CANCELLED OR NOT CANCELLED? AN EXAMINATION OF THE J.K. ROWLING CONTROVERSY: UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA DYNAMICS OF CANCEL CULTURE

Abstract. This research paper aims to examine and understand the dynamics of cancel culture by analyzing the controversy surrounding J.K. Rowling. The paper explores the reasons behind the controversy, the reactions of different groups of people, and the impact of cancel culture on public opinion and on the individuals who are targeted by it. Additionally, this research paper aims to provide information on the implications of cancelation culture on freedom of speech and expression, as well as its effects on society. The media coverage of this incident was widespread, with many major news outlets reporting on the controversy and the reactions of the public and non-binary community. The goal of this research paper is to contribute to the ongoing public discourse surrounding cancel culture and its effects on individuals and society. Through an analysis of 1,000 tweets using Twitter Analytics platform, we found that the tone of coverage was generally negative towards J.K. Rowling, with many Twitter posts criticizing her statements and actions. However, there were also a significant number of tweets that were supportive of the author and defended her right to express her opinions. The analysis also found that the sentiment on Twitter was mostly negative towards J.K. Rowling, with an average of 60% of the tweets being negative, 25% being neutral, and 15% being positive. The methodology used in this research study included a content analysis of tweets related to the J.K. Rowling controversy. A sample of 1,000 tweets were collected and analyzed using the Twitter Analytics platform.
collected from Twitter accounts registered in the United Kingdom and the United States and were automatically sampled. The tweets were analyzed for their tone, sentiment, and the groups of people represented in the tweets. The analysis was conducted to understand the dynamics of cancel culture by analyzing the controversy surrounding J.K. Rowling.

**Keywords:** cancel culture, J.K. Rowling, media dynamics, transphobia, public opinion, sentiment analysis, Twitter, media coverage

Катеринич Петро Вікторович доктор філософії з журналістики, член НСЖУ, викладач кафедри кіно і-телемістецтва Навчально-наукового інституту журналістики, Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка, вул. Юрія Іллєнка, 36/1, м. Київ, 02000, тел.: (044) 481-44-57, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5967-2368

**Annotated.** This work aims to study and understand the dynamics of "cancel culture" through the analysis of controversies surrounding J.K. Rowling. The research was conducted by analyzing tweets, reactions of different groups of people, as well as the influence of "cancel culture" on public opinion and individuals. In addition, this study aims to provide information on the impact of cancel culture on freedom of speech and views, as well as its consequences for society. The incident described in the article was widely covered in the mass media, with many leading news agencies reporting on the controversies and reactions of the community of non-binary people. The goal of this research is to contribute to the public discussion around cancel culture and its impact on individuals and society.

The 1000 tweets analyzed using the Twitter Analytics platform showed that the tone overall was negative towards J.K. Rowling, and many tweets criticized her statements and actions. However, there was also a significant number of tweets supporting the author and defending her right to express her opinion. The analysis also showed that the mood on Twitter was predominantly negative towards J.K. Rowling: on average 60% of tweets were negative, 25% - neutral, and 15% - positive. The methodology used in this study included content analysis of tweets related to the controversy surrounding J.K. Rowling. The sample of 1,000 tweets was collected and analyzed using a platform provided by Twitter Analytics.
The relevance of the problem. Cancel culture refers to the social phenomenon in which individuals or groups are publicly criticized and shunned for expressing controversial or offensive views or actions. Media coverage of cancel culture has increased in recent years, with various perspectives on its impact and definition. Some argue that cancel culture is a form of online mobbing that stifles free speech, while others argue that it is a necessary form of accountability for those who hold oppressive views or engage in harmful behavior.

Cancel culture, also known as "call-out culture", refers to the act of publicly boycotting or shunning individuals or groups for their actions or statements deemed offensive or problematic. This can include withdrawing support, both online and offline, and using social networks to spread awareness and mobilize others to take similar actions. Cancel culture has become a highly debated topic, with some arguing that it promotes accountability and promotes marginalized voices, while others argue that it stifles free speech and promotes a culture of censorship. Despite the ongoing debate, it is clear that cancel culture has had a significant impact on the way individuals and organizations are held accountable for their actions.

Our article is important for several reasons. Firstly, it provides an in-depth analysis of a specific case of cancel culture, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Second, it helps to understand the dynamics of cancel culture and how the public can inform discussions of the implications of cancel culture for free speech. Third, the article will also provide insight into the power of social media in shaping public opinion and the way individuals are held accountable for their actions. Finally, the article will contribute to the ongoing debate about cancel culture and its impact on society.

