responsible to a certain extent. If an influencer gets canceled the negative attitude can transfer to the brand in which they risk being canceled. If the brand does not take responsibility or end the collaboration with them, they can be guilty by association (Cocker et al., 2021) and how people perceive the brand can change as the respondents may feel like they identify less with them as they will assume that the brand supports this behavior. The type of transgression the influencer made or the reason why they got canceled also influence their attitude towards the endorsed brands. They expressed that if they collaborated with someone that has done something “bad” or unacceptable they might boycott the brand if they were not to end the collaboration. However, what is considered as extreme or unacceptable are dependent on the social environment and the self-concept which makes it complex due to the complexity of subjectivity. In some cases, it was more objective such as influencers that are convicted criminals such as rape and murder. On the other hand, the respondents' behavior to cancel was very subjective and differed due to their own views and influence. Moreover, what is unacceptable and morally wrong for some might not be to others, highlighting the complexity of canceling culture. The respondents are very affected by other people's opinions, especially within their friend groups or people they like or look up to.

The behavior to cancel, or the feeling of a brand or influencer deserves to be canceled was highly dependent on the nature of the perceived transgression or scandal. In some cases, the participants would be more likely to want or feel pressured to cancel a brand or influencer and in others they are more likely to forgive or not care about the transgression. All the participants were least tolerant towards what they perceive as racist, sexism, unsustainable, body shaming and antisemitic. Furthermore, from the findings it was evident that these violations hold underlying beliefs and values and when they go against each other, the likelihood of the intent or behavior to cancel are greater. If someone acts in a way the participants perceive as racist, it goes against their beliefs of that everyone should be treated equally and in a similar way the belief that everyone has the right to their own religion makes antisemitic perceived as wrong. The belief that everyone should care about creating a better world will lead to a negative attitude of influencers and brands that act in a way that they perceive as unsustainable. Furthermore, if one commits an action that is perceived as sexism or shaming someone due to their body, it goes against the beliefs of gender equality and to treat everyone with respect regardless of gender or how one looks.

6.2 the desire of belongingness

The social groups one belongs to and seek acceptance for will form one's values and beliefs that affect the intention to cancel a brand and individual. The findings showed that the group one belongs to tends to view the other ones negatively and their own positively as (Harwood 2020, p.2) argued. It was evident that respondent M got very affected by the social environment and that she thought a lot about how others will see her. Respondent M made a statement that Kanye West has been a favorite artist for a long time but that the perception of him changed due to his anti-sematic and racist actions, which lead respondent M to cancel West (Section 5.4). The social group respondent M identifies with belongs in a different social group whereas Kanye West holds different values and beliefs. Furthermore, respondent M felt that due to this it was needed to boycott him both as respondent M did not support his action but also that the social group may perceive respondent M as "bad", or in another social group due to the beliefs and values they have (Harwood, 2020). Respondent A expressed that opinions from the friend group would be more influential than on social media since the friend group opinions matter more than social media opinions.

Furthermore, one must consider how subjectivism depends on several factors which influence people's values and beliefs including their self-concept as well as their social group. Respondent V expressed the perception of Hanna Friberg as a bad influencer as she encouraged people to eat less and to be skinny while respondent P and A had positive perception towards influencers who gave running advice etc. Furthermore, some perceive being skinny and eating healthier as something positive while others might see it as body shaming. Thus, emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjectiveness in what is wrong and right which creates different perceptions.

However, some respondents felt more affected by others while others expressed that they did not, respondent P and W clearly expressed that they do not get affected by others' opinions. (5.4). On the other hand, they are also several times discussed what they perceive as morally wrong and right and what they considered a good and bad influencer or brand. Thus, this hypocrisy can be explained by social identity theory as the respondents ¨perceptions of what is considered "wrong" and "right" are based on their beliefs and values which are highly influenced by the social environment and which social groups they belong to (Collins et al., 2007, p.558). So, even though they might not be affected consciously, it is human nature to be influenced by the social environment around us.

This type of behavior does not only reflect their self-concept, it also comes down to seeking social acceptance and feelings of belonging. This particular group views their own group positively and others negatively (Harwood, 2020, p.1) in which they risk being criticized or disliked if she goes against the group's values and beliefs. This behavior is brought from trying to achieve positive feelings towards their own group membership which they will achieve if they agree with the group (Harwood, 2020, p.1), to cancel the influencer or brand. Moreover, the process of liking oneself and when the group one belongs to criticize other groups that hold different values and beliefs, can contribute to some prejudice and discrimination on other groups (Harwood, 2020, p.2). Furthermore, as social identity theory implies, people identify and feel belongingness towards groups which hold similar values or beliefs, and this is very much the case in cancel culture as people seek to cancel influencers or brands that do not share the same beliefs and values as that group.

The findings made it apparent that people tend to put themselves into social groups and that these social groups play a great role in cancel culture. It is clear that the respondents are very affected by other people's opinions, especially within their friend groups or people they like or

look up to. Some respondents felt more affected by others while others expressed that they did not, respondent P and W clearly expressed that they do not get affected by others' opinions. (5.4) On the other hand, they are also several times discussed what they perceive as morally wrong and right and what they considered a good and bad influence. Thus, it can be seen as hypocrisy as these perceptions are created of their values and beliefs which are affected by the social environment and what social groups they belong or identify with. Furthermore, it is human nature to be influenced by the social environment whereas it is impossible to not be, even though it can be unconsciously.

The respondents' behavior to cancel or feeling like a brand or influencer deserves to be canceled depends on what the person or brand has done. They would be more forgiving or unbothered in some cases but in others they would boycott the brand or influencer without question. The personal beliefs and values especially human rights, racism, anti-sematic, sexism and body shame was seen as the most serious things that are most likely to lead to canceling. Even though it may seem obvious that all respondents agree on those things, everyone perceives things differently and therefore what someone defines as racism or sexism are very subjective. Furthermore, this subjectivism depends on several factors which influence people's values and beliefs including their self concept as well as their social group.

6.3 Triggers of cancel culture

Based on our respondents' reflections, it is apparent that cancel culture is a complex social phenomena that plays out in different ways depending on which factors are influencing it. The behavior to cancel is not only about holding an influencer or endorsed brand accountable for their questionable behaviors. Instead, in terms of respondents perspective, genuinity, transparency and authenticity are crucial for influencers and endorsed brands to deliver. Influencer(s) or endorsed brand(s) could jeopardize their relationship with their consumers if they fail to maintain these traits.

Genuinity, transparency and authenticity highlight the importance of influencer/endorsed brand actions to align with beliefs or values of their consumers. In order to predict behavior, subjective norms are one driver that influences the intended behavior and actual behavior (Ham et al., 2015. p. 740). In terms of subjective norms our respondents discussed how their perception of canceled influencers and brands are influenced by social pressure to perform or not perform a certain behavior. In section 5.2 respondent P expressed that Pontus Rasmusson is someone who respondent P and others have a negative image of due to his inappropriate behaviors. This perception of inappropriate behaviors are considered to be subjects where individuals base values and moral judgment on their own perspective. What is considered inappropriate varies due to subjectivity and is shaped by an individual's personal beliefs and subjective norms.

