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THE SILENT ELEPHANT

How Brand and Consumer behavior, in the fashion industry,
drive social media Cancel Culture?

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Master Thesis

presented as a partial requirement for obtaining a master's degree in Data-Driven Marketing

NOVA Information Management School
Instituto Superior de Estatística e Gestão de Informação

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THE SILENT ELEPHANT:
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By

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Master's Thesis presented as a partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in
Data-Driven Marketing, with a specialization in Digital Marketing & Analytics

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism, any form of undue use of information, or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Rules of Conduct and Code of Honor from the NOVA Information Management School.

Joana Clérigo De Moraes

[Lisbon, April 15th]

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ABSTRACT

Cancel culture has emerged as the silent elephant of the fashion industry, a widespread but often unspoken force that shapes relations between brands and consumers. This study explores how brand and consumer behavior in the fashion sector drive social media Cancel Culture. By using a quantitative methodology to validate hypotheses, this study explores the relation between ethical consumer behavior, perceived brand social responsibility, brand trust and transparency, diversity, and inclusion (D&I) efforts, and social media engagement. The findings indicate that ethical consumer behavior have a positive effect on how a brand's social responsibility is perceived, subsequently fostering trust and transparency. However, these same ethically conscious consumers are also more inclined to engage in social media boycotts when brands do not align with their values. On the other hand, strong D&I initiatives function as a protective factor, reducing the likelihood of brand cancellation. The study highlights that consumers who actively participate in Cancel Culture also show higher levels of social media interaction with brands, displaying both critical and supportive behaviors. From a theoretical standpoint, this research deepens knowledge of Cancel Culture dynamics in the fashion sector, particularly regarding its relation to ethical consumption and digital activism. From a management point of view, it emphasizes the need for brands to go beyond performative ethics by adopting genuine transparency and meaningful D&I initiatives to cultivate consumer trust and mitigate reputational risks. Ultimately, this study illustrates how social media amplifies ethical scrutiny, making Cancel Culture an increasingly present force that brands must manage with authenticity and responsibility.

Keywords

Cancel Culture; Ethical Consumerism; Corporate social responsibility; Diversity and Inclusion; Trust and Transparency; Social media engagement

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement of Integrity	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
List of Figures.....	vi
List of Tables	vii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	viii
1. Introduction	1
2. Theoretical Background.....	4
2.1 Ethical and Social Responsibility Concepts Overview	4
2.1.1 Sustainability	5
2.1.2 Trust and Transparency	7
2.1.3 Ethical and Fair Labor Practices	8
2.1.4 Diversity and Inclusion	10
2.2 Consumer Behavior and Values.....	11
2.3 Social Media Brand Engagement.....	13
2.4 The “Cancel Culture”	16
2.5 Research Model	18
3. Methodology.....	24
3.1 Study Design and Method	24
3.2 Measurements.....	24
3.3 Data Collection and Participants	27
4. Results.....	31
4.1 Qualitative Analysis	31
4.2 Measurement Model.....	33
4.3 Structural Model.....	35
4.4 Mediation Analysis	37
5. Discussion	40
6. Conclusions and Future Research	43
6.1 Theoretical Contributions.....	43
6.2 Managerial Contributions.....	44
6.3 Limitations and Future Research.....	46

Bibliographical References	48
Appendix.....	58
Appendix A - Nova IMS Ethics Committee Approval.....	58
Appendix B - Copy of the questionnaire.....	59
Appendix C - Cross Loadings.....	65
Appendix D - VIF	65

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Representation of sustainability as the intersection of three dimensions: social, environmental, and economic.....	6
Figure 2: Research framework from Fernandes, Guzmán and Mota (2024)	15
Figure 3: Conceptual Model	23
Figure 4: Keywords of CANCEL Culture respondents' perception.....	33
Figure 5: Complete sample structural model with direct path coefficients	37

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Real-world evidence of Cancel Culture affecting fashion.	17
Table 2: Literature Scales used in the Questionnaire	26
Table 3: Demographics Scales	28
Table 4: Familiarity with Cancel Culture.....	30
Table 5: Construct’s Reliability and Validity.	34
Table 6: Fornell-Larcker	35
Table 7: HTMT.....	35
Table 8: Hypotheses Overview and Results	39

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

D&I	Diversity and inclusion
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
SDG	Sustainable development goals
UGC	User-generated content
AI	Artificial Intelligence
eWOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
NWOM	Negative Word-of-Mouth

1. INTRODUCTION

The fashion sector has a significant influence in shaping consumer culture, setting trends, and influencing global economic flows. Beyond aesthetics and self-expression, it has been increasingly scrutinized for its ethical, social and environmental impact (Stringer, 2023). Nowadays consumers, particularly younger generations, expect brands to implement ethical and sustainable practices, with 62% of worldwide consumers believing that companies should advocate for social, cultural, and environmental issues (Egholm & Marku, 2023). This shift in consumer expectations has made it more urgent for brands to navigate corporate social responsibility (CSR) with openness and genuineness to preserve consumer trust and brand loyalty (Quiles-Soler et al., 2022). However, the rise of digital platforms has transformed consumer activism, offering individuals and communities the power to make brands accountable for alleged ethical failures (Halilovic, 2023).

Cancel Culture, a term widely described as the public rejection of endorsement from individuals or organizations due to assumed ethical misconduct, has become a growing force in the fashion industry (Ng, 2020). Initially emerging from social justice movements, it has evolved into a digital accountability mechanism that may result in quick brand boycotts, reputational damage, and financial losses (Mueller, 2021). Several high-profile cases highlight the consequences of mistakes made by companies. H&M, for example, faced widespread backlash for a racially insensitive advertisement, while other brands were accused of greenwashing, misleading consumers about sustainable efforts. Some companies have also been criticized for their lack of diversity and inclusion (D&I), while others have faced allegations of unfair working conditions, resulting in credibility and consumer trust damage (Stack, 2018; Pereira et al., 2021). Moreover, transparency and ethical commitment have become critical factors in whether brands can avoid public condemnation and sustain long-term relations with consumers (Reck et al., 2022).

Despite the increasing prevalence of social media boycotts and its potential to cause significant reputational and financial damage in the fashion sector (Ng, 2020), there remains a critical lack of academic research that integrates the ethical dimensions driving this phenomenon. While CSR, ethical branding and consumer activism have been studied, few research analyse their combined impact with factors such as ethical consumer behavior, brand trust and transparency, and D&I initiatives in relation to brand cancellation (Ng, 2020). Given increased consumer ethical expectations, especially among younger generations, and the transforming power of social media in amplifying brand controversies (Halilovic, 2023), understanding these complex interactions is now absolutely crucial for fashion brands to reduce risks, meet evolving demands (Quiles-Soler et al., 2022), and

effectively manage the "silent elephant" of Cancel Culture in the contemporary market. This research addresses this gap by providing a much-needed analysis of the brand and consumer behaviors that contribute to a social media driven Cancel Culture.

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on key concepts that influence Cancel Culture in the fashion industry. Firstly, ethical consumer behavior plays a crucial role, since consumers increasingly form their purchase choices on moral values, giving priority to brands that align their own social and environmental principles (Nikolic & Kostic-Stankovic, 2022). In this context, the view of a brand's social responsibility becomes a key driver of consumer trust, with research showing that transparency, fair labor practices and sustainability commitments significantly impact consumer loyalty (Yang & Battocchio, 2021). Additionally, D&I initiatives are essential for brand reputation, as modern consumers expect fashion companies to represent social diversity in their marketing and corporate policies (Ferraro et al., 2022). However, brands that engage in inauthentic D&I efforts risk negative consumer reactions, highlighting the need for genuine representation to remain credible (Deloitte, 2022). This dynamic is extremely amplified by the rise of digital platforms, serving as both an opportunity and a challenge, while digital engagement can increase brand visibility and foster consumer trust, it also creates a platform for greater scrutiny, where perceived ethical lapses, whether related to sustainability, D&I or labor practices, can quickly turn into a negative public reaction and, in the worst scenario, Cancel Culture (Costa & Azevedo, 2024).

This research seeks to investigate how specific aspects of brand and consumer behavior in the fashion industry interact to drive Cancel Culture, going beyond general explorations of CSR and ethical branding. The research question leading this study is: How do brand and consumer behavior in the fashion industry drive social media Cancel Culture? This study will investigate how ethical consumer behavior, includes not only support for ethical brands but also the willingness to participate in brand cancellation when values are misaligned, influences perceptions of brand social responsibility. It will also assess whether the different impacts of multiple D&I actions influence the phenomenon of Cancel Culture. This research will also determine how brand trust and transparency impacts Cancel Culture participation. Finally, we will analyze social media's impact as a platform for consumer-driven boycotts, specifically exploring the level and nature of engagement of those who participate in Cancel Culture. This study aims to improve the current research by addressing these key issues and sharing details on how these factors interact, giving brands ideas on how to handle ethical challenges in a socially aware market.

We opted for a quantitative methodology to empirically analyse the relations between consumer behavior, brand perception, and participation in Cancel Culture. An online survey collected data, assessing consumer attitudes towards fashion brands with distinct levels of ethical commitment and transparency. Finally, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was applied to examine the causal paths between the key variables and evaluate the hypotheses established in the study (Sarstedt et al., 2021).

The structure of this research ensures a systematic investigation of the study topic, the literature review examines ethical and social responsibility concepts, consumer behavior and values, social media brand engagement, and the Cancel Culture, identifying the main theoretical frameworks and research gaps. The hypothesis development section builds on these concepts by proposing testable relationships between brand perception, consumer behavior, and ethical concepts. Moreover, the methodology chapter details the research design, survey structure and data analysis approach, ensuring methodological rigor as the results section presents the empirical findings, highlighting the significant links between the variables. Further discussion interprets these results in the context of the existing literature, assessing their implications for brand management and business ethics. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings, recognizes the constraints of the study, and presents suggestions for future investigation into the evolving dynamics of this phenomenon in the fashion industry.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This theoretical background analyzes the existing research on brand and consumer behavior within the fashion sector through social media, investigating the Cancel Culture phenomenon. This review is divided into four main themes: (i) ethical and social responsibility concepts overview; (ii) consumers' behavior and values; (iii) social media brand engagement; and (iv) the "Cancel Culture". As consumers become more conscious of ethical and social responsibility concerns, it is vital to understand how their ethical behavior influence Cancel Culture. A recent Accenture study highlighted that "62% of consumers expect companies to take a stand on social, cultural, environmental, and political issues" (Forbes, 2023), highlighting the significance of brand ethics and corporate responsibility.

While there is significant literature on CSR and ethical branding, this review seeks to address a lack of understanding regarding how brand and consumer behavior's contribute to the challenges of Cancel Culture (Quiles-Soler et al., 2022). In addition, to analyze social media engagement, studies will be conducted on how it is impacted by brand social responsibility and Cancel Culture. Finally, this review will explore studies on the influence of Cancel Culture and its relevance to the industry, as it aims to clearly understand the existing research on these topics and identify the main patterns.

2.1 Ethical and Social Responsibility Concepts Overview

Ethics, in its broadest sense, denotes a system of norms, principles or moral values that guide the actions of individuals, these ethical sentiments can be neutral take on a favorable or an unfavorable judgment. The terms "ethical" and "unethical" are used to define subjective moral evaluations of actions or behaviors as right or wrong, good or bad (Brunk, 2010). Ethical concerns have emerged in the fashion context (Stringer, 2023), the main issues are categorized into four topics of concern: sustainability, trust and transparency, fair labor practices, and D&I. Social responsibility, particularly for Gen Z, involves a company's dedication to moral values, fair working conditions, and transparency. Consumers easily associate terms like "responsible" and "ethical" to brands driven by a strong sense of purpose, this association is particularly strong among Gen Z consumers, who prioritize ethical values and social responsibility (NielsenIQ, 2025).

2.1.1 Sustainability

According to the Brundtland Commission, sustainability is explained as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Pereira et al., 2021). In fashion, this ambiguous term includes a comprehensive framework of ecological, social, and economic benefits of sustainability, typically illustrated by three intersecting sectors: society, economy, and environment (Purvis et al., 2019) (see Figure 1). Nonetheless, as the fashion industry experiences significant expansion and consequent adverse environmental effects, the need for sustainability has intensified through globally recognized campaigns in the past three years. Numerous sustainability initiatives and organizations within the fashion industry have led these campaigns to encourage all fashion companies, regardless of their position in the sector, to adopt eco-friendly materials and methods throughout production, product design, and distribution channels (Wu & Li, 2019). Consequently, the idea of sustainability in the apparel sector encompasses an understanding of social injustices and environmental degradation that occur during the processes of creation, consumption, and disposal (Pereira et al., 2021). These factors have a detrimental impact on the overall health of ecosystems, the well-being of human laborers, and the sustainability of natural resources (Ali, 2018).

Moreover, brand social responsibility in the fashion industry can also be evaluated as the convergence of these three dimensions. Brand social responsibility in fashion covers responsible work practices, fair compensation, and safe working environments (social dimension) (Stringer, 2023), the use of sustainable materials and reduced waste (environmental dimension) (Pereira et al., 2021), and economic models that prioritize long-term value over short-term profit (economic dimension) (Nikolic & Kostic-Stankovic, 2022). Consequently, when sustainability and social responsibility collide, firms must maintain transparency to understand how their business models may foster a fairer and more sustainable fashion industry (Reck et al., 2022).