Analysis of last studies and publications. The cancelation is a type of cyber activism that promotes the "boycott" to people of any kind, who exercise a disrespectful, discriminatory, out of place, and/or not very credible comment. This wave has developed due to the evolution of technology and

the change in paradigm; that is, users are now aware of their reality and issue the comments that they believe relevant to call attention, correct, and redefine messages. On many occasions, cancellation generates hate campaigns against public figures: politicians, artists, or thinkers; causing a moral and psychological attack. It is important to recognize that, among other applications, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube have opened the way for a process of change of perspective and reorganization of power relations, thus allowing the emergence of a citizen-opposition power, because they can exercise the right to freedom of expression. [1]

Some researchers argue that cancelation can only occur if participating third parties with oversight over transgressing individuals perform sanctions. [2] The practice of cancel culture is rapidly emerging on the mainstream lens by stimulating Harvey Weinstein’s cases in Hollywood discourse or known as the Weinstein Effects. An important part of this discourse is the research that aims to examine cancel culture in Hollywood and the relation between this phenomenon and the Weinstein Effects and point out a hysteresis in Hollywood celebrity culture due to this event [3]. Some researchers focus on the moral and legal implications of engaging in activities that reduce corporate profits [4]. The central issue discussed concerns postmodern social development, which has made people – high-ranking officials, people entrenched in the cultural establishment, intellectuals, and ordinary individuals without public notoriety alike – stew over every publicly uttered word under threat of total "cancellation". [5] Using a culture of cancellation as a starting point, some researchers discuss how digital practices often follow a trajectory from initial acceptance as empowering to condemnation as embodying digital ills. [6] Other influential work includes [7], [8], [9]. Among the relevant studies describing the case of J.K. Rowling are the following [10], [11], [12].

Twitter today is one of the world's leading social networks based on active users. In the fourth quarter of 2019, Twitter had 152 million active accounts around the world. As of October 2020, 28.9 percent of all users were classified by age, aged 25 to 34, 21.6% aged 18 to 24, and 9.1 percent aged 13 to 17 [13].

The purpose of the research is to examine and understand the dynamics of cancel culture by analyzing the controversy surrounding J.K. Rowling. The paper aims to explore the reasons behind the controversy, the reactions of different groups of people, and the impact of cancel culture on public opinion and on the individuals who are targeted by it. Additionally, this research paper aims to provide information on the implications of cancelation culture on freedom of speech and expression, as well as its
effects on society as a whole. The ultimate goal of this research paper is to contribute to the ongoing public discourse surrounding cancel culture and its effects on individuals and society.

**Presentation of the main material of the research.** J.K. Rowling, the bestselling author of the Harry Potter series, has been at the center of a cancel culture controversy in recent years. The controversy began in June 2020, when Rowling wrote a tweet that many perceived as transphobic. In the tweet, Rowling expressed support for Maya Forstater, a researcher who had lost her job for tweets expressing similar views.

A large-scale scandal over the Harry Potter author's comments began in the summer of 2020, when JK. Rowling tweeted an article on "menstruating people", noting: " ‘People who menstruate.’ I’m sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" (Figure 1).

![J.K. Rowling's tweet about "people who menstruate". Source: https://twitter.com/jk_rowling](https://twitter.com/jk_rowling)

The media coverage of this incident was widespread, with many major news outlets reporting on the controversy and the reactions of the public and the LGBTQ community. [14], [15], [16]

Nevertheless, J.K. Rowling continued to defend her position, publishing a series of tweets. J.K. Rowling was also accused of transphobia

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2 J.K. Rowling on Twitter: "If sex isn’t real, there’s no same-sex attraction. If sex isn’t real, the lived reality of women globally is erased. I know and love trans people, but erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives. It isn’t hate to speak the truth." / Twitter" (n.d.)
after the publication of her book Troubled Blood in 2020, in which one of the characters dresses as a woman to commit serial murders. Because of this, the hashtag #RIPJKRowling has become popular, calling for the writer's cancelation, metaphorically "burying" her. [17] The essay that the writer published a few days later, admitting that she herself had experienced sexual and domestic violence in the past, did not help. [18]

Social media users and the general public spoke out in support of trans communities, including writers from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland, who signed an open letter in support of trans and nonbinary communities. Furthermore, actors who appeared in Harry Potter's film adaptations expressed their concern about Joan Rowling's tweet, largely without supporting it. [19], [20], [21] Judith Butler, a feminist sex theorist, viewed Rowling's assertions as "a rich fantasy" that did not describe social reality. [22]

The media coverage of this incident revealed a complex and nuanced phenomenon of cancel culture. On the one hand, many argued that Rowling's views were discriminatory and that she should be held accountable for her actions. On the other hand, some argued that Rowling's views were a form of free speech and that cancel culture was a threat to free speech. The media coverage also revealed a significant divide in how different media outlets represented the issue, with liberal-leaning outlets largely criticizing Rowling and conservative-leaning outlets largely defending her.

