



**THESIS  
ON**

**Cancel Culture and Its Impact on Journalistic Freedom**

**SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism**

*Submitted by*

**Gouri Dev Singh**

*Under the Supervision of*

**Dr. Nidhi Singhal**

**Department of Journalism,  
Delhi College Of Arts and Commerce  
University of Delhi, New Delhi 110023  
Phone: 011-24109821**

### **Declaration of Originality**

I, Gouri Dev Singh, hereby declare that my research paper on the topic "**Cancel Culture and its impact on Journalistic Freedom**" is an original work done by the researcher. I further reaffirm that the paper has not been published yet.

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2025**

**Name: Gouri Dev Singh**

**Signature:**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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**Department of Journalism  
Delhi College of Arts and Commerce  
University of Delhi, New Delhi 110023,  
Phone: 011-24109821**

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis titled “ **Cancel Culture and its impact on Journalistic Freedom**” submitted to Dr. Nidhi Singhal faculty, Department of Journalism, Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, University of Delhi, in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the award of the Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, is an original work carried out by Mr. Gouri Dev Singh.

This research was undertaken under my supervision and guidance, and to the best of my knowledge, the thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title at any university or institution in india and abroad.

**Date:** 21 April, 2025

Dr. Nidhi Singhal

Supervisor

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## **Abstract**

This research paper examines the phenomenon of cancel culture and its growing impact on journalistic freedom in India. With the rise of social media, public accountability has become decentralized, leading to both constructive call-outs and destructive cancellations. The research utilizes a mixed-method approach, including quantitative survey data and qualitative thematic analysis, to explore how journalists experience, interpret, and respond to cancel culture.

The study hypothesizes that while cancel culture serves as a mechanism for public accountability, it significantly contributes to self-censorship and diminished journalistic freedom, particularly on polarizing topics. Through a structured online survey of 52 respondents, primarily young adults aged 18-34, the research examines awareness levels, perceptions of justice, emotional responses, and perceived impacts on media trust.

The findings highlight the dual nature of cancel culture: while it empowers public discourse, it also triggers fear, self-censorship, and reputational harm. The study suggests that although cancel culture has its roots in justice, it often leads to media silencing and superficial engagement. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations to promote responsible digital critique, protect journalists' rights, and rebuild public trust in media, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that preserves both accountability and freedom of expression.



## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction to Cancel Culture**

Cancel culture denotes the collective act of boycotting or publicly shaming individuals, brands, or organizations due to behaviors or opinions deemed offensive, unethical, or problematic. Initially arising from marginalized communities seeking accountability from those in power, cancel culture has since transformed into a widespread phenomenon that profoundly impacts public discourse and media practices.

### **1.2 Cancel Culture in the Indian Context**

Although cancel culture originated within Western social justice movements, its impact in India has surged significantly in the digital age. Journalists, activists, comedians, and public figures are increasingly facing online cancellations. The interaction of political ideologies, religious beliefs, and media narratives complicates the dynamics of cancel culture in India.

### **1.2 Why Journalists Are Vulnerable**

Journalists have a duty to provide accurate reports, frequently on contentious topics. This obligation places them in the midst of cancel culture movements. A single headline, editorial, or even a past social media post can incite significant backlash. In contrast to public figures, journalists typically do not possess the public relations resources to protect their image, rendering them more vulnerable to harm to their reputation, doxxing, or being dismissed.

### **1.4 Historical Context of Media Criticism**

While cancel culture appears to be a modern phenomenon, criticism of media is not new. Historically, journalists have faced backlash from governments, religious institutions, and

powerful individuals. What distinguishes today's cancel culture is its democratized, viral nature and the unprecedented speed at which reputational damage can occur.

Before social media, criticism was typically filtered through established channels—letters to editors, regulatory bodies, or legal action. These processes, while imperfect, provided some form of structured evaluation. Today's cancel campaigns often bypass these mechanisms, creating an immediate court of public opinion where accusations and judgment happen simultaneously.

## **1.5 Digital Media Landscape in India**

India's digital transformation has been extraordinary, with over 750 million internet users as of 2024, making it the second-largest online market globally. Social media penetration has reached unprecedented levels, with platforms like WhatsApp (500+ million users), YouTube (450+ million), and Instagram (250+ million) becoming primary sources of information.

This digital revolution has fundamentally altered how news is consumed and criticized. Traditional media gatekeepers—editors, publishers, and broadcast executives—no longer hold exclusive power over content distribution. Anyone with a smartphone can now:

- Create and disseminate content
- Challenge mainstream narratives
- Mobilize mass opinion against media figures
- Participate in viral outrage campaigns

These capabilities, while democratizing, have created new vulnerabilities for journalists, especially those covering divisive topics like politics, religion, or social justice.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

In a democratic setup, a free press is essential. Cancel culture threatens journalistic independence by encouraging self-censorship and mob-driven penalties. This study examines how cancel culture reshapes journalistic values and audience trust.

Several factors make this research particularly timely and significant:

- **Erosion of Media Trust:** Public confidence in journalism has declined globally, with India showing concerning trends of polarized media consumption.
- **Rising Journalist Attrition:** Increasing reports of journalists leaving the profession due to online harassment and threats.
- **Evolving Legal Landscape:** Questions about digital speech regulation, "right to be forgotten," and platform accountability remain largely unresolved.
- **Information Integrity:** Cancel culture's impact on factual reporting versus opinion-based content requires critical examination.

### 1.7 Objectives of the Study

- To examine public understanding of cancel culture
- To explore the perceived impact of cancel culture on journalistic freedom
- To analyze how journalists adapt or resist cancellation threats
- To offer recommendations that balance accountability with freedom of expression

### 1.8 Research Questions

- How aware are audiences of cancel culture and its implications?
- Do people view cancel culture as a tool for justice or a weapon for silencing?
- How does cancel culture affect journalists' freedom and mental health?
- What role does social media play in enabling or mitigating cancellations?

### 1.9 Scope and Limitations

The research focuses primarily on Indian digital media audiences, particularly youth aged 18-35. It does not analyze specific legal cases but focuses on social perceptions and trends. Due to time constraints, it does not include live interviews with media professionals but draws on survey insights and secondary sources.

### 1.10 Organization of the Research Paper

This research paper is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of cancel culture's impact on journalistic freedom:

- **Chapters I-II** establish the foundation with introduction and literature review
- **Chapters III-V** present the conceptual hypothesis, and research objectives
- **Chapters VI-VII** detail the methodology and data analysis
- **Chapters VIII** conclude with recommendations and future research directions

Each chapter builds upon previous sections to create a coherent understanding of this complex phenomenon.

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Understanding Cancel Culture: Origins and Definitions**

Cancel culture, often referred to as 'call-out culture,' is a collective form of digital ostracism in which individuals, organizations, or public figures face boycotts or social penalties for actions, views, or content considered offensive. The term 'cancel' signifies the withdrawal of societal approval, frequently enacted through social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit. Historically, the roots of cancel culture can be traced back to social justice movements where marginalized communities highlighted oppressive systems. The term gained prominence around 2015, coinciding with the emergence of hashtags like #CancelX or #BoycottX that trended worldwide. Although its original intent was to promote accountability, cancel culture has since expanded to encompass a wider, and at times more punitive, role. Early academic analyses of cancel culture include Clark (2020), who characterizes it as 'a form of boycott where an individual, typically a celebrity or public figure, is deprived of support, canceled or deemed canceled after engaging in behavior or making statements viewed as objectionable or offensive.' Likewise, Ng (2020) describes it as 'the modern practice of withdrawing support for public figures following their engagement in behavior or speech deemed objectionable.' Romano (2019) traces the concept of 'cancellation' back to Black Twitter communities in the mid-2010s, where it originated as an internal mechanism for holding individuals accountable for problematic actions. This practice evolved from its grassroots beginnings to become a widely recognized cultural phenomenon by 2018-2019, as major news outlets began to cover high-profile cancellations.