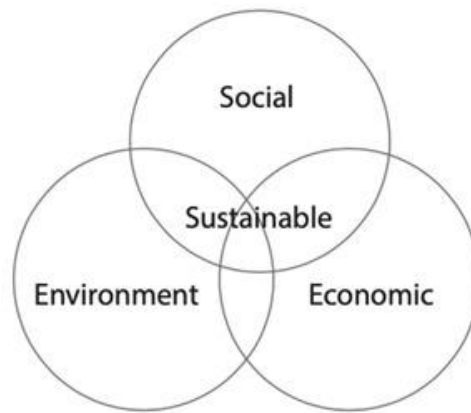


Figure 1: Representation of sustainability as the intersection of three dimensions: social, environmental, and economic. Adapted from Purvis, Mao, and Robinson (2019)

In reaction to growing evidence of this industry's adverse effects on sustainability, industry leaders and academics have increasingly focused on identifying sustainable practices that can reshape production and consumption dynamics. Sharing standards and principles for sustainable operations, along with transparent reporting on sustainable performance, also plays a crucial role to mitigate these environmental issues. However, some companies are hesitant to publish sustainability efforts if they are not aligned with their environmental impact results, which indicates the need for stronger accountability mechanisms (Pereira et al., 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many research studies have observed a major shift in consumer behavior and expectations, particularly the emergence of the circular economy where consumers increasingly chose to rent, donate, or resell clothing, highlight a growing demand for ethical and sustainable products (Nikolic & Kostic-Stankovic, 2022). However, despite these positive changes, the continued prominence of fast fashion, characterized by a dramatically increased frequency of collections with brands such as Zara and H&M launching fresh designs weekly, still encourages overconsumption and generates substantial waste, placing significant pressure on workers, communities, and natural resources (Atik & Ertekin, 2022). This underscores the ongoing need for a comprehensive industry commitment to ethical and sustainable practices that respect both environmental limits and social well-being (Atik & Ertekin, 2022).

2.1.2 Trust and Transparency

Transparency in brand communication is essential to improve consumer trust and brand reputation, especially concerning sustainability and ethical norms as consumers are increasingly interested regarding socially responsible issues. However, a lack of transparency can discourage the adoption of sustainable practices and, in some cases, lead to misleading marketing practices, known as “greenwashing” (Pereira et al., 2021). Greenwashing is a form of misleading advertising, as it involves presenting a brand or product as more environmentally friendly than it is, often through exaggerated claims about eco-friendly production or materials, this approach creates a false perception of sustainability that can damage consumer trust when exposed (Salo, 2020). Based on the credibility and perceived reliability of brands, trust requires consistent and truthful communication from companies, a standard highlighted by Kantsperger and Kunz (2010). According to these authors, companies should implement systematic processes to maintain transparency as such efforts are essential to build and preserve consumer trust.

Based on research into transparency effects on consumer behavior, it is crucial to assess loyalty and purchase intentions. According to the findings of Aij and Sutikno's (2015), consumers tend to distrust "green" marketing, partly because of their frequent exposure to greenwashing. This doubt weakens consumers' trust in sustainable claims, ultimately affecting their purchase decisions. The authors' study also indicates that consumers are prepared to convert to greener products, but their desire depends on genuine trust, since greenwashing undermines this trust, generating negative perceptions and not influencing consumers to select more environmentally friendly items. Therefore, it is essential to use specific and unambiguous marketing methods to reduce consumer doubt and increase purchase intentions (Aji et al., 2015).

While an important proportion of consumers are found to demand more information about sourcing, production, and other practices from clothing brands, it is observed that their willingness to pay for moral clothes may not reflect that demand, as many customers often battle to choose moral products over convenience and low prices. This means that although transparency can effectively influence how consumers feel, their buying habits are usually determined by a more complicated mix of values beyond ethics (Stringer, 2023). Research shows that different effects of CSR transparency depend on brand attributes, for example smaller brands generally increase consumer trust and purchase intention toward CSR activities, but with large brands, trust can decline due to overexposure (Reck et al., 2022). A brand image is strengthened, and purchase intentions are promoted when clear information and explanations are provided about materials and production costs (Yang & Battocchio, 2021).

Lastly, unveiling marketing communications is essential to establish perceived brand authenticity and impact brands' image. This approach enhances trust and loyalty to close the gap between promised brand value and consumer ethical demand (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018). Therefore, transparency, plays an essential role in today's marketing strategies for customer loyalty and trust as it helps to close the gap between consumer expectations and company actions.

Transparency in the fashion industry has become a critical topic, particularly as the sector faces increasing scrutiny for its environmental and social impacts, with national regulation, "private governance" mechanisms such as certifications, corporate codes of conduct and multiple stakeholder groups such as the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) emerging to address the industry's negative externalities (Balsiger, 2014). However, despite these efforts, concerns over greenwashing persist, underscoring the need for clearer transparency practices (Salo, 2020). Moreover, transparency is considered an essential step toward environmental and social sustainability, the levels of commitment to transparency vary significantly among fashion retailers. Factors such as reputational risks from scandals, national norms, CEO values, external pressure from NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and consumers influence the degree of transparency adopted by companies (Yang & Battocchio, 2021). While companies like H&M have adopted comprehensive transparency practices, other fast fashion brands exhibit lower levels (Pereira et al., 2021). To conclude, transparency in the fashion industry is not a uniform strategy but rather an interaction of factors that lead to different degrees of exposure (Reck et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Ethical and Fair Labor Practices

When considering ethical behavior in organizations, the focus is often on external stakeholders, especially customers, addressing ethical gaps such as pricing policies, transparency, and responsible marketing. However, CSR in the fashion industry must also be examined in relation to internal stakeholders, its workers. Ethical labor practices are key aspects to ensure brand social responsibility and foster sustainable development, particularly in the fashion sector (Pereira et al., 2021, p.11). Despite the increase of global awareness, this industry is still facing many challenges to achieve fair wages, secure working conditions, and ethical labor standards (Stringer, 2023).

As a leading player in the global economy, the fashion sector encounters substantial obstacles to balance ethical, environmental, and social demands in its complex manufacturing process (Eicher & Tortora, 2010). Many clothing factories, particularly in developed countries, continue to face problems including inadequate wages, unfair working

conditions, and excessive overtime. Other important concerns include the lack of benefits for workers, such as maternity leave, child labor, and poor sanitary facilities. In countries such as Vietnam, the inability of farms and private manufacturers to comply with labor rights standards or provide decent salaries is a growing problem (Anner, 2012). Despite the growing awareness of these problems, systematic issues in this industry remain an important challenge to address.

Over the past few years, there has been a significant rise in consumers awareness regarding ethical labor practices in the fashion sector, as more individuals become concerned about workers' treatment and the ethical implications of their purchases. However, although consumers often express concern for worker welfare, their actual purchasing behavior tend to be driven by personal fashion preferences and price considerations rather than social responsibility factors. This pattern is evident in studies highlighting the gap between consumers' behavior toward ethical practices and their actual purchasing behavior (Stringer, 2023).

According to Galavielle (2004), the treatment of workers was ranked as one of the main ethical considerations by consumers. Carrigan and Attalla (2001) discovered a contrasting perspective, with participants assigning lesser importance to factors such as working conditions and human rights in their purchasing decisions. Demographic variables may explain these contradictory outcomes. In the research conducted by Brunk, respondents aged between 18 and 25 years old, who are typically younger and possessing limited professional experience, exhibited diminished sensitivity to labour issues. Despite younger consumers' disapproval of unethical labor practices, they may not prioritize these issues in their behavior. However, many consumers clearly expect brands to ensure acceptable working conditions, such as safety standards, decent working hours, and appropriate compensation (Brunk, 2010).

The increased consumer demand for ethically manufactured clothes has pushed certain brands to embrace greater transparency and responsible labor practices, including offering above-average wages, providing additional social benefits, and improve safety standards (Brunk, 2010). Although these actions can have a positive impact on how consumers perceive brand's ethics and image, research shows that ethical considerations are often secondary compared to other factors, such as fashion trends and price, during the decision-making process (Stringer, 2023).

2.1.4 Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity refers to the “real or perceived differences” between individuals and includes several attributes such as gender identity, sexual preference, physical and intellectual capacity, age, ethnicity, cultural background, religious beliefs, and other identity-based factors that influence interpersonal interactions (Nguyen et al., 2024). Issues of power and vulnerability, as well as other social dynamics, arise when notable differences exist between group members (Baker et al., 2005; Wooten, 1995). In the fashion industry diversity consists of presenting diverse demographics to represent various groups.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary explains inclusion as “the act or practice of including or accommodating people who have historically been excluded.” (Zanotti, 2022). D&I operate as a socio-political framework within the fashion industry to showcase various demographic segments while acknowledging human differences that define cultural stories and consumer relationships (Olivares, 2013). D&I are related but not synonymous; they represent distinct approaches in modern practice. Diversity focuses on the inclusion of different groups, but inclusion goes beyond representation to ensure active value and integration of diverse people (Kaplan & Donovan, 2016; Bernstein et al., 2019). Licsandru and Cui (2017) expand on this vision by categorizing inclusion as a subjective and multidimensional experience that involves “acceptance, belongingness, empowerment, equality, and respect”. This reinforces the idea that brands must go beyond visual representation and promote a sense of genuine inclusion through emotionally engaging communication. In the fashion industry, D&I initiatives enable the resolution of social issues by shifting the responsibility for organizational change, from isolated social actions to broader institutional transformation (Bernstein et al., 2019).

Fashion companies use marketing strategies to promote diversity through multiple identity representations including race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability. While historically, brands have focused primarily on characteristics like age, gender, and ethnicity, there has been a noticeable shift toward incorporating a broader spectrum of identities, including religion, sexual orientation, and neurodiversity (Ferraro et al., 2022). Still, certain claims about diversity in fashion have come under examination. Some marketing and social media studies suggest that brand narratives can reinforce diversity messaging without providing genuine representation (Arrigo, 2018). Particularly on platforms such as Instagram, where consumers are constantly surrounded by brand material, the significance behind diversity message can get diluted or lost (Atwal & Williams, 2017). Companies that regularly show merely light-skinned models, risk unintentionally promoting exclusivity and failing to align with the expectations of a more diverse and socially conscious audience (Bernstein et al., 2019).

This issue highlights the importance for brands to be authentic in their diversity strategies to prevent superficial representations that contradict their core values. Consumers are increasingly becoming more mindful of how brands communicate D&I, and the authenticity of such efforts influences their behavior and perceived brand social responsibility. Research suggests that consumers expect brands to authentically reflect society's diversity, which includes embracing various cultural backgrounds, attitudes, and behaviors (Deloitte, 2022). This shift is largely driven by an evolving global demographic, where inclusion and equity are central to consumer expectations (Kipnis et al., 2020).

However, the way diversity is communicated can significantly affect consumer behavior, since an overemphasis on diversity cues, such as repeatedly showcasing certain ethnic or gender groups, can result in inauthenticity or an overly performative appearance (Calafell & Eguchi; Moreira, 2023). Moreover, consumers that believe that a brand's efforts towards diversity are superficial or lack transparency might affect their behavior regarding the brand and their brand advocacy (Kroeper et al., 2022). Conversely, effective diversity representation can improve consumer perceptions of brands, particularly when such representation relates to perceived brand values and brand efforts to lead social change. Studies show that when fashion brands authentically embrace diversity, it can lead to a more positive evaluation of their social responsibility message, enhancing consumer loyalty and trust (Ferraro et al., 2024). As fashion markets become more diverse, brands are increasingly adopting multi-segment marketing strategies that authentically engage with a wide range of audiences through messages that reflect their values (Kim & Kim, 2022).

2.2 Consumer Behavior and Values

In the last few decades, consumers have exercised their buying power as a way to express social and ethical awareness. This happens in the world of fashion where consumers seek brands that operate through socially responsible ways, meaning fairness in working conditions, ethical branding and transparency, environmental ethics, and animal rights (Manchiraju & Sadachar, 2014). Those who consider such factors during the buying process are called ethical fashion consumers or socially and environmentally responsible buyers, who appreciate transparency and expect brands to be open about their branding ethics (Jones & Kang, 2020).

In the past, consumers seemingly did not care about socially responsible products. Now, however, there is a clear awareness of responsible purchasing, as consumers are even prepared to pay more for sustainably sourced goods, fair trade certification, or recycled

materials (Carter, 2009). Still, this growing concern is not always reflected in consumer behavior. Research has revealed a gap of intention versus action, as consumers may want to support good causes, they are often held back by high prices, low accessibility/in-store availability and niche retail locations (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

Personal beliefs have a significant impact on shaping ethical consumer behavior. When consumers prioritize fair trade and practices, social justice, and sustainability, they tend to choose brands that reflect those priorities (Stringer, 2023). But that does not mean all ethical consumers share the same values as some may be more concerned with animal protection than the environment or workers' rights (Brunk, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial for brands to understand the link between consumer values and their behaviors, to design products and messages that speak to what ethical consumers truly care about (Maio et al., 2006).