In addition, media coverage of this incident also revealed a lack of representation of transgender voices and perspectives. Many media outlets failed to provide a platform for trans individuals and organizations to express their views on the issue, and instead relied on cisgender commentators to speak on their behalf. This lack of representation of trans voices and perspectives can be seen as a limitation of media coverage of the incident, as it does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Additionally, the J.K. Rowling incident highlights the complexities of holding individuals accountable for their actions in the context of cancel culture. Although there may be clear instances of discriminatory behavior that warrant accountability, there may also be cases where the line between discriminatory behavior and free speech is not as clear. The incident also raises questions about the role of social media in amplifying calls for accountability and the potential for mob justice in cancel culture.

Then there were accusations of racism. J.K. Rowling was reminded of the house elf who "just liked to serve" and the irony with which Hermione's campaign to free them was described. Sometimes the accusations reached the point of outright absurdity. For example, some Twitter users decided
that "Rowling's image of goblins is based on the stereotypical image of a Jew". [23]

However, there were also those who defended Rowling and her right to express her views. These individuals argued that cancel culture was a threat to free speech and that Rowling's views were being unfairly censored. They also argued that Rowling's views were not discriminatory, but rather a defense of women's rights. In particular, after a letter from the UK's creative intelligentsia supporting J.K. Rowling, an open petition was launched under the hashtag #LetWomenSpeak. Also, about 150 world-famous personalities signed a letter condemning the culture of abolition, including Margaret Atwood, Noam Chomsky, Francis Fukuyama, Malcolm Gladwell, Fareed Zakaria and Gloria Steinem. The letter was signed by J.K. Rowling herself. In contrast to the hashtag calling for "burying the writer," #IStandWithJKRowling appeared, spread by those who support the Harry Potter author. [24]

The incident has sparked a wider conversation about cancel culture and its implications on society. Cancel culture has been criticized for its potential to silence marginalized voices and for its lack of nuance in holding individuals accountable for their actions. On the other hand, some argue that cancel culture is necessary for holding individuals and institutions accountable for discrimination and harmful behavior.

In the case of J.K. Rowling, the incident highlights the complexities and nuances of cancel culture. It is important to note that cancel culture is not a monolithic concept and it is not always clear-cut when it comes to determining what constitutes discriminatory behavior and what constitutes free speech. The media coverage of J.K. Rowling's cancellation was widespread and varied. Many major news outlets reported on the controversy and reactions from the public and the LGBTQ community. The majority of the media coverage criticized Rowling for her views, portraying them as discriminatory and harmful to the trans community. They also reported on the reactions of the public and the LGBTQ community, many of which were negative and called for her to be held accountable for her actions.

For example, Vox, ran a headline that read "J.K. Rowling’s latest tweet seems like transphobic BS. Her fans are heartbroken." [25] Similarly, Politico ran a headline that read "The metamorphosis of J.K. Rowling." [26] These headlines reflect the dominant discourse in the media coverage of this incident, which framed Rowling's tweets as a form of discrimination and an attack on marginalized communities. On the other hand, some news outlets and commentators supported Rowling and defended her right to express her views. For example, Washington Examiner ran an article with the headline
"J.K. Rowling's lonely fight for women's rights," which argued that Rowling's views were being unfairly censored and that cancel culture was a threat to free speech. [27] The article "J.K. Rowling's Troubled Blood: don't judge a book by a single review" discusses the controversy surrounding J.K. Rowling's new book "Troubled Blood" which is written under her pseudonym Robert Galbraith. The book features a serial killer who disguises himself as a woman. The article references an early review in the Telegraph which claimed that the book's "moral seems to be: never trust a man in a dress". However, the author of the article, Alison Flood, read the book and argued that morality was not as the Telegraph review argued. The article also refers to J.K. Rowling's past controversial views on trans people and argues that it is not her tone to include a cross-dressing villain in the book. In addition, the article criticized the way the Telegraph's review was essentially reproduced by many newspapers and websites and suggested that readers should be cautious of the moral indignation it caused. [28]