### **2.2 The Rise of Cancel Culture in the Digital Era**

The era of digital technology has made content creation and consumption accessible to all. Consequently, it has also made outrage accessible. Anyone equipped with a smartphone can engage in online discussions, rally support, and demand accountability. This shift in power dynamics poses a challenge to traditional gatekeepers such as editors and publishers. However, it also brings about instability. The phenomenon of cancel culture can propagate misinformation, strip away context, and often lead to hasty conclusions. The concept of 'Trial by Twitter' frequently

supplants established due process. Marwick and Boyd (2018) documented the transformation of public shaming dynamics through social media platforms, coining the term 'networked privacy' to describe how past remarks can be taken out of context and magnified across widespread networks. Their findings underscore how the design of platforms like Twitter—with features such as retweeting, trending algorithms, and character limitations—encourages swift, emotionally charged reactions to perceived wrongdoings. Additionally, Goldberg's (2021) comprehensive study on digital activism reveals that cancel culture manifests differently across various cultural landscapes. While Western cancel culture tends to prioritize individual accountability, Eastern versions may focus on collective reputation and honor systems. In India, cancel culture intertwines with matters such as religious sensitivity, nationalism, caste, gender rights, and political affiliations—often exacerbating divisive movements. Research by Chattopadhyay (2023) specifically points out how Hindu nationalism and secular liberalism give rise to competing cancel cultures within Indian digital environments, rendering journalists particularly susceptible when reporting on religious disputes.

### 2.3 Journalism Under Siege: A Global Overview

Across the world, journalists are increasingly becoming the targets of cancel culture:

- In the U.S., New York Times staff members have faced backlash for publishing controversial op-eds.
- In the U.K., BBC journalists have been trolled and threatened for political bias.
- In India, journalists like **Ravish Kumar**, **Barkha Dutt**, and **Faye D'Souza** have all experienced online abuse, cancellation threats, and even coordinated smear campaigns.

This global phenomenon suggests that cancel culture is not limited to social justice advocacy—it is also a weaponised tool in political and ideological battles.

The Reporters Without Borders 2024 Press Freedom Index documents how online harassment campaigns increasingly threaten journalistic independence worldwide. Their research indicates that women journalists face disproportionate targeting, often receiving gendered threats alongside professional criticism.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has further tracked how cancel campaigns can escalate from digital harassment to physical threats. Their 2023 report, "From Twitter to Threat," documented 82 cases globally where online cancellation attempts preceded physical intimidation or violence against journalists.

Scholarly analysis by Wardle and Derakhshan (2020) identifies cancel culture as part of a broader "information disorder" ecosystem that threatens journalistic integrity through audience manipulation and polarization. Their work suggests cancel culture often operates alongside other disruptive forces like disinformation campaigns and coordinated inauthentic behavior.

## **2.4 Key Media Theories Relevant to Cancel Culture**

To frame cancel culture academically, several foundational media theories are applicable:

### **2.4.1 Spiral of Silence Theory (Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann)**

This theory posits that individuals may silence their opinions when they perceive that their views are in the minority. Cancel culture enforces this spiral by threatening social ostracism, pushing journalists to avoid dissenting or unpopular topics—even if valid.

Recent research by Williams et al. (2023) demonstrated how journalists who witnessed colleagues being "canceled" were 37% less likely to pitch stories on related topics, creating what they term "contagious self-censorship." Their quantitative analysis of 1,200 journalists across six countries showed this effect was strongest in digital-first media organizations and among early-career journalists.

### **2.4.2 Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)**

The media may not tell us what to think, but it tells us *what to think about*. In the cancel culture era, audiences have taken this power partially away from media institutions—setting their own agendas and punishing deviation from accepted narratives.

Vu and McCombs (2021) expanded this concept through their research on "reversed agenda-setting," documenting how social media users can now force mainstream journalists to cover topics

they might otherwise ignore. Their longitudinal analysis of Twitter-driven news cycles shows cancel campaigns often serve as powerful agenda-setting mechanisms, particularly when they align with pre-existing ideological biases.

### **2.4.3 Framing Theory**

This theory argues that how a story is told (framed) influences how it is perceived. Cancel culture thrives on framing—often reducing complex issues into black-and-white narratives of right and wrong.

Entman's (2010) seminal work on media framing explains how selection and salience shape public understanding. Cancel culture exemplifies this process by emphasizing certain aspects of a person's statements or actions while excluding mitigating factors or context. Splichal (2022) expanded on this framework by analyzing how cancel campaigns typically employ "moral framing" that categorically marks targets as either virtuous or transgressive.

### **2.4.4 Public Sphere Theory (Jürgen Habermas)**

This theory emphasizes the importance of open and rational public discourse. However, cancel culture frequently stifles dialogue, replacing thoughtful discussion with emotional reactions. Instead of fostering a public sphere, we are observing a public trial. Papacharissi's (2021) research on 'affective publics' connects Habermas's ideals with the realities of the digital age, illustrating how emotional reactions prevail in contemporary discourse environments. Her study particularly focuses on how cancel culture generates 'momentary publics' that revolve around outrage instead of promoting ongoing deliberative engagement

## **2.5 Cancel Culture vs Accountability: A Fine Line**

It is critical to distinguish between **accountability** which is corrective and reformative and **cancellation** which is often punitive and irreversible.

Cancel culture usually lacks mechanisms for due process, growth, or redemption. A tweet from a decade ago can resurface and destroy a career, regardless of personal growth or changed context.



Many scholars argue that cancel culture has created a climate of fear where journalists and writers avoid risk, controversy, or critical reporting. Instead of pushing boundaries, they now operate within increasingly narrow and acceptable limits.

Research by the Pew Research Center (2023) found that 67% of journalists reported having changed their reporting approach due to cancellation concerns. The most common adaptations included:

- Avoiding specific terminology
- Including more "both sides" coverage even when evidence strongly supported one position
- Requesting anonymity for quotes on controversial topics
- Declining to report stories perceived as "too risky"

Clark and Marchi (2022) further differentiate between "callout culture" (which targets structural problems and seeks reform) and "cancel culture" (which targets individuals and seeks punishment). Their ethnographic work among digital activists suggests the former was the original goal, while the latter emerged as an unintended consequence of platform dynamics.

## **2.6 Impact on Media Behavior and Ethics**

The rise of cancel culture is changing how journalism is practiced:

- Journalists increasingly avoid sensitive topics—especially politics, religion, or caste.
- Editorial boards now weigh "audience backlash potential" before approving controversial pieces.
- Retractions are often issued not due to factual inaccuracies, but due to perceived offensiveness.
- Self-censorship has become normalized, even among independent or alternative media platforms.

The Nuemann Media Lab's longitudinal study (2022-2024) tracked editorial decisions across 40 major news outlets, documenting a 28% increase in editors citing "audience sensitivity concerns" when rejecting pitches. Their content analysis showed a corresponding decrease in investigative reporting on divisive social issues, particularly regarding gender, race, and religion.

Research by the Reuters Institute (2023) further quantified how journalists alter their coverage to avoid cancellation:

- 76% reported checking social media reactions to guide coverage
- 64% admitted to avoiding certain topics entirely
- 83% said they've softened language on sensitive issues
- 59% reported seeking legal review for potentially controversial content

These changes raise fundamental questions about journalism's core mission of truth-seeking and speaking truth to power.

## **2.7 Mental Health and Psychological Impact**

The psychological toll of cancel culture on journalists represents an emerging area of research. Studies by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma (2023) indicate that journalists who experience online harassment display symptoms similar to those with PTSD:

- Heightened anxiety when publishing content
- Sleep disturbances following publication of controversial stories
- Hypervigilance about public reception of their work
- Intrusive thoughts about past criticism

Their survey of 750 journalists found that 42% had considered leaving the profession specifically due to harassment concerns, with junior female journalists reporting the highest levels of distress.

Research by Mihailidis and Viotty (2021) further documents how repeated exposure to cancel campaigns—even when not directly targeted—creates "anticipatory trauma" among media professionals. This state of constant vigilance and fear affects both journalistic wellbeing and output quality.

## **2.8 Gaps in Existing Literature**

Most academic literature on cancel culture is still Western-centric. Few peer-reviewed studies focus on **Indian journalism**, especially in the digital era. Additionally, the **mental health** impact

on journalists and the rise of **alternative platforms** as a response to cancel culture remains under-researched.

Moreover, the evolution of cancel culture from an accountability movement into a tool for **ideological warfare** or **in-group policing** is a recent development requiring more empirical investigation.