Social media is a critical component of how consumers become aware of ethical fashion. Strähle and Gräff (2017) note that social media facilitates consumer awareness and transparency of the supply chain while enabling consumers to post about their experiences with ethical consumption. In addition, ethical fashion marketing often leverages social media influencers, and consumers appreciate when these influencers appear genuine, without an obvious hidden motive. When consumers believe an influencer is genuinely enthusiastic about a product and its ethical attributes, they are more inclined to believe the suggestion and follow through (Ercegovic & Tankosić, 2023).

However, the effectiveness of this ethical messaging on social media depends entirely on execution. As an example, transparency is crucial since brands that transparently acknowledge their sourcing and production methods, clearly communicate their ethical stance, and fully disclose relevant information are more likely to earn consumer support. Brands involved in "greenwashing" or take other inauthentic measures risk consumer backlash, especially when their ethical claims are overshadowed by other marketing messages or are seen as driven by self-interest rather than the public good (Kroeper et al., 2022). The more informed consumers are about the information spread on social media, the better they can assess whether brands are being honest or just engaging in superficial marketing (Godey et al., 2016).

Despite the increasing recognition of ethically driven fashion, several research opportunities remain. First, consumer values regarding transparency and D&I should be explored, with research findings assessed to see if ethical concerns supersede other values (Stringer et al., 2020). Second, the connection between consumers' moral goals and their stated behaviors should be investigated, particularly regarding their ability to disengage

from unethical brands (Ng, 2020). Finally, the "ethical purchasing gap" remains a major challenge in sustainable fashion research. Although many customers show concern regarding ethical matters, they often fail to align their buying decisions with these values due to higher prices, restricted availability, and an absence of accessible data (Manchiraju & Sadachar, 2014).

2.3 Social Media Brand Engagement

Ethical communication via digital platforms has become a crucial element of branding efforts to communicate values and increase engagement. Branding strategies now emphasize transparent, authentic, and purposeful campaigns. Brands that effectively communicate the values underlying their campaigns are likely to find consumers more inclined to trust them and support their long-term growth. Such strategies help create engaged communities and strengthen brand identity, providing a competitive advantage in a value-oriented market (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021; Fernandes et al., 2024). Furthermore, social media provides a platform for unique, real-time, two-way communication. These platforms not only create connections but also raise awareness of social concerns and encourage engagement with social issues (Mora et al., 2021).

Transparency and authenticity as part of ethical communication are crucial for building consumer trust. Consumers seek to understand the principles a brand upholds, its operational framework, the causes it endorses, and the processes involved in its production and distribution. Brands can easily give this information out and have legitimate brand stories to boast through employee spotlights or customer testimonials, even behind-the-scenes footage that plays to an emotional appeal or educates the viewer. When brands let people see what they do and how they do it, they strengthen credibility among their consumers and even their competition. However, if the effort at authenticity lacks impact is perceived as a temporary trend, it can backfire, as consumers can "smell" inauthentic brand messaging from a mile away (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021).

Equally significant is the role of purpose-driven campaigns, which reinforce consumer trust by emphasizing socially responsible choices. Brands that highlight their commitment to D&I, transparency, and social impact initiatives demonstrate a broader responsibility beyond profit-driven motives. Purpose-driven branding enables companies to target different audience segments by tailoring their social media campaigns to align with different consumer ethical behaviors. By effectively communicating their ethical commitments, brands have the potential to improve their image and establish more robust connections

with socially aware consumers who prioritize transparency and social responsibility in their purchasing choices (Fernandes et al., 2024).

In addition, social media and increasingly data-driven strategies manifest a multi-channel approach that appeals to large demographic segments (Mora et al., 2021). Social media functions as a dynamic platform where brands engage with consumers in real time, responding to comments instantaneously and addressing issues promptly to build a community that further amplifies ethical endeavors. This type of transparency and open communication is a trust-building exercise and a form of social reciprocity (Malhotra et al., 2004).

Social media is not just a space for brand collaboration and consumer connection; it is where social campaigns flourish. For instance, in influencer marketing, brands that collaborate with the right influencers can spread their message and gain legitimacy. However, such partnerships must also feel authentic and align with the brand's ethical standards. Compliance is maintained by properly disclosing paid partnerships (Ercegovac & Tankosić, 2023). But in the 21st century, social media is used for more than just product marketing since effective ethical branding creates an image of honesty, proper citizenship, and empathy. Therefore, when brands effectively incorporate ethics into their marketing efforts, they rejuvenate their corporate image and increase the satisfaction of ethics-driven consumers (Chong & Patwa, 2023). Social media goes beyond being a tool for consumer engagement, it is a breeding ground for social activism. In this way, social networks serve as a vehicle for social activist movements, whether it is #BlackLivesMatter or #MeToo, demanding visibility and equity within industries that serve similar communities. Such movements emphasize that social media is a complex communication vehicle rooted in culture and ethics (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021).

In the social media context, user-generated content (UGC) and consumer sharing are pivotal for campaign success. Authentic engagement through UGC enhances relatability, while "shares" generate exponential impressions, extending campaign reach. Campaigns including #JustDoIt (Nike) and #BTS (Coca-Cola) demonstrate the power of consumer-driven content (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019). Some studies show that Millennials favor socially responsible brands with ethical practices (Buckley et al., 2016).

Ethics can be a competitive advantage in a value-driven market. Brands are more likely to resonate with loyal customers willing to pay slightly more for the experience if they actively and consciously operate with an awareness of consumer values (Golob & Podnar, 2019).

For example, brands like Patagonia and Lush have intrinsic causes of their business models, allowing them to champion their causes even more ethically while remaining authentic through time (Schmidt et al., 2022).

Fernandes, Guzmán and Mota (2024) study the incremental impact of goal-oriented marketing on brand outcomes, self-brand congruence, brand image, brand recommendation and purchase intention. Figure 2 is the research framework constructed by the authors, with cause-brand congruence and authenticity as the necessary components to create a better brand perception. The results of the author's research reveal that a consistently conscious and purpose-driven brand (CPB) is the way forward.

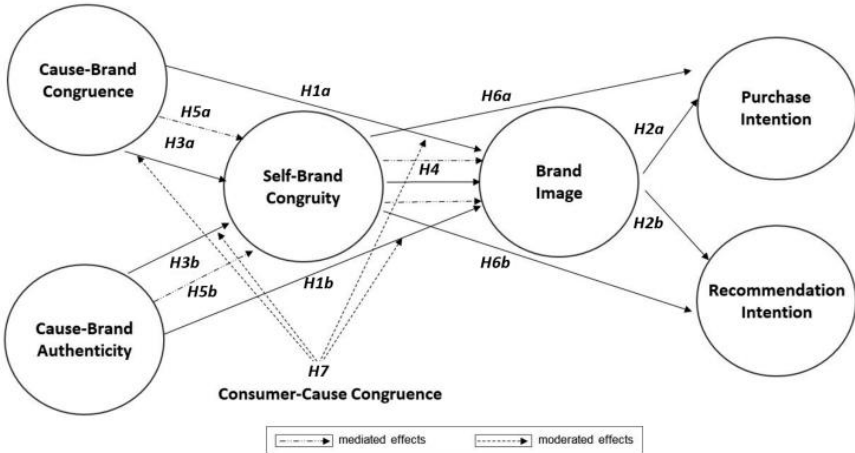


Figure 2: Research framework from Fernandes, Guzmán and Mota (2024)

Despite extensive research on the impact of ethical communication and social media’s contribution in this area, there remains insufficient data about whether consumers who actively participate in Cancel Culture exhibit higher levels of social media engagement with brands or if they are merely following a trend without sustained involvement (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2019).

2.4 The “Cancel Culture”

Social media serves a pivotal function in the spread of Cancel Culture by enabling the fast dissemination of information on brand controversies (Halilovic, 2023). The increasing emphasis on ethical communication on social media has amplified the visibility of both positive brand behaviors and ethical missteps, giving rise to the emergence of Cancel Culture. This cultural movement, driven by “social media platforms such as Twitter/X, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram”, involves a collective detachment from individuals, brands, or organizations whose actions are considered morally unacceptable (D. Clark, 2020; Nilsson & Lopes, 2024). Cancel Culture frequently begins as digital discourse, often leveraging hashtags to highlight perceived ethical violations or social injustices, as seen in high-profile movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). These online platforms have become central to holding brands accountable, allowing users and communities to publicly scrutinize and challenge unethical behaviors (Ng, 2020).

Cancel Culture is broadly described as the collective, often public condemnation of individuals or entities, typically by marginalized voices, in response to perceived unethical or harmful behavior (Ng, 2020). Initially associated with high-profile celebrity controversies, it has increasingly targeted businesses and brands whose actions contradict the values of their stakeholders (Tandoc et al., 2024). While most studies focus on how brands can avoid adverse reactions, Scholz and Smith (2019) present a different perspective in that, under certain conditions, brands can benefit from facing online firestorms. They argue that assertive responses can energize brand advocates and reinforce brand identity, especially when the reaction is morally focused.

According to a review of numerous studies and essays, Tandoc et al. (2024) identified three key elements that consistently characterize Cancel Culture: (i) the public shaming of unacceptable actions or behaviors; (ii) Withdrawal of support or engagement (e.g., boycotts or unfollowing); and (iii) a desire to impose consequences or penalties on the target, ranging from economic repercussions to social exclusion. Cancel Culture has demonstrated its ability to significantly impact the fashion industry, often fueled by social media platforms (Mueller, 2021). When brands act unethically or align with controversial behavior, consumers mobilize to hold them accountable, resulting in boycotts, reputation damage, and financial losses (Halilovic, 2023). Several high-profile controversies have exemplified how Cancel Culture impacts the industry.

Firm	Baseline Problem	Consumer response	Source
Balenciaga	Allegations of child exploitation	Balenciaga faced backlash against its marketing campaign, sparking widespread condemnation and the trending hashtag #cancelBalenciaga	NYTimes (2022)
Adidas	The collaboration between Yeezy and Adidas ended after Kanye West, the musician associated with Yeezy, made a series of anti-Semitic statements	The public outcry led Adidas to end its partnership with Yeezy, resulting in a financial loss of \$1.3 billion for the brand	Sim (2022)
Zara	Violations of labor rights	Violations of labor rights, including unpaid wages in Turkey and alleged use of forced labor in Xinjiang, China, where Uighur Muslims face abuses	Breeden, Gallois, & Paton, (2021)
H&M	Releasing an advertisement featuring a black child wearing a hoodie with the slogan "coolest monkey in the jungle," viewed as racially insensitive"	Sparked boycotts and calls for accountability. The Weekend canceled his collaboration with the brand due to dissatisfaction	Stack (2018)

Table 1: Real-world evidence of Cancel Culture affecting fashion.

The examples presented in Table 1 highlight how Cancel Culture pressures fashion brands to confront unethical practices and demonstrate the significant reputational and financial risks of failing to meet consumers' ethical expectations.

Hegner (2017) introduced a framework that provides insights into how consumers react to brands they dislike, outlining behaviors like brand hate, avoidance, retaliation, and negative word-of-mouth (NWOM). In this context, cancelling brands happens when consumers reject a brand because its values or actions conflict with their beliefs. Differing from conventional word-of-mouth, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) spreads quickly and widely through digital platforms, shaping how people perceive a brand and influencing trust, attitudes, and purchasing decisions (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2017). Negative eWOM often leads to the "co-destruction of value," where a brand's reputation and well-being take a significant hit due to actions like boycotts or consumer retaliation (Nam et al., 2018).

UGC has a crucial impact in amplifying the effects of Cancel Culture (Costa & Azevedo, 2024) as it encompasses text, reviews, videos, and other media that consumers create to share opinions about brands or products (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). These contributions can escalate from simple discussions to organized anti-brand communities, which take activist roles against brands (Zarantonello et al., 2016).

Moreover, Edelman's 2018 study revealed that 64% of consumers worldwide make buying choices based on a brand's position on cultural or governmental issues. This reflects political consumerism, where individuals deliberately boycott or support companies for ethical, social, or political reasons (Edelman, 2018). Ultimately, Cancel Culture poses significant brand risks, harm to reputation, value destruction, and decline of consumer trust. The interplay of NWOM, UGC, and political consumerism underscores the growing influence of consumers in holding brands accountable in the digital era. Brands are recognizing these implications and investing in aligning with ethical and social values to avoid being targeted by cancellation movements (Costa & Azevedo, 2024).

Organizations must adopt transparent, ethical, and proactive practices to avoid being "canceled" and maintain a strong online reputation. By openly sharing their actions, policies, and decisions, they build trust, while promptly addressing mistakes and misinformation fostering genuine stakeholder connections and resilience against Cancel Culture. In addition, developing tailored crisis communication plans helps ensure timely and cohesive responses to reputational threats, and conducting training and simulations enhances teams' capacity to manage public backlash effectively (Halilovic, 2023). Social listening tools help track public sentiment, identify risks early, and respond strategically to shape positive perceptions. Engaging stakeholders through feedback and collaborative decision-making strengthens trust and advocacy while demonstrating social responsibility and responsiveness (Tandoc et al., 2024). Regular evaluation of strategies and benchmarking against best practices ensures adaptability and effectiveness in managing online reputation (Costa & Azevedo, 2024).