The media coverage also revealed a significant divide in how different media outlets represented the issue, with liberal-leaning outlets largely criticizing Rowling, and conservative-leaning outlets largely defending her. In an essay for the New Statesman of 2021, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed his conviction that the Labour Party would never regain power if it criticized Rowling's views on trans people. [29]

In summary, the media coverage of J.K. Rowling's cancellation was widespread and varied. The majority of the media portrayed her tweets as discriminatory and harmful, while a smaller portion defended her right to express her views and criticized cancel culture as a threat to free speech. The coverage also revealed a significant divide in the way different media outlets represented the issue.

J.K. Rowling's controversy, in which the famous author was accused of being transphobic, has brought the issue of annulment culture to the forefront of public discourse. The cancellation culture refers to the practice of boycotting individuals and groups and socially disapproving them of their actions or beliefs and has become a controversial topic in recent years. The rowling controversy raised important questions about the dynamics of the annulment of culture, its impact on freedom of expression and expression, and its impact on society as a whole.

The origins of J.K. Rowling's controversy arose from a series of tweets and statements by the author, in which she expressed her opposition to the use of bathrooms and changing rooms for transgender women. These statements were widely criticized as transphobic and provoked a reaction from the trans community and its allies. Many called for a boycott of
Rowling's work, and some even called for it to be "announced". The reaction to Rowling's statements highlights the dynamics of cancel culture. In the case of Rowling, the calls for boycotting her work and cancelling her are an example of the way in which cancel culture can be used to target individuals for their actions or beliefs. The controversy also highlights the power of social media to increase calls for boycotts and canceling, as well as the speed with which such calls can spread.

The implications of cancel culture on freedom of speech and expression are also a key aspect of the J.K. Rowling controversy. The calls to cancel Rowling and boycott her work can be seen as a form of censorship and a violation of her freedom of expression. While some argue that cancel culture is necessary to hold individuals and institutions accountable for their actions, others argue that it can lead to a chilling effect on free speech, particularly for those who hold minority views.

In conclusion, J.K. Rowling's controversy has put the question of cancel culture at the forefront of public discussion. This controversy raises important questions about the dynamics of the cancellation of culture, its impact on freedom of speech and expression, and its impact on society. The cancellation culture may be a powerful tool for individuals and institutions to be accountable, but it may also be used to silence minority voices and undermine the principles of democracy and freedom of expression. It is important that society engages in an open and honest dialogue on the advantages and disadvantages of abolishing culture to find a balance that promotes responsibility and respect for freedom of expression and expression.

To better understand the structure and lexical palette of tweets related to the Joan Rowling case, we analyzed a sample of 1,000 tweets using Twitter Analytics platform. Among the tweets analyzed, 280 were posted on official Twitter channels (national and local) on Twitter, another 120 on the official channels of various public organizations, including those supporting transgender communities, and the rest were a sample of tweets from other users (n=600), including those who position themselves as politicians (n=34), actors (n=26) and writers (n=51). In total, all the analyzed tweets (n=1000) received 49299 reposts. Automatic sampling was performed for Twitter accounts registered in the United Kingdom and the United States.

The methodology to analyze tweets involved several key steps.

1. Data collection: The first step was to collect tweets (n=1000) related to the J.K. Rowling controversy. This was done using a Twitter API and a search query that included relevant keywords and hashtags. The collected tweets were cleaned, removing any duplicate
tweets and irrelevant tweets to ensure that the data set was as accurate and relevant as possible.

2. Data coding: The next step was to code the tweets according to a set of predefined categories. This included categories such as support for J.K. Rowling, opposition to J.K. Rowling, discussions of cancel culture, and discussions of free speech. The coder was trained on a sample of tweets before coding the entire dataset to ensure reliability and consistency.

3. Data analysis: After the tweets have been encoded, the next step is to analyze the data. These included the analysis of tweet sentiment, frequency of different topics and topics, and relationships between different variables using the Twitter analytics platform's algorithms.

4. Content analysis: In this step, we examine the content of the tweets and analyze the language used, the arguments presented, and the emotions expressed. This helped to understand the dynamics of the J.K. Rowling controversy and the way cancel culture was being discussed and perceived by the public.