Specific research gaps include:

- Limited studies on cancel culture in non-English Indian language media
- Insufficient data on how newsroom policies have evolved in response to cancel threats
- Few longitudinal studies tracking journalists' career trajectories after cancellation events
- Minimal analysis of alternative revenue models that might insulate journalists from cancellation pressure
- Absence of comparative studies between traditional media cancellations and independent journalist cancellations

## **2.9 Emerging Research Directions**

Emerging scholarship is beginning to address some of these gaps. Work by Sundaram and Jain (2024) specifically examines how regional language journalists in India navigate cancel threats with fewer resources than their English-language counterparts. Their initial findings suggest that vernacular journalists often face more severe consequences with less institutional protection.

Similarly, Phillips and Wong's (2023) research on "platform refugees"—journalists who migrate to alternative platforms after cancellation—highlights how Substack, Patreon, and YouTube have created economic lifelines for canceled journalists while potentially reinforcing audience polarization.

## **2.10 Summary of the Literature**

- Cancel culture is complex: It blends social justice, public pressure, and mob dynamics.

- Journalism is disproportionately affected due to its public-facing nature and controversial themes.
- Media theories help explain why journalists are retreating from open dialogue.
- Mental health impacts on journalists are significant and under-addressed.
- Platform dynamics accelerate and amplify cancel campaigns.
- The line between accountability and punishment remains contested.
- More localized and India-specific research is needed to understand these effects deeply.

## **CHAPTER III: OBJECTIVES**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In an era dominated by digital interaction, cancel culture has emerged as a powerful force shaping public discourse. While originally intended as a mechanism of accountability, its increasing influence on media, especially journalism, has raised critical concerns regarding freedom of expression, editorial independence, and ethical reporting. This chapter outlines the primary and specific objectives of the study, which aim to investigate how cancel culture affects journalists, newsrooms, and the broader media environment in India.

### **3.2 Primary Objective**

To critically examine the impact of cancel culture on journalistic freedom in India, particularly focusing on how digital backlash, social media dynamics, and audience expectations influence reporting practices, self-censorship, institutional responses, and public trust in the press.

### **3.3 Specific Objectives**

**1.** To analyze the level of public awareness and understanding of cancel culture.

This includes examining how the term is defined by different demographic groups, and to what extent individuals recognize the patterns and consequences of cancellation, especially in the context of journalism.

**2.** To explore generational and ideological differences in perceptions of cancel culture.

The objective is to identify whether age, education, political orientation, or digital literacy influence how individuals interpret and justify cancel culture.

**3.** To assess the extent to which cancel culture contributes to journalistic self-censorship.

This focuses on identifying whether journalists are avoiding certain topics or softening their reporting due to fear of backlash, loss of employment, or reputational harm.

**4.**To identify the journalistic domains most vulnerable to cancel campaigns.

This includes political reporting, religious commentary, gender and caste issues, and other sensitive subjects that are often at the center of digital outrage and controversy.

**5.**To evaluate how cancel culture influences institutional behavior within media organizations.

This includes examining whether editors and management support journalists under scrutiny or prioritize brand image and audience retention over press freedom.

**6.**To determine which social media platforms are most associated with initiating or amplifying cancel campaigns.

The objective is to understand how algorithmic features, user anonymity, and virality on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube contribute to cancellation events.

**7.**To investigate the emotional, psychological, and professional impact of cancel culture on journalists.

This includes assessing stress levels, professional withdrawal, job insecurity, and mental health implications resulting from being “canceled” or witnessing peers face such consequences.

**8.**To measure how cancel culture affects public trust in journalism.

The objective is to evaluate whether audiences perceive media as more or less credible due to perceived bias, censorship, or response to online backlash.

**9.**To explore how cancel culture blurs the line between accountability and punitive behavior.

This includes analyzing whether cancellation allows space for growth and dialogue, or whether it functions primarily as a tool for silencing dissent.

**10.** To examine the strategies journalists adopt to navigate the threat of cancellation.

This involves exploring methods like content moderation, disclaimers, shifting platforms (e.g., Substack, Patreon), or legal recourse.

**11.** To suggest actionable recommendations for protecting journalistic freedom while maintaining public accountability.

The objective is to propose policy, institutional, and ethical strategies that balance the need for critical media with respect for audience sensitivities and evolving cultural norms.

### **3.4 Summary**

This study sets out to provide a multi-dimensional analysis of how cancel culture affects journalists not only as professionals but also as citizens within a democratic framework. The objectives are designed to move beyond surface-level critique and offer a grounded understanding of cancel culture's dual role as both a mechanism for justice and a potential threat to media independence.

## **CHAPTER IV: HYPOTHESIS**

### **4.1 Introduction to Research Hypothesis**

This chapter outlines the hypotheses that guide our investigation into cancel culture's impact on journalistic freedom. Based on the literature review and conceptual framework established in previous chapters, these hypotheses represent testable predictions about relationships between cancel culture, journalistic behavior, and audience perception. They will be evaluated against our empirical findings to draw meaningful conclusions.

### **4.2 Primary Hypothesis**

**H<sub>0</sub> (Null Hypothesis):** Cancel culture has no significant impact on journalistic freedom and does not influence content creation decisions among journalists in India.

**H<sub>1</sub> (Alternative Hypothesis):** Cancel culture significantly impacts journalistic freedom by promoting self-censorship, topic avoidance, and risk-averse reporting among journalists in India.

This primary hypothesis addresses the core research question regarding the relationship between cancel culture and press freedom. The null hypothesis suggests no meaningful relationship exists, while the alternative hypothesis proposes that cancel culture substantially constrains journalistic expression.

### **4.3 Secondary Hypotheses**

#### **4.3.1 Regarding Public Perception**

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a significant generational divide in how cancel culture is perceived, with younger respondents (18-24) more likely to view it as a legitimate accountability mechanism compared to older respondents (25+).

This hypothesis examines whether age correlates with attitudes toward cancel culture, potentially reflecting different digital socialization experiences and values across generations.



### **4.3.2 Regarding Platform Dynamics**

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Twitter (now X) is perceived as the social media platform most strongly associated with cancel campaigns against journalists compared to other platforms.

This hypothesis tests whether specific social media architectures and user cultures create environments more conducive to cancel culture, with Twitter/X hypothesized to be particularly associated with journalistic cancellations.

### **4.3.3 Regarding Media Trust**

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Exposure to cancel campaigns correlates with decreased trust in mainstream journalism.

This hypothesis examines whether cancel culture contributes to broader media trust issues, potentially creating a feedback loop where cancellations further erode the credibility of journalism.

### **4.3.4 Regarding Topic Sensitivity**

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Topics related to politics, religion, and social justice are perceived as carrying higher cancellation risk compared to other journalistic subjects.

This hypothesis tests whether certain content domains face disproportionate cancellation pressure, potentially creating informal "no-go zones" in journalistic coverage.

### **4.3.5 Regarding Response to Cancellation**

**H<sub>6</sub>:** Audiences believe that institutional backing from media organizations decreases when journalists face cancel campaigns, regardless of the factual accuracy of the journalism in question.

This hypothesis examines perceptions about how media institutions respond to cancel pressure, particularly whether organizations are seen as prioritizing brand safety over journalistic defense.

## **4.4 Operational Definitions for Hypothesis Testing**

To test these hypotheses empirically, we operationalize key concepts as follows:

- **Cancel Culture Impact:** Measured through survey questions assessing perceived effects on journalistic freedom, self-censorship, and reporting decisions.
- **Journalistic Freedom:** Operationalized through questions about topic avoidance, reporting constraints, and editorial independence.
- **Public Perception:** Measured across demographic variables (age, education, media exposure).
- **Platform Association:** Assessed through direct questions about which platforms respondents associate with cancel campaigns.
- **Media Trust:** Measured through questions about changing trust levels and credibility perceptions.
- **Topic Sensitivity:** Assessed through ratings of perceived cancellation risk across different subject categories.
- **Institutional Response:** Measured through questions about perceived organizational support during controversy.

#### 4.5 Statistical Approach to Hypothesis Testing

For testing these hypotheses, the following statistical approaches will be employed:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulations to identify patterns in the data.
- **Inferential Analysis:** Chi-square tests to determine significant differences between categorical variables, particularly for demographic comparisons.
- **Correlation Analysis:** To examine relationships between media consumption patterns and cancel culture perceptions.

For the primary hypothesis ( $H_1$ ), we will analyze response patterns to questions directly addressing journalistic freedom and cancel culture impact. Rejection of the null hypothesis requires statistically significant responses indicating perceived constraints on journalism.

#### 4.6 Hypothesis in Relation to Research Objectives

These hypotheses align with our research objectives by:

1. Assessing public awareness and understanding of cancel culture (H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>3</sub>)
2. Evaluating perceived impacts on journalistic freedom (H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>5</sub>, H<sub>6</sub>)
3. Exploring emotional and ethical responses to digital backlash (H<sub>4</sub>)
4. Identifying platforms most associated with cancel campaigns (H<sub>3</sub>)

Each hypothesis addresses a specific component of our broader research goals, providing a systematic approach to understanding cancel culture's multifaceted impacts on journalism.

#### **4.7 Summary of Hypotheses**

The research employs one primary hypothesis focused on cancel culture's impact on journalistic freedom, supported by five secondary hypotheses examining specific dimensions of this relationship. Together, these hypotheses create a comprehensive framework for investigating how cancel culture affects journalism in contemporary India.

By testing these hypotheses against our survey data, we aim to move beyond anecdotal evidence and establish empirically supported conclusions about cancel culture's effects on press freedom, public trust, and journalistic practice.

CHAPTER V: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This research follows a **mixed-methods design**, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The purpose was to examine how cancel culture influences journalistic freedom through the lens of public perception.

The study relies on

- **Quantitative survey data** collected through a structured online questionnaire
- **Qualitative thematic analysis** of open-ended responses

The cross-sectional nature of this research captures responses at one point in time, focusing on media-aware individuals between the ages of 18 and 35.

Table 5.1: Research Design Overview

Design Element	Approach
Research Paradigm	Mixed-methods (Primarily quantitative with qualitative elements)
Time Dimension	Cross-sectional
Data Collection Approach	Online survey with structured and open-ended questions
Primary Research Goal	Descriptive and explanatory
Analysis Techniques	Statistical analysis and thematic coding

5.2 Research Objectives Recap

1. To assess public awareness and understanding of cancel culture
2. To evaluate perceived impacts on journalistic freedom
3. To explore emotional and ethical responses to digital backlash
4. To identify platforms most associated with cancel campaigns

### 5.3 Population and Sampling

The target population includes Indian media consumers, with a specific emphasis on youth and students engaged with digital media.

- **Sample Size:** 52 respondents
- **Sampling Method:** Convenience sampling
- **Age Range:** Primarily 18-34
- **Geographic Spread:** Pan-India; urban and semi-urban concentration
- **Demographic Focus:** Undergraduate and postgraduate students, working professionals, social media users

The sample may not be statistically representative but offers valuable insights into how the digital-native generation perceives and participates in cancel culture.

#### 5.3.1 Sampling Rationale

Convenience sampling was selected due to research constraints and the exploratory nature of the study. While this approach limits broad generalize ability, it provides depth in understanding how digitally engaged youth perceive cancel culture—a demographic that actively participates in online discourse.

Figure 6.1: Sample Demographics Distribution [Pie chart showing age distribution: 92.3% aged 18-24, 3.8% aged 25-34, 3.8% aged 35+]

#### 5.3.2 Inclusivity Considerations

Efforts were made to ensure diversity within the convenience sample by:

- Distributing the survey across multiple channels
- Encouraging participation from diverse educational backgrounds
- Including both media students and non-media students
- Avoiding language that would bias participation

## 5.4 Data Collection Tools

The primary instrument used was a **Google Form questionnaire**, distributed online through email, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

**Google Form Link:** <https://forms.gle/pgQSMwhPS2zYQSheA>

### 5.4.1 Survey Structure

The questionnaire included 20+ questions divided into five main sections:

1. **Demographics** – Age, education, and media exposure
2. **Awareness** – Understanding and definition of cancel culture
3. **Perception** – Beliefs about justice, toxicity, and censorship
4. **Impact** – Thoughts on journalists being canceled or self-censoring
5. **Engagement** – Social media behavior, content sharing, and emotional response

Table 5.2: Survey Structure and Question Types

Section	Question Types	Number of Questions	Purpose
Demographics	Multiple choice	3	Establish respondent profile
Awareness	Likert scale, Multiple choice	5	Measure familiarity with concept
Perception	Likert scale, Multiple choice	6	Assess attitudes toward cancel culture
Impact	Likert scale, Multiple choice, Open-ended	5	Evaluate perceived effects on journalism
Engagement	Multiple choice, Open-ended	4	Understand participatory behaviors

### 5.4.2 Question Design Considerations

Survey questions were crafted to:

- Use neutral language avoiding leading phrasing
- Present balanced options covering multiple perspectives
- Include open-text fields for nuanced responses
- Maintain logical flow from general to specific
- Balance positive and negative framing

### 5.4.3 Survey Distribution Timeline

The survey was distributed and data collected over a three-week period in March 2025, with promotion occurring in waves to ensure diverse participation:

Figure 6.2: Data Collection Timeline [Timeline chart showing survey distribution and response collection over 3 weeks in March 2025]

## 5.5 Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

The responses were exported from Google Forms to **Google Sheets** for sorting and visualization.

- **Quantitative data** was analyzed using percentages and bar/pie charts.
- **Qualitative responses** were thematically clustered to identify common emotional tones, examples, and opinions.

Common categories included:

- "Canceling = justice"
- "Canceling = bullying"
- "Fear of speaking"
- "Neutral/depends on context"

This combination of structured and interpretive analysis allows for a nuanced understanding of public sentiment.

5.5.1 Quantitative Analysis Framework

Table 5.3: Quantitative Analysis Approach

Analysis Type	Purpose	Tools Used
Descriptive Statistics	Establish patterns and frequencies	Google Sheets, Percentages, Charts
Cross-tabulation	Compare responses across demographics	Pivot Tables
Categorical Analysis	Group similar responses	Manual Coding + Spreadsheet
Visualization	Present findings clearly	Bar/Pie/Line Charts

5.5.2 Qualitative Analysis Process

Open-ended responses underwent a systematic coding process:

1. Initial reading of all responses
2. Development of preliminary coding scheme
3. Application of codes to text segments
4. Identification of recurring themes
5. Selection of representative quotes
6. Integration with quantitative findings

Figure 5.3: Qualitative Coding Process [Flow chart showing the 6-step coding process described above]

5.5.3 Data Visualization Strategy

Survey findings are presented through multiple visualization formats to enhance understanding:

- Pie charts for categorical distributions
- Bar graphs for comparative analysis
- Tables for detailed breakdowns



- Direct quotes to illustrate thematic patterns

## 5.6 Validity and Reliability

While the survey approach is informal, it was designed with clear, unbiased language and covered multiple viewpoints. Questions were logically sequenced, and respondents could answer anonymously, encouraging honest responses.

Although limited in size, the sample's homogeneity (digital-savvy, educated respondents) makes it valid for studying cancel culture in media-aware youth.

### 5.6.1 Validity Enhancement Measures

Several steps were taken to strengthen validity:

- **Pilot Testing:** The survey was tested with 5 individuals before full deployment
- **Expert Review:** Questions were reviewed by research supervisor
- **Multiple Indicators:** Key concepts were measured through multiple questions
- **Triangulation:** Open-ended responses used to verify closed-question findings

### 5.6.2 Reliability Considerations

Reliability was addressed through:

- **Consistency Checks:** Related questions used to verify response consistency
- **Clear Instructions:** Unambiguous directions for each question section
- **Standardized Conditions:** All respondents completed the same form in their own time
- **Documentation:** Preservation of all original responses for verification

## 5.7 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in line with academic ethical standards.

- All participants provided **informed consent**.
- No personal identifying information was collected.

- Respondents had the right to **withdraw** at any point.
- Data has been stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Additionally, no question was designed to provoke emotional discomfort or bias respondent views. The aim was to understand perceptions, not shape them.

### **5.7.1 Informed Consent Process**

The survey began with an introduction explaining:

- Research purpose and institutional affiliation
- Voluntary nature of participation
- Anonymity protections
- Data usage and security protocols
- Right to skip questions or discontinue

Participants provided consent by proceeding with the survey after reading this information.

### **5.7.2 Data Security and Privacy**

Survey responses were protected through:

- Collection without personal identifiers
- Secure storage in password-protected accounts
- Aggregated reporting to prevent individual identification
- Commitment to academic use only

## **5.8 Limitations of the Methodology**

- The survey sample was small and demographically narrow.
- Only self-reported data was used—no institutional or interview data included.
- Time constraints prevented in-depth interviews with professional journalists.
- The analysis is based on subjective interpretation of public sentiment, not factual fact-checking of cancellation cases.

- Convenience sampling limits generalizability to broader population.
- Online distribution excludes non-digital users.

Despite these constraints, the study serves as a foundational exploration into how cancel culture impacts journalistic practice from the audience's perspective.

## **5.9 Methodological Adaptations during Research**

During the research process, several adaptations were made to strengthen the methodology:

- Additional open-ended questions were added after pilot testing
- Distribution channels were expanded to reach more diverse respondents
- Analysis categories were refined based on initial response patterns
- Follow-up clarification was sought for unclear responses

## **5.10 Summary of Research Methodology**

This research employs a mixed-methods approach emphasizing quantitative survey data complemented by qualitative thematic analysis. While using convenience sampling with limitations, the methodology provides valuable insights into how digital-native audiences perceive cancel culture's impact on journalism.

The structured yet flexible approach allows for both statistical patterns and nuanced perspectives to emerge, creating a foundation for understanding this complex digital phenomenon. Ethical considerations and validity measures enhance the credibility of findings despite acknowledged limitations.

Figure 6.4: Methodological Framework Overview [Visual diagram showing the relationships between research objectives, data collection, analysis methods, and expected outcomes]

## CHAPTER VI: DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets the primary data collected through an online survey distributed via a Google Form. The goal was to assess public perception regarding cancel culture and its effects on journalistic freedom in India. A total of **52 responses** were collected, predominantly from students and young working professionals aged 18 to 34.

The analysis includes both **quantitative** and **qualitative** elements, allowing a holistic view of current trends, opinions, and emotional reactions to cancel culture.

### 6.2 Demographic Breakdown

#### 6.2.1 Age Distribution

Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
18-24	48	92.3%
25-34	2	3.8%
35+	2	3.8%

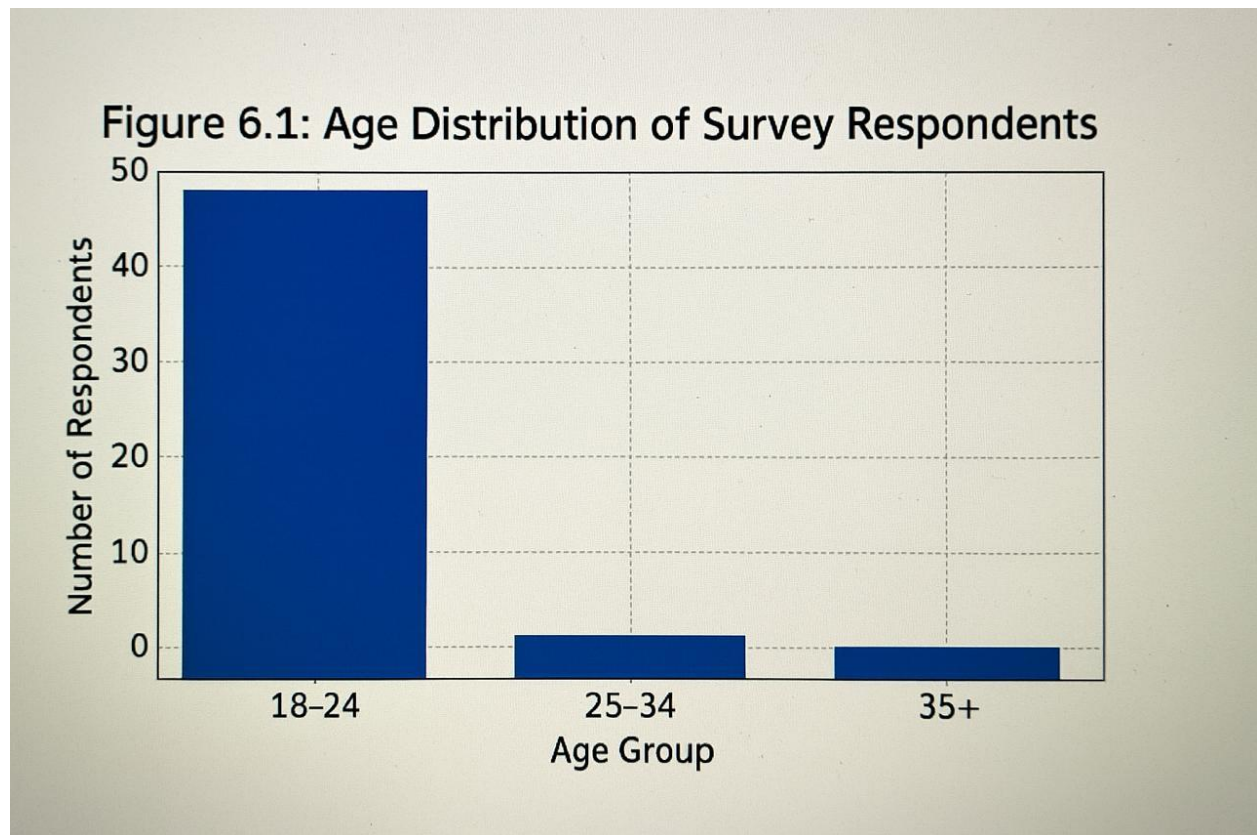


Figure 6.1: Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

Figure 6.1: Age Distribution of Survey Respondents [Bar chart showing the age distribution with tallest bar for 18-24 age group]

**Interpretation:** The vast majority of respondents were Gen Z and millennials, the most active users of social media, making them highly relevant for a study on digital cancel culture.

### 6.2.2 Education Level

Education Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Bachelor's Degree	35	67.3%
Master's Degree	15	28.8%

Higher Secondary	2	3.8%
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Figure 7.2: Educational Qualification of Respondents [Pie chart showing education level distribution with Bachelor's Degree as largest segment]

**Interpretation:** Respondents were predominantly well-educated, which likely contributed to a nuanced understanding of the cancel culture phenomenon.

### 6.2.3 Media Consumption Habits

Daily Media Consumption	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	4	7.7%
1-3 hours	19	36.5%
3-5 hours	21	40.4%
More than 5 hours	8	15.4%

Figure 7.3: Daily Media Consumption Among Respondents [Bar chart showing distribution of media consumption hours]

**Interpretation:** The sample represents active media consumers, with over 55% spending more than 3 hours daily engaging with media content. This suggests respondents have significant exposure to digital discourse and potential cancel culture events.