2.5 Research Model

Understanding how brand and consumer actions, in the fashion sector, drive social networks Cancel Culture, is highly relevant in the contemporary business and marketing landscape. Recent studies underline that consumers now expect companies to actively respond to ethical and social concerns. Factors such as transparency and trust in brand communication have become critical to build trust and mitigate the risks associated with

negative consumer reaction (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Salo, 2020). Thus, brands are increasingly struggling with their engagement approach, facing a growing “elephant in the room” effect in their strategies. Many communities hold specific ethical values, and consumers are always looking for brands that take a clear ethical, political, and social position. While these positions can work in a brand's favor, they can also backfire when not managed correctly (Ng, 2020). This represents the silent “elephant” that is getting louder and causing apprehension among brands. Therefore, it is essential to study the role of this phenomenon and the reasons contributing to the emergence of Cancel Culture.

Ethical consumer behavior is tied to how consumers perceive a brand's social responsibility (Stringer, 2023). Consumers who prioritize values such as fairness, social justice, and environmental protection usually support brands that match with these principles and expect them to communicate their ethical standards transparently (Brunk, 2010; Jones & Kang, 2020). This value-driven mindset influences purchase decisions and shapes perceptions of brand authenticity and responsibility (Carter, 2009). When brand actions align with consumer ethical values, it fosters trust, loyalty, and advocacy (Maio et al., 2006). Moreover, this behavior generates pressure on brands to adopt and maintain ethical practices to meet consumer expectations (Stringer, 2023). Hypothesis one connects directly to the research question by illustrating how ethically motivated consumers significantly influence brands' accountability, potentially driving Cancel Culture in the fashion industry. Thus, we expected that:

H1: Ethical consumer behavior positively influences the perception of brand social responsibility.

When customers view a brand as socially aware, it significantly enhances their trust in the brand and their perception of its transparency. This trust is built through consistent and truthful communication about their ethical practices (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). Brands that clearly disclose their values, production processes, and supply chain practices tend to establish strong consumer trust (Kroeper et al., 2022). Likewise, providing transparent information about materials and production costs further reinforces a brand's image as socially responsible (Yang & Battocchio, 2021). Consumers are more likely to believe in a brand's commitment to ethical actions when there is tangible, verifiable evidence of these efforts, such as certifications, detailed reporting, and initiative-taking engagement with social and environmental issues. This heightened trust and transparency encourage consumers to form deeper, more favourable connections with the brand, enhancing their loyalty and willingness to advocate for it (Fernandes et al., 2024). The following hypothesis addresses the brand behavior aspect of the research question by showing that trust and

transparency, shaped by perceived social responsibility, can either reinforce consumer loyalty or trigger social media Cancel Culture when expectations are not met. This led to postulate that:

H2: Perceived brand social responsibility strengthens brand trust and transparency.

Perceived brand social responsibility plays an important role shaping consumers interactions with fashion companies on social media. When brands communicate their ethical values, such as using sustainable materials, ensuring fair labor practices, and maintaining transparency, they foster trust and emotional ties with their community (Pereira et al., 2021; Stringer, 2023). As a result, this trust encourages consumers “to engage with the brand online by liking, commenting, sharing posts, or recommending it to others” (Fernandes et al., 2024). In this context, social media serves not just as a promotional tool but as a platform for expressing shared values. Therefore, consumers tend to support brands they perceive as socially responsible (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021). Moreover, brands that clearly communicate a purpose beyond profit are often seen as more authentic and trustworthy (Kroeper et al., 2022). For this reason, social responsibility should not be viewed as a secondary branding element but rather as a key driver of consumer behavior on digital platforms. This hypothesis contributes to the research question by highlighting how ethical brand behavior can lead to increased social media engagement, which in turn shapes consumer reactions in the scenario of Cancel Culture. Thus, we expected that:

H3: Perceived brand social responsibility increases social media engagement.

Consumers with strong ethical beliefs are more likely to participate in efforts to cancel brands that do not align with their values. This tendency is particularly evident on social media, where ethical missteps quickly become public and widely discussed. As a result, the more negative a consumer’s perception of a brand, the greater the likelihood they will engage in cancellation efforts (Costa & Azevedo, 2024). Ethical fashion consumers, in particular, value transparency and expect brands to clearly communicate their ethical standards (Jones & Kang, 2020). When brands fail to meet expectations related to fairness, social justice, or environmental protection, these consumers are not only less likely to support them but also more likely to boycott or criticize them publicly (Stringer, 2023). Moreover, social media amplifies these reactions by accelerating the spread of negative word-of-mouth, which can rapidly influence public opinion, trust, and purchase decisions. Supporting this, Edelman’s 2018 study found that 64% of global consumers make purchasing choices based on a brand’s social or political stance, illustrating the power of political consumerism (Costa & Azevedo, 2024). Therefore, this hypothesis contributes to the research question by showing that when fashion brands fail to live up to ethical

expectations, it is often ethically motivated consumers who lead the response, using social media as a platform to drive Cancel Culture. For this purpose, H4 was defined as:

H4: Ethical consumer behavior increases the likelihood of engaging in Cancel Culture.

Strong D&I initiatives by brands can reduce the likelihood of Cancel Culture by promoting positive consumer perceptions (Kroeper et al., 2022). This is especially relevant in the contemporary market, where consumers expect brands to authentically reflect the diversity of society, and where the perceived authenticity of these efforts directly shapes their attitudes (Deloitte, 2022). When brands consistently present diverse representation in their marketing and social media content, they are generally perceived as more genuine and trustworthy (Ferraro et al., 2022). In addition, diversity initiatives that are well-executed and aligned with brand values and broader CSR strategies tend to reinforce this positive perception (Ferraro et al., 2024). Therefore, by genuinely embracing D&I, brands are more likely to develop stronger relationships with customers and foster a more resilient brand image. This, in turn, reduces their chances of being targeted by Cancel Culture, especially in the socially conscious fashion sector (Kim & Kim, 2022). Overall, the following hypothesis illustrates how inclusive branding practices shape consumer attitudes and function as a protective factor against reputational damage in the digital era. Thus, we expect that:

H5: Strong brand D&I initiatives reduce the likelihood of Cancel Culture.

Brands that demonstrate ethical behavior and transparency tend to obtain the support of their customers and avoid being cancelled, since these practices promote trust and loyalty. Transparency in brand communication is essential for consumer trust, particularly regarding sustainability and ethical practices (Pereira et al., 2021). Moreover, ethical communication on social media generates trust and encourages engagement. Consumers value consistency in ethical commitments from brands, fostering long-term emotional connections (Schwarz et al., 2021). Additionally, companies that align with consumer values often attract loyal customers who are willing to pay more for their clothes. By openly sharing their actions, policies and decisions, fashion companies may build consumer trust and create a positive feedback loop that reinforces their ethical beliefs (Halilovic, 2023). This prediction connects with the research question by demonstrating that when brands exhibit a lack in trust and transparency, consumers are more likely to engage in Cancel Culture on social media, leading to H6 that stands:

H6: Gaps in brand trust and transparency increase the likelihood of Cancel Culture.

Consumers who actively participate in Cancel Culture have higher levels of engagement with brands, both positive and negative, on digital platforms. Social networks allow for the fast dissemination of information about brand controversies, amplifying the visibility of positive and negative brand behaviors (Nilsson & Lopes, 2024). Consumers who are frequent users of social media tend to engage in digital activism, boycott campaigns and brand criticism. These individuals leverage social media to share their opinions and information about unethical practices, organizing collective actions against brands. While some consumers may interact with brands to express their support, others may use social media to amplify their criticisms and call for boycotts (Nilsson & Lopes, 2024). Recognizing the drivers and behaviors of these highly engaged consumers is essential for brands seeking to navigate the complex social media landscape and reduce the threats linked to Cancel Culture (Costa & Azevedo, 2024). This hypothesis examines the consumer behavior aspect of this study topic, demonstrating that in this industry, highly engaged digital users are essential in driving Cancel Culture by using their platforms to enhance brand approval or condemnation. Thus, we expected that:

H7: Consumers actively participating in Cancel Culture exhibit higher levels of social media engagement with brands.

This research seeks to address a critical gap in existing literature by exploring how brand and consumer behavior in the fashion sector leads to the emergence of social media Cancel Culture. While extensive studies on CSR, ethical branding, and the impact of social media on consumer perception have been conducted, limited attention has been given to how brand trust and transparency, D&I, and ethical consumer behavior influence Cancel Culture (Quiles-Soler et al., 2022; Arrigo, 2018). Moreover, existing studies often explore ethical concerns such as sustainability, transparency, individually, without assessing their combined impact on consumer social media engagement and public actions like boycotts or digital activism (Purvis et al., 2019; Stringer, 2023). The research question guiding this study is:

RQ: How Brand and Consumer behavior, in the fashion industry, drive social media Cancel Culture?

Building on consumer behavior and values research, this study takes a novel approach by investigating whether consumers with more sustainable purchase behaviors, so-called ethical customers, are indeed more willing to take part in Cancel Culture. While ethical consumption is often associated with positive brand advocacy, the degree to which these consumers actively engage in brand cancellations when companies fail to align with their values, remains largely unexplored (Stringer, 2023).

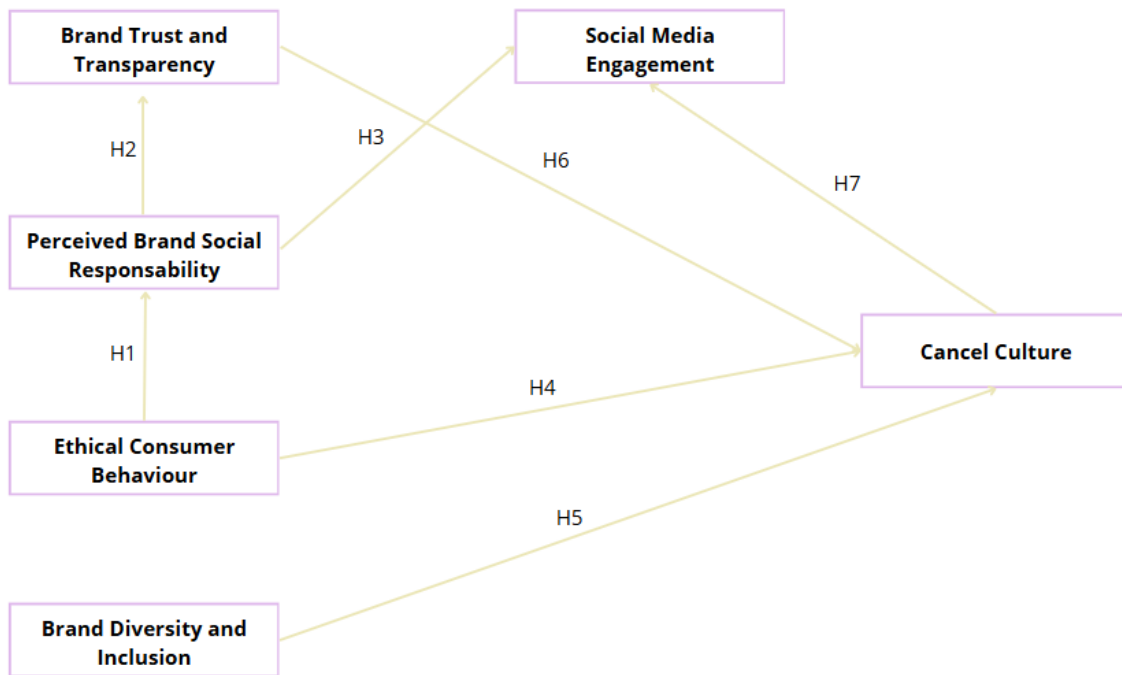


Figure 3: Conceptual Model

Through an analysis of the connections presented in Figure 3, this study supports the existing body of research by exploring how brand trust and transparency, D&I, and ethical consumer behavior influence Cancel Culture. It also investigates how perceived brand social responsibility affects social media engagement, and how this engagement, in turn, relates to the dynamics of Cancel Culture, providing useful insights to tackle ethical challenges in today's fashion industry, which led to our Conceptual Model (see, Figure3).

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods employed to explore the research question, test the proposed hypotheses, and derive conclusions. To begin, a summary of the chosen research approach is provided, followed by the study design and measurements. Finally, the study provides the data obtained in the collection of data.

3.1 Study Design and Method

The research model was designed to explore how consumer and brand actions in the fashion industry drive Cancel Culture on social media. Specifically, this study examines the impact that trust and transparency, D&I and ethical consumer behavior have on the emergence of Cancel Culture. In addition, since social networks significantly amplify the visibility of this phenomenon, research was conducted to examine the connection between brands' corporate responsibility and the effect of Cancel Culture on social media engagement.

A hypothetical-deductive approach was utilized, where hypotheses were created based on established theories and later tested using empirical data. This approach enables the assessment of relations between ethical gaps, consumer behavior, and Cancel Culture (Lawson, 2013). To assess the proposed hypothesis and identify correlations between variables, this research used a quantitative research method. Data was collected via an online survey using Qualtrics (Appendix C). After careful validation to confirm accuracy, consistency, and alignment with the study goals, this research used Partial Least Squares (PLS) for data analysis. PLS is a variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method, ideal for sophisticated models with minimal prior knowledge and appropriate for exploratory research (Henseler et al., 2009). Given the study's focus on a new model and exploring correlations, PLS was chosen for its ability to evaluate and estimate causal relationships within the framework. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4 software (Cheah et al., 2023).

3.2 Measurements

At the start of the questionnaire, respondents were notified that the research focused on exploring how brand and consumer behavior in the fashion industry contribute to Cancel Culture on social media. A brief explanation about the study's goals and the handling of

survey data was given, along with a consent form, giving participants the choice to opt out if they preferred. The survey was structured into four primary sections covering ethical behavior and ethical gaps perception, consumer perception, Cancel Culture familiarity and motivation, and brand engagement on social media. Participants first responded to questions about their ethical behavior in daily purchasing decisions before evaluating ethical issues in the fashion sector, with a specific emphasis on sustainability, D&I, and trust and transparency.

The first set of questions aimed to assess respondents' perceptions of ethical standards within the fashion sector, how much they value ethical responsibility from brands, and whether there is a relationship between individual ethical behavior and consumer expectations toward brands. Ethical gaps were assessed using previously validated metrics derived from existing research, as detailed in Table 3. For the section on D&I, respondents were shown three images of brands using inclusive models, illustrating different representations of diversity in fashion. These images aimed to assess consumer reactions to inclusive representation and evaluate whether such efforts influence perceptions of brand ethics and authenticity. The next section assessed consumer perception of brands' social responsibility using an adapted scale from Ferrell et al. (2019).

The following section focused on Cancel Culture, exploring how consumers respond to brands that fail to meet ethical expectations. Familiarity with Cancel Culture was assessed using a familiarity scale based on Buchanan et al. (2019). Additionally, participants were presented with an open-ended question: "Please share the first thoughts or ideas that come to your mind when you think about Cancel Culture.". This qualitative input was designed to capture participants' immediate associations with the concept, providing deeper insights into personal perspectives and attitudes. After their response, participants were presented with a brief definition of Cancel Culture: "Cancel Culture can be broadly defined as the collective, often public condemnation of individuals or entities, typically by marginalized voices, in response to perceived unethical or harmful behavior" (Ng, 2020). Finally, motivations for engaging in Cancel Culture were analyzed through social motivations, with dimensions adapted from Cummings et al. (2024). Before moving to the demographic information section, brand engagement on social media was measured using an adapted scale from Schivinski, Christodoulidis, and Dabrowski (2016) to provide valuable insights into how this sample interacts with brands on digital platforms and how it is impacted by Cancel Culture.

All constructs in the survey were evaluated using a six-point Likert scale ranging from one, (strong disagreement) to six (strong agreement). This scale was chosen to eliminate neutral responses and encourage participants to provide more definitive and valuable answers,

thereby reducing ambiguous or inconclusive data. In addition to the primary constructs, demographic data was gathered, including age, gender, occupation, education, and perceived financial status, as presented in Table 2.

	Measurement items		
	Variable	Source	Statement
Ethical Considerations	Ethical Consumer Behaviour On a scale of 1 to 6, (1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree)	Buerke et al. (2016)	1. I deliberately try to avoid products that cause environmental damage. 2. I mostly buy environment-friendly products (e.g. with an organic label). 3. When I have the choice between two similar products, I always take ecological aspects into consideration.
	Diversity and Inclusion On a scale of 1 to 6, (1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree)	Lee et al. (2024)	1. Brands using disability models show they care about the society. 2. Brands using disability models improve the industry. 3. Brands using disability models find it easier than other brands to attract consumers. 4. Brands using disability models make me feel emotionally belong to the society. 5. Brands using disability models make me feel empowered. 6. Brands using disability models make society more open to diversity. 7. Brands using disability model make society more equal. 8. Brands using disability model make society more respectful.
	Fair labour practices On a scale of 1 to 6, (1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree)	Buerke et al. (2016)	1. I try to buy fairly traded products (e.g. with a fair-trade label). 2. I strictly avoid purchasing from companies that are known for bad working conditions for their employees. 3. I deliberately try to buy products from companies that are considered to be socially responsible.
Consumer perception	Perceived Brand Social Responsibility and Transparency On a scale of 1 to 6, (1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree)	Ferrelle et al. (2019)	1. Companies should have a code of ethics. 2. I believe companies should not engage in bribery. 3. Companies should not be involved in communication that deceives facts. 4. I do not want to do business with companies that damage customers. 5. I feel that it is important for companies to be transparent in engaging stakeholders. 6. I do not want to do business with companies that deceive customers. 7. Managers should avoid conflicts of interest by not advancing their own interests over those of the firm. 8. I feel that it is important for companies to be honest in engaging stakeholders.
Cancel culture	Familiarity On a scale of 1 to 5, (1 = Not familiar at all; 5 = Extremely familiar)	Buchanan et al. (2019)	1. How familiar are you with the concept of "Cancel culture"?
	Consumer motivation On a scale of 1 to 6, (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Cummings et al. (2024)	1. Canceling is an effective means to make a company change its action. 2. By canceling, I can change the behavior of other companies because they will see the consequences of the canceling. 3. Canceling is an effective way to punish the company. 4. By canceling, I can help change a company's decision.
Social media	Engagement On a scale of 1 to 6, (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree)	Adapted from Schivinski, Christodoulidis, & Dabrowski (2016)	1. I am very active on fashion brand's social media (e.g., liking, commenting, or sharing posts). 2. I frequently contribute to fashion brand's social media. 3. I spend time interacting with fashion brand's content on social me

Table 2: Literature Scales used in the Questionnaire

The income variable, adapted from Howe et al., was included to enable segmentation analysis and assess potential moderating effects within the model. Rather than measuring respondents' exact income levels, this scale was designed to capture their perceived financial situation, providing a more accurate understanding of their economic reality. Since income alone does not reflect an individual's financial well-being without accounting for expenses, this method provides a more detailed analysis of how respondents experience their economic conditions. By incorporating these demographic insights, the study aimed to explore possible variations in responses based on social and economic backgrounds, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of consumer perspectives on ethical gaps, digital networks engagement, and Cancel Culture.

3.3 Data Collection and Participants

The data for this research was gathered through an online survey, developed and administered on Qualtrics. According to the approval granted by the NOVA IMS Ethics Committee, all participants gave informed consent (Appendix A). Conducted in Portugal, our survey was distributed in both English and Portuguese to reach a broader range of participants. Since the study's focus on social media users' perspectives, it was primarily distributed through platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as the university's institutional email (Weller, 2016). The survey was open from February 7 to 21, 2025, allowing ample time to collect enough responses. While the primary structure of the survey was quantitative, it also included one open-ended question to gather more in-depth, individual insights. This approach combines quantitative methods with qualitative elements, enabling the study to capture both statistical trends and contextual understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The sample consisted of 213 individuals from Portugal, aged between 18 and 78 years. The age profile demonstrates the clear dominance of younger subjects, with 24% falling within the 18-24 age range, and 32% between 25 and 34 years (see, Table 3). In addition, 18% of the interviewees were between the ages of 45 and 54, 14% were aged 35 to 44, while 12% were 55 years or older. This demographic profile reveals a predominantly young population, in contrast to the smaller representation of older individuals. Understanding the age distribution is important for this study, as it helps to explore how different age groups perceive ethical issues in the fashion industry (Brunk, 2010).

Distribution (n = 213)			
Variable	Answer options	Obs	Obs (%)
Age	18-24 years	51	24%
	25-34 years	68	32%
	35-44 years	30	14%
	45-54 years	39	18%
	55+ years	25	12%
Gender	1. Prefer not to say	0	0
	2. Non-binary / third gender	5	2%
	3. Female	119	56%
	4. Male	89	42%
Subjective Income (Howe et al., 2011)	1. We live without worries	71	33%
	2. We get along with a smart budgeting	102	48%
	3. Sometimes, we have minor financial problems	33	15%
	4. We often have financial problems	3	1%
	5. I do not know	4	2%
Education	1. High school or lower	27	13%
	2. Professional degree	26	8%
	3. Bachelor's degree	49	23%
	4. Master degree	91	43%
	5. Post-Graduate	30	14%
Occupation	1. Student	10	5%
	2. Student-Worker	22	10%
	3. Employed	159	75%
	4. Unemployed	7	3%
	5. Retired	5	2%
	6. Other ()	10	5%
Social media usage	1. Less than 1 hour	52	24%
	2. Between 1 and 2 hours	95	45%
	4. More than 2 hours	66	31%

Table 3: Demographics Scales

Concerning gender balance, the sample includes representative proportions of female subjects (56%) and male subjects (42%), with 2% of the subjects identifying as non-binary/third gender. The above study suggests that the female population is more likely to consider ethical and environmentally responsible aspects while making consumption decisions, particularly within the fashion industry. Diversity and representation are now core consumer requirements, and brands that are unwillingly committed to these ideals are likely to suffer the consequences (Deloitte, 2022). Although the relatively low number of non-binary subjects, they are included and emphasize the growing importance of inclusive and diversified marketing strategies within the fashion industry.

Upon examining financial situations, 33% of the respondents' state that they are free from financial difficulties, while 48% practice careful management of budgets. At the same time, 15% find they are facing slight financial difficulties, 1% are facing recurring financial difficulties, and 2% are uncertain about their financial situation. Ethics often cost more in fashion, and while several customers express the need for ethical and green fashion brands, financial constraints may limit their ability to purchase regularly from such sources (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). The situation highlights the ever-existing ethical consumption disparity, with the stated values and consumer practices failing to always align.

In terms of education, a high percentage of the participants hold advanced degrees, as reflected in the 43% with a master's degree, 23% with a bachelor's qualification, and 14% with a postgraduate degree. The rest of the participants are 13% with secondary education and 8% with a professional degree. Previous research has established that educational levels are associated with increased sensitivity towards CSR and greater skepticism towards marketing claims. As a result, consumers with higher educational levels are more critical of claims in green marketing and can identify inconsistencies in a brand's ethical messages (Fernandes et al., 2024).

Regarding the occupational situation of the subjects, 75% are at work, 10% are student-workers, 5% are students, 3% are unemployed individuals, and 5% are retirees. Work largely affects ethical consumption since financial well-being often helps the consumer to place more importance on ethical aspects and principles while making purchase decisions. The same applies to the unemployed and the students since they are more ethically aware but are confronted with financial issues that impede the embracement of ethical consumption practices (Antoni & Faillo, 2022).

The utilization of social media holds particular importance due to the impact it has on brand perception formation and the spreading of Cancel Culture. The study finds that 45% of the respondents spend between one and two hours of the day using social media, 31% spend more than two hours, and 24% spend less than an hour using it daily. With the fact that most of the study subjects spend much of their time using digital networks, they are highly expected to be exposed to discussions of ethical fashion. Social media now represents the platform upon which customers give opinions about matters, call out unprincipled practices, and shape brand perceptions. Social media enthusiasts have a higher tendency to engage in digital protestation, boycott campaigns, and brand disapproval, making the presence of social media a critical factor of modern brand management (Ercegovac & Tankosić, 2023).

Familiarity with Cancel Culture		
Answear options	Obs	Obs(%)
Not familiar at all	32	15%
Slightly familiar	35	17%
Somewhat familiar	47	22%
Very familiar	63	30%
Extremely familiar	34	16%

Table 4: Familiarity with Cancel Culture

Finally, accordingly, to the Table 4, the survey results indicate that most respondents have some level of familiarity with Cancel Culture. The most common response was "Very familiar" (30%), followed by "Extremely familiar" (16%), meaning that nearly half of the sample (46%) has a strong awareness of the concept. Additionally, 22% of respondents described themselves as "Somewhat familiar", indicating a moderate understanding, while 17% identified as "Slightly familiar", reflecting limited knowledge. Only 15% of respondents reported being "Not familiar at all", suggesting that Cancel Culture is a widely recognized phenomenon. Overall, 76% of the sample has at least some awareness of Cancel Culture, with a significant portion demonstrating high familiarity, while a smaller percentage remains completely unaware.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Qualitative Analysis

The open-ended responses to the question “Please share the first thoughts or ideas that come to mind when you think of Cancel Culture” were analyzed by Atlas. TI to identify recurring patterns and underlying thematic structures. A Word Cloud (Figure 5) was generated to visualize the frequency and prominence of specific terms within the dataset (Rana et al., 2024) and facilitate a preliminary understanding of the dominant associations made by the respondents with Cancel Culture.

The analysis revealed that the most frequent application of terms included “social”, “media”, “cancel”, “culture”, “people”, “consequences”, “justice”, “public”, “exclusion” and “responsibility”. The prevalence of these terms indicates that the participants associate the dominant Cancel Culture primarily with its social media driven nature, ethical implications and public consequences for individuals and brands. A significant proportion of responses referenced Cancel Culture as a mechanism for accountability and ethical responsibility, frequently associating it with justice and fairness. One respondent exclaimed, "Cancel Culture ensures people and brands take responsibility for their actions, as they should." These answers suggest that public scrutiny serves as a means of ensuring ethical behavior and holding individuals or organizations accountable for misconduct. This is aligned with previous literature highlighting the impact of digital activism in promoting corporate responsibility and individual accountability (Ng, 2020). However, other responses highlighted concerns about the punitive nature of Cancel Culture, with frequent references to exclusion and reputational damage. One participant remarked, "Cancel Culture often leads to unnecessary destruction of careers and reputations, sometimes without full context." This indicates that for some consumers, cancellation is seen as an excessive response, particularly when applied without due process, reflecting concerns about online collective behavior and its potential impact on social dynamics (D. Clark, 2020).

Concerns over freedom of expression and censorship were also apparent in the data supplied. Participants often expressed concerns that Cancel Culture have restrictions on the ability of people to express divergent opinions, in which one contributor stated, " people do not wish to voice opinions that challenge majority opinion due to fear of being cancelled". The use of terms such as censorship and lack of context shows that some participants believe that Cancel Culture is a barrier to free and open discussion rather than a tool that acts as a mechanism of social accountability. These findings align with broader

debates about whether Cancel Culture serves as a corrective force or a method of suppressing opposing viewpoints, as highlighted by academic studies on digital speech and online interactions (Bouvier & Machin, 2021c).

The impact of social media in amplifying Cancel Culture was a prevalent theme in the dataset. The prominence of words such as “social” “media”, “online”, “digital”, and “public”, indicates that respondents associate the phenomenon with online discourse and viral trends. One participant observed, "Social media magnifies mistakes, making it impossible to recover from even minor errors." This suggests that the rapid pace and widespread nature at which information spreads online leads to the intensity of Cancel Culture, making reputational damage more immediate and severe. Previous research has highlighted how social media intensifies public scrutiny and enables fast dissemination of controversy, leading to reputational crises that brands and public figures struggle to recover from (Halilovic, 2023).

Another important finding was the perception that Cancel Culture has become overused and, in some cases, ineffective. Some responses referenced words such as “trend”, “short-lived”, and “oversaturation”, implying that cancellations often lose impact over time. One respondent commented that "Cancel Culture has become a trend instead of an actual effort to effect real change, people often forget about it too quickly". This suggests that while cancellations may lead to short term public backlash, it does not always lead to lasting outcomes or meaningful change. This aligns with previous studies which have demonstrated that online controversies fade quickly, and attention shifts rapidly from one issue to another, resulting in little to no long-term outcomes for digital anti-establishment movements (Halilovic, 2023).

Transparency_3 (0.679) and DiversityInclusion_3 (0.586), had loadings slightly lower than the guideline value, indicating limited reliability.

All Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.70 (Adeniran & Olaniyi, 2019) and ranged between 0.741 (Perceived Brand Social Responsibility) and 0.934 (Cancel Culture), indicating good internal consistency. Composite reliability (CR) scores for all constructs also exceeded the suggested minimum of 0.70 (Ab Hamid et al., 2017), which further confirmed internal coherence and reliability.

Convergent validity assurance in the measurement framework was provided by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with all factors exhibiting AVE results beyond the set limit of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The values ranged between 0.570 (Ethical Consumer Behavior) and 0.878 (Social Media Engagement), implying that each factor explained for more than half of the variance in its respective indicators. These results indicated that the conditions for reliability and validity, needed before evaluating the structural model, were met (see, Table 5).

	Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Diversity and Inclusion	DiversityInclusion_1	0,769	0,891	0,911	0,913	0,572
	DiversityInclusion_2	0,750				
	DiversityInclusion_3	0,586				
	DiversityInclusion_4	0,728				
	DiversityInclusion_5	0,654				
	DiversityInclusion_6	0,809				
	DiversityInclusion_7	0,838				
	DiversityInclusion_8	0,872				
Trust and Transparency	Transparency_1	0,820	0,863	0,874	0,901	0,647
	Transparency_2	0,848				
	Transparency_3	0,821				
	Transparency_4	0,679				
	Transparency_5	0,842				
Ethical Consumer Behaviour	ConsumerBehaviour_1	0,769	0,855	0,886	0,888	0,570
	ConsumerBehaviour_2	0,763				
	ConsumerBehaviour_3	0,720				
	ConsumerBehaviour_4	0,717				
	ConsumerBehaviour_5	0,833				
	ConsumerBehaviour_6	0,723				
Perceived Brand Social Responsibility	CSR_1	0,803	0,741	0,751	0,852	0,658
	CSR_2	0,778				
	CSR_3	0,850				
Social Media Engagement	SME_1	0,940	0,931	0,952	0,956	0,878
	SME_2	0,960				
	SME_3	0,912				
Cancel Culture	CancelCulture_1	0,917	0,934	0,934	0,953	0,834
	CancelCulture_2	0,927				
	CancelCulture_3	0,901				
	CancelCulture_4	0,908				

Table 5: Construct’s Reliability and Validity.

To examine discriminant validity, cross-loadings analysis was conducted (see Appendix C) which revealed that the loading of each indicator on its corresponding construct was greater than its cross-loadings on other constructs, and therefore fulfilled the criterion for discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). Additionally, Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) were employed to assess discriminant validity.

	Brand Diversity and Inclusion	Brand Trust and Transparency	Cancel Culture	Ethical Consumer Behaviour	Perceived Brand Social Responsibility	Social Media Engagement
Brand Diversity and Inclusion	0,756					
Brand Trust and Transparency	0,107	0,805				
Cancel Culture	0,395	0,146	0,913			
Ethical Consumer Behaviour	0,343	0,274	0,321	0,755		
Perceived Brand Social Responsibility	0,089	0,722	0,136	0,190	0,811	
Social Media Engagement	0,297	-0,071	0,324	0,166	-0,090	0,937

Table 6: Fornell-Larcker

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is established when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each factor exceeds its correlations with other constructs. As indicated in Table 6, all constructs have passed this criterion.

	Brand Diversity and Inclusion	Brand Trust and Transparency	Cancel Culture	Ethical Consumer Behaviour	Perceived Brand Social Responsibility	Social Media Engagement
Brand Diversity and Inclusion						
Brand Trust and Transparency	0,156					
Cancel Culture	0,414	0,158				
Ethical Consumer Behaviour	0,375	0,282	0,334			
Perceived Brand Social Responsibility	0,147	0,891	0,157	0,210		
Social Media Engagement	0,321	0,083	0,342	0,169	0,109	

Table 7: HTMT

The HTMT is calculated as the mean of the heterotrait-heterometric correlations compared to the mean of the monotrait-monotrait correlations (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). As the recommended threshold for HTMT is it being lower than 0.90, we have concluded that this criterion was satisfied, thereby supporting the discriminant validity of this factors (see, Table 7).

4.3 Structural Model

Following the examination of how appropriate the measurement model is, we can embark on the validation of the structural model. This involves analyzing the path coefficients that illustrate the interconnections between variables under study and the examination of their statistical significance. It is through this step that we can evaluate the proposed hypothesis. The path coefficients of the structural framework were estimated by bootstrapping, using 5,000 resampling iterations, as recommended by Hair et al. (2021). To check whether multicollinearity had not compromised the results, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was checked (Appendix D). The VIF threshold is suggested as 5.0 (Hair et al., 2021), and beyond this, multicollinearity can be a problem. Most of the values were lower than this threshold value, thereby collinearity is not an issue for most of the constructs. Nevertheless, SME_2 (5.407) just exceeds the threshold, suggesting a potential moderate multicollinearity issue that should be interpreted carefully. The maximum values were those of SME_2 (5.407) and SME_1 (3.686), whereas the minimum values belonged to CSR related measures (1.399 –

1.586) and D&I items (1.434 – 3.402). Despite this, the model still works within acceptable ranges for structural estimation, considering that no serious multicollinearity issues are apparent.

The hypothesis testing results indicate that Ethical Consumer Behavior positively and notably impact Perceived Brand Social Responsibility ($\beta = 0.190$, $p = 0.003$), thereby supporting H1. This is in line with earlier studies suggesting that customers who behave ethically tend to view brands as more socially responsible (Bhandari, 2021). Consequently, Brand Social Responsibility perception significantly enhances Brand Trust and Transparency ($\beta = 0.722$, $p = 0.000$), thus confirming H2. This strong relationship aligns with findings emphasizing that corporate responsibility breeds consumer trust (Hair et al., 2021).

However, the findings did not validate Hypothesis 3, which showed that Perceived Brand Social Responsibility does not have a significant influence on Social Media Engagement ($\beta = -0.137$, $p = 0.019$). This suggests that even though consumers might consider a brand socially responsible, such perceptions do not automatically manifest in greater engagement on social media channels. In contrast, hypothesis 4 was proved to be supported, and a finding that Ethical Consumer Behavior has a significant contribution to Cancel Culture ($\beta = 0.195$, $p = 0.002$) was confirmed. The finding affirms that ethical consumers are more willing to engage in Cancel Culture as a reaction to perceived corporate misconduct.

Hypothesis 5 was empirically validated, as D&I initiatives were found to significantly lower the possibility of Cancel Culture ($\beta = 0.321$, $p = 0.000$). This validates the argument that companies with robust inclusion and diversity initiatives are less exposed to adverse public backlash (Bhandari, 2021). On the other hand, the interaction effect of Brand Trust and Transparency and Cancel Culture (H6) was not significant ($\beta = 0.057$, $p = 0.350$), suggesting that perceived concerns with brand trust and transparency do not necessarily motivate consumer engagement with Cancel Culture.

Finally, Hypothesis 7 is supported by the research, as Cancel Culture phenomenon was found to strongly enhance Social Media Engagement ($\beta = 0.343$, $p = 0.000$). The implication here is that individuals who take part in Cancel Culture are more engaged in social media conversations regarding brands, whether it is through showing disapproval, enabling support for causes, or engaging in brand-related content. The explanatory capacity of this framework was also evaluated using R-Square (R^2) values to demonstrate the degree to which variation in the dependent variables can be explained by the predictor variables.

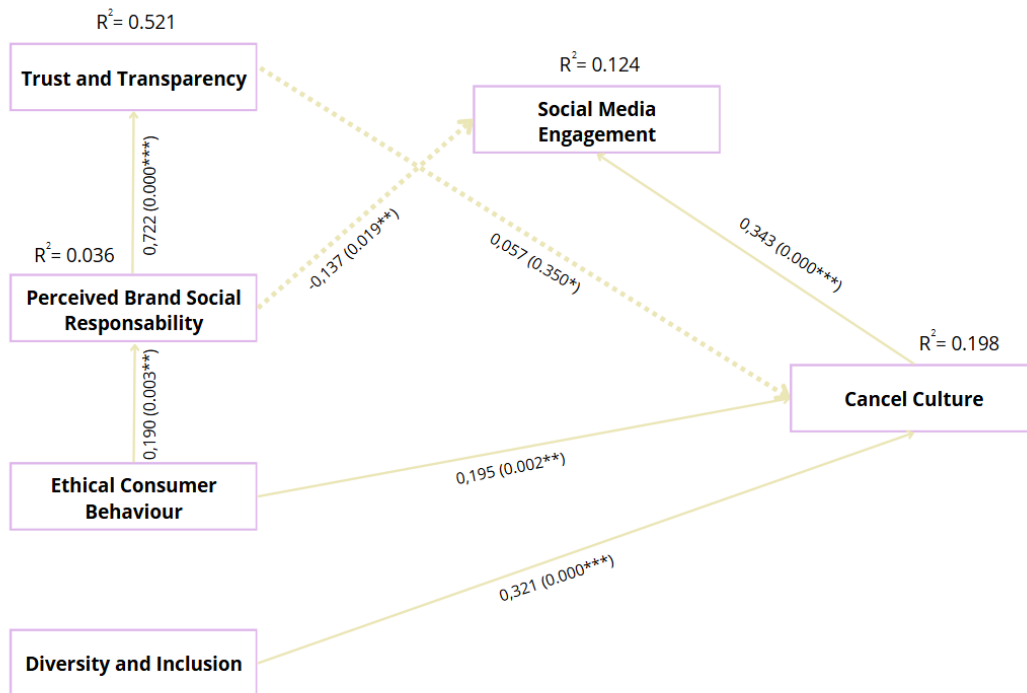


Figure 5: Complete sample structural model with direct path coefficients.