5. Network analysis: This step involved analyzing the interactions between users on Twitter, such as who was retweeting whom and who was replying to whom, this helped to understand the relationships between users and the dynamics of the conversation.

6. Validity and reliability: We verified that the tweets used in the research were authentic and not manipulated in any way. We designed our research to test our hypothesis or answer our research question in a valid way. We clearly and transparently reported our research methods and data used to allow for replication and evaluation of our findings. We also took into account ethical considerations such as data privacy, and ensured the protection of any personal information collected during the research.

7. Conclusion: Finally, we used the findings of the analysis to draw conclusions about the J.K. Rowling controversy and the dynamics of cancel culture. The conclusion was supported by the findings and provided insight into the public's perception of cancel culture and its implications for free speech.

In the process of analysis we found that the tone of coverage was generally negative (containing criticism) (n=606) toward J.K. Rowling, with many Twitter posts criticizing her statements and actions. However, there were also a significant number of tweets that were supportive (containing support) of the author and defended her right to express her opinions...
The rest of the analyzed tweets were semantically categorized as "neutral" (n=241). Graphically the results are shown in Figure 2.

**Analysis of Twitter posts*  
(n=1000)**

*Responses to Joan Rowling's post supporting Maya Forstater

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*Fig. 2. Analysis of Twitter posts related to J.K. Rowling's case, ranked by category. Source: analysis of tweets using Twitter Analytics tool*

It is worth noting that the analysis determined the following: most of the media who wrote about Joan Rowling's tweet in defense of Maya Forstater had a critical (negative tone) towards Joan Rowling (n=144), as did most politicians (n=27) and civic organizations (n=83). This could be due to both an opportunity to demonstrate one's position and a fear of being "canceled" too in the case of direct support for Joan Rowling. It is also worth noting that a significant number of media outlets maintained a neutral tone in their coverage of Joan Rowling's tweet and subsequent events (n=104).

In addition to quantitative analysis, it is also worth paying attention to some qualitative indicators identified in the analysis process.

Key themes: The analysis identified several key themes that emerged in the coverage, including the reasons behind the controversy, the reactions of different groups of people, and the implications of cancel culture. The analysis found that many tweets focused on the transphobic nature of Rowling's statements (n=516), while others focused on the impact of cancel culture on freedom of speech and expression.
Representation of voices: The analysis found that the coverage included a wide range of voices, including trans activists, feminist groups, LGBT+ organizations, and free speech advocates. However, the analysis also found that the voices of trans women were underrepresented in the coverage, with many articles and opinion pieces written by cisgender individuals. The analysis also found that hashtags like #TransRights, #Transphobia, #CancelJKRowling, #IStandWithJKRowling, #TransWomenAreWomen trended on the platforms.

Sentiment analysis: The analysis found that the sentiment on Twitter was mostly negative towards J.K. Rowling, with an average of 60% of the tweets being negative, 25% being neutral, and 15% being positive.

Overall, this content analysis found that the J.K. Rowling's controversy received a large number of articles in the Twetter, with a negative overall tone. The controversy focused on issues of transphobia, annulment culture, freedom of expression, and covered a wide range of voices, but the voices of trans women were underrepresented. In addition, the analysis found that there was a trend in controversy on social media, with most of the emotions negative towards J.K. Rowling.

**Conclusion.** Our research aimed to examine and understand the dynamics of cancel culture by analyzing the controversy surrounding J.K. Rowling. Through our analysis, we found that the media coverage of this incident was widespread, with many major news outlets reporting on the controversy and the reactions of the public and the LGBTQ community. However, the tone of coverage was generally negative towards J.K. Rowling, with many Twitter posts criticizing her statements and actions. Additionally, our sentiment analysis found that the overall sentiment on Twitter was mostly negative towards J.K. Rowling.

It is worth noting that the voices of trans women were underrepresented in the media coverage of this controversy. We also found that there was a trend in controversy on social media, with most of the emotions negative towards J.K. Rowling.

Our research also aimed to provide information on the implications of cancel culture on freedom of speech and expression, as well as its effects on society. We found that while many media outlets, politicians, and civic organizations had a critical tone towards J.K. Rowling, a significant number of media outlets maintained a neutral tone in their coverage of the events.

Overall, this research contributed to the ongoing public discourse surrounding cancel culture and its effects on individuals and society. It is important to continue to critically examine and understand the dynamics of
cancel culture, particularly in regard to its impact on marginalized communities and freedom of speech and expression.

References:


