

# **Cancel Culture and YouTuber Micro-celebrities: Scandal, Public Shaming and Crowd Psychology**

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Kristopher Christou

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**Hank Green**  @hankgreen · May 11, 2019

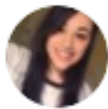
...

Did you just hate-buy vitamins? 2019 is wild.

 15

 251

 4.2K



**Jess**  @BadCripple · May 11, 2019

...

I love that every genre of YouTube is watching this shit show unfold; a true community lol

 2

 20

 1K



**Hank Green**  @hankgreen

...

@hankgreen

Replying to [@BadCripple](#) [@elijahdaniel](#) and [@GlamLifeGuru](#)

Hello, and welcome to Crash Course: Tea

12:34 PM · May 11, 2019 · Twitter Web Client

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**1.1K** Retweets   **81** Quote Tweets   **4.6K** Likes

## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the nuances of online cancel culture, with attention to online public boycotting, mass shaming and humiliation and the deplatforming of influential public figures, known as micro-celebrities, via social media “call-outs”. It argues that the Internet amplifies pre-existing elements of call-out culture through anonymous participation across distributed online networks and examines how cancel culture is a shorthand term for online toxicity, memeification, scandalisation, shaming and collective mob mentality. Through a series of interconnected case studies examining cancel culture within the beauty community, the thesis examines the effects of cancel culture on micro-celebrities on YouTube, and seeks to better understand how online spaces operate as the support structure for social control via a public discourse that punishes perceived transgressions within online communities with impunity.

The approach is grounded in the overlap of two media and communication fields, celebrity studies and persona studies, and develops an analytical framework of three concepts - scandal, public shaming and crowd psychology - to provide a means to observe and analyse the cancelling of micro-celebrities in action, with the intent of providing a model for the further analysis of cancel culture in action more broadly.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work except where I have given full documented references to the work of others, and that the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for formal assessment in any formal course and the word length is 18787.

Kristopher Christou

30th October 2020

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction to Cancel Culture

### 1.1 Introduction & Structure

Cancel Culture refers to communities holding individuals accountable for perceived immoral or otherwise problematic behaviour, and generally involves an attempt to disrupt the individual's prominence or end their public career. This thesis seeks to examine a contemporary account of cancel culture focusing on one major case in the YouTube 'Beauty Community'. It will examine this one case from the perspective of four different 'personas', drawing on celebrity, fan and persona studies theory to understand the initial instance while employing the theoretical framework of scandal, shaming and crowd psychology to shape the analysis. The intention is to provide a methodology for examining cancel culture in the future in order to better understand the effect of this phenomenon on micro-celebrities and their audiences. A 'micro-celebrity', defined by Senft (2008; 2013), Marwick (2013) and Marwick and Boyd (2011), is a type of celebrity that uses social media, such as YouTube, Twitch or Instagram, to replicate the effects of celebrification and industrialized celebrity manufacturing (Marwick 2015; Moore, Barbour & Lee 2017; Hou 2019) and is discussed further in this chapter (see section 1.3).

In Chapter 1, I will outline the theoretical contributions from celebrity and persona studies which are central to this thesis. Specifically, the concepts of micro-celebrity and persona, which will be used to understand the role of micro-publics and social media technologies in cancel culture. A micro-public is a concept used to describe how "collectives form in contemporary culture and the way in which personas are modelled" (Marshall et al. 2015, p. 291) and will be discussed further in this chapter (see section 1.5)

In Chapter 2, the literature review provides the background for the theoretical framework used to examine the case study chapters. This chapter will discuss the available research on scandal,

shaming, and crowd psychology as nuanced factors of cancel culture. These concepts work in harmony with the concepts of micro-celebrities drawn from celebrity studies and micro-publics drawn from the emerging field of persona studies which examines the public presentation of the self online.

The thesis will then provide one case study from four different perspectives surrounding the events of the YouTube community's biggest scandals, nicknamed 'Dramageddon 2.0', following the stories of James Charles, Tati Westbrook, Shane Dawson and Jeffree Star.<sup>1</sup> Each of these case studies will use celebrity and persona theory to examine the events and occurrences through the proposed theoretical framework of scandal, public shaming and collective crowd behaviour.

Our research question then becomes: Is a theoretical framework consisting of scandal, public shaming and crowd psychology effective in analysing nuanced instances of cancel culture?

## 1.2 What is Cancel Culture?

Cancel culture is a collective behaviour amongst public groups where it functions to impose "consequences for unacceptable behaviour" (Henderson 2020, p. 37). The increased prominence of cancel culture in society, in what has been described as the #MeToo era in society (Franssen 2020), has sparked critical discussions regarding social norms (Bouvier 2020). The voices of cancel culture are typically marginalised groups expressing censure of prominent figures using social media platforms as turbocharged tools of social justice to expose powerful individuals engaging in controversial actions (Ng 2020; Matei 2019; Bouvier 2020).

The public act of 'cancelling' has been heavily criticised as a form of entertainment, a "performative spectacle of ritual blood-letting" (Bouvier 2020, p. 1) and "satirical art

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<sup>1</sup> Dramageddon 2.0 was the second instance of large scale drama within the beauty community, this is discussed in more depth in the third chapter of this thesis.

performance” (Nagle 2017, p. 36), as it facilitates “moral grandstands” (Henderson 2020, p. 37). However, the cancelling of perpetrators also grants a feeling of unity amongst community members (Henderson 2019; Bouvier 2020). As a demonstration of commitment to community (Henderson 2020), participation in cancel culture allows individuals to feel good by outwardly opposing transgressive behaviour (Ditum 2014; Bérubé 2018). However, some question the brutality of elements of cancel culture, as the ‘call out’ becomes destructive towards both the perpetrator and community (Kirk 2018) as all perceived problematic behaviour is considered equal in transgression.<sup>2</sup> Brooks (2019, cited in Ng 2020, p. 623) comments on the zeal for ideological purity and “the loss of a reasonable scale of transgression within cancel culture” - the treatment of cases and punishment becomes indistinguishable between someone who made a single problematic post years ago and someone with an established pattern of problematic behaviour (Ng 2020). These attributes of cancel culture are amplified as the ability to circulate content via social media accelerates the speed of large scale circulation and responses to suggested transgressions (Ng 2020). This immediate dissemination results in a lack of accurate information and has come to affect numerous, far less prominent individuals such as micro-celebrities.

### **1.2.1 Cancel Culture in the Past**

Although the concept of cancel culture is new, the foundational structure of this phenomenon is nuanced throughout history in different forms. Cancel culture is characterised by forms of public shaming, scandalising and crowd psychology that are amplified by the internet.

Public shaming is epistemically ingrained with how the public, as spaces of community discussion (Habermas 1992), deal with transgressive behaviour (Ronson 2015). Corporal punishment, such as flagellation, was used as a public spectacle to elicit shame onto perpetrators in the 18th and 19th century (Wright 2010). The major aim of this punishment was

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<sup>2</sup> Call-out culture functions as a tool for the marginalized to reveal injustice, the need for reform and underpins social justice movements by drawing critical attention to unacceptable actions or behaviour (Matei 2019).

the deterrence of others offending in the same way as the public witnessed the perpetrator's fear and agony (Wright 2010; Wüschner 2017). Similarly to cancel culture, the community creating a spectacle of a transgressor's pain in public is nuanced as scandals publicise a transgressors hardships and results of their shaming.

Scandals have increased in visibility due to the cultural globalisation of the media and digital technologies as traditional and social media have made reputation management crucial in surviving a scandal (Billings et al., 2012; Brown et al. 2015). Traditional forms of tabloids, gossip magazines and entertainment television shows have transcended their mediums into the online space where multiple layers of meaning are created for audiences in a celebrity's scandal (Wu & Choy 2018). Currently, we are in a time of "perpetual scandalisation" where digital technology catalyses emotional attacks, spark outrage or voice public discontent (Um & Lee, 2015). These scandals are mobilised by intensifying levels of digital slander (ECREA 2020) as media coverage becomes riddled with attacks and critiques of character. Hybrid media systems (Chadwick 2013) perpetuate this culture of tabloidization and infotainment as a scandal's originally short communicative half-life becomes amplified in scale by social media and digital media. The participatory nature of these scandals on social media create a spill over of micro-publics where the discourse becomes uncontrollable (ECREA 2020), that can result in adverse media and public perceptions regarding a celebrity (White et al. 2009).

The importance of crowd psychology in assessing the way individuals share and circulate these narratives of shaming and scandal online becomes key in attributing the mobilisation of cancel culture as a form of supercharged public boycott. Aligning the innovative findings of Le Bon (1927) in the anonymous, contagious (Gibbs 2008), and suggestive attributes of the crowd will assert the participatory (Jenkins 2006), destructive and chaotic nature of 'persona' movements within communities and their specific micro-publics.

### 1.2.2 The Origins of Cancel Culture: “That’s Over. It’s Cancelled.” (Tatered 2016)

Cancel Culture is a part of the larger phenomenon of public shaming and public-boycott undertaken by a group responding to offensive behaviour, typically via social media channels (Bromwich 2018; McDermott 2019; Coates 2019; Rogers 2020). The term “canceled” rose to prominence after being used as a meme from internet personality “Joanne the Scammer” on Black Twitter.<sup>3,4</sup> Joanne struggles with an espresso machine and declares that the product should be boycotted but phrased it in the way that it should be “cancelled” (Figure 1). Cancel is a transactional word that not only correlates to products but also “speaks to a lifestyle of commodity, consumerism and capitalism, of transactions being cancelled” (Richards 2018, cited in Bromwich 2018) and the parasocial relationship that audiences and micro-celebrities share to make these transactions intimate.



Figure 1: Original video of Joanne the Scammer using the phrase ‘It’s Cancelled’ (Tatered 2016, 0:25-0:45).

<sup>3</sup> View clip via Tattered (2016, 0:25-0:45).

<sup>4</sup> Black Twitter is an online subculture largely consisting of black users focusing on issues of interest to the black community, particularly in the United States, where the chief focus of this space was calling out cultural appropriation (Reid 2018).

In a subscription-heavy era (Pot 2018) the language of cancellation has become common in referring to instances of public-boycott. Cancelling is now part of a transactional cultural boycott (Nakamura 2020, cited in Casa-Todd 2020), an agreement between communities not to amplify, share or give money to transgressors in order to minimise their relevance in the community. For micro-celebrities, this relevance correlates to Crawford's (2015, p. 11) "attention economy" which applies economic theory to audiences' relationship with micro-celebrities. Because the social media environment includes an overwhelming amount of available content, attention is a scarce, intangible commodity and depriving micro-celebrities of attention reduces their relevance and therefore income.

### 1.2.3 The Meaning of Cancel Culture

The term 'cancel culture' has gained traction in both online communities and mainstream media to describe a desire to publicly shame an individual for their lack of adherence to social norms. The adherence that cancel culture manifests contrasts the freedom, the limited censorship and low degree of regulation that online spaces provide. In 2018, YouTube refused to hold Logan Paul accountable for his actions after he posted a deeply insensitive video. Audiences were compelled to take matters into their own hands and attempted to deplatform him.<sup>5</sup>

Cancel culture then becomes a ruthless, user-generated censorship machine where communities take a culture of decentralised accountability on themselves regarding those who engage in socially irredeemable behaviour. Online culture is becoming more serious and there is a perversity towards shaming transgressive people to constrict how others behave, effectively working as a catalyst of social norms at an amplified level (Bromwich 2020). This amplification occurs as the circulation of content via social media facilitates the immediate

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on Paul's controversy in a timeline format see Rice (2018).



dissemination of information (Ng 2020), resulting in public boycotts becoming easy and contagious.

The affective high of cancellation is infectious (Gibbs 2008) where shaming and censoring becomes fetishised and entertaining. Audiences do not only contribute to the culture but cultivate the communal formations and interactions manifesting a contagious behaviour (Gibbs 2008) that pressures those in the community to act in uniform ways. This culture has become a dominant form of moral panic that has been supercharged and magnified exponentially by the features of social media that micro-celebrities must navigate within their communities.

### **1.3 Micro-Celebrities: *Basically, everyone is famous these days!***

Micro-celebrities are a construction of online identity, a public presentation of the self that can be described as a 'persona' that is mediated and curated for an audience via multiple media channels. Micro-celebrities are a subset of the film studies term 'star' (deCordova 1990; Dyer 1979; Ellis 1982) however unlike the representational screen persona of the traditional media celebrity, micro-celebrities are part of the presentational media paradigm of the social media era (Marshall 2010).

Holmes & Redmond (2010, p. 4) define celebrity as "the contemporary state of being famous" and Rojek (2001, p. 10) argues that "celebrity = impact on public consciousness". The concept of public and "publicness" (Moore, Barbour & Lee 2017, p. 3) is essential here as a celebrity's definition of fame relies on their "public visibility" (Lam, Raphael & Weber 2018, p. 3). Senft (2013, p. 351) argues that the "erosion between private and public has spread beyond those who are famous and those who wish to be famous" (cited in Jerslev 2016, p. 5236) as people can craft an idealised persona through celebrification.

Social media has changed the accessibility of celebrification via the ability to present a curated persona online. Moore, Barbour & Lee (2017, p.3) describe the industrial model of celebrity as

“a highly polished, scheduled and controlled version that is produced, performed and mediated” by teams of people. While this translates into the performance of a micro-celebrity (Barbour 2015), the construction of fame online begins with presenting a persona to be remembered by publics rather than notoriety, talent or skill (Marshall 2010; Lam, Raphael & Weber 2018; Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2015). The exclusivity of traditional celebrity media spheres and celebrification becomes permeable where multimedia channels, such as the internet, allow for anyone to replicate celebrification through constructing a ‘persona’ and leveraging social media to promote this identity (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Gamson, 2011). Kotler et al. (1997, p. 14) suggest “a celebrity is a name which once made the news, now makes news by itself”, for example micro-celebrities create ‘news’ via the mediated presentation of their “public identity” through their online channels (Moore, Barbour & Lee 2017, p. 3). In the context of this thesis, we will be dissecting the application of a mediated identity known as a micro-celebrity persona in regards to YouTube content creators.

Rojek (2001) finds traditional celebrification is a mediated form of visibility, framing an identity. In micro-celebrities, this is the same “process of celebrification trickling down” into online users (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 141). Micro-celebrity celebrification disseminates into online communities through social media channels leveraging aggregated and curated content to increase their recognition within a specific niche (Hou 2019) to attract audiences who consume “the strategic intimacy of the micro-celebrity” (Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2019, p. 90-91).

The persona of a micro-celebrity is the authentic presentation of this individual (Lam, Raphael & Weber 2018; Wynn 2020; Hou 2019). However, these personas are not fixed and move between different registers of performance (Barbour 2015) depending on the performance they want to give to their audience. These registers are the personal, the professional and the intimate and assist in the construction of a public persona (Barbour 2015).

The curated “performative identity” that Moore, Barbour & Lee (2017, p. 3-4) describe as the staged and presented persona is a micro-celebrity being commodified with the intention to

interact with others. Butler's (1999) model regarding performative identity resonates with this planned interaction between micro-celebrities and their intended audiences as a negotiation of their public identity. However, the presentation of this identity is both enabled and constrained by the cultures, communities and networks it performs, effectively, suiting the needs of the intended audience (Barbour 2015) but invites "speculation into what lies behind the performed persona" (Lam, Raphael & Weber 2018, p. 5). The performance of a micro-celebrity's identity then becomes the continuous maintenance of relevance through commodification. They must perform as an operation of "continuous marketing of the self's value" (Marshall 2010) to keep their micro-publics engaged as micro-celebrities are vulnerable to the factors of relevance and reputation, correlating to their value (De Backer 2005; Moore, Barbour & Lee 2017). This value manifests in the power-distance relationship micro-celebrities rely on as commodification and monetization of their persona through subscriptions, comments and likes from audiences (Hou 2019).

### **1.3.1 Commodifying a Micro-celebrity: *Money, Money, Money***

Celebrity personas emulate a visibility, exclusivity and charisma that marginal groups and niche communities identify (Abrahamson & Prior-Miller 2015; Lam, Raphael & Weber 2018). When individuals connect or admire a celebrity, they establish a "possessive advocacy" (Barbas 2001) for a celebrity's "human persona" (Coombe 1992, p. 61). Micro-celebrities are defined by this advocacy which correlates to their popularity and relevance. However, this simultaneously leaves them open to criticism, gossip and scandal, like celebrities, as their identity no longer becomes intangible but a tangible, commodified product.

Some audience members perceive ownership over a micro-celebrity (Maltby et al. 2003) as they have a physical and mental "preoccupied attachment" (Roberts 2007, p. 59) which borders on obsession. Maltby et al. (2003, p. 25) describes this as "celebrity worship"<sup>6</sup> as some fans

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<sup>6</sup> Celebrity Worship: an obsessive addictive disorder in which a person becomes overly involved with the details of a celebrity's personal and professional life. Maltby et al. (2003, p. 25).

“establish an identity and sense of fulfillment” by worshiping this persona as a “culturally mediated process of negotiation” (Dyer 2004, p.18).

Horton and Wohl (1956) theorised fan-celebrity interactions as one-sided parasocial relations that develop as a direct consequence of a celebrity's on screen presence, encouraging degrees of intimacy and attachment (Raphael & Lam 2018). The relationship is strengthened as micro-celebrity personas share intimately with their audiences through decentralised nodes as audiences have access to their content anywhere at any time online (Moore, Barbour & Lee 2017). Caughey (1984 p. 33, cited in Bird, 1992 p. 155) gives insight as “people characterise unmet media figures as if they were intimately involved with them” with social media’s remote nature amplifying this effect. Audiences see celebrities in their homes and therefore can see them as being part of their social networks (Barkow 1992). This explains why some audiences feel the need to control micro-celebrity behaviour as they feel a sense of ownership over the parasocial relationship. This authority and ownership correlates to that of a physical product which audiences then can boycott and review.

Friedman (1985, cited in Klein et al. 2004) describes consumer boycott as encouraging others to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace and Klein (2004) frames the concept of public boycott as a cost-benefit relationship. Micro-celebrities and fans use this relationship as an investment of time, an “attention economy”, where celebrities actively seek attention from their audiences to maintain their relevance (Lam, Raphael & Weber 2018). Crawford (2015, p. 11) reiterates this as "attention is a resource—a person has only so much of it". Micro-celebrities inherently rely on this attention from their audiences as an investment, in return audiences consume a micro-celebrity’s content, image and persona. Consequently, when a fan does not see the benefit of viewing content, they will boycott a micro-celebrity as they would if they were dissatisfied with a product, usually leaving a nasty comment as feedback. Fans as consumers then use actions of commodification to make this parasocial relationship an economic exchange of monetary value through subscriptions, donations and attention. This

behaviour is not new and replicates ancient types of parasocial relations, such as giving money to a shrine to appease a deity or donating to a church.

Micro-celebrities are tied intimately to their micro-publics and social media, as their relevance relies on them, making them very vulnerable to cancel culture as their constructed, performed and presented persona can be destroyed extremely quickly. This will be demonstrated in the case study of James Charles and his loss of 1 million subscribers in 24 hours (see section 3.1).