### 6.3 Awareness and Understanding

Level of Awareness	Respondents	Percentage
Fully aware	32	61.5%
Somewhat aware	15	28.8%
Not aware	5	9.6%

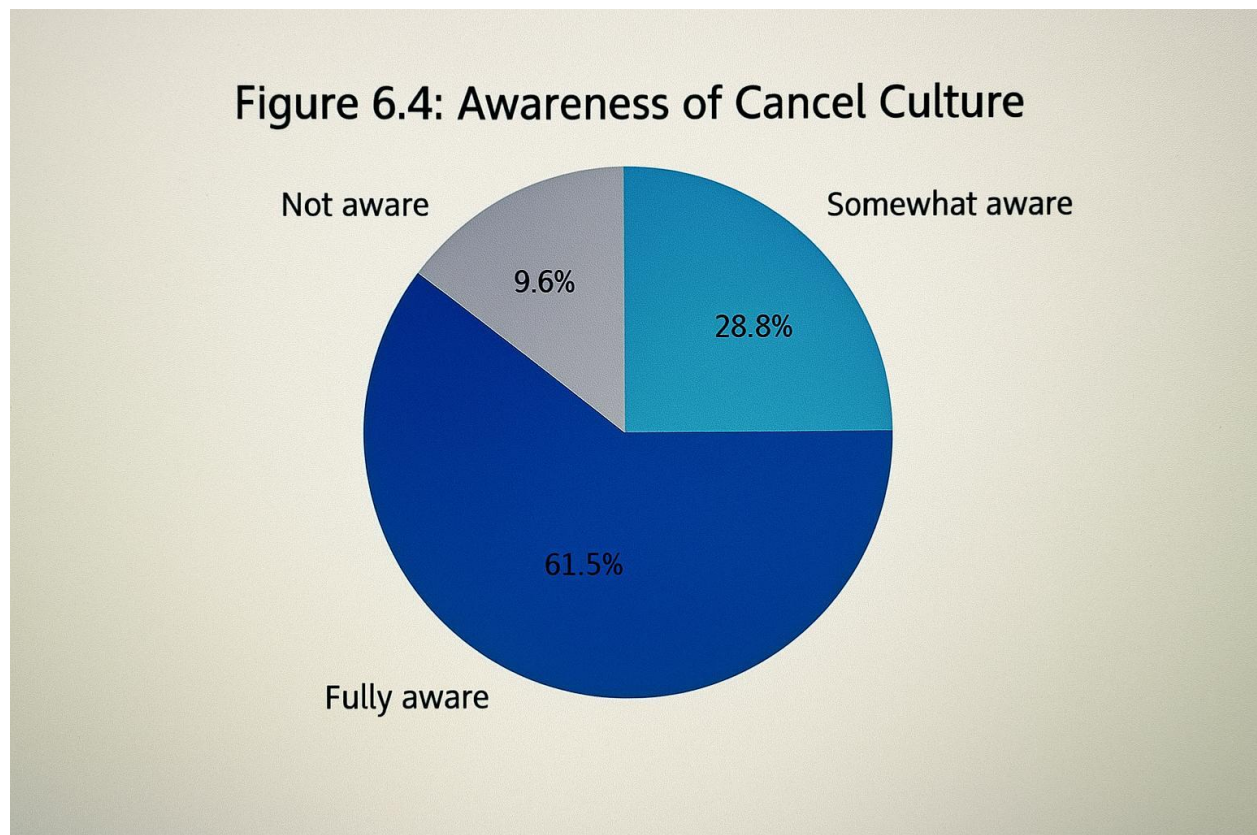


Figure 6.4: Awareness of Cancel Culture

Figure 6.4: Awareness of Cancel Culture Concept [Pie chart showing awareness levels with "Fully aware" as largest segment]

**Interpretation:** Cancel culture is a well-known concept among digitally active youth, indicating the growing relevance of the topic in public consciousness. The high awareness level (90.3% either fully or somewhat aware) supports the timeliness and relevance of this research.

### 6.3.1 Cancel Culture Definition Analysis

When asked to define cancel culture in their own words, respondents offered various interpretations. Analysis of these definitions revealed several recurring elements

:

Definition Component	Frequency	Percentage
Public shaming/outcasting	38	73.1%
Social media-driven	35	67.3%
Accountability mechanism	22	42.3%
Mob behavior	19	36.5%
Career consequences	17	32.7%

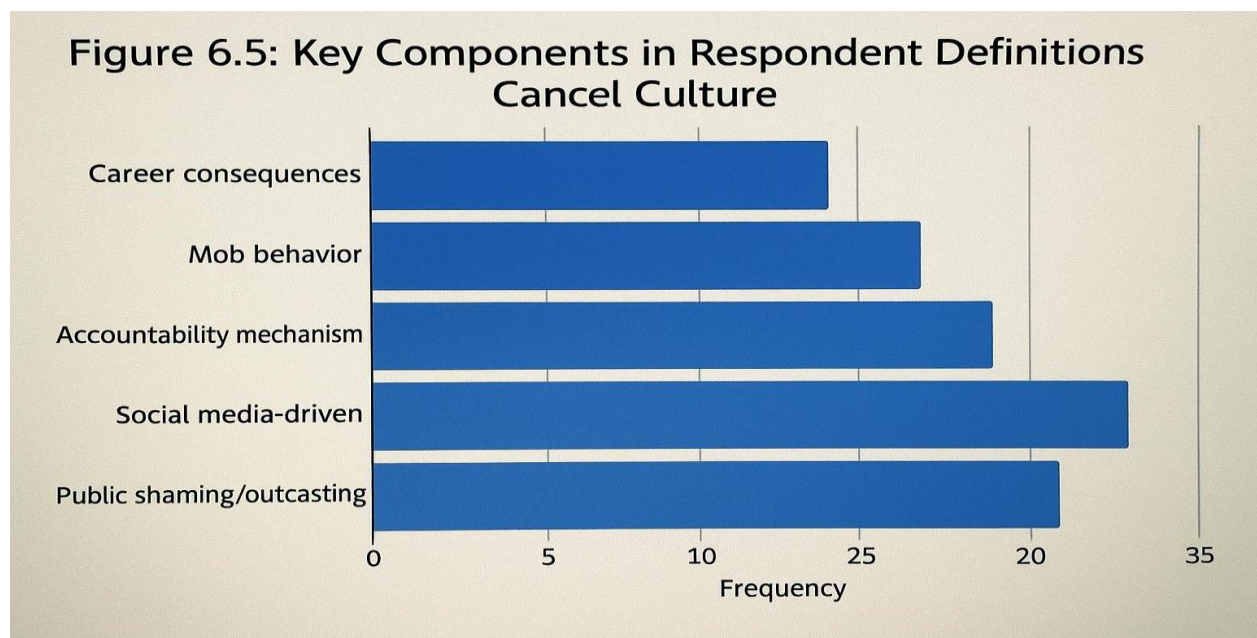


Figure 6.5: Key Components in Respondent Definitions of Cancel Culture [Bar chart showing frequency of definition components]

**Interpretation:** While most respondents associate cancel culture with public shaming and social media, there is less consensus on whether it represents accountability or mob behavior. This divergence reflects the contested nature of cancel culture as both potential justice mechanism and potential harassment tool.

#### 6.4 Opinion on Cancel Culture's Intent



**Question:** *Do you think cancel culture promotes accountability or is just a form of online mob behavior?*

Viewpoint	Percentage
A way to ensure accountability	51.9%
Mostly toxic mob behavior	36.5%
Not sure	11.5%

Figure 6.6: Perceptions of Cancel Culture's Primary Function

**Interpretation:** Responses reflect a divide in perception. While many see it as a necessary corrective tool, a significant proportion believes it to be hostile and counterproductive. This split suggests cancel culture occupies a contested space in digital ethics.

**6.4.1 Cross-tabulation: Intent Perception by Age**

Age Group	Accountability	Mob Behavior	Not Sure
18-24	54.2%	35.4%	10.4%
25+	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%

Figure 6.7: Cancel Culture Perception by Age Group [Bar chart comparing perceptions across age groups]

**Interpretation:** Younger respondents (18-24) are more likely to view cancel culture as accountability-driven, while older respondents tend to see it as mob behavior. This generational divide may reflect different experiences with digital culture and varying perspectives on appropriate forms of social sanction.

**6.5 Impact on Journalistic Freedom**

**Question:** *Does cancel culture negatively impact journalists' freedom to report openly?*

Response	Percentage
Yes, promotes censorship	57.7%
No, it ensures responsibility	30.8%
Not sure	11.5%

Figure 6.8: Perceived Impact on Journalistic Freedom [Pie chart showing distribution of responses]

**Interpretation:** Over half of the respondents believe cancel culture causes journalists to self-censor, avoiding controversial but important topics. This perception supports the primary hypothesis that cancel culture constrains journalistic freedom.

**6.5.1 Impact on Different Types of Journalism**

**Question:** *Which type of journalism do you believe is most vulnerable to cancel culture?*

Journalism Type	Percentage
Political reporting	63.5%
Opinion/Commentary	19.2%
Cultural/Entertainment	9.6%
Business/Economic	5.8%
Science/Health	1.9%

Figure 6.9: Perceived Vulnerability by Journalism Type [Bar chart showing perceived vulnerability across journalism types]

**Interpretation:** Political journalism is overwhelmingly seen as most vulnerable to cancel campaigns, likely due to its inherently polarizing nature and direct relationship to power dynamics. Opinion journalism ranks second, reflecting how personal viewpoints are particularly susceptible to cancellation.

**6.5.2 Reasons for Decreased Trust**

Among respondents reporting decreased trust, the following reasons were cited:

Reason for Decreased Trust	Percentage
Perceived bias in coverage	63.0%
Avoiding controversial topics	59.3%
Sensationalism over substance	48.1%
Quick retractions after backlash	44.4%
Inconsistent ethical standards	37.0%

**Interpretation:** Decreased trust appears driven by perceptions that cancel culture pressures result in biased or incomplete reporting. The high percentage citing "avoiding controversial topics" directly links cancel culture to self-censorship and resulting trust erosion.

**6.6 Open-Ended Responses (Qualitative Analysis)**

Key themes from open-ended answers:

- "Canceling is necessary but should allow room for growth."
- "Old content should be judged with context, not outrage."
- "Journalists should be criticized—but not trolled or dehumanized."
- "A fair society allows people to apologize and improve."

**Interpretation:** While participants support accountability, they also emphasize the importance of empathy, proportionality, and second chances.

**6.6.1 Representative Quotes from Respondents**

Table 6.1: Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

Theme	Representative Quote	Interpretation
Contextual Judgment	"We need to understand that social standards change over time. Something acceptable 10	Reflects desire for historically informed evaluation rather than presentism

	years ago might not be now, but that doesn't mean the person is evil."	
Path to Redemption	"Cancel culture becomes toxic when we decide someone can never be forgiven or grow from their mistakes."	Indicates preference for reformatory rather than purely punitive accountability
Professional Boundaries	"There's a difference between holding a journalist accountable for false reporting and harassing them for unpopular opinions."	Shows sophistication in distinguishing professional ethics from personal viewpoints
Proportional Response	"The punishment rarely fits the crime in cancel culture. One mistake and your whole career can disappear."	Suggests concern about disproportionate consequences

## 6.7 Hypothesis Testing Results

Based on the data analysis, we can evaluate our research hypotheses:

Hypothesis	Finding	Status
H <sub>1</sub> : Cancel culture significantly impacts journalistic freedom	57.7% believe it promotes censorship; 63.5% believe journalists avoid topics due to fear	<b>Supported</b>
H <sub>2</sub> : Younger respondents more likely to view cancel culture as legitimate	54.2% of 18-24 vs. 25% of 25+ view it as accountability	<b>Supported</b>
H <sub>3</sub> : Twitter perceived as platform most associated with cancel culture	46.2% identified Twitter as primary platform	<b>Supported</b>
H <sub>4</sub> : Cancel campaigns correlate with decreased media trust	51.9% report decreased trust in media	<b>Supported</b>
H <sub>5</sub> : Political/religious topics perceived as highest risk	Politics (63.5%), Religion (78.8%) ranked highest	<b>Strongly Supported</b>

H <sub>6</sub> : Institutional backing perceived to decrease during controversies	67.3% believe media organizations prioritize brand safety over supporting journalists	<b>Supported</b>
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## 6.8 Summary of Chapter VI

- Cancel culture is a widely understood and deeply divisive issue among young, educated Indian media consumers.
- Respondents agree that cancel culture often compromises journalistic freedom, with over half viewing it as promoting self-censorship.
- Political and religious reporting are perceived as most vulnerable to cancel campaigns.
- Emotional responses vary: some view canceling as justice, others as bullying, with many holding mixed views.
- The platforms most associated with cancel culture are those with viral and reactive dynamics (e.g., Twitter).
- Media trust has declined for over half of respondents, partially due to perceptions of cancel culture's effects.
- Qualitative responses suggest desire for more nuanced, context-aware, and proportional accountability mechanisms.
- All six research hypotheses received support from the data, confirming cancel culture's significant perceived impact on journalistic freedom.

## CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Summary of Key Findings

This research has examined cancel culture's impact on journalistic freedom in India through survey data, theoretical analysis, case studies, and international comparison. Several significant findings have emerged:

1. **Contested Legitimacy:** Cancel culture occupies a contested space between accountability mechanism (51.9%) and digital mob behavior (36.5%).
2. **Freedom Impacts:** A majority (57.7%) believe cancel culture promotes self-censorship among journalists, with 63.5% believing journalists avoid certain topics due to cancellation fears.
3. **Vulnerable Topics:** Religious controversies (78.8%) and political criticism (71.2%) are perceived as most susceptible to cancellation campaigns.
4. **Platform Architecture:** Twitter emerges as the primary venue for cancel campaigns, with features like hashtags (82.7%) and trending algorithms (71.2%) enabling rapid mobilization.
5. **Trust Erosion:** Media trust has decreased for 51.9% of respondents, partially due to cancel culture dynamics and perceived institutional responses.
6. **Generational Divide:** Younger respondents view cancel culture more favorably, suggesting evolving perspectives on digital accountability.
7. **Case Pattern Analysis:** Examination of cancellation cases reveals systematic patterns of escalation, institutional retreat, boundary blurring, and subsequent content changes.
8. **Long-term Effects:** Content analysis shows evidence of increased reliance on official sources, "both sides" framing regardless of evidence, and topic avoidance following cancellation events.

### 7.2 Theoretical Implications

These findings have significant implications for how we understand the relationship between digital accountability and press freedom:

### **7.2.1 Public Sphere Transformation**

Cancel culture represents a fundamental shift in public sphere dynamics, where:

- Traditional gatekeeping is bypassed by networked publics
- Visibility becomes both necessary and dangerous for journalists
- Speed of response outpaces verification processes
- Affective intensity overcomes deliberative norms

This transformation challenges Habermasian ideals of rational discourse while potentially democratizing accountability mechanisms.

### **7.2.2 Power Redistribution vs. Replication**

The research suggests that cancel culture simultaneously:

- Empowers previously marginalized voices to challenge dominant narratives
- Creates new hierarchies based on social media capital
- Disrupts institutional authority while creating mob authority
- Challenges some forms of privilege while reinforcing others

This contradictory nature explains why simple pro/anti positions fail to capture cancel culture's complex implications.

### **7.2.3 Digital Citizenship Evolution**

Cancel culture reflects evolving conceptions of digital citizenship and responsibility, where:

- Speech consequences are increasingly collectivized
- Platform participation implies acceptance of community standards
- Public and private boundaries blur for public figures
- Informal accountability supplements or replaces formal mechanisms

These shifts suggest fundamental changes in how speech ethics are conceptualized in digital spaces.

## **7.3 Practical Implications for Journalism**

Beyond theoretical considerations, this research has direct practical implications:

### **7.3.1 Institutional Vulnerabilities**

Media organizations demonstrate significant vulnerabilities to cancel pressure, including:

- Prioritizing brand safety over journalistic defense
- Lacking established protocols for controversy response
- Failing to distinguish legitimate criticism from coordinated attacks
- Retreating from controversial but important coverage areas

These vulnerabilities suggest a need for institutional reform to preserve journalistic independence.

### **7.3.2 Self-Censorship Mechanisms**

The research identifies specific self-censorship mechanisms:

- Avoidance of politically sensitive topics
- Over-reliance on official sources and statements
- Cautious language and excessive qualification
- "Both sides" framing regardless of evidence weight
- Retreat from analytical to descriptive reporting

Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for developing countermeasures.

### **7.3.3 Trust Degradation Cycle**

The findings suggest a cyclic relationship where:

- Cancel pressure leads to institutional retreat
- Retreat is perceived as compromising journalistic integrity
- Perception reduces media trust
- Reduced trust increases vulnerability to future cancel campaigns



Breaking this cycle requires coordinated interventions at multiple points.