Differences in personal beliefs and subjective norms showed different perspectives or opinions from our respondents regarding an influencer and their behavior on social media. In respondent P's case, their negative perception of Rasmusson is seen, according to theory, to be a reflection of their own values and beliefs not matching Rasmussons, where respondent P perceives the inappropriate actions not to be acceptable.

This negative perception could reflect a social environment that might influence to discourage Rasmusson's inappropriate behavior. As mentioned in section 6.1, the self-concept and social identity have a significance on this perceived inappropriate behavior. However, this negative perception and attitude could be further connected to a subjective norm that encourages

respondent P to discourage and not support Pontus Rasmusson due to his bad and inappropriate behaviors on social media (Ham et al., 2015, p. 740). According to respondent P, many others share similar negative beliefs towards Rasmusson. This influential group seems to put pressure on respondent P to behave in a certain way, to align with the “others" beliefs. As earlier mentioned, this is a behavior that can be explained by social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p.20), but it is also of importance to analyze this behavior in relation to subjective norms (Ham et al., 2015, p.740). According to subjective norms, where individuals consider the influential groups approval for their behavior. However, according to previous studies, attitudes have a greater impact on one's behavior, compared to subjective norms. In this case, the negative perception of Rasmusson can have a greater influence on respondent P’s behavior if there is a negative attitude towards him in generall (Ham et al., 2015, p.740).

As mentioned in section 6.1, attitudes are formed by beliefs and values within a certain environment. If the attitude is negative, the behavior will most likely tend out to be negative (Cacioppo & Bernston, 1994). Attitudes are also brought up by own experiences, values and beliefs. (Holland et al., 2012). In section 5.2 respondent M expresses her negative attitude towards Margaux Dietz. Respondent M negative attitude towards Dietz is explained to be formed by a mismatch between their values, where respondent M states that Dietz values are not thought out and that she has a lot of controversies behind her. According to TPB, attitudes are influenced by beliefs and values, which in this case a perceived mismatch in values links the negative attitude towards Dietz (Cacioppo & Bernston, 1994). Values are an important factor considering the formation of attitudes toward influencers and endorsed brands (Holland et al., 2012, p.356). Respondents' answers in section 5.3 continue to explain that their own values, as well as group values, are shaping individuals' opinions regarding moral and ethical actions by influencers and endorsed brands.

In terms of TPB, if an individual has an favorable attitude and subjective norm in relation to another individual, the higher possibility it is for a perceived behavioral control (Ham et al., 2015, p.740). In other words, an favorable attitude and subjective norm will often result with performing a certain behavior that the respondent perceives is acceptable by their social environment, that in this case is a subjective norm. Moreover, if the respondent feels like they get support from their environment, their behavior will feel safe and controlled, which in this way is perceived behavioral control. In section 5.4 respondent M expresses that there is an interest and likeness in Kanye West music, however, the respondents social environment has an negative attitude towards West and the subjective norm is to cancel him due to his controversial actions. Respondent M explains that this affects the behavior towards West, despite liking his music, respondent M could not support him due to their social environment and subjective norms against him. From another perspective, if the subjective norm would match with West, if the social environment would keep supporting him despite these actions, the perceived behavioral control of supporting him due to his music would be higher as a negative attitude, often leads to a negative behavioral intent and the other way around. Our respondents' attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control highlighted that important factors that influence perception of influencers and endorsed brands are genuinity, transparency and authenticity in actions. There are several factors that could trigger cancel culture, where subjective norm shapes respondents attitudes, and where attitudes shape behavior towards those canceled individuals (Ham et al., 2015. p. 740).

As TPB states, personal beliefs, past experiences and values shape the respondents perception and attitude towards the influencers and endorsed brands they mentioned during the interview (Holland et al., 2012, p.356). Those who had values that aligned with influencers and endorsed

brands had a positive attitude towards them, which decreased a potential cancellation to occur. However, if the attitude towards an influencer is negative due to mismatch in values, or an action being morally wrong, the outcome would be a negative attitude that could increase the risk of canceling to occur. Cancel culture is a complex social phenomenon where a diversity of factors influences the outcome of a situation, we will further elaborate on those factors that trigger cancel culture to understand why it occurs in section 6.3. Based on our respondents' reflections, it is apparent that cancel culture is a complex social phenomena that plays out in different ways depending on which factors are influencing it. The behavior to cancel is not only about holding an influencer or endorsed brand accountable for their questionable behaviors. Instead, in terms of respondents perspective, genuinely, transparency and authenticity are crucial for influencers and endorsed brands to deliver. Influencer(s) or endorsed brand(s) could jeopardize their relationship with their consumers if they fail to maintain these traits.

6.4 Actual behavior to cancel

This section connects social identity theory, self-congruity and the theory of planned behavior in order to analyze the intent and behavior to cancel. From the analysis it is evident that the self-concept and one's social identification have an significant impact on the respondents behavior. The use of social identity theory recognizes patterns and understanding of how the identification of oneself as well as identification of social groups shape subjective norms that are related to the planned behavior theory. Furthermore, there was a connection between TPB from an additional perspective on self-congruity where we saw attitudes towards certain behaviors from our respondents. For example, what they thought regarding canceling someone, or canceling culture in general. Our findings suggest that our respondents usually engage in behaviors that are consistent with their own self-concept, where we saw that canceling would occur if someone felt like an action or behavior crossed one's own values, beliefs or the subjective norms.

The participants' desire to belong to groups as well as seeking social acceptance are influenced by norms and values that impact the participants intention and behavior to cancel (Harwood, 2020, p.1). The self-congruence concept, social identity theory and planned behavior theory all emphasize that characteristics such as beliefs, values, perceptions, traits and past experiences influence the participants perception of themselves in which their own perception of their identity determines the extent they identify with an influencer or group. Furthermore, the participants beliefs and values are shared with their social groups which they feel like they belong to, the participants often create a negative attitude and perception towards a brand or influencer that acts in a way that contradicts these shared beliefs and values the possibility of the behavior to cancel are greater (Harwood, 2020, p.2).

The analysis of behavioral intent starts off with understanding each factor of self-congruity, social identity theory and theory of planned behavior. From our respondents, within self-concept we saw that factors such as values, perception, traits and past experiences determined how they identified themselves and how they in turn, identified with an influencer and endorsed brand. These factors are highlighted in the theory of self-congruity (Sirgy, 2017, p.198), but also reflected and seen in theory of social identity and TPB. The respondents' own identities, including values and beliefs, are shared with a social group that has similar identities (Harwood, 2020, p.2). Where the social identity theory states that values and beliefs that are not shared, are disliked by a particular group (Harwood, 2020, p.2). This behavior was evident when our respondents discussed their negative perception of an influencer or endorsed brand. In section 5.2 our respondents discuss their negative perception toward Dietz, Roberto and Rasmusson

where we saw a pattern in a perception of misbehavior from the influencers, in the form of crossing subjective norms or breaking values that the respondents consider to be important. Moreover, the respondents made it clear that it all depends on what an influencer or endorsed brand has done, which is highly subjective and complex. This creates a gray area between norms, values and beliefs since each individual has its own. However, our empirical findings show a pattern where if an influencer or endorsed brand crosses a moral barrier, jeopardizes important values and dismisses subjective norms, there will be a higher motivation for the respondents to have a behavioral intent to cancel. However, this might not always be the case since cancel culture is a complex phenomenon. Due to this complexity, we will also have to consider other factors in our analysis.

It is important to highlight within all three theories that what is considered to be unacceptable by our respondents depends on their social environment, but also self-concept. Moreover, this subjectivity is what makes it complex to decide what is acceptable or not. This can be seen from another perspective where our respondents state that cancel culture could be unnecessary and that individuals get canceled for mistakes. In other words, the respondents intended behavior to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand is subjective and depends on different factors influencing the behavior. From our findings, we saw similarities on which factors affect behaviors. From previous research we concluded that canceling someone wrongly would lead to prejudice, however, that is a natural behavior of TPB and social identity theory where one group sees their group as superior which could lead to discrimination on other groups. Personal beliefs or subjective norms such as human rights, racism, sexism or body shaming were topics our respondents intended on reasons to cancel. This could be connected to social identity theory where individuals usually tend to put themselves into social groups with similar values that are considered to be acceptable on the side of cancel culture that wants to maintain social justice on social media. The environment of friend groups or individuals one looks up to are usually influencing the behavior or opinions of our respondents.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, TPB states that one's behavior is usually determined by one's own intention to perform it. As mentioned during our analysis, this intent to cancel culture behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms and behavioral control. From our perspective on cancel culture, attitudes and subjective norms are shaped by our respondents' self-concept, beliefs, values and group identification. From social identity theory and self-congruity theory we have analyzed all factors in our case that could influence behavioral intent. Our respondents' answers have made repetitive answers that made it clear for us that their attitudes towards canceling an influencer or endorsed brands are based on their own perception of their misbehavior, which is complex and subjective. Their social groups influence their subjective norms and values regarding social justice topics that have been mentioned before.

Moreover, these norms and attitudes influence the participation of behavioral performance, or in other words, behavioral intention to cancel. If they choose to participate in the behavior is influenced by the behavioral control which is their perceived control to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand. To analyze the actual behavior, we have to consider factors that influence behavioral intent such as subjective norms, attitudes and the perceived behavioral control.

As we have seen during our analysis, the factors influencing cancel culture are complex and it all depends on our respondent’s own perception of an influencer or brands misbehavior. During our interview, we asked questions that would generate a response of either intended behavior to cancel, or not. In some cases, the respondents showed intention to cancel an influencer or

endorsed brand. For example, in section 5.3.1 the respondents express that it all depends on what the influencer or endorsed brand has done. Moreover, in section 5.4 our respondents expressed that they would engage in canceling an influencer or endorsed brand if the action is considered morally or socially unacceptable. As our theoretical framework supports this with social pressure coming from their social groups that have certain beliefs or values that could influence the respondents' behaviors it's important to analyze if the intended behavior will actually turn into an actual behavior of our respondents. Intended behavior is a strong prediction of actual behavior according to TPB, however, it is not a perfect predictor as human beings are complex and situational factors could influence the behavioral performance. These situational factors could be the fact that our respondents recognized the complexity of canceling culture themselves. In section 5.3 our respondents state that canceling an influencer or endorsed brand is not always the correct thing to do as individuals can make mistakes. Furthermore, the respondents acknowledged that canceling someone should be done through evaluating if the behavior of an influencer or endorsed brand is such an extreme action which crosses morality or socially acceptable norms.

A few of our respondents showed an intention to cancel due to their own perception of misbehavior, that is formed by subjective norms, group identification, personal beliefs, attitudes and perceived behavioral control. However, what is considered socially acceptable is subjective and depends on each individual in question. Their behavioral intent, as our analysis has shown, is shaped by social environment, self-concept (values, beliefs, subjective norms, experiences, attitudes), and group identification (social justice, sexism, racism, norms). If our respondents show strongly that their behavioral intention is to cancel, behavioral control could be a factor influencing the performance of actual behavior. Perceived behavioral (personal beliefs, social support) control could be influenced by factors that are complex, and could change from time to time. From this, we can see that there are a range of interrelated factors that influence intended behavior to actual behavior, and that the prediction is not always accurate due to its multifaceted phenomena. Through our analysis, we have recognized an interplay between self-concept, group identification, behavioral control and social norms, which also has complex interconnected factors within themselves.

7. Conclusion and discussion

In this chapter we will start to discuss the dilemma of cancel culture and draw a general conclusion. Managerial and societal implications are also discussed. Lastly, limitations and future research are presented.

7.1 Dilemma of cancel culture

From our research we can support previous research on that cancel culture is a complex social phenomenon. In our case it is occurring on social media between followers, influencers and endorsed brands that is influenced by personal and social factors. As social media influencers create relationships with their followers through interactions through authentic topics or

interests, followers develop their own perception of them. Their perception of an influencer has been seen through our findings and can change throughout their lifetime. In our analysis in chapter 6 we discussed that consumers' perceptions of influencers and endorsed brands actions are highly influenced by what is considered socially acceptable or not. From our analysis we have seen that perception of social norms within cancel culture has a strong relation to the respondent's self-concept and social identification. This is contributing to previous research (Saldanha et al, 2022) research suggesting empirically examining what shapes consumers own perceptions and how it might influence cancel culture.

The perception furthermore expresses the need of strong congruence between the respondent and influencer or endorsed brand, if not, the influencer or endorsed brand risks to get a negative perception or attitude from their consumers or followers. Previous research has examined the spill-over effect on the endorsed brand (Reinikainen et al., 2021), however our study examined how the negative perception might influence the influencer at first. As influencers, through self-branding, create a narrative that resonates with their followers, the followers could get a perception of that specific narrative. However, according to our analysis if an influencer breaks the current subjective norms, values or beliefs that jeopardizes that narrative, the perception changes. We see similarities from our respondents on previous studies that have concluded that attitudes towards social norms on social media are driven by social effects, where the current state of norm between individuals influences their perception (Arias, 2019, p.577). As norms are constantly changing due to societal levels (Varnum, 2019, p.211), individuals might have a mismatch between norms and values in some circumstances or specific topics which could increase the possibility of a negative attitude. Beliefs and values in terms of social justice have shown to influence the performance of intended behavior to actual behavior. However, our research has shown that intended behavior and actual behavior is influenced by varios drivers and that the performance of an canceling might vary depending on how much each driver impacts an individual.

Whether the self-concept matches the perception of an influencer plays a crucial role in the attitude formation. This is usually linked to identity and how one views themselves and compares it to the influencer. Self-concept plays an important part in the attitude formation, however our study found that an identity does not have to match in order to shape a positive attitude. This is an example of how attitude formation is a complex process, where each individual has its own past experiences, self-concept, social identity and creates their own attitude towards an influencer, whether it matches with their self-concept or not. The mismatch between identities could create a feeling of being the wrong target segment, however, if an individual has a high congruence between influencer and self, due to self-concept a strong personal connection could be created. Congruence between an individual and influencer is beneficial as our study found that individuals then perceive those influencers as sincere and trustworthy. Which in turn, if an intended behavior to cancel would occur, an individual would reconsider their connection in terms of a high congruence due to matching self-concept and not cancel the influencer. Previous research has studied physiological predictors of behaviors in terms of cancel culture where individuals usually evaluate the characteristics and if the action was morally, legally or ethically wrong (Mueller, 2021). Our findings contribute to interesting discussions regarding how one's self-concept might evaluate the decision to cancel an individual.

As we have mentioned during our whole thesis, cancel culture is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by various drivers. Congruence between an individual and influencer is one example to explain why canceling might occur. However, to try to explain the complex

phenomena better we have seen that social groups also have a strong influence on the decision to engage in cancel culture. As our findings correlated to the social identity theory where we found that within cancel culture, our participants view groups with values perceived as bad negative compared to themselves. This in turn could help to explain why negative attitudes form within cancel culture. The individual who is about to get canceled, is viewed to have "bad" values and beliefs, or in this case, not matching ones, which creates an negative attitude from the other group towards that individual who is considered to be categorized into a group of influencers who is perceived to be morally wrong due to their actions. However, once again it is important to mention the role subjectivity plays in this. Values and beliefs, including one's self-concept is all subject and depends on individuals and actions made. What is considered right or wrong is subjective and our research has made it evident that it is important to recognize the diversity of perspectives within cancel culture and that each driver that influences the performance of a canceling behavior varies and depends on everyone's self-concept, past experiences and social environment.

However, as we have seen the great impact of congruence and social pressure, there are other factors from our findings that have contributed to the understanding of actual behavior towards canceling an influencer. It is of great importance for researchers within cancel culture to understand the social environment and its influence on canceling behavior. As our study has found, respondents' perception is shaped by their social environment with subjective norms, values and beliefs. This perception forms an attitude, and whether the social pressure is so strong that the individual has a sense of a great control over their behavior, canceling would highly occur. The theory of planned behavior together with social identity theory has helped us to explain the complex phenomena of cancel culture. Moreover, our respondents and findings have been out of great importance clarifying and providing insights of their thoughts that could transform into actions in terms of canceling. Through extending TPB with social identity theory we have been able to explain both a rational and irrational part of a complex behavior to cancel.

Previous research has analyzed motivations and definitions in terms of cancel culture where authors found that perceived behavioral control influences the intention to cancel (Tandoc et al., 2020). Through our findings we have examined the impact of perceived behavioral control together with social pressure and found an unknown driver that could help explain actual behavior to cancel. Self-concept is considered to be an underlying driver seen in our conceptual framework in section 2.4, however, our findings clearly showed that self-concept is a repeating driver that gets conscious when our respondent evaluated their performance from intended behavior to actual behavior. This finding is interesting from the point of view that previous research has concluded that before gaining an intention to cancel, an individual evaluates the canceled person's characteristics and actions (Tandoc et al., 2020), where from our perspective, an individual evaluates its own self-concept before actually deciding to cancel someone.

To conclude this discussion, it is evident that cancel culture is a complex social phenomenon with various drivers influencing the decision to cancel or not. The perception of misbehavior or crossing a moral barrier is rather subjective and shaped by one's social environment either pressure to cancel, or one's self-concept thriving to accomplish social justice. The subjectivity complicates the behavior to cancel as the intention might not always be the actual performance. Therefore, researchers within this scope must consider that there is a complexity understanding which personal and social factors influence the process to cancel. Our study has tried in depth to understand how personal and social drivers influence the process, where there could be other drivers or factors influencing the performance of canceling.

7.2 General Conclusions

This study shed new light and insights of the rising phenomena of cancel culture examining it from a consumer perspective towards influencers and endorsed brands. The purpose of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of cancel culture by especially examining the underlying social and personal drivers of the behavior to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study gains a deeper understanding of the perceptions, attitudes and behavior regarding cancel culture. To fulfill the purpose of the study this research question was adopted:

What are the personal and social drivers that could influence the behavior to engage in cancel culture?

In order to be able to examine the drivers for cancel influencers and brands we have employed the social identity theory, self-congruence concept and the theory of planned behavior. These theories have been conceptualized and illustrated in a conceptual model (section 2.4) with the aim to improve it further based on the empirical findings. The revised model extends the initial one through recognizing the unknown drivers that lead from intention to actual behavior to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand. From our thematic analysis and discussion, we have come up with the following conclusions.

The findings revealed that the individual's self-concept, personal beliefs and values combined with the desire to belong to a social group, social acceptance, group pressure and norms are the major drivers forming an individual attitude to engage in cancel culture. Cancel culture occurs when the influencer or endorsed brand fails to align with the individual's beliefs and values or violate the moral standards or social norms. Hence, the reasoning for canceling or feeling like an endorsed brand or influencer deserves to be canceled are due to the fact that they perceive that they have acted in an unacceptable way and they advocate for social justice (Chiou, 2020, p.297). The perceived behavior control decides the actual behavior, to cancel or not. Additionally, the nature of the transgression is an important determination if the attitude and behavior to cancel where what they perceive as racist, sexist, body shaming, anti-sematisc was the most common type of transgressions that was perceived as “unacceptable”. However, the perception of what is considered “wrong” and “unacceptable” is highly subjective and dependent on the individual's personal beliefs and values as well as the surrounding social environment.

It was found that the level of congruence between an individual and influencer or brand, the more likelihood of a favorable attitude. If the self-concept, especially personal beliefs and values contradicts with the influencer or endorsed brand, the greater is the possibility of a negative attitude and behavior to cancel. Higher congruence often most commonly leads to a more positive attitude whereas a mis-match between an individual's beliefs, values and moral increases the possibility of shaping a negative attitude and to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand. Moreover, they are more likely to have a positive attitude if they feel like they identify themselves with that influencer on a personal level which creates a stronger relationship. From our findings, it can also be argued that if there is a strong relationship with an influencer or endorsed brand might lead to more forgiveness and minimize the risk of the individual to cancel. Additionally, cancel culture can be viewed as a group behavior where one group asserts its dominance to increase their own positivism which creates a strong bond of identification within a specific group. The group sees themselves as superior and in turn can lead to the behavior of

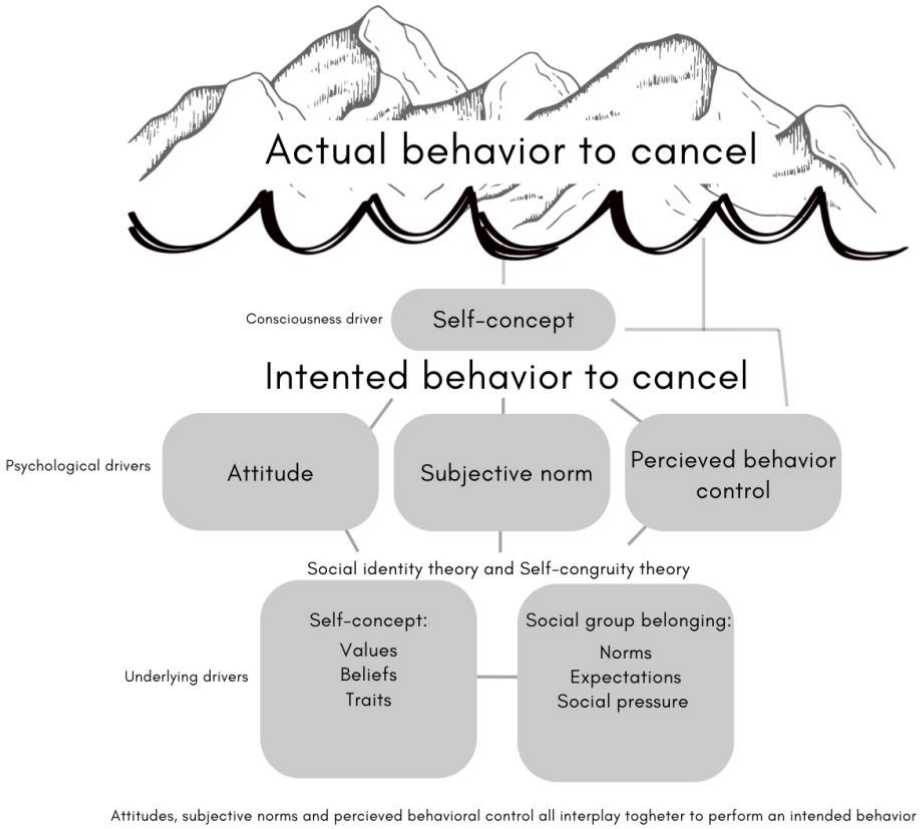
cancel the influencer or endorsed brand that contradicts the beliefs and values or norms of that group (Harwood, 2020). Thus, the group seeks to cancel an influencer or endorsed brands that do not align with their shared values, beliefs and norms. Moreover, as individuals are highly affected on how others perceive them, they seek for acceptance and belongingness of a group, it can lead to group pressure, where they risk being judged, leading them to cancel.

We also found that brands can be negatively affected if an influencer gets canceled. It is important with congruence between an influencer and endorsed brand as the brand risks being found "guilty by association" if the endorsed influencer commits a transgression. However, we found that brands are responsible for the influencer they choose to collaborate with but to some extent. If the influencer has not behaved in a perceived "wrong" way before the collaboration, they would not be as responsible as they would be if that was the case. However, when a transgression by an influencer happens, the brand is responsible for how to respond to the scandal. We found that a public statement and to take distance from the influencer behavior in terms of ending the collaboration increase the possibility of forgiveness. Furthermore, the relationship between influencer and followers are significant to protect both influencers and brands, as a strong relationship can minimize the risk of influencer and brand avoidance in relation to transgressions (Pradhan et al., 2022, p.38).

Personal drivers	***Social drivers***
Self concept:	**Social group belonging:**
Values, beliefs, traits	Norms, expectations, social pressure

7.3 Summary and revised conceptual framework

Throughout our empirical findings we have a revised version of our theoretical framework seen in section 2.4. The theory of planned behavior together with self-congruity concept and social identity theory, seen through the lens of an iceberg model, has helped us to analyze and discuss the complex phenomena of cancel culture. Cancel culture through a lens of the iceberg model suggests that the phenomena of canceling is a behavior that is seen at the top of the iceberg. With our interviews and participants, we have found interesting findings that confirm underlying drivers such as self-concept and social belonging. However, the conceptual framework in section 2.4 shows that between intended behavior and actual behavior there is an unknown driver to actual behavior. This unknown driver has re-constructed the conceptual framework through the discovery of our findings from the interviews.



Attitudes, subjective norms and percieved behavioral control all interplay togheter to perform an intended behavior

Cancel culture could be seen as the tip of the iceberg, below there is a much more complex environment with various drivers influencing the performance of an canceling behavior. Firstly, the underlying driver self-concept which includes beliefs, values and traits. Furthermore, social group belonging that consist of norms, expectations and social pressure are seen by our findings and theory to influence attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. It is important to note that these underlying drivers influence psychological drivers of individuals in different ways. Everyone grows up in different environments, experiencing various things in different cultural settings. For example, if an individual has a strong desire of self-concept with their own values and beliefs, their attitudes might shape according to their strong self-concept. From another perspective, an individual with a strong connection of a social identity within a particular group might form their attitude from the group's values and beliefs. This framework works well in terms of subjective interpretation as each case of actual behavior to cancel could be examined through their own underlying drivers. Individual subjectivity must be considered when trying to understand one's underlying drivers and how it might influence the performance later on intended behavior to actual behavior.

As mentioned previously, there was a gap of an unknown driver between intended behavior to cancel and actual behavior to cancel. As our findings and analysis states, one could have the intention to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand. According to theory, perceived behavioral control explains one's own control to perform the behavior. The higher behavioral control, the greater chance it is for one to perform an actual behavior of canceling an influencer or endorsed brand. However, our findings and analysis found that despite having the intention to cancel someone, some respondents did not perceive the behavioral control to be the only driver that influenced the decision to cancel. Instead, they took a reflection of their own self-concept and if the self-concept approves of the behavior to cancel an individual. Self-concept became a conscious driver that influenced the decision-making process of our respondents to cancel an

influencer or not. Therefore, we made a revised conceptual framework stating that perceived behavioral control might influence the performance of canceling behavior but is not seen as the only driver from our study. An individual could either go from attitude and subjective norms to form an intended behavior, but then consider their self-concept consciously before deciding to cancel an individual. From another perspective, an individual could through attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control form an intended behavior and perform the actual behavior due to the social environment where the individual perceives the behavior to be acceptable from their environment. Or, it could be both ways where an individual considers both their perceived behavioral control and self-concept before making a decision to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand.