#### **1.4 Cancel Culture and Social Media: *#CancellingsOverParty***

Social media incentivises worldwide, remote communication and engagement by the function of online platforms. While social media is used to share, connect and converse, the internet's social norms of accountability, call-out culture and public shaming reframe these uses. Of course, social media has provided valuable platforms for movements against transgressions such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, leveraging the power of social media to bring justice to prominent abusers and make an example of those who had oppressed others (Wynn 2020). However, this culture makes accountability a form of user generated censorship and deplatforming.<sup>7</sup> Orient (2019) describes cancel culture as social media deplatforming which involves the censorship and isolation of dissidents, demonstrating a shift in the consideration of acceptable behaviour in online communities (Rogers 2020). The social justification of deplatforming is described by Nagle (2017, p. 130) as a mixture of an individual's performative vulnerability and "self-righteous wokeness and bullying". Logan Paul's cancellation in 2018 is an example of community pressured deplatforming. Social media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter reward this behaviour through the engagement that the conversation generates, as "destinations for extreme content" (Rogers 2020, p. 219). Wynn (2020) agrees that YouTube is a platform which promotes criticism and feeds off content which provokes discussion no matter

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<sup>7</sup> "the removal of one's account on social media for breaking platform rules, has recently been on the rise" (Rogers 2020, p. 1).

how destructive. Digital societies allow for these conversations as the internet provides a platform for freedom of voice through its anonymous nature.

Society, in a digital context, is described by Al Zidjaly (2019, p. 365) as an environment which feeds off the “absence of physical space and ease of anonymity” where there are various degrees of accessibility and blurred lines of social realities. This results in new systems of social integration and communication in online spaces that cultivate new behaviours that “can be formed, learned and policed” (Blommaert 2017, p. 123). The decentralised nature of online networks builds upon these new environments of unique micro-publics where acceptable behaviour is discussed and policed.

### **1.5 Cancel Culture, The Public Sphere and Micro-Publics: *We’re all in this together.***

Publics are defined by Dewey (1927) as individuals who face problems in their community, recognise these problems and organise themselves to address them. In the context of this research, we will be looking at micro-public members adherence to their constructed social norms and the demonstration of socially acceptable behaviour where members fulfil the expectations of the public (Kruse et al. 2018). Publics come together to discuss: societal problems, social norms, expectation of members and the steps to evolve their community. Connected to the idea of publics is the public sphere (Overland 2018). Defined by Habermas (1992, p. 27), the public sphere occurs where “private people come together as a public” as a discursive space made up of individuals who gather to articulate the needs of society to reach a common judgement about matters of mutual interest (Hauser 1999). Social media links the online public spheres to participatory democracies leading action in the form of social movements (Fuchs 2012; Halpern and Gibbs 2013; Jenkins 2006; Loader and Mercea 2011; Kruse et al. 2018). An example is Twitter’s favourable conditions for the public sphere as it is easily accessible with digestible content of under 240 characters. Social media like this allows people “to challenge discourses, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions” (Loader and Mercea 2011, p. 760) where “access, participation, reciprocity, and peer-to-peer

rather than one to many communication” (Jenkins 2006 p. 208–209) encourages collaboration. However, the negative implications of these spaces, such as mob mentality and moral panic, are heightened by the online sphere’s attributes of anonymity and remote accessibility. Shirky (2008) describes networked populations in a utopian way where it provides “more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action” (Shirky 2011, p.29), although, admits it is “difficult to keep online conversations from devolving into either name-calling or blather” (Shirky 2008, p. 50). Participation through “user generated” content of the public sphere increases the visibility of social movements and empowers public members (Shirky 2008, p. 83) in a way similar to communicative action<sup>8</sup> but is sometimes used in an antagonistic way to attack those who have opposing opinions.

Highfield & Bruns (2016) suggest that social media constitutes a reassessment of the definition of public spheres, shifting to distinct overlapping publics, as there is not, nor has there ever been “one public sphere” (Collins, Marichal & Neve 2020, p. 9). Social media has accelerated this process of public fragmentation (Dahlgren 2005) and contributes to the mass distribution of publics towards smaller pockets of the internet (Collins, Marichal & Neve 2020). The ability for many micro-publics to exist allows them to overlap and bleed into each other as a contributor to the mass mobilisation of public movements online. Unlike traditional publics, these formations are usually defined by the followers that aggregate around a persona as a networked group (Marshall et al. 2015). All personas have micro-publics and all micro-celebrities can be said to have an audience, which would include their various social media micro-publics. A community includes micro-publics who actively support a micro-celebrity or micro-celebrities within the same niche, such as ‘the Beauty Community’, whose audiences are overlapping micro-publics. Micro-publics are differentiated by their platform as a Twitter micro-public and YouTube public will behave in accordance to the affordances, constraints and format of the platform - YouTube is primarily in a video format, Twitter is primarily in a text format.

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<sup>8</sup> Communicative action is cooperative action undertaken by individuals based upon mutual deliberation and argumentation (Habermas 1992).

Social media acts as an online public sphere organiser, where individuals as remote nodes come together to participate in discussion within the community. These individuals are a micro-celebrity's audience and micro-public where their affiliation and common ground is the persona which they admire. These micro-publics facilitate a collective of individuals surrounding a persona that connects to other micro-publics within the community resulting in a "collective dimension of persona, a meta-collective complex" (Moore, Barbour & Lee 2017, p. 6). These overlapping micro-publics (Pond & Lewis 2017; Dahlgren 2005) conceptualise an individual as a node which orbits other nodes in the distributed networks where the central point is the user's persona (Figure 2). Moore, Barbour & Lee (2017) use the example of a selfie as a distribution of content with overlapping audiences due to the intent of effortless sharing across multiple social media platforms at the point of self-publication.

The central identity of a micro-celebrity is used as a magnet for other audiences in varying micro-publics that attracts by personally producing, responding and broadcasting to media platforms. These actions amplify the bond between audiences and micro-celebrities as new dimensions of expression, consumption and authority are defined by micro-publics (Moore, Barbour & Lee 2017; Blommaert 2017). Public persona emerges across these presentational media forms and micro-publics forcing a renewed focus on the management of micro-celebrity reputation (Barbour & Marshall 2012).



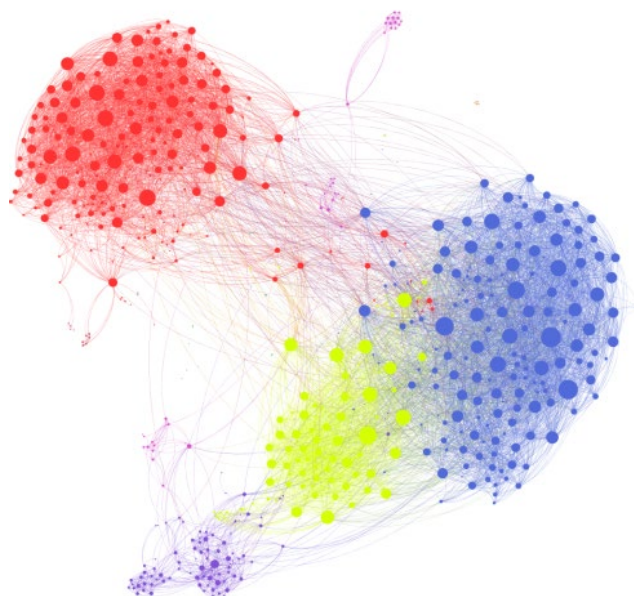


Figure 2: Example of a social media map visualising data of hashtags and mentions on Facebook, highlights the overlapping nodes (dots) in specific publics (colours) (Griffen 2012).<sup>9</sup>

## 1.6 Summary

The assessment of digital landscapes involving micro-celebrities, micro-publics and social media will provide a foundation to examine cancel culture in online environments. The identification of micro-celebrity's performed personas and their specific community as an extension of overlapping micro-publics will assist in examining the amplified attributes of audience distribution, anonymity and dramatisation online. The exploration of a micro-celebrity's destruction of reputation through relentless, collective scandalising and shaming of their persona will be discussed in the next chapter of this thesis.

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<sup>9</sup> A deeper explanation of social media mapping can be found via Griffen (2012).

# Chapter 2

## Scandal, Shame and Crowd Psychology

### 2.1 Scandal, and Shaming, and Crowds, *Oh Girl Bye*

This chapter provides a review of the literature examining the concepts of scandal, shaming and crowd psychology and the ways they have been applied to online environments. In addition to the broader theoretical contributions of celebrity and persona studies detailed in the previous chapter, these concepts form the basis for the theoretical framework used in the following case studies that will help us analyse the processes and effects of cancel culture.

### 2.2 Scandal: *Sister Scandal*

Scandal occurs when an individual's actions are identified as behaviour which is morally or legally wrong (Merry 1984, pp. 271). Scandal is used as a tool to identify 'problematic behaviour' such as J.K. Rowling's transphobic tweets in 2020 (Figure 3), her actions circulated across legacy media and social media (Figure 4) being coined as "problematic" (Torres 2020).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Problematic behaviour is typically not considered acceptable by community standards, for a more comprehensive definition of problematic behaviour see Lichtwarck-Aschoff & Geert's (2007) *A dynamic systems perspective on social cognition, problematic behaviour, and intervention in adolescence*.



Figure 3: Tweet from J.K. Rowling that is perceived to be invalidating transgender identities (Rowling 2020).



Figure 4: Tweet responding to J.K Rowling's tweets (Lambert 2020).

Bayle & Rayner's (2018) model (Figure 5) demonstrates that scandal is dependent on denunciation which mobilises and circulates a person's problematic actions immediately. These mobilisations take form in the saturation of media platforms, such as Tiger Woods' marriage affair in 2009 or Jenna Marbles' blackface scandal in 2020. These scandals circulated in an instant but stopped once the public lost interest, but more specifically for Marbles, once she deleted her channel. This is because without mobilisations, a scandal ceases to exist; if this mobilisation stops, the scandal stops (Bayle & Rayner 2018, p. 596). However, the consequential factors of resolving or failing to overcome a scandal is not discussed by Bayle & Rayner (2018); these are fundamental in understanding the end of a scandal or how it is perpetually circulated.