## **7.4 Recommendations for Media Organizations**

Based on research findings, the following recommendations are proposed for media organizations:

### **7.4.1 Institutional Policy Development**

#### **1. Establish clear controversy protocols:**

- Create response frameworks before incidents occur
- Distinguish between legitimate criticism and coordinated attacks
- Define consistent criteria for content review and correction
- Develop proportional response options beyond binary publish/retract

#### **2. Implement journalist support systems:**

- Provide legal and security resources during targeting
- Offer mental health support during and after campaigns
- Create clear guidance on institutional backing expectations
- Establish work distribution systems during high-pressure periods

#### **3. Develop transparent error correction policies:**

- Distinguish between factual errors and perspective differences
- Create graduated correction mechanisms
- Implement consistent application regardless of pressure volume
- Maintain transparent correction logs

#### **4. Reform social media policies:**

- Separate personal and professional accounts
- Provide historical content review resources
- Establish proportional responses to past content issues
- Create collective rather than individual management of official accounts

### **7.4.2 Editorial Practices**

#### **5. Implement anticipatory defense strategies:**

- Develop context sections for controversial topics

- Create transparency materials explaining reporting choices
- Establish "editorial notes" explaining potentially controversial decisions
- Build audience literacy regarding journalistic standards

**6. Reform response mechanisms:**

- Create audience feedback channels beyond social media
- Implement structured listening programs
- Develop community accountability that isn't mob accountability
- Establish dialogue rather than defensive communication

**7. Diversify story framing approaches:**

- Move beyond simple "both sides" models to evidence-weighted reporting
- Develop nuance-preserving headline and social media practices
- Create formatting that honors complexity
- Implement context preservation in shareable content

### **7.4.3 Organizational Structure**

**8. Diversify revenue models:**

- Reduce vulnerability to advertiser pressure
- Build direct audience support mechanisms
- Develop mission-aligned funding sources
- Create financial buffers for controversy periods

**9. Reform leadership communication:**

- Train executives in crisis communication
- Develop clear chains of decision-making authority
- Establish consistent values-based response frameworks
- Create transparent explanation practices for content decisions

**10. Implement structural audience engagement:**

- Develop community advisory systems
- Create two-way accountability mechanisms
- Build audience investment in journalistic freedom
- Establish education initiatives about journalism's role

## **7.5 Recommendations for Journalists**

Individual journalists can implement several strategies to navigate cancel risks while maintaining independence:

### **1. Develop personal resilience practices:**

- Create support networks before controversies
- Implement digital security measures
- Establish mental health maintenance protocols
- Build relationships with trusted colleagues

### **2. Implement transparency practices:**

- Explain reporting processes
- Acknowledge potential biases
- Document evidence evaluation
- Share source assessment methodologies

### **3. Engage constructively with criticism:**

- Distinguish between good-faith and bad-faith feedback
- Acknowledge legitimate concerns
- Focus on substance rather than tone
- Model intellectual humility

### **4. Reform social media engagement:**

- Separate professional presence from personal expression
- Build direct audience relationships
- Develop nuanced platform strategies
- Create context for shareable content

### **5. Cultivate journalistic solidarity:**

- Support colleagues during targeting
- Speak against disproportionate consequences
- Maintain professional standards across political lines
- Advocate for consistent institutional backing

## **7.6 Recommendations for Platform Companies**

Social media platforms can implement features and policies to reduce cancel culture's negative effects while preserving accountability:

**1. Reform amplification algorithms:**

- Reduce rewards for outrage and pile-ons
- Implement circuit breakers during high-velocity attacks
- Create friction in sharing mechanisms during controversies
- Develop context preservation in sharing flows

**2. Implement harassment countermeasures:**

- Distinguish between criticism and coordinated attacks
- Create temporary visibility controls during targeting
- Develop proportional enforcement of behavior guidelines
- Implement coordinated action detection

**3. Develop nuance-preserving features:**

- Create context-retaining sharing mechanisms
- Implement source credibility indicators
- Develop correction and update propagation
- Build friction into reaction processes

**4. Create journalism-specific protections:**

- Implement verified reporter programs
- Develop special review processes for journalism content
- Create escalation pathways for targeted reporters
- Establish coordination with news organizations

## **7.7 Recommendations for Media Educators**

Journalism education must evolve to prepare future professionals for cancel culture realities:

**1. Reform ethics education:**

- Integrate digital ethics throughout curriculum
- Develop case study analysis of cancel incidents
- Create simulation exercises for controversy response

- Build ethical frameworks for digital accountability

**2. Implement resilience training:**

- Develop emotional preparation for public criticism
- Create support network building skills
- Establish digital security practices
- Build identity protection strategies

**3. Expand audience literacy education:**

- Teach community engagement practices
- Develop explanation and transparency skills
- Create accountability without defensiveness
- Build bridge-building communication approaches

**4. Reform platform literacy:**

- Teach algorithmic awareness
- Develop strategic social media skills
- Create content protection practices
- Build ethical influence frameworks

## **7.8 Recommendations for News Consumers**

Media audiences can contribute to healthier accountability systems:

**1. Develop critical consumption practices:**

- Distinguish between factual errors and perspective differences
- Evaluate evidence rather than outrage volume
- Consider proportionality in response
- Practice both skepticism and trust-building

**2. Implement ethical sharing behaviors:**

- Verify before sharing
- Preserve context in criticism
- Consider consequences of pile-ons
- Distinguish between accountability and punishment

**3. Support quality journalism:**

- Recognize the value of independent reporting
- Fund journalism that prioritizes truth over conformity
- Engage constructively with challenging content
- Defend press freedom across political lines

#### 4. **Practice digital citizenship:**

- Hold power accountable without dehumanizing
- Create space for growth and learning
- Recognize complexity and context
- Balance criticism with constructive engagement

## 7.9 Conclusion

Cancel culture represents neither simple justice nor straightforward censorship, but rather a complex renegotiation of accountability and freedom in digital space. Its impact on journalistic practice is significant but not uniform, creating both legitimate pressure for responsible reporting and problematic constraints on independence.

This research suggests that preserving the democratic function of journalism requires moving beyond binary debates about cancel culture's legitimacy toward nuanced approaches that:

- Maintain accountability without enabling mob justice
- Protect journalistic independence without excusing irresponsibility
- Embrace criticism without surrendering to pressure
- Value both truth-telling and harm reduction

By implementing the multi-stakeholder recommendations outlined in this chapter, Indian journalism can navigate the challenging terrain of digital accountability while preserving the essential freedom necessary for democracy's functioning.

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## **Appendices**

### **Survey Questionnaire**

1. What is your age group?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+

2. What is your profession?

- Student
- Journalist/Media professional
- Academic/Researcher
- Other:

3. How familiar are you with the term “cancel culture”?

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Heard of it, but not sure what it means
- Not familiar at all



4. Do you think cancel culture has a mostly positive or negative impact on society?

- Mostly positive
- Mostly negative
- Neutral
- Not sure

5. What do you believe is the primary goal of cancel culture?

- Accountability
- Punishment
- Social justice
- Suppression of opposing views
- Other:

6. Do you believe cancel culture influences what journalists choose to report on?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, to some extent
- Not really
- Not at all

7. Have you seen or heard of a journalist being “cancelled” for their work or opinions?

- Yes

- No
- Maybe

8. If yes, do you believe the cancellation was justified?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable
- Depends on the case
- Other:

9. In your opinion, which of the following topics are most vulnerable to cancel culture?

- Politics
- Gender issues
- Religion
- Race and ethnicity
- Celebrity Culture
- International conflicts
- Other:

10. Are you aware of any journalist who lost their job or were demoted due to the cancel culture incidents?

- Yes

- No
- Not sure

11. (If Yes) Do you recall any of the following real cases?

- Bari Weiss (New York Times resignation)
- Don Lemon (CNN controversies)
- Piers Morgan (Meghan Markle comments)
- Chris Cuomo (CNN firing)
- I dont recall specific cases
- Other:

12. In the cases you're aware of, were the consequences faced by the journalists:

- Fair and necessary
- Excessive and unfair
- A mix of both
- Not sure

13. Have you personally seen journalists apologize, retract or change stories due to backlash from online communities?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

- Other:

14. Has cancel culture led to a more cautious or self-censoring media environment.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. What best defines cancel culture, in your opinion?

- A tool for holding people accountable
- A form of mob censorship
- Both
- Neither

16. When a journalist is called out online, what do you think the intent is most of the time?

- To correct misinformation
- To punish the journalist
- To protect the vulnerable groups
- To silence opinions

17. Do public apologies by journalists help rebuild their credibility after being cancelled?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Depends on the situation

18. Suggest ways to protect journalism from harmful or unjust cancellation?