7.4 Contributions to literature

Our thesis aims to contribute to the complex phenomena of cancel culture from a consumer behavior perspective. Our research has contributed to the discussion of what drives cancel culture from a personal and social perspective. Previous research within cancel culture has mostly been quantitative, where we have filled out a gap by conducting qualitative research with semi-structured interviews to get a deeper understanding of how social identification and self-concept might influence the performance of engaging in cancel culture. As mentioned, previous literature has mostly been quantitative, where authors have studied physiological predictors of behavior to cancel an individual (Mueller, 2021). Where our study has helped to contribute to the understanding of underlying and conscious psychological drivers of individuals toward engaging in canceled culture. Mueller (2021) suggested future research to study immoral, illegal, and unethical acts from a qualitative approach, where our qualitative study through semi-structured interviews has recognized that immoral, illegal, and unethical acts are those acts that are perceived to perform a higher intended behavior to cancel and to perform actual behavior to cancel an individual.

Cancel culture according to previous literature is still at its early stage (Tandoc et al., 2020), where there are many possibilities for further research. Our research has, through empirical data, concluded that there are different personal and social drivers that shape an individual's attitude toward intended behavior to cancel and actual behavior to cancel. Previous research has examined the behavior to cancel in Singapore using the theory of planned behavior (Tandoc et al., 2020). Tandoc et al. (2020) study examined factors influencing the intended behavior to cancel an individual, however our study contributes to previous literature as we use an extended version of the theory of planned behavior, including self-congruity concept and social identity theory to explain the performance of behavior to actual cancel someone. This is done through the lens of the iceberg model as we believe that our respondents past experiences, beliefs and values have a large influence on their attitude formation as well.

Our research contributes to the theory of planned behavior as the original theory is rational rational, which is one of the main criticisms of using the theory (Chetiou et al., 2019, p.363). However, our extended version of TPB with social identity theory and self-concept concept through the lens of an iceberg model has contributed to literature explaining and predicting consumer behavior from a more irrational manner including variables such as emotions, beliefs and thoughts. Therefore, our study also contributes to the original iceberg model constructed by Edward T hall (1976) as our conceptual framework argues for an actual behavior to cancel is the visible performance of human behavior in terms of cancel culture. As our study follows the iceberg model, the actual behavior to cancel is therefore a small part of the iceberg that is visible for everyone to see. Our study has found that below the surface there is a complex

environment where we have concluded that there are personal and social drivers that help to explain underlying drivers that shape attitudes and intended behavior to cancel. The extension of TPB has provided the ability, from our research, to predict not only, intended behavior, but also actual behavior to cancel from an self-concept, social identity and iceberg model perspective.

7.5 Managerial implications

The managerial implications of this study are to provide a foundation for marketers and managers to be able to tackle the challenges posed by cancel culture, especially in terms of influencer marketing. The study provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of cancel culture and what drives individuals to engage in cancel culture which provide valuable insights of how marketers can minimize the risks of being found "guilty by association" if an endorsed influencer gets canceled.

Based on the findings and analysis, we found three main important components that marketers should take to consideration in terms of their influencer marketing namely the selection process, the congruence between the brand and the response strategy. There was found that people consider that brands are responsible for those they choose to collaborate with but to some extent. If the endorsed influencer acts in a way that the society considers as "wrong" or "unacceptable" and has not acted in such a way before, people hold brands less responsible than if the influencer has shown such behavior before or during the collaboration. However, all respondents expressed that brands are very much responsible when making the choice of who they should collaborate with. Furthermore, this emphasizes the importance of thoroughly examining the influencers past actions, previous statements and what they stand for before making a decision to collaborate with that influencer as it has a significant impact on the perception and attitude towards a brand.

The findings also showed that brands risk being criticized even though the influencer might not have committed a transgression or acted in a way that the public consider as misbehavior. All the participants expressed that authenticity is something they valued highly of both influencers and brands. If there is low congruence between the brand and endorsed influencer, the participants felt that the brand was not authentic and genuine as they thought that they only do the collaboration for the money. This can be in terms of a collaboration with an influencer that has no interest or knowledge of the product but it can also be that the influencer contradicts a brand's core values. Moreover, even though an very big and established influencer may reach out to more people, it could backlash if they are not congruent in which it may be more beneficial to use a smaller influencer that are more congruent with the brand to minimize the risk of being perceived as not being authentic and genuine.

A brand's response to a transgression by an influencer was found to be of significance as it most likely will determine the attitude and if the participants would boycott the brand or not. Furthermore, we acknowledged that a public statement by the brand involving taking distance from the influencers behavior formed a favorable attitude. Furthermore, ending the collaboration with the influencer was found to be the most effective way to minimize the risk of being found "guilty by association" or canceled. On the other hand, if the brand does not act at all in such a scenario, there is more likely that they risk being boycotted which can hurt the brand image and lead to financial loss. Moreover, it is important that marketers act quickly in such scenarios and evaluate if they want to be associated with that influencer or not. If they do

not stand for or want to be associated with such behavior, the most efficient way to minimize the risk of reputation damage is to make a public statement and end the collaboration.

Another important implication from our findings and analysis was that the participants tend to be more forgiving towards brands they have strong and personal relationships with. If they have a strong and personal relationship with the brand they tend to be more loyal and forgiving. Furthermore, a personal and strong relationship is beneficial for brands from multiple perspectives and in regards to cancel culture, it could lead to more forgiveness and loyalty when a transgression by an endorsed influencer has been made.

Finally, as cancel culture on social media is increasing and in turn the risks and challenges for brands do as well. It is important that brands are prepared for those risks as it can happen from nowhere and create severe consequences if the brand does not act quickly. Thus, there should be clear plans and guidelines in place if an endorsed influencer would be canceled as to how the brand response and handling of the scandal can determine the outcomes.

7.6 Societal implications

The thesis provides a deeper understanding of cancel culture in society. It was revealed that cancel culture are highly related by the social environment which affects the choice to cancel or not. Our study showed that cancel culture is very effective in promoting social justice, giving everyone a voice and demanding accountability from those in power. Hence, this affects the society in the way that ordinary people have more power than before to influence and hold people or brands that the wider society perceive as unethical or immoral.

As discussed, the involvement of black twitter and mee-too movements paved the way for cancel culture in which ordinary people can collectively punish and call out powerful figures. (Clark, 2015). Our study shows that people have a huge impact to call out misconduct, controversial behavior, transgressions from public figures. Hence, the findings could lead to positive societal implications as culture can create social justice and be valuable for democracy. It has the potential to increase equality and justice, especially in terms of racism, sexism and homophobia. Moreover, the implications from our study make people aware of how much they actually can influence and demand social justice through social media platforms. Cancel culture is growing and has become a social trend in today's society in which our study provides valuable insights of the societal implications of the phenomena of cancel culture.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that our study shows that public figures or brands can be wrongly accused for actions or behavior that they have not done. Furthermore, people may be too quick to criticize without all the facts which can lead to being canceled from something that is not true. As social media is not always a credible choice, it is important to reflect and do further research before making the choice to cancel someone as it can create severe consequences for the one accused of misbehavior.

7.7 Limitations

To be able to make the research feasible and possible to carry out, we have intentionally made several choices in order to control the scope and scale of the study. We examined personal and social drivers that lead to engagement in cancel culture. However, a major limitation is that there are endless factors that can affect this type of behavior whereas we focused on exploring

some aspects of the personal and social drivers. This is because cancel culture is a very complex social phenomena. It has endless perspectives and factors that affect the behavior to cancel which can be analyzed and explored which was a major limitation for us as we found multiple factors and areas that are of relevance for our study. Nevertheless, even though we recognized that we can implement more perspectives to our research, the limited amount of time would make it impossible. When intentionally only focusing on some aspects of the personal and social drivers, we narrowed down the scope and scale of the study which enabled us to provide a deeper understanding and be able to analyze, discuss and draw conclusions.

One of the main limitations for this study is that there is a limited amount of research on this particular topic as well as canceling culture in general which means that there may be gaps in the understanding and knowledge that need to be explored further. The limited amount of research that has been done on the topic also leads to the lack of theories and frameworks that we can use to navigate the research process and theoretical framework.

The collected data in this study holds one major limitation. Our analysis, discussion and conclusion is primarily based on the interviews with the five participants. These participants are close in age and all are from Sweden, meaning that they have much in common which limits the study as the conclusions and generalizations are made from the Swedish context. Also, our study used a qualitative approach which itself comes with limitations. We are aware that there might be some translation biases as the interviews were done in Swedish and then translated to english. However, even though the qualitative approach provides limitations it is important to notice that the interpretations and findings are based on the theoretical framework and the data set that support the evidence.

7.8 Future research

As recognized in the research gap, the research of cancel culture is still at its early stage and there is an urgent need to examine the deeper underlying motivations and social context of cancel culture (Tandoc et al., 2022). Further research could be done in regard to the underlying drivers of the behavior to cancel a brand or an influencer. The actual behavior to cancel an influencer or brand are dependent on an individual's beliefs, values, past experience and the surrounding social environment and as our study is limited to the Swedish context, further research might compare the drivers of the actual behavior depending on country and culture. This can broaden the scope of understanding and provide valuable insights on the complex phenomena of cancel culture, and bring a deeper understanding of how differences in origin and culture may affect the behavior to cancel an influencer or endorsed brand. Additionally, further research could explore cancel culture based on participants with different political ideologies as these beliefs affect the behavior to cancel.

We found that brands can get negative and severe consequences if an endorsed influencer gets canceled. As there is barely any research of how this impacts brands and how they can manage these challenges, further research could investigate how brands affect this and may provide a framework that can provide valuable managerial implications on how they can prepare and respond to such scenarios. Also, our findings implied that a strong personal connection towards a brand or influencer might minimize the risk of being canceled. Therefore, it would be interesting if future research explored this in more detail.

Previous research regarding cancel culture has mainly used a quantitative or mixed approach, future research could implement a qualitative approach in order to provide a deeper

understanding of this complex phenomena by recognizing people's feelings, experiences, thoughts and perceptions. This may provide further valuable insights and understanding of the complexity and subjectivity of cancel culture.

Our thesis is built on the rise of social media influencers, furthermore, the rise of consumer power of calling out for misbehavior in terms of influencers and endorsed brands. According to previous research, consumers have a different type of power today compared to before (Saldanha et al., 2022, p.2). This type of power could be seen as a way for consumers to advocate for social justice which has led to an increment of canceling influencers or brands that is seen to have crossed a moral barrier. Furthermore, this has paved a way for future research within how power structures change in society and how consumer power changes in terms of morality or social justice. It could be interesting to see how the changes within consumer power on social media affect influencers and endorsed brands.

The impact of social media influencers varies, however, as cancel culture significantly increases it would be interesting to analyze how cancel culture influences endorsed brands and how they are seen by consumers from an influencer lens. Moreover, future researchers within this area could be researchers analyzing current brand strategies and its effectiveness. Researchers could examine and evaluate the effectiveness of their current strategies managing canceled influencers.

It could be seen as sensitive information, where endorsed brands might not want to reveal their weaknesses in a thriving environment of cancel culture. However, as the trend of cancel culture is currently increasing with the rise of consumer power on social media, research within brand strategies would provide valuable insights on how to manage cancelled influencers as an endorsed brand during a cancel culture crisis. This could potentially benefit the endorsed brands customers and stakeholders, furthermore, reputation and perception of brand identity.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview guide (English)

Theme	**Question(s)**	**Purpose**
Introduction	Briefly explaining the topic.	
Influencer marketing	• What do you know about influencer marketing? *Why is it good and why is it bad?* • Do you get influenced by influencer promotions? *If so, can you recall the last time you purchased something that was an influencer promotion?* • Do you perceive all influencers to be credible for promotions? *What makes them credible?* *What makes them uncredible?* • Do you think that influencers' values reflect the endorsed brands' values? *How? Why?* • Can you name and give an example of an “good” influencer *Why are they a good influencer?* • Can you name and give an example of an “bad” influencer? *Why are they bad?*	To understand how the respondents perceive influencers.
Transgression and betrayal of influencer	• Have you ever had a bad experience of an influencer that	

	made you change your perception of them? *If so, explain the feeling and the changed perception.* • Have you ever experienced a feeling of betrayal of an influencer promotion? *If so, explain your emotions towards influencers and brands.* • If an influencer did something that felt like an "betrayal" to you. Would you forgive them? *Why would you forgive them? Why would you not forgive them?* • This moment in time, is there any influencer you are not supporting due to misbehavior? *If so, what was the misbehavior?*	To conclude which emotions respondents, feel after transgression or influencer betrayal. Moreover, to see whether there is a changed perception or attitude toward influencer or brand.
Cancel culture	• How well are you aware of cancel culture on social media? • What do you think about it? *good? bad?* • Can you explain the last time you experienced a cancel culture moment on social media? *If so, give example, and explain why?* • Have you ever felt that a brand or influencer deserved to be canceled? *If so, why? If not, why?* • Have you stopped purchasing or supporting a brand that has been canceled or collaborated with a canceled influencer? • Have you ever unfollowed an influencer that got canceled? • Have you ever felt affected by others opinions regarding canceling brands or influencers? • Have you participated in any kind of canceling of influencers or brands? *How?*	To get an idea of the participants thoughts and feelings and behavior in relation to cancel culture.
Self-congruity	• Are you aware of brand identities?	

	If so, how would you explain a company and its brand identity? • Are you aware of influencer identities? *If so, how would you explain an influencer and its identity?* • What is your attitude towards brands with characteristics very unlike yourselves? • What is your attitude towards brands with characteristics very like yourself? • Can you give an example of an influencer that you can relate to? *Why and how do you relate to them?* • Think of influencers that you follow, and the brands they promote. Do you see any similar identities or characteristics between those two? *Do you think they have to have similar identities and characteristics?* *Why do you think the way you think?* • Can you explain a long-term relationship you have with an influencer? *Clarification: influencer you supported the longest. Why and how do you feel a connection to them?* • Can you explain a long-term relationship you have with one brand? *Clarification: a brand you have supported for a long time. Why do you keep supporting them?*	To get an understanding of how the attitude towards an influencer or brand are influenced by the level of identification.
Spillover effect on endorsed brands	• Have you ever felt that your emotions and feelings toward an influencer affect the feelings and emotions towards an endorsed brand? *If so, Why? how?* • What is your perception of moral and ethical misconduct? • How (if) will your feelings and perceptions of a brand be if they collaborate with an influencer	To explore the participants thoughts and feelings towards brands that collaborate with an influencer that are cancelled.

	that does something you perceive as bad or unethical? • What brands are you loyal to and why? • What would make you stop being loyal to a brand? • Do you have any bad relationships towards some brands? *Why, how?* • Do you feel that brands are responsible for the endorsed influencers behavior? *Why? In what way*? *In which situations?* • In what way do you believe brands' response towards a canceled influencer affects your perceptions/feelings towards the endorsed brand? • In which cases would you forgive the brand? • In which cases would you not forgive the brand? • How do you think a brand should respond if an endorsed influencer gets canceled? • Can you give examples of situations where you would avoid a brand? *Follow up: Are there exceptions of brands that you would not avoid? why?* • Have you ever wanted to avoid a brand but did not do it? If so, Explain, Why?	

Appendix 2. Interview guide (Swedish)

Intro	**Question**	**Purpose**

Influencer marketing	• Vad vet du om influencer marketing? *Varför är det bra och varför är det dåligt?* • Blir du påverkad av influencer marketing? *I så fall, kan du komma ihåg senaste gången du köpte något som var en influencer-promotion?* • Uppfattar du alla influencers som trovärdiga för marknadsföring? *Vad gör dem trovärdiga?* *Vad gör dem inte trovärdiga?* • Tycker du det är viktigt att influencers egna värderingar speglar företaget de marknadsför? *Hur? Varför?* • Kan du nämna och ge ett exempel på en "bra" influencer? *Varför är de en bra influencer?* • Kan du nämna och ge ett exempel på en "dålig" influencer? *Varför är de dåliga?*	*Få en förståelse över hur deltagarna ser på influencer marketing.*
Transgression and betrayal of influencer	• Har du någonsin haft en dålig upplevelse av en influencer som fick dig att ändra din uppfattning om dem? *I så fall, beskriv känslan och den ändrade uppfattningen.* • Har du någonsin känt dig sviken av en influencer-promotion? *I så fall, beskriv dina känslor gentemot influencers och varumärken.* • Om en influencer gjorde något som kändes som en "besvikelse" för dig. Skulle du förlåta dem? *Varför skulle du förlåta dem? Varför skulle du inte förlåta dem?*	*Få fram vilka känslor som uppstår efter en "transgression".*
Cancel culture	• Hur väl känner du till "cancel culture" på sociala medier? • Kan du förklara senaste gången du bevittnade att någon blev cancelled på sociala medier? • Vad tycker du om det? *Bra? Dåligt? Varför?* • Har du ändrat uppfattning av ett företag som blivit cancelled? *Om fallet är så, ge ett exempel på hur och varför.*	Få en förståelse av deltagarnas tankar, attityder, känslor och

	• Har du någonsin känt att en influencer eller företag förtjänar att bli cancelled? *Om fallet är så, varför, varför inte?* • Har du slutat stödja ett företag som samarbetat med en cancelled influencer? • Har du någonsin avföljt en influencer som blivit cancelled? • Har du någonsin känt dig påverkad av andras åsikter angående influencers och företag som blivit cancelled? • Har du deltagit i någon form av cancel culture av influenser och företag? *Hur?* • Har du försökt förhindra någon form av cancel culture av ett företag eller en influencer på sociala medier? *Hur?* • Skulle du sprida information om en cancelled influencer/företag till din nära kompisgrupp? Varför, varför inte?	beteende gentemot cancel culture.
Self-congruity	• Är du medveten om företagsidentiteter? *Om fallet är så, hur skulle du beskriva ett företag och deras identitet?* • Är du medveten om influencers identiteter? *Om fallet är så, hur skulle du beskriva en influencer och deras identitet?* • Vad är din attityd mot företag som har en annan identitet/egenskap jämfört med dig? • Vad är din attityd mot företag som har en lik identitet/egenskap som dig? • Kan du ge ett exempel på en influencer som du relaterar till? *Varför och hur relaterar du till dem?* • Tänk på en influencer du följer, och företagen som de marknadsför. Ser du någon likhet mellan deras identiteter och egenskaper? *Tror du att de måste ha liknande identiteter eller egenskaper? Varför/varför inte?*	Få en förståelse hur deltagarnas attityd mot en influencer påverkas av hur mycket dom identifierar sig med influencer som

	• Kan du tala om en långvarig relation med en influencer? *Förtydligande: en influencer du valt att stödja längst. Varför och hur känner du till dem?* • Kan du tala om en långvarig relation med ett företag? *Förtydligande: ett företag du valt att stödja längst, varför och hur känner du till en koppling till dem?*	
Spillover effect on brands	• Har du känt att dina känslor och uppfattning gentemot en influencer påverkar dina känslor och uppfattningen gentemot ett marknadsfört varumärke? *I så fall, varför och hur?* • Vad är din uppfattning om moralisk och etisk misskötsel av företag och influencers? *Förtydligande: Vad anser du är fel moraliskt och etiskt av ett företag och influencer?* • Hur (om) kommer dina känslor och uppfattningar om ett varumärke vara om de samarbetar med en influencer som gör något du uppfattar som dåligt eller oetiskt?	Få en förståelse om deltagnas känslor och attityd gentemot företag som samarbetar med cancelled influencers.
	• Kan du ge exempel på tillfällen där du skulle undvika ett företag? *Follow up: Finns det undantag där du väljer att inte undvika ett företag som andra gör?* • Har du någonsin velat undvika ett företag, men inte gjort det? Om fallet är så, förklara varför. • Vilka företag är du lojal till och varför? • Vad skulle få dig att sluta vara lojal mot ett varumärke? • Finns det ett varumärke som du anser dig ha en dålig relation till? *Varför och hur?* • Om ett varumärke som använder sig av influencer marketing, känner du att de har ansvar över influencers beteende på sociala medier?	

	Hur, på vilket sätt och varför? • På vilket sätt tror du att ett varumärkes respons gentemot en cancelled influencer påverkar dina uppfattningar/känslor gentemot det marknadsförda varumärket? • I vilka fall skulle du förlåta varumärket? • I vilka fall skulle du inte förlåta varumärket? • Hur tycker du att ett varumärke bör agera om en marknadsförd influencer blir cancelled?	

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