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; Dashed arrows represent non-significant relationships

From the results, it is established that Brand Trust and Transparency ($R^2 = 0.521$) have high explanatory power, while Cancel Culture ($R^2 = 0.198$) and Social Media Engagement ($R^2 = 0.124$) demonstrate moderate predictive correctness. The social responsibility perceived by the brands ($R^2 = 0.036$) has limited explanatory power, indicating that there may be additional influencing variables affecting the CSR perception that are not considered in this model.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

The comprehensive analysis showed that the brand's Perceived Social Responsibility presented important partial mediating roles in the association between Social Media Engagement and Ethical Consumer Behavior as well as between Social Media Engagement and Brand Trust and Transparency ($\beta = 0.190$, $T = 2.945$, $p = 0.003^{**}$). Further, Cancel Culture showed important mediating roles for the relationship between Diversity and Social

Media Engagement ($\beta = 0.343$, $T = 5.777$, $p < 0.001^{***}$). The results suggest that ethical consumer behavior increases brand trust through the prism of perceived brand social responsibility, while the dynamics of consumer-brand relationship are impacted by the effect of the Cancel Culture phenomenon within the scenario of social media platforms. Nonetheless, the results did not support the proposed mediating role of Brand Trust and Transparency in the connection between Perceived Social Responsibility of the brand and Cancel Culture ($\beta = 0.057$, $T = 0.934$, $p = 0.350$). The results suggest that while company responsibility boosts the perceived brand's credibility, the presence of brand trust does not necessarily mediate the likelihood of the brand being canceled.

To investigate the influence of marketing on brand perception, this research examined the mediating effect of Cancel Culture between Social Media Interaction and Ethical Consumption Behavior ($\beta = 0.195$, $T = 3.120$, $p = 0.002^{**}$). The results indicate that ethically conscious consumers tend to engage with the brand online in the context of online boycotts, highlighting the impact of widespread public disapproval in shaping consumer responses in the digital space. Additionally, the analysis revealed that Perceived Brand Social Responsibility was a strong mediator in the connection between Ethical Consumer Behavior and Brand Trust and Transparency ($\beta = 0.722$, $T = 14.181$, $p < 0.001^{***}$), thereby confirming that consumer beliefs about the company are crucial in building trust. However, Perceived Brand Social Responsibility did not show a significant mediating influence in the link between Ethical Consumer Behavior and Social Media Engagement ($\beta = -0.137$, $T = 2.345$, $p = 0.019$). This implies that while responsible branding builds trust, it does not automatically increase consumer engagement on social media.

Furthermore, the overall impact of D&I on Cancel Culture was determined to be positive and statistically significant across the entire sample ($\beta = 0.321$, $T = 5.527$, $p < 0.001^{***}$). This finding supports the argument that strong practices of D&I are related to a reduced likelihood of consumer initiated Cancel Culture behaviors. Moreover, the overall impact of Cancel Culture on Social Media interactions was confirmed ($\beta = 0.343$, $T = 5.777$, $p < 0.001^{***}$), reinforcing the fact that consumers engaging in Cancel Culture simultaneously have a higher tendency to engage with brand content on social media platforms, expressing both criticism and support.

	P values	Original sample (O)
H1: Ethical Consumer Behaviour -> Perceived Brand Social Responsibility	0,003	Supported
H2: Perceived Brand Social Responsibility -> Brand Trust and Transparency	0,000	Supported
H3: Perceived Brand Social Responsibility -> Social Media Engagement	0,019	Rejected
H4: Ethical Consumer Behaviour -> Cancel Culture	0,002	Supported
H5: Brand Diversity and Inclusion -> Cancel Culture	0,000	Supported
H6: Brand Trust and Transparency -> Cancel Culture	0,350	Rejected
H7: Cancel Culture -> Social Media Engagement	0,000	Supported

Table 8: Hypotheses Overview and Results.

Our analysis confirms five of the seven proposed hypotheses, revealing significant pathways between ethical consumption, brand perceptions, and social media behavior. Ethical consumer behavior positively impacts both the perception of brand social responsibility ($\beta = 0.190$, $p < 0.01$) and participation in Cancel Culture ($\beta = 0.195$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that ethically minded consumers actively evaluate, and disapprove brands based on moral standards. Contrary to our expectations, perceived brand social responsibility does not directly influence social media engagement (H3), and neither brand trust and transparency significantly affects participation in Cancel Culture (H6). These non-significant pathways suggest that Cancel Culture responds more to specific ethical violations than general trust deficits, and that social media engagement follows more complex motivational patterns than simple perceptions of brand responsibility.

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to explore the brand and consumer behavior dynamics within the fashion sector and how it may be driving the emergence of Cancel Culture. Through the analysis of variables including brand trust and transparency, D&I, ethical consumer behavior, and perceived social responsibility, this research was designed to understand the impact of these variables on consumer engagement and the likelihood of canceling a brand.

The first hypothesis (H1) intends to evaluate whether ethical consumerism positively impacts the perception of a brand's social responsibility. This study confirmed this hypothesis by demonstrating that consumers who make ethical purchasing decisions are more prone to judge brands by their CSR efforts. This observation aligns with literature, which highlights that ethically minded consumers gravitate towards brands that reflect their values and hold them responsible for their business conduct (Brunk, 2010; Stringer, 2023). Further, the results legitimize the promotion of ethical marketing since brands that maintain social responsibility, have the potential to boost credibility and foster customer loyalty (Jones & Kang, 2020).

The second hypothesis (H2) tested the degree to which perceived brand social responsibility enhances brand trust. This research identified a significant relationship, aligning with prior studies highlighting the importance of transparency in establishing customers trust (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). Consumers tend to trust the statements of brands they perceive as ethically responsible and view their communication as transparent. However, despite the strength of this relationship, it is important to highlight that lower levels of trust and transparency do not automatically result in higher consumer engagement in Cancel Culture, as evidenced by the results related to H3. The findings revealed that social brand responsibility does not influence social media engagement, since customers can be supportive of a brand's ethics but not engage with it via social media. This contradicts earlier findings in which socially responsible brands have been found to engage more (Aji et al., 2015), showing the complexity of online consumer-brand interaction. An explanation for the opposite result is evolving consumer expectations in corporate ethics. With growing CSR initiatives, being ethically responsible is no longer a differentiator provoking engagement, but an expected norm. Consumers will be more likely to respond when the moral standpoint of a brand is in question or fails to meet expectations, compared to when it aligns with their own values.

This study also investigates the direct relation between Cancel Culture and ethical consumerism (H4), which was supported by the findings. Consumers who prioritize ethical

responsibility tend to participate in brand cancellations when a company is not meeting their ethical expectations. This result is consistent with previous research on political consumerism, which reported that ethical consumers were more likely to engage in boycotts and online activism (Edelman, 2018). It also contributes to the rising impact of social media in driving customer-driven accountability, where ethical transgressions are rapidly shared and condemned through social media (Ng, 2020).

The influence of D&I within the framework of Cancel Culture was investigated (H5). This study findings confirmed that strong D&I practices make brand cancellation unlikely, showing the value of genuine representation in branding initiatives. This supports previous research showing that customers expect brands to adopt diversity sincerely and consistently (Deloitte, 2022). Brands that successfully incorporate D&I into their communication are viewed as inclusive and socially responsible, making them less likely to face public criticism (Ferraro et al., 2022). This is in line with the study by Licsandru and Cui (2017), according to which inclusion should be understood as a subjective and multidimensional experience that goes beyond superficial representation and promotes a deeper emotional connection with consumers.

Contrary to earlier expectations, our findings did not validate Hypothesis 6, which had predicted that brand transparency and trust deficits would increase the possibility of Cancel Culture incidents. This finding disagrees with earlier literature proposing consumer trust deficits as a reason for brand cancellations (Salo, 2020). One possible explanation is that, although transparency plays a key role in brand reputation, Cancel Culture is more often triggered by ethical scandals than by general trust issues. Consumers tend to participate in Cancel Culture when they believe a brand has failed in its moral or social responsibilities, rather than simply lacking transparency. Furthermore, trust may act as a moderating factor only in cases where the brand already has strong consumer loyalty. Otherwise, ethical concerns appear to outweigh trust. Future research should consider other factors that might influence this relationship, such as crisis communication strategies and how brands respond to public criticism.

Lastly, the research assessed the potential impact that Cancel Culture has on social media engagement (H7). Our findings backed a positive and significant relationship, which indicates that consumers engaging in brand cancellations are more active online. These results support existing literature on online activism, suggesting that negative sentiment towards brands always creates more eWOM (Costa & Azevedo, 2024). This has important implications for brand management since firms must actively work with customers in a way that allows them to successfully manage Cancel Culture and prevent damage to their

reputation. One reason for this is that anger and negative emotions tend to drive higher engagement than positive reactions, as social media algorithms often prioritize controversial and emotionally charged content. In this context, research by Scholz and Smith (2019) has shown that, in some situations, brands can profit from speaking up and reacting. Showing that bold answers to online criticism may help strengthen brand identity and build support, even during a crisis.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis fills a significant gap in existing literature by exploring how brand and consumer behavior intersect within the fashion sector and their impact on driving the rise of Cancel Culture on social networks. While previous studies have explored CSR, consumer activism, and brand reputation separately, few have integrated these dimensions to analyze their collective impact on the dynamics of Cancel Culture. This study provides an extensive model that not only links ethical consumer behavior, trust and transparency, and D&I with Cancel Culture but also empirically tests their interrelations. This study offers a deeper insight into Cancel Culture as a consumer-driven accountability system, particularly in an era where social media boosts both brand support and opposition (Ng, 2020; Costa & Azevedo, 2024).

However, Cancel Culture remains the silent elephant in the room, an unspoken but powerful force, dictating the rules of brand-consumer relations in the digital era. One of the most important highlights of this study is the identification of ethical consumer behavior as a key driving force behind Cancel Culture. The results show that consumers who prioritize ethical factors in their purchase decisions tend to participate in Cancel Culture when they observe a misalignment between a brand's actions and their own values. This insight challenges the prevalent assumption that ethical consumers primarily support brands with shared values, showing instead that they actively participate in the punishment of brands that do not fulfil their ethical standards (Edelman, 2018; Stringer, 2023). Additionally, this study furthers knowledge about consumer engagement by revealing that Cancel Culture is not just a reactive phenomenon, but a form of sustained interaction, in which individuals who participate in cancelling brands show higher levels of social media engagement with them (Halilovic, 2023).

Another key contribution is the finding that perceived brand social responsibility significantly strengthens brand trust and transparency, reinforcing how important is ethical coherence in preserving consumer trust. However, the research also highlights an unexpected contrast between brand transparency and higher Cancel Culture engagement. This contradicts existing theories that position transparency deficits as a direct trigger for consumer backlash. Instead, the study suggests that consumers may be more tolerant of some opacity in brand communications, if brands do not violate core ethical values (Salo, 2020). This challenges the traditional literature on CSR and crisis communication by emphasizing that value-based violations, and not merely trust deficits, are the main protagonists of public cancellation efforts.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the existing theory on D&I in branding by empirically validating its impact on reducing the Cancel Culture threat. While prior studies have suggested that brands benefit from authentic D&I efforts, this research provides statistical evidence that strong D&I strategies can serve as a protective buffer against adverse consumer reactions (Ferraro et al., 2024; Kroeper et al., 2022). This conclusion carries implications for marketing and business strategy, as it underscores the need for brands to integrate meaningful and authentic inclusion practices to safeguard their reputation in an increasingly critical and socially conscious market.

This study provides essential theoretical contributions which expand knowledge about social media Cancel Culture as the "silent elephant" within the fashion industry. The research shows that ethical consumer action supports ethical brands and serves as a primary factor that activates Cancel Culture whenever ethical standards fail to be met, this perspective illustrates that ethical consumers play an active role in brand condemnation. (Edelman, 2018; Stringer, 2023). This study explains that social media transcends its platform function, serving as a crucial tool for ethical monitoring, as members show their higher engagement during Cancel Culture to demonstrate rapid ethical failures and increasing consumer demands in the digital age (Ng, 2020; Costa & Azevedo, 2024). This study uses "ethical consumer agency theory" to show how consumers' ethical values are connected to how they hold brands accountable online. It explains that people can recognize when brands are not being truly ethical, especially when D&I efforts seem superficial. This is called "performative ethics vulnerability", and it increases the chance of negative reactions or even brand cancellation. The present study shows that when brands go against consumers' ethical values, it can lead to stronger Cancel Culture responses than just losing trust (Fernandes et al., 2024). In general, this study helps to better understand Cancel Culture as a way for consumers to demand accountability, influenced by ethical expectations, brand behavior, and online activism.

6.2 Managerial Contributions

The findings from this research provide valuable insights for managing brand strategy and digital communication, especially during an era where social media and consumer responsibility significantly impacts brand reputation. As Cancel Culture becomes an increasingly influential force in shaping how consumers see brands, it is crucial for companies to implement transparent and forward-thinking strategies that reduce reputational risks and build trust. This research highlights the importance of ethical branding, effective crisis response, and active consumer engagement, offering useful

guidance for marketers and decision-makers as they face the challenges of digital social responsibility.

A key contribution of this study to brand management is the emphasis on the role of CSR and D&I in how consumers perceived brand integrity. The results confirm that brands that prioritize ethical business practices and authentically integrate D&I into their corporate values are less likely to be targeted by Cancel Culture. This emphasizes the need for companies not only to communicate their commitments to ethical and inclusive practices, but also to ensure that these commitments are consistently reflected in their overall operations, marketing campaigns, and stakeholder relations (Ferraro et al., 2024). Authenticity in ethical branding is crucial, as consumers are increasingly examining brands for potential contradictions between their stated values and business practices.

Moreover, this study highlights the need for brands to build resilience by being transparent and prepared to crisis management strategies. The findings suggest that while a lack of transparency may not always trigger Cancel Culture, brands that fail to provide clear, timely, and honest responses to consumer concerns run the risk of making crises worse when controversies arise. Implementing strong corporate communication strategies that include fast response protocols, consumer dialogue initiatives, and social listening tools can help brands anticipate potential adverse reactions and engage meaningfully with their audiences before crises become worse (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). In that regard, brands must recognize that the digital consumer landscape demands open, two-way communication, where responsiveness and liability are key factors to maintain consumer trust.

The relation between Cancel Culture and social media engagement presents another critical consideration for brand managers. The results indicate that consumers who actively participate in Cancel Culture tend to exhibit a strong level of brand-related content engagement, either through criticism or advocacy. This suggests that brands should change their approach to social media engagement, adopting ethical consumerism as an opportunity for brand differentiation. Companies that promote open discussions around social responsibility and sustainability can build communities of ethically conscious consumers who act as brand advocates rather than critics (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2017). Investing in long-term community-building initiatives, collaborating with influencers who share ethical values, along with purpose-driven campaigns, brands can strengthen consumer loyalty and reduce vulnerability to Cancel Culture.

Furthermore, this research provides evidence that Cancel Culture does not inevitably cause lasting damage but can be managed effectively through a strategic re-positioning. Brands that have faced incidents of Cancel Culture can rebuild trust by demonstrating meaningful

changes in business practices, acknowledging past mistakes, and addressing consumer concerns transparently. This reinforces the relevance of post-crisis recovery strategies, in which companies must show a sustained commitment to ethical and social reform, rather than performing damage control (Ng, 2020). The ability to turn crises into opportunities for growth and empowerment can optimize a brand's credibility and endurance.

Ultimately, this study offers a strategic framework for brands that operate in a digital environment in which ethical considerations are increasingly becoming central to consumer decision-making. The results suggest that companies should adopt ethical branding as an ongoing commitment and not merely as a reactive strategy. Addressing Cancel Culture requires brands to acknowledge and engage with the Silent Elephant, not by avoiding difficult conversations, but by integrating ethical integrity, transparency and inclusiveness into their core strategies. Brands that proactively align their operations, messaging, and stakeholder relations with ethical values, reduce the threat of Cancel Culture, while also strengthen consumer trust and long-term engagement. The implications for brand management are clear; ethical integrity, transparency and inclusiveness are not just safeguards for reputation, but strategic imperatives for sustainable brand growth in the age of digital social responsibility.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

This research has certain limitations, which, such as many studies, create opportunities for future exploration, contributing to the development of refining and expanding the understanding of this topic. This chapter describes the main constraints of this study and suggests possible options for future investigation.

A limitation of this research is that the data were collected from a sample in Portugal, which may not fully capture the fine details of consumer perceptions and the dynamics of Cancel Culture in other multicultural contexts. Future studies could broaden the geographical focus to encompass multiple regions and demographics, improving the general results. Another gap in the literature is the exploration of how specific concerns, such as worker welfare, influence purchasing behavior (Stringer et al., 2020). While some studies have addressed general consumer concerns about fashion industry practices, more targeted research is needed to understand how these concerns manifest in purchasing behavior, especially for fast fashion. In addition, the evolving nature of ethical fashion, including emerging trends such as circular and digital fashion, presents new challenges for consumers and brands.

However, limited research has examined how these innovations shape perceptions of ethical consumption (Uddin et al., 2023).

Another possible area for further research is exploring the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in mitigating the risks associated with Cancel Culture. As social media becomes a critical battleground for brand reputation, AI can be used to analyze social media content. Future research could explore how brands can effectively use AI to review social media marketing and communication, ensuring that their messages resonate positively with consumers and align with ethical and social values. This could involve examining the effectiveness of AI-driven tools in identifying potentially offensive or controversial content, as well as their ability to predict consumer reactions based on sentiment analysis and ethical considerations. AI can also be used to analyze social media content by employing AI to assess whether a post or a social media communication aligns with ethical standards and values, identifying potential triggers for negative consumer reactions. This tool can also improve brand management by AI-powered social listening tools, which assists brands monitoring public sentiment and fostering positive perceptions. This proactive approach allows for the early detection of risks and strategic responses to potential reputational threats. In addition, AI can improve communication strategies by guaranteeing that communication is consistent with ethical principles, reducing the risk of accusations, of greenwashing or dishonest ethical claims (Pereira et al., 2021). To conclude, future research could look at how AI can help with crisis communication during a Cancel Culture incident. AI systems can help create quick, clear, and honest responses, allowing brands to protect their reputation and rebuild consumer trust (Halilovic, 2023).

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APPENDIX

Appendix A – Nova IMS Ethics Committee Approval



This is to certify that

Project No.: **DDMKT2025-2-73010**

Project Title: **The Silent Elephant: How Ethical Gaps in the Fashion Industry Drive Social Media Cancel Culture**

Principal Researcher: **Joana Clérigo De Morais**

according to the regulations of the Ethics Committee of NOVA IMS and MagIC Research Center this project was considered to meet the requirements of the NOVA IMS Internal Review Board, being considered **APPROVED** on 2/7/2025.

It is the Principal Researcher's responsibility to ensure that all researchers and stakeholders associated with this project are aware of the conditions of approval and which documents have been approved.

The Principal Researcher is required to notify the Ethics Committee, via amendment or progress report, of

- Any significant change to the project and the reason for that change;
- Any unforeseen events or unexpected developments that merit notification;
- The inability of the Principal Researcher to continue in that role or any other change in research personnel involved in the project.

Lisbon, 2/7/2025

NOVA IMS Ethics Committee
ethicscommittee@novaims.unl.pt

Appendix B – Copy of the questionnaire

English ▾

My name is Joana Clérigo, and I am conducting a study on **how ethical gaps in the Fashion Industry drive social media Cancel Culture**. This research is part of my Master's in Data-Driven Marketing, specializing in Digital Marketing and Analytics, at NOVA-IMS.

All data collected will remain confidential and will only be used for academic purposes. The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at 20230168@novaims.unl.pt.

Thank you for your participation!

Consent by selecting "I agree", you declare that your participation is voluntary and that you understood all the information previously mentioned.

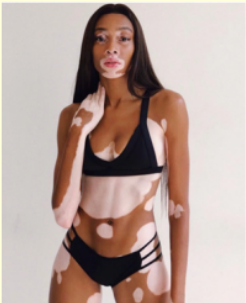
I agree to participate in the questionnaire

I do not agree to participate in the questionnaire

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
I deliberately try to avoid products that cause environmental damage.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I mostly buy environment-friendly products (e.g. with an organic label).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I have the choice between two similar products, I always take ecological aspects into consideration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Before answering the next question, please review the following examples. These examples **highlight efforts made by luxury fashion brands to promote inclusivity and diversity** by featuring individuals with disabilities or unique characteristics. Consider how these efforts align with your personal values and their potential impact on your perception as a consumer.



Victoria's Secret featuring Winnie Harlow, a model with vitiligo.



Luxury brands including models with prosthetics to promote accessibility.



Gucci featuring Ellie Goldstein, a model with Down Syndrome.

Considering the presented examples, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
Brands using disability models show they care about the society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brands using disability models improve the industry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brands using disability models find it easier than other brands to attract consumers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brands using disability models make me feel emotionally belong to the society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brands using disability models make me feel empowered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brands using disability models make society more open to diversity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brands using disability models make society more equal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brands using disability models make society more respectful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
Companies should have a code of ethics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe companies should not engage in bribery.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Companies should not be involved in communication that deceives facts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not want to do business with companies that damage customers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that it is important for companies to be transparent in engaging stakeholders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not want to do business with companies that deceive customers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Managers should avoid conflicts of interest by not advancing their own interests over those of the firm.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that it is important for companies to be honest in engaging stakeholders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How familiar are you with the concept of "Cancel culture"?

Not familiar at all

Slightly familiar

Somewhat familiar

Very familiar

Extremely familiar

Done

Please share the first thoughts or ideas that come to your mind when you think about **Cancel Culture**.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
I try to buy fairly traded products (e.g. with a fair-trade label).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I strictly avoid purchasing from companies that are known for bad working conditions for their employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I deliberately try to buy products from companies that are considered to be socially responsible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Before moving on to the next questions, please take a look at the following description of Cancel Culture.

Cancel Culture can be broadly defined as the collective, often public condemnation of individuals or entities, typically by marginalized voices, in response to perceived unethical or harmful behavior (Ng, 2020).

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
Canceling is an effective means to make a Brand change its action	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By canceling, I can change the behavior of other Brands because they will see the consequences of the canceling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Canceling is an effective way to punish the Brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By canceling, I can help change a Brand's decision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How old are you? (Insert your age with numbers, e.g. "24")

What is your highest education?

High school or lower

Professional degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Post-Graduate

Doctoratee

On average, how many hours do you spend on social media daily?

less than 1 hour

between 1–2 hours

more than 2 hours

Done

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
I am very active on fashion brand's social media (e.g., liking, commenting, or sharing posts).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I frequently contribute to fashion brand's social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I spend time interacting with fashion brand's content on social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your gender?

Prefer not to say

Non-binary / third gender

Female

Male

How would you describe your household's financial situation?

We live without worries

We get along with a smart budgeting

Sometimes, we have minor financial problems

We often have financial problems

I do not know

What is your current occupation?

Student

Student-Worker

Employed

Unemployed

Retired

Other ()

Appendix C - Cross Loadings (SmartPLS)

	Perceived Brand Social Responsibility	Cancel Culture	Ethical Consumer Behaviour	Brand Diversity and Inclusion	Social Media Engagement	Brand Trust and Transparency
CSR_1	0,803	0,135	0,224	0,135	-0,053	0,592
CSR_2	0,778	0,056	0,031	0,004	-0,092	0,519
CSR_3	0,850	0,130	0,185	0,066	-0,079	0,635
CancelCulture_1	0,089	0,917	0,281	0,357	0,304	0,058
CancelCulture_2	0,183	0,927	0,281	0,385	0,311	0,164
CancelCulture_3	0,122	0,901	0,305	0,353	0,286	0,170
CancelCulture_4	0,099	0,908	0,308	0,345	0,283	0,138
ConsumerBehaviour_1	0,150	0,223	0,769	0,275	0,063	0,198
ConsumerBehaviour_2	-0,001	0,184	0,763	0,237	0,128	0,049
ConsumerBehaviour_3	0,058	0,154	0,720	0,168	0,008	0,098
ConsumerBehaviour_4	0,171	0,208	0,717	0,155	0,146	0,251
ConsumerBehaviour_5	0,224	0,329	0,833	0,313	0,172	0,306
ConsumerBehaviour_6	0,135	0,266	0,723	0,337	0,168	0,195
DiversityInclusion_1	0,015	0,292	0,277	0,769	0,289	0,016
DiversityInclusion_2	0,054	0,165	0,234	0,750	0,169	0,048
DiversityInclusion_3	-0,017	0,257	0,204	0,586	0,142	-0,030
DiversityInclusion_4	0,085	0,239	0,337	0,728	0,178	0,060
DiversityInclusion_5	-0,106	0,245	0,233	0,654	0,276	-0,103
DiversityInclusion_6	0,200	0,359	0,233	0,809	0,198	0,245
DiversityInclusion_7	0,104	0,334	0,227	0,838	0,282	0,120
DiversityInclusion_8	0,117	0,389	0,329	0,872	0,241	0,167
SME_1	-0,083	0,342	0,159	0,303	0,940	-0,084
SME_2	-0,102	0,308	0,179	0,267	0,960	-0,085
SME_3	-0,065	0,248	0,121	0,264	0,912	-0,020
Transparency_1	0,637	0,086	0,287	0,156	-0,106	0,820
Transparency_2	0,589	0,126	0,205	0,105	-0,063	0,848
Transparency_3	0,588	0,104	0,180	0,051	-0,023	0,821
Transparency_4	0,443	0,063	0,199	-0,017	-0,067	0,679
Transparency_5	0,622	0,192	0,227	0,106	-0,030	0,842

Appendix D - VIF (SmartPLS)

CSR_1	1,399
CSR_2	1,480
CSR_3	1,586
CancelCulture_1	3,811
CancelCulture_2	4,108
CancelCulture_3	3,116
CancelCulture_4	3,342
ConsumerBehaviour_1	2,274
ConsumerBehaviour_2	2,941
ConsumerBehaviour_3	2,532
ConsumerBehaviour_4	2,193
ConsumerBehaviour_5	2,564
ConsumerBehaviour_6	1,570
DiversityInclusion_1	2,129
DiversityInclusion_2	2,055
DiversityInclusion_3	1,434
DiversityInclusion_4	2,099
DiversityInclusion_5	1,843
DiversityInclusion_6	2,722
DiversityInclusion_7	3,157
DiversityInclusion_8	3,402
SME_1	3,686
SME_2	5,407
SME_3	3,588
Transparency_1	2,110
Transparency_2	2,467
Transparency_3	2,116
Transparency_4	1,507
Transparency_5	2,344