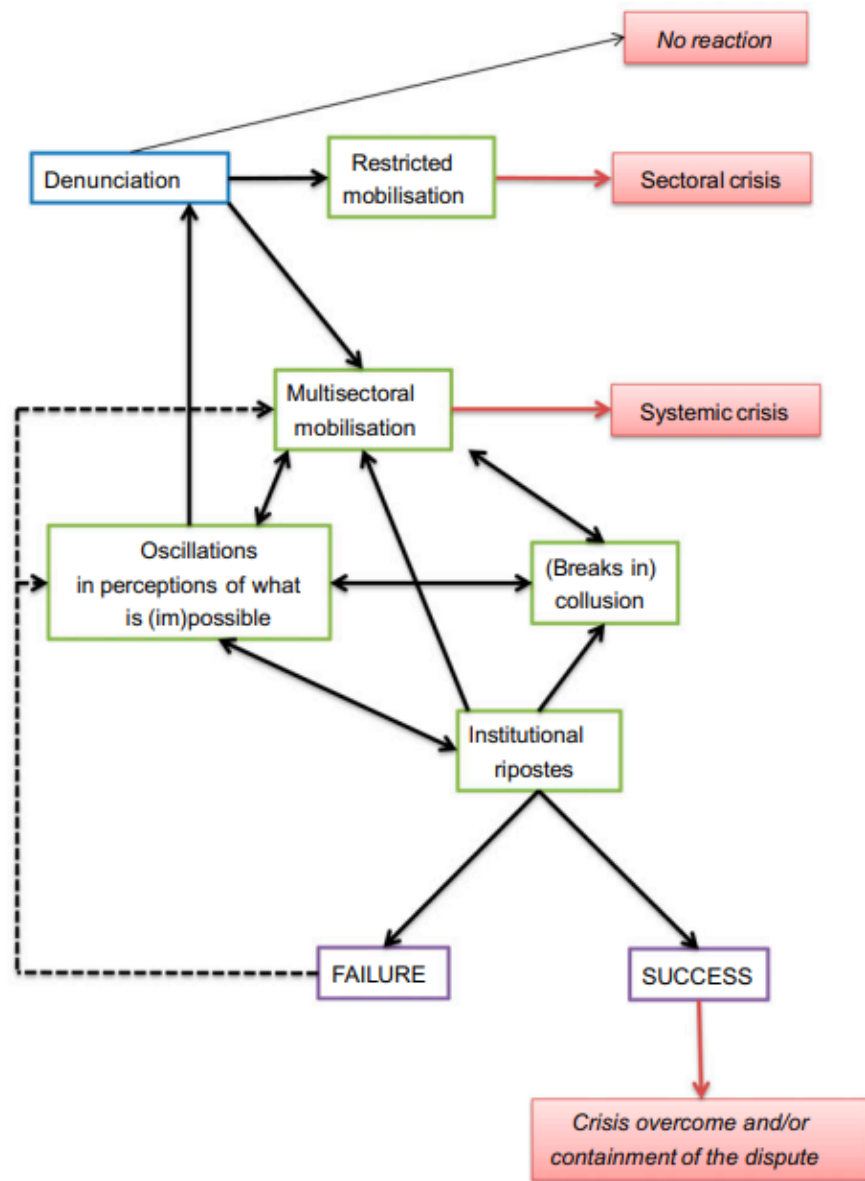


Figure 5: Bayle & Rayner's (2018, p. 598) scandal analysis model.

Scandals circulate when an incident is considered 'nefarious' by the broader population (Bailey 1971, p. 288).<sup>11</sup> An example is the case of Jussie Smollett, star of the television show *Empire*, who in 2019 was scandalised after falsely reporting a suspected racist and homophobic attack (Marinoff, 2019).<sup>12</sup> After this news, fans of *Empire* found Jussie Smollett's scandal so nefarious

<sup>11</sup> Nefarious actions are considered wicked, criminal or morally bad (Cambridge 2020).

<sup>12</sup> American musical drama television series created by Lee Daniels and Danny Strong for Fox.

that the television show was cancelled, (Marinoff, 2019) as was his career.<sup>13</sup> Smollett's audience is in mainstream television and therefore as a traditional 'celebrity' his audience is the broader population. This scandal is a demonstration of Bayle and Rayner's (2018) model where this scandal circulates public opinion against Smollett, mobilising gossip, scandalisation and boycott.

Adapting this model to analyse the circulation and mobilisation of scandal, via social media and audience involvement, provides a foundation in examining a micro-celebrity's initial instances of cancel culture. These micro-celebrities are vulnerable to this circulation of scandal, public opinion and gossip as social media discourse is able to immediately mobilise action.

### **2.2.1 Scandal and Gossip: *What's the Tea Sis?***

According to Jerslev (2014) gossip is communication between two parties with the third being absent. Gossip becomes mobilised as information consisting of possible facts that are considered scandalous by a public which are then shared through intimate channels. The mobilisation of scandal is connected to the processes of gossip which together map the social and political relations of competition, conflict and reputation (Merry 1984, pp. 271-272) such as Hilary Clinton's email controversy before the presidential election in 2016 (Zurcher 2016). Bordo (2017) details the rumours and gossip which quickly circulated and tarnished Clinton's reputation regardless of factual evidence leading to her loss of the 2016 US election. In Clinton's case, gossip transformed her narrative through online and traditional media discourse which was mobilised by her political rivals to manipulate her image and destroy her reputation.

De Backer (2005) argues that the mobilisation of gossip can act as a form of social control, and be used to establish and maintain social bonds. A celebrity's reputation is therefore vulnerable where gossip functions as a mobilisation of social comparison between celebrities, a means to achieve power, a form of entertainment and a way to produce normative homogeneity (De

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<sup>13</sup> See also the cancellation of the Rosanne revival show after racist tweets (Koblin 2018).

Backer 2005; Merry 1984, p. 295). Some micro-celebrities use gossip to enhance reputation by creating online content that includes gossip intended to scandalise others. In 2018, beauty influencer Manny Gutierrez attempted to scandalise Jeffree Star, mobilising gossip to frame Star as a “racist”.<sup>14</sup> However, this attempted mobilisation backfired resulting in what Adkins (2019, p. 76-77) describes as “shame backlash”, demonstrating the precariousness of gossip fueled scandal as a strategy to gain ‘clout’.<sup>15,16</sup> Reputation gossip is also activated here as Star and Gutierrez were colleagues within the beauty community before the mobilisation of gossip adding credibility, validity and therefore value to the gossiping claims (De Backer 2005).<sup>17</sup> Post (1994) notes that “gossip supports community” when in the appropriate context “but when it is liberated from that conversation and located instead within the mass media, gossip destroys community” (Post 1994, p. 71). In this circumstance, Post’s (1994) prediction is accurate as this gossip supports the beauty community’s overlapping micro-publics in creating internal discourse. Ultimately, Star’s reputation was stronger, possibly due to a larger proportion of fans within the community, resulting in Gutierrez’s public shaming and loss of followers, leading to his brief departure from the internet via the hands of his own community (Raga 2019).

### **2.2.2 The Production of Scandal and Gossip: *That’s not my narrative Gia!***

The production of a scandal relies upon a combination of factors including the initiating event and the scandal’s broader dissemination that demands audience attention, which is dependent on “mobilisation of some of the most fundamental archetypes of human emotion and reaction” (Butler & Drakeford 2005, p. 47). The production of scandal is, therefore, often dramatised as a narrative of heroes, victims, or villains where scandals involve actors and “acts of heroism and betrayal” (Butler & Drakeford 2005, p. 156). These tropes and their characteristics “give the

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<sup>14</sup> Gutierrez is better known as ‘Manny MUA’ on YouTube, find his channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbO9bltbkYwa56nZFQx6XJg>

<sup>15</sup> Shame Backlash: where shame is redirected back on the person attempting to shame (Adkins 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Clout refers to communicating with a sense of power, influence and authority due to your perceived popularity (Tiffany 2019).

<sup>17</sup> The value of gossip is heightened by the reputation of two existing parties being connected to each other prior to gossiping claims (De Backer 2005).

public [a] clear portrayal of conflict and the media a clear outlier to target” (Sanders & Tsay-Vogel, 2015, pp. 236-238). These traits can be found in the case of Sherry Pie from Season 12 of RuPaul’s Drag Race.<sup>18</sup> Whilst the dramatic roles can be clear cut archetypes, they can also become entwined with each other as time, information and speculation evolves incidentally complicating the scandal’s narrative. Narratives involving celebrity scandal encourage audiences to personalise the way they understand, relate, and make judgement towards the scandalised individual through public opinion.

Public involvement and opinion implicate the mobilisation of narrative, and as gossip circulates, narratives can change. Jerslev (2014) notes that gossip is more than the production, dissemination, and debate of information, it is also the exchange of moral opinions about the content and veracity of this information. The morality of gossip fueled narratives becomes a distinguishable discourse where the “interpretation, evaluation and moral judging” (Jerslev 2014, p. 182) of information becomes content for audiences. For content producers, like micro-celebrities, the incentive for gossiping becomes less about whether the scandal is true and more about its effects on the audience’s perspectives. This is how half-stories, snippets and phrases can become narrativised and mobilised by the micro-celebrity deliberately, then circulated by the audience with details becoming misconstrued and lost in the growing dissemination. The production of scandal evolves when audiences directly contribute public opinion and the shaming process.

### **2.3 Shame & Online Public Shaming: *On Wednesdays we Shame***

Shame is an emotion elicited by guilt after public denunciation or humiliation and often involves taboos and transgressions that result in public outrage (Scheff 2011). Adkins (2019) argues shame spoils reputation where the individual experiences alienation, viewing themselves through “the scornful eyes of the community” (Adkins 2019, p. 77) as their identity

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<sup>18</sup> Pie had been caught catfishing men, once Reddit had unveiled Pie’s past, victims began to come forward painting her as a villainous, horrific individual by the RPDR community. Her screen time was cut and her promotions were culled, minimising her exposure and effectively cancelling her.

is ruptured and publicly denounced. Exacerbated personal shame results in individuals succumbing to “regret” (Ronson 2015, p. 40) ensuring their humiliation in the public.

Nussbaum (2004 cited in Adkins 2019, p. 77) defines public shaming as “stigmatizing judgement where an actor or group condemns another actor or group for failing to adhere to a shared ideal or norm”. In this way, public shaming works as a mechanism to ensure that social norms are harmonious in a community where individuals adhere to the rules priorly established (Nussbaum 2004). For example, Erick Dota shared his opinions regarding the use of certain language which was considered racist by his community (see Figure 6), due to his lack of adherence he was shamed by his community, a paradigm of social punishment (Wüschner 2017).

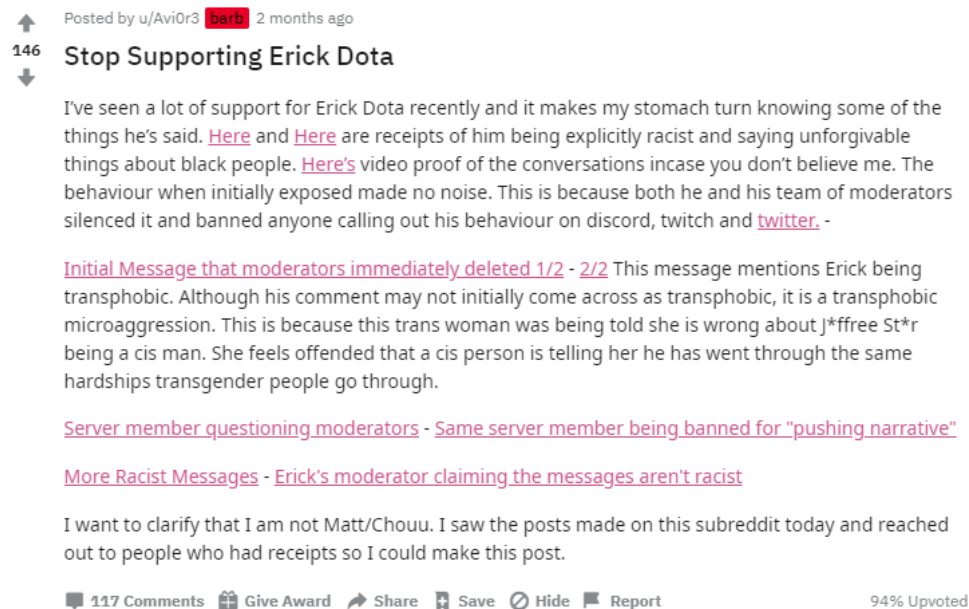


Figure 6: Reddit post from Erick Dota’s micro-public denouncing his behaviour (Barb 2020).

Online shaming occurs through the mobilisation of scandal and gossip on social media to correct transgressive public behaviour in contexts which call for conformity (Bicchieri 2018). Scandals of the internet encourage the perpetual shaming of scandalised individuals as punishment and entertainment (Nagle 2017; Ronson 2015; Wüschner 2017). Public shaming



can become dangerous when these social norms are perpetuated and twisted to manifest false or misleading narratives, Wynn (2020) points to these norms being easily abused online.

### 2.3.1 Shame as a mechanism of social norms: *We're the public, it's what we do*

Social norms are informal mechanisms for governing behaviours and are supported by shared expectations regarding what is acceptable and deters individuals from engaging in behaviour that would transgress those accepted norms (Nussbaum 2004). Bicchieri et al. (2018) raises the concept of internalisation where individuals develop a conformity to shared norms eliciting a consistent acceptable behaviour.

Jacquet (2015, pp. 100-106) argues that public shaming can be used as a tool for constructive public action by communities seeking to drive political change. The #MeToo movement had feminists shame individuals such as Woody Allan (see Figure 7) and James Franco (see Figure 8) to push gender equality. From this lens, Jacquet (2015) defends shaming as an effective mechanism to reform when a norm has been violated, resolving the violation involves finding a figure to blame and shame as a function of accountability echoing Brennan et al. (2013). Ullman-Margalit (1977) agrees that social norms solve collective action problems, such as MrBeast actioning on the internalised shame of his audience and other micro-celebrities to drive his #teamtrees campaign for reforestation (Leskin 2019).<sup>19,20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> YouTuber Jimmy Donaldson, more commonly known as MrBeast, is notable for his stunts and philanthropy.

<sup>20</sup> In total this campaign has assisted in planting over 22 million trees: <https://teamtrees.org//>



Figure 7: Tweet accusing Allen of sexual assault supported by the #TIMESUP & #MeToo movements (Farrow 2018).



Figure 8: Tweet accusing Franco of sexual assault supported by the #TIMESUP & #MeToo movements (Paley 2018).

Social norms facilitate shaming when the community values are “shared between the shamed, shamer and the audience” (Adkins 2019, p. 78). Here, the audience is not just members of the community, but rather participants in the production of media experience. The participatory nature of both cancel culture and the internet link here as engaged micro-publics are likely to share common community values. Yadin (2019, p. 409) argues that social media shaming exposes people for “inappropriate or unseemly behavior”, driven by political moral or social

change (Adkins 2019). This is an active attempt to not only adhere to conformity but actively reform the behaviour of online micro-publics.

### 2.3.2 Can Shaming be used to morally reform? *Dishonour on you. Dishonour your cow.*

Public shaming is a form of social control stemming from an individual's transgressions or violation of social norms (Bicchieri et al. 2018; Nussbaum 2004; Adkins 2019). Nussbaum (2004, p. 237) argues that shaming “does not function as a progressive reform, but rather as an agent of increased social homogeneity and social control”, Nagle (2017) and Ronson (2015) agree in the lack of morality in shaming. Edelman (2017, p. 917) identifies two types of public shaming, “disintegrative” and “reintegrative;” reintegrative shaming has a degree of processual ‘fairness’, while disintegrative shaming is “humiliating and disrespectful”. The amplified effects of social media ensure that shaming becomes anonymous resulting in a disintegrative shaming culture where fairness is oppressed in favour of shaming for entertainment (Nagle 2017).

Yadin (2019) and Safari & Taebi (2017) discuss regulatory shaming in government and corporate social responsibility, respectively, as morally acceptable when properly understood and administered. Yadin (2019, p. 451) argues that shaming can achieve “regulatory goals and can inspire trust between public regulators and private communities,” and therefore suggests that shaming is “not inherently morally flawed”. The concept of regulatory shaming is associated with audiences' justification that the shaming process is morally acceptable to maintain harmony in correlation with social norms.

Ronson (2015, p. 112) argues that people are “motivated by the desire to do good” and believe that shaming results in restorative effects via the humiliation of transgressors. This is a utopian view of public shaming, where shaming is employed as a tool and social mechanism for reform and reintegration. However, there are other effects and aspects to shaming which prevent public shaming from being entirely egalitarian. Nagle (2017) uses ‘gamergate’ as an example of how public shaming can be used against an individual who attempts to progressively reform,

enlighten and comment. Nagle (2017, p. 28) argues gamergate was founded upon a form of progressive, reintegrative shaming towards the gaming industry's "cathedral of misogyny". Although a complex situation, Nagle (2017) states that during gamergate women in gaming attempted to use reintegrative shaming to push the community to become more accepting of women. However, as shaming is "an agent of increased social homogeneity and social control" (Nussbaum 2004, p. 237) the community targeted by this shaming did not agree with the reform as it disrupted their social homogeneity, thus "shame backlash" occurred. Nagle (2017) finds that shaming in its essence cannot truly be used as a way to achieve moral reform but can be used, as Edelman (2017, p. 917) describes, as a "humiliating and disrespectful" way to persuade individuals to conform to the social norms of a specific community, environment or space.

### **2.3.3 Social Media Amplification, Anonymity, and Toxicity: *I don't know her***

The decentralised distributed network topology (Baran 1962) of social media allows for vastly different micro-publics to emerge, generating their own social norms and values as the physical public mind becomes virtual (Gal et al. 2016, p. 1699). Public shaming is then amplified by the speed and dissemination of information across the distributed networks of the internet, allowing users to rapidly judge individuals actions based on the relative social norms.

The culture of anonymous discourse online allows for audiences to have little accountability and repercussions for their actions (Al Zidjaly 2019), which Nagle (2017, p. 91) attributes to "a more openly hateful [online] culture". Anonymous accountability encourages audience members participation in shaming as the fear of punishment is reduced as the ability to "lose themselves in the anonymous crowd" (Ronson 2015, p. 59) is easily achievable. This reduction of fear allows audiences to justify their actions as positively influencing their community, implying its moral justification. Nagle (2017, p. 36) argues that the "rejection of imposed morality" now runs through online culture, describing transgressive shaming as a "satirical art performance" where shamers gain cultural capital and a sense of collective identity

(Nissenbaum & Shifman 2015, p. 484). While this may be the case for those knowingly engaging in the attempt to destroy someone who has been shamed, Ronson (2015, p. 249) writes that some are trying to do the right thing without realising that it actually “destroys” people.

Ronson (2015) reminds us that shaming is a public phenomenon, and dates back to the days of stocks and flogging, where “punishments that exercise - intensified, multiplied forms of training, several times repeated” (Foucault 1995, p. 179) were morally acceptable. Shaming was used to enforce public behaviour, stabilise public norms, and was a form of entertainment, most notably in the form of a guillotine. Now, public shaming is a part of the cancel culture paradigm, a 21st century networked guillotine that brings justice but can also become a sadistic entertainment spectacle (Wynn 2020). Shaming is volatile in nature, changing over time and dependent on the social norms which include morality and ethics. However due to the speed of social media sharing, public shaming cannot be regulated or controlled within the digital domain in the same way it has been historically managed. In her examination of 4chan users, Nagle (2017, pp. 31-47) observes that shaming is “based on leaderless user-generated social media” where content becomes aggressively transgressive and suggests that shaming online is “transgressive and anti-moral” which is echoed by Yadin (2019, p. 451) conceding anonymity ultimately results in audiences engaging in toxic behaviour. Norlock (2017, p. 4) suggests that a danger of this anonymity lies in users' “imaginal relationship” with each other as they seek recognition from each other's toxic behaviour. The anonymous relationship that shamers have with each other allows them to see themselves as a disempowered group taking down the unjustly powerful; thus, they shame more viciously than justified.

#### **2.4 Crowd Psychology: *One is a crowd, two is cause for Cancellation***

Crowd psychology is used to evaluate collective behaviour where individuals congregate in a manner which is “volatile, appears relatively unorganised and is characterised by strong emotions” often due to the violation of social norms (Manstead & Hewstone 1996, pp. 152). Collective behaviour can manifest from rumours, crazes, fads, fashions, social movements,

enthusiasm, anxiety, fear and hostility (Manstead & Hewstone 1996) and, therefore, can become heavily influenced by gossip and shaming as catalysts for collective movement (Jacquet 2015; Adkins 2019). The integration of the crowd becomes key in dissecting the motivation of online audiences and their participation in amplifying the effects of scandal and shaming. To achieve this, Le Bon's (1927) framework regarding anonymity, contagion and suggestion will be employed in the case studies as an interpretation of the general characteristics of the crowd, guiding our understanding of the crowd in online contexts.<sup>21</sup> The growth of the crowd size, voice and opinion becomes almost infinite online as the micro-publics of micro-celebrities are interconnected within micro-publics that leak and spill between each other.

#### **2.4.1 Formation and Transformation: *Mobilisation, Crowds in Disguise***

Crowd formation relies on a public's universality in opinion, perspective and behaviour (Greenberg 2010; Toch 1988) where these publics are mobile and mouldable (Le Bon 1927). To understand the difference between crowds and the public, I will draw on Laursen & Møller's (2016) adaption of Le Bon's (1927) theory of 'transformation'. Laursen & Møller (2016) argue a public is filled with rational individuals while a crowd is an unconscious melding of collective personality characterized by social homogeneity where the "feelings and thoughts of all the crowd members move in the same direction" (Le Bon 1927; Park 1982, p. 18). This is the same homogeneity that social norms enforce to dissuade acts of independence and perceived transgression. When a public lacks independence it is transformed into a crowd where individuals are influenced by a collective drive to obey without criticism (Park 1982), resulting in crowds undermining individual rationality and opinion (Laursen & Møller, 2016; Stott & Reicher, 1998).

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<sup>21</sup>Although Le Bon (1927) has been "severely criticised" (Parkin-Gounelas 2012, p. 69) and fallen out of methodological disuse, I agree with Parkin-Gounelas (2012) and Reicher (1987) in that utilising this sources can assist in our understanding of crowds, political order and the mass mobilisation of people giving us "insights into the fundamental nature of the social bond" (Reicher 1987, p. 67). Laursen & Møller (2016) use and justify the use of Le Bon's work in their own critique of more current crowd psychologists.

These concepts correlate to the creation of online, distributed, and homogenous micro-publics that can share collective identities. Through the speed and dissemination of information, online crowds can form in an instant from remote points across the globe. These crowds emulate anonymity and lean towards the leaderless characteristics of crowds (Nagle 2017), echoing the arguments of Al Zidjaly (2019) & Blommaert (2017) that an emerging culture is being formed. These new mobile cultures are able to force conformity and governance regardless of moral correctness through the power generated from anonymity, contagion and suggestion.

#### **2.4.2 Anonymity In Crowds: *I'm a ghost... Boo!***

Le Bon (1927, p. 12) argues that the mobility and anonymity of the crowd “renders [the crowd] very difficult to govern” due to the loss of individual responsibility.<sup>22</sup> In online spaces, anonymity stems from the distribution of connected individuals. Baran’s (1962) Distributed Networks theory highlights the ability for anonymous users across the globe to fill the crowd remotely which amplifies mass mobilisations of collective behaviour.

Jenkins (2006) and Bernstein et al. (2011, p. 55) suggest that internet culture is “inherently ephemeral and anonymous”. The functional anonymity of the internet generates an environment (Al Zidjaly 2019, p. 365) of ‘audience’ to ‘crowd’ transformation supported by Baran’s (1962) decentralised model (Figure 9). Immediate mobilisation is possible due to the distribution of decentralised networks and is a representation of emerging leaderless and anonymous online cultures (Blommaert 2017). Traditionally in politics, Chianter-Stutte (2018, p. 169) would describe this as giving “voice to the masses” but the power anonymous distributed networks give the masses is more than just a voice (Nagle 2017). Subsequently, what Anderson (2008, p. 50) calls the “democratisation of the tools of production” grants anonymous, online crowds the ability to manipulate public perception.

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<sup>22</sup> The limitations of Le Bon’s theories without adaptation begin here as he lacks to acknowledge Kettling, see Grantham-Philips, Davis & Coltrain (2020).

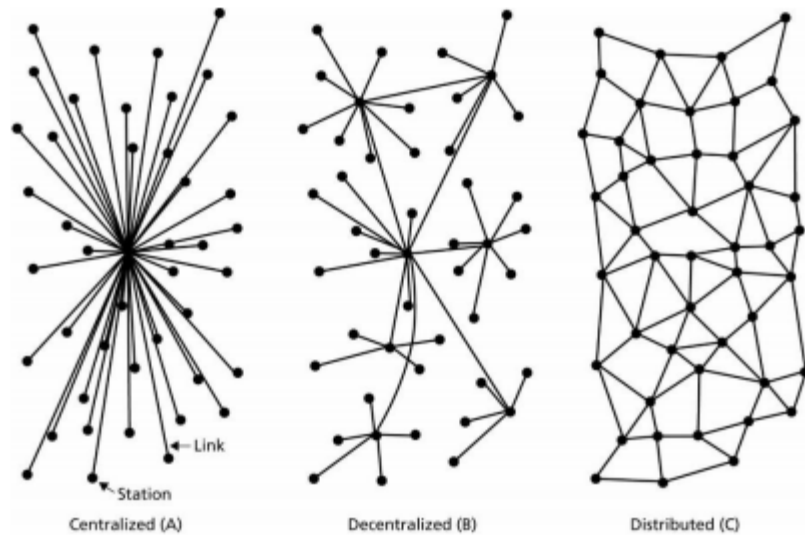


Figure 9: Paul Baran’s (1962, p. 3) three network topologies: centralised, decentralised and distributed.

Ronson (2015) and Nagle (2017) attest that individuals of certain online communities believe they are the authority with the ability to morally judge situations. The decentralised networks allow anyone to enter with each node or member in the model being equally powerful (Baran 1962; Nagle 2017). Therefore, online crowd formation relies on anonymity and distributed networks to circulate information immediately and remotely, generating a collective perception which mobilises behaviour such as memefication and shaming. Ng (2020) considers the militate activities of crowds in cancel culture, highlighting the toxic mobility and culture of memefication that online users cultivate as a contagious form of entertainment (Nagle 2017).

### **2.4.3 Contagion in Crowds: *Toxic! I’m Slipping into the Crowd!***

Distributed networks theory (Baran 1962) and Affect theory (Gibbs 2008) support the notion of “contagion” as information circulation. Contagion causes the rapid dissemination of ideas within the crowd where the emotions and thoughts of crowd members become mirrored (Le Bon 1927, p. 6). The mass mobilisation of crowds involves behavioural contagion which infects those who are susceptible to suggestion where crowd members become a collective



identity.<sup>23,24</sup> This behavioural contagion rests in the voraciousness of crowds and their demand for vilification of scandalised individuals. Le Bon (1927) agrees that audiences and crowds create narratives with heroes and villains to inject an excessiveness and immediacy to their claims. This manipulation of narratives is what makes crowds powerful as their magnified spread of information accelerates storylines, regardless of the truth, where assumption becomes a byproduct of their voracious nature. The expansion of contagion in online crowds manifests content which feeds the circulation of scandal and shaming, specifically, YouTube drama channels such as 'DramaAlert'.<sup>25</sup> The parallels between traditional media forms feeding audiences in gossip magazines and the internet promoting user-generated content is indicative of this emergent culture that promotes mob mentality against scandalised individuals.

Organised 'witch hunting' is then a unification of a contagious social identity where crowd members must conform (Stott, Hutchison & Drury 2001, p. 362), and any perceived lack of conformity to social norms is seen as a threat (Bicchieri et al. 2018).<sup>26</sup> These norms are contagious and become cognitive representations of appropriate behaviour resulting in the punishment and control of transgressors within micro-publics. Therefore, social identity and social norms are the initial catalysts for the mobilisation of public shaming as "the self is transformed by virtue of participation in collective action" (Drury & Reicher 1999, p. 383) demonstrating contagious, collective behaviour is responsible for 'witch hunting'. Here, the transformation from individuals in a micro-public to active crowd members becomes inherently linked to their collective, social identity indicative of their community. Protecting this identity from destruction overrules advocacy for a micro-celebrity where individuals feel the need to shame a micro-celebrity if they have transgressed the community. In this way, we can assert

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<sup>23</sup> Behavioural contagion pertains to the repeated behaviour of imitation within groups (Le Bon 1927; Drury & Reicher 1999, p. 383).

<sup>24</sup> Collective identity applies Reicher's (1987), Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory in discussing the crowd as having a shared social identity.

<sup>25</sup> DramaAlert is a YouTube channel hosted by internet personality, Keemstar as a tabloid content aggregator in the niche of YouTube micro-celebrities: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC11PvrGPzo6Y7Zc6-e9cAKg>

<sup>26</sup> Conformity of the group is mediated by group members as individual members are enveloped in self-categorisation. For a comprehensive explanation of the social identity framework please see Bicchieri, Muldoon & Sontuoso's (2018) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

that online communities will purge those who do not conform to community standards inherently linking contagious social norms to micro-publics and therefore the transformation of micro-publics to crowds.

#### 2.4.4 Crowds and Suggestion: *What are you suggesting?*

Le Bon (1927, p. 9) describes the crowd as being impractical, passive, unconscious and at all times “intellectually inferior to the isolated individual”, denouncing the crowd’s intelligence. Here, Le Bon (1927) insinuates that the crowd is unable to correctly identify right from wrong without underlying bias or judgement. While I disagreed with this judgement initially, Le Bon’s (1927, p. 22) concept of “suggestion” is very similar to the lens of confirmation bias where “suspicion transforms itself into incontrovertible evidence”.

Suggestion occurs when opinions and ideas are mobilised as beliefs become considered absolute truths and reality is unclear (Le Bon 1927, p. 24). The crowd then actions on the suggestions without discussion or acknowledgment of facts through a confirmation bias (Le Bon 1927, p. 8). This is because people actively search for online information consistent with their pre-existing beliefs, opinions, attitudes or expectations (Itzchakov & Van Harreveld 2018; Vydiswaran et al. 2015). Moravec et al. (2019, p. 1353) echoes this in finding that audiences are “more likely to believe news headlines they wanted to be true” making confirmation bias a dangerous form of cognitive dissonance in crowds. Social media users' goal in seeking news is not to determine what is real, rather, they seek enjoyment and pleasure “with articles that make them feel good, which tend to be articles supporting their beliefs” (Moravec et al. 2019, p. 1345). An example of this contagious confirmation bias is *Stephaine Soo vs Nicocado Avocado’s scandal*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In this scandal audience members quickly disseminated information online which changed the scandals narrative multiple times regardless of what was fact or fiction. More on this instance of cancel culture here: <https://www.distractify.com/p/stephanie-soo-and-nick-avocado-drama>.

Suggestion and confirmation bias are weaponised by crowds to construct narratives where the accuracy of these narratives is irrelevant and the entertainment value of these narratives is key. Bayle & Rayner (2018) agree that “a scandal can occur even if the scandalous facts are unfounded” if the narrative is entertaining enough. The online space can change this public narrative immediately as the dissemination and aggregation of this information is made immediate by the internet (Fritscher 2019). In this way, the power of suggestion and confirmation bias as a unified concept can be an extremely dangerous attribute of the crowd as fictional narratives can be made and disseminated quite easily.

## 2.5 Summary

Micro-celebrities face an imminent challenge as their performed persona is always judged in online spaces which makes their identity vulnerable to scandalising, shaming and collective opinion. In this chapter, we have examined some of the reasons why a micro-celebrity may be cancelled by their micro-publics as crowds attempt to maintain conformity to social norms through scandalisation and shaming. Social media’s power has been examined as a remotely distributed open source censorship machine in some instances, where the circulation and mobilisation of scandal and shaming is perpetuated by micro-publics who feel social norms have been breached.

Given the restrictions of this thesis, I am unable to examine emerging forms of shaming in detail such as memeification, content aggregation in regard to drama channels and deplatforming involving social media platforms. These areas should be examined in the future to understand cancel cultures emerging shaming tactics in more detail.

# Chapter 3

## Case Study 1: James Charles

### 3.1 James Charles

The online beauty community is notorious for toxic behaviour and audiences' insatiable hunger for drama (Dodgson, 2019). One of the most infamous cases of drama has been nicknamed 'Dramageddon' which involved beauty vlogger, James Charles. Charles is a makeup artist with over 22.9 million subscribers and is the number one most subscribed to beauty guru on YouTube (Social Blade 2020a). However, this isn't the only title Cover Girl's first male model holds, Charles was also the first YouTube personality to lose over 1 million subscribers in 24 hours (SkyNews 2019; Figure 10).

2019-05-04	Sat	+10,855	16,560,335	+1,098,339	1,464,940,743	\$275 - \$4.4K	
2019-05-05	Sun	+7,508	16,567,843	+971,002	1,465,911,745	\$243 - \$3.9K	
2019-05-06	Mon	+4,983	16,572,826	+688,126	1,466,599,871	\$172 - \$2.8K	
2019-05-07	Tue	-4,959	16,567,867	+1,357,848	1,467,957,719	\$339 - \$5.4K	
2019-05-08	Wed	-9,243	16,558,624	+3,015,195	1,470,972,914	\$754 - \$12.1K	
2019-05-09	Thu	-5,045	16,553,579	+1,898,579	1,472,871,493	\$475 - \$7.6K	
2019-05-10	Fri	-538,883	16,014,696	+1,927,854	1,474,799,347	\$482 - \$7.7K	
2019-05-11	Sat	-1,261,460	14,753,236	+19,033,207	1,493,832,554	\$4.8K - \$76.1K	
2019-05-12	Sun	-772,373	13,980,863	+18,432,586	1,512,265,140	\$4.6K - \$73.7K	
2019-05-13	Mon	-127,474	13,853,389	LIVE	+5,219,457	1,517,484,597	\$1.3K - \$20.9K
Daily Averages		-75,098		+3,684,840		\$921 - \$14.7K	
Last 30 Days		-2,252,953		+110,545,200		\$27.6K - \$442.2K	

Figure 10: Charles' live subscriber count during his cancellation (Flowers 2019).

In this chapter we will examine the cancellation of Charles through the conceptualisation of scandal, shaming and crowd psychology. This chapter is broken up into sections, beginning with

the initiating event of Tati Westbrook's call-out video, the scandalisation of Charles, the shaming of Charles and the implications of the crowd on Charles. This case of cancellation, and the amalgamation of differing perspectives in the following case studies, of a prominent micro-celebrity can help us better understand how cancel culture operates in online spaces.

The goal of examining these nuanced cases of cancel culture is to process the relationship between micro-celebrities and their publics to explore why scandal, shaming and crowd psychology are key applications of cancel culture. Analysing the reason that they are transferable rather than isolated incidences of random groupthink or mob mentality is what will be discussed along with the amplification of each attribute which holds micro-celebrities accountable for their behaviour.

### **3.2 Dramageddon 2.0: James Charles' Sister Scandal**

In May 2019, Charles' collaborator, mentor and YouTube 'Mum' Tati Westbrook 'cancelled' Charles in a 43-minute long video titled *Bye Sister* (Parker Productions 2019).<sup>28</sup> Westbrook suggested, in the now-deleted video, that Charles was disloyal, "manipulated people's sexuality" (Quintana 2019; Arias 2019) and used "fame, power and money to play with people's emotions" (SkyNews 2019). This video strategically critiqued Charles' character after he was sponsored by one of Westbrook's brand competitors. Westbrook's audience and micro-public immediately participated in Charles' cancellation as he lost over 1 million subscribers in less than 24 hours, while Westbrook's increased by over 4 million (Arias 2019). Once Charles' story spread, he became scandalised by his own community.

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<sup>28</sup> Westbrook and Charles had a relationship over the past 2 years prior to this scandal they describe as maternal.

### 3.3 Scandalising a Cover Girl

The initialisation of Charles' cancellation originated from Westbrook weaponising her micro-public and broader community to mobilise cancel culture by way of creating and circulating Charles' scandal. Charles' alleged scandalous behaviour involved the manipulation of individuals and implied sexual predation towards straight men. Westbrook's video initially went viral on Youtube, transcending any prior case of cancel culture in micro-celebrities. Charles' scandal falls into a multisectoral mobilisation (Rayner & Bayer 2018) where audience ripostes circulated the scandal immediately.

Charles' community justifies the participation in his cancellation as his 'nefarious' acts transgressed social norms (Figure 11), specifically his accused behaviour towards straight men (Figure 12; Parker Productions 2019, 23:50-24:20). The scandal was mobilised as Charles' Twitter micro-public was connected to the broader beauty community using the #JamesCharlesIsOverParty to circulate their disdain (Figure 13 & 14).

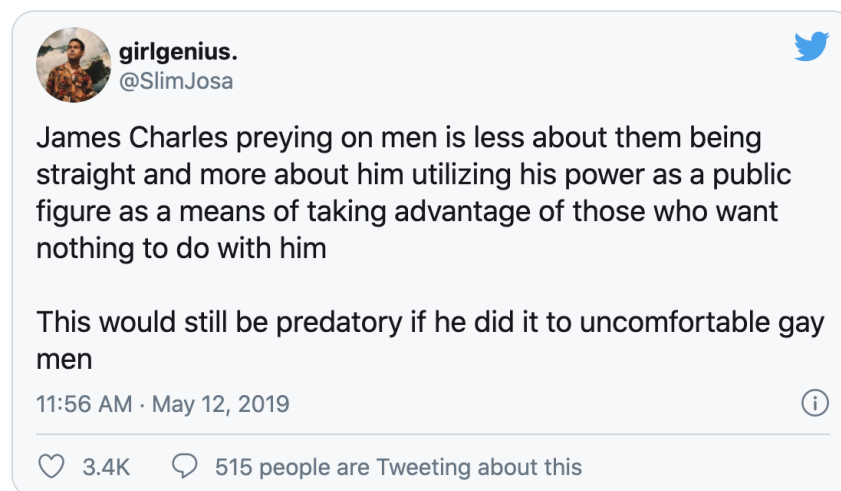


Figure 11: Tweet about Charles' behaviour transgressing social norms (SlimJosa 2019).



Figure 12: Tweets from Charles that his audience found predatory (Wasserman 2019).



Figure 13: Tweet with Westbrook running Charles over with her car under #JamesCharlesIsOverParty (McEvoy 2019).

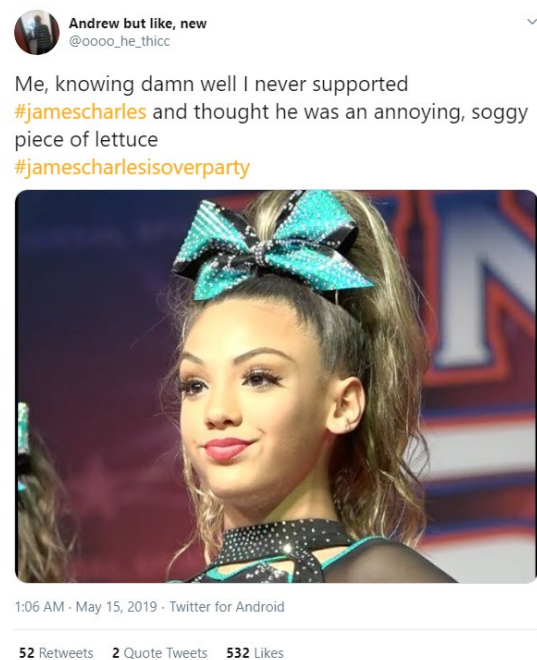


Figure 14: Tweet defaming Charles and his persona under #JamesCharlesIsOverParty (oooo\_he\_thicc 2019).

Other celebrities (Twersky 2019; Abrahams 2019; Tilchen 2019) fired tweets with Charles own slogan, 'Bye Sister' (Figure 15). This is an example of crowd mobilisation, as there is a collective attempt from the celebrities to disassociate from Charles' cancellation and the destruction of his brand. One of the more interesting tweets was from Zara Larson who suggested that Charles' scandalous behaviour was nothing new (Figure 16). The hashtag #ByeSister trended across social media contributing to Charles' cancellation and diminishing his micro-celebrity authority.

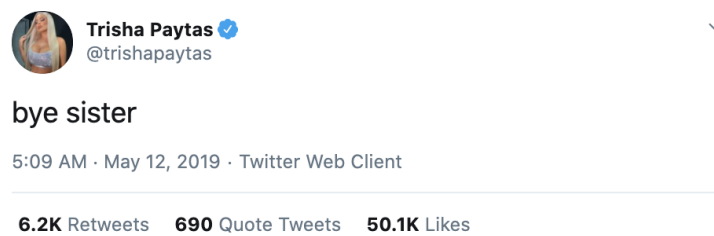


Figure 15: Tweet of Trisha Paytas shaming Charles (Paytas 2019).

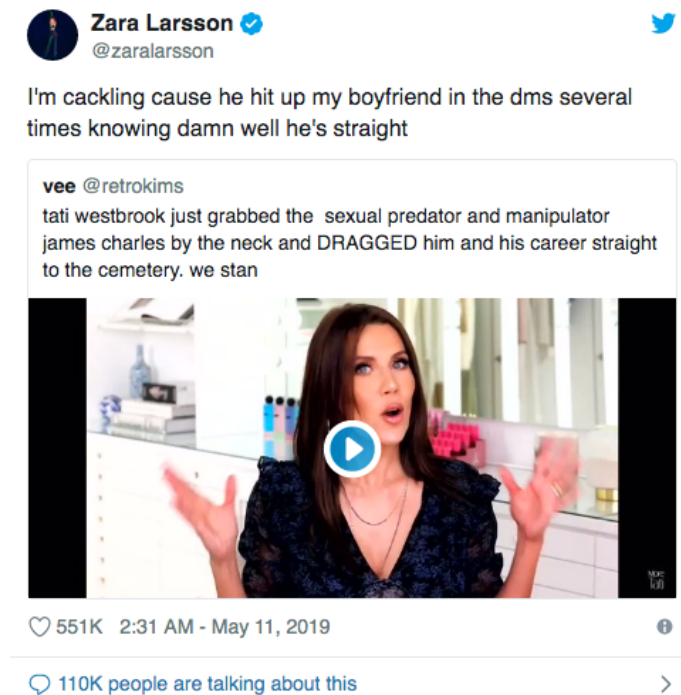


Figure 16: Tweet from Zara Larsson regarding Charles' accusation (David 2019).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Larsson's original tweet has been deleted. However, it has been archived on multiple news sources.



The scandalisation was ruthless, and Charles was cancelled in a tsunami of tweets and comments which Westbrook initially benefited from as the increased attention of the scandal attracted audiences outside the beauty community. Westbrook and Charles’ relationship demonstrates the application and effects of reputation gossip (De Backer 2005). Westbrook was able to weaponise gossip and her micro-public as tools to scandalise Charles because she had the authority, ethos and reputation as a friend of Charles and as his mentor, to legitimise her claims.<sup>30</sup> The power imbalance here is somewhat frightening as audiences believe these claims due to Westbrook’s strong sense of authority considering her age and position of power as a micro-celebrity. Here, Westbrook intentionally took advantage of their relationship dynamic to cancel Charles (Wallace 2020a) due to her anger of his betrayal. Westbrook’s claims and framing transformed Charles’ persona into a villain and Westbrook into a hero for outing him (Butler & Drakeford 2005). Westbrook was able to create a narrative of betrayal for her micro-public to manipulate the beauty community demonstrated by her subscriber gain and personal brand promotion (Figure 17). More importantly, this case is nuanced and demonstrates how the beauty community benefits from the mobilisation of gossip as a form of entertainment (Tait 2020), where scandal production becomes about the exchange of audiences’ moral opinions (Jerslev 2014).



Figure 17: Westbrook’s daily subscriber gain peaked at the height of the scandal (Sarna 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Wallace (2020a) suggests this is an intentional smear of presenting Charles’ case as similar to that of *Boys Beware* (1961) by Sid Davis.

Wynn (2020) argues that cancel culture, as a mobilisation of scandal, abstracts narratives and therefore the truth through the circulation of information. In Charles' case, abstraction through the dissemination of micro-public information replaces the details of his accusation. In audience discussion Charles' narrative quickly shifted from "Tati Westbrook accuses James Charles of trying to trick straight men" to "James Charles tried to trick straight men" then, it was generalized into "James Charles is toxic and manipulative" (Wynn 2020).

Westbrook's scandal was the application of social control regarding Charles's commercial behaviour (working with brands other than hers), but the dramatization and abstraction of the narrative transformed the perception of the micro-public. The scandal shifted from Charles acts badly to Charles *is* a bad person, which then shifted to "James Charles tried to trick straight men" to "James Charles *is* a sexual predator" as the narrative circulated in a massive multiplayer online game of Chinese whispers. Suddenly, the interpretation of his actions became recontextualised as his persona changed, collaborations with other influencers became fueled by perceived greed, relationships with his teenage friends (who were straight males) became predatory and therefore the audience was able to justify the narrative (Wallace 2020a, 36:55-37:15). Jerslev (2014) sees this interpretation and evaluation of Charles' actions as content for audiences where his narrative regarding his predation becomes less about whether he is guilty or not and more about if this story is entertaining. Essentialism is what Wynn (2020) attributes to micro-publics criticising Charles' performed, professional persona (see Figures 18 & 19) as the scandal is produced around his manipulative persona as perceived by the audience. Here, Charles' performed persona changed rapidly from beauty influencer to sexual predator as the scandal circulated immediately and became mobilised via social media shaming.



Figure 18: Tweet which calls out Charles’ personality rather than actions (angelspray 2019).



Figure 19: Tweet calling Charles manipulative (bbkwonnie 2019).

### 3.4 Shaming a Beauty Guru

Charles’ persona was scandalised as he was involuntarily branded as a sexual predator by his micro-public through Westbrook’s production of social media discourse, which was then mobilised by both Westbrooks and Charles’ overlapping micro-publics (Pond & Lewis 2017; Dahlgren 2005). Memefication was an important part of the scandalising process that was deployed to shame Charles (see Figures 20 & 21). However, the progression of his narrative saw Charles repair his reputation through what Lam, Raphael & Weber (2018) would describe as “authenticity”. Charles was shamed profusely until he made his second video, a reverse call-out where receipts were released to underpin the true narrative which was also an entertaining spectacle.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Receipts’ are internet slang for evidence or proof in the form of personal text messages or direct messages when calling someone out (Dodgson 2019).



Figure 20: Meme of Westbrook destroying Charles (KhannVictt 2019).



Figure 21: Meme regarding Charles' career ending (C0deRainb0w 2019).

Wynn (2020) notes that social norms are abused and weaponised so audiences can shame with power and purpose, as shaming constitutes progression and the liberation of minority groups (Jacquet 2015). The accusations against Charles were the perfect catalyst to judge and condemn him as constructive public action (Jacquet 2015; Ullman-Margalit 1977) via the internalised social norms (Bicchieri et al. 2018) of the beauty community being progressive, inclusive, and made up of marginalised groups (Wharry 2020; Lawson 2020); Charles was shamed as his accused behaviour did not align with the social norms of his micro-public's standards. Charles' persona, manipulated by gossip and scandal, appeared to lack conformity with these collective social norms resulting in his shaming. The social norm which destroyed Charles initially was "believe victims", a norm which attempts to destroy the taboo of abuse victim silence regarding their encounters (Start by Believing 2020; Alexander-Scott et al. 2016), which in Charles' case propagated a system of guilty until proven innocent conflicting with the presumption of innocence as a concept (Sharpe & Mascia-Lees 1993).

By denouncing Charles, micro-publics exacerbate shame rupturing Charles' perceived reputation and disassociating him from the community as a form of social punishment

(Wüschner 2017). The moral reformation of shame is used to signal the social standards of the collective identity but Charles' persona succumbed to a destructive form of "character assassination" known as "trashing" (Freeman 1976, pp. 49-51) rather than a reformation of his actions. The inherently destructive nature of cancel culture is revealed through the processes of shaming, where Charles' shaming is personal (Wynn 2020) as some fans ideological purity (Brooks 2019) causes them to be openly hateful (Nagle 2017) for disrupting the social homogeneity. This is an example of disintegrative shaming, as the audience does not actively seek to reform his actions but attack Charles as a form of social cleansing and social change for the transgressive actions he committed (Yadin 2019). The disintegrative shaming of Charles amalgamates in #ByeSister (see Figure 22 & 23), universally utilised by micro-publics to memefy him as a "humiliating and disrespectful" (Edelman 2017, p. 917) way to increase social conformity and control.



Figure 22: Tweet of Charles being memefied in multiple formats (Wonder 2019).



Figure 23: Tweet shaming Charles with a SpongeBob Squarepants meme (Meme\_Binder 2019).

Online public shaming is contagious (Gibbs 2004) as social media discourse pressures those who do not engage, especially prominent individuals that have public visibility (Lam, Raphael & Weber 2018). The social pressure to conform or be ostracised becomes a binary of right and wrong. Freeman (1976, p. pp. 49-51) extrapolates this instance as nuanced as all of the people around you become a “chorus of condemnation” (see Figure 24 & 25) where individuals association with Charles becomes synonymous with the actions of Charles (Wynn 2020). This is why celebrities were provoked to distance themselves from Charles and why the shaming of Charles became contagious. Charles’ community pressured mainstream celebrities connected to him to unfollow him such as the Kardashians, Miley Cyrus and Zara Larsson (Mastroianni 2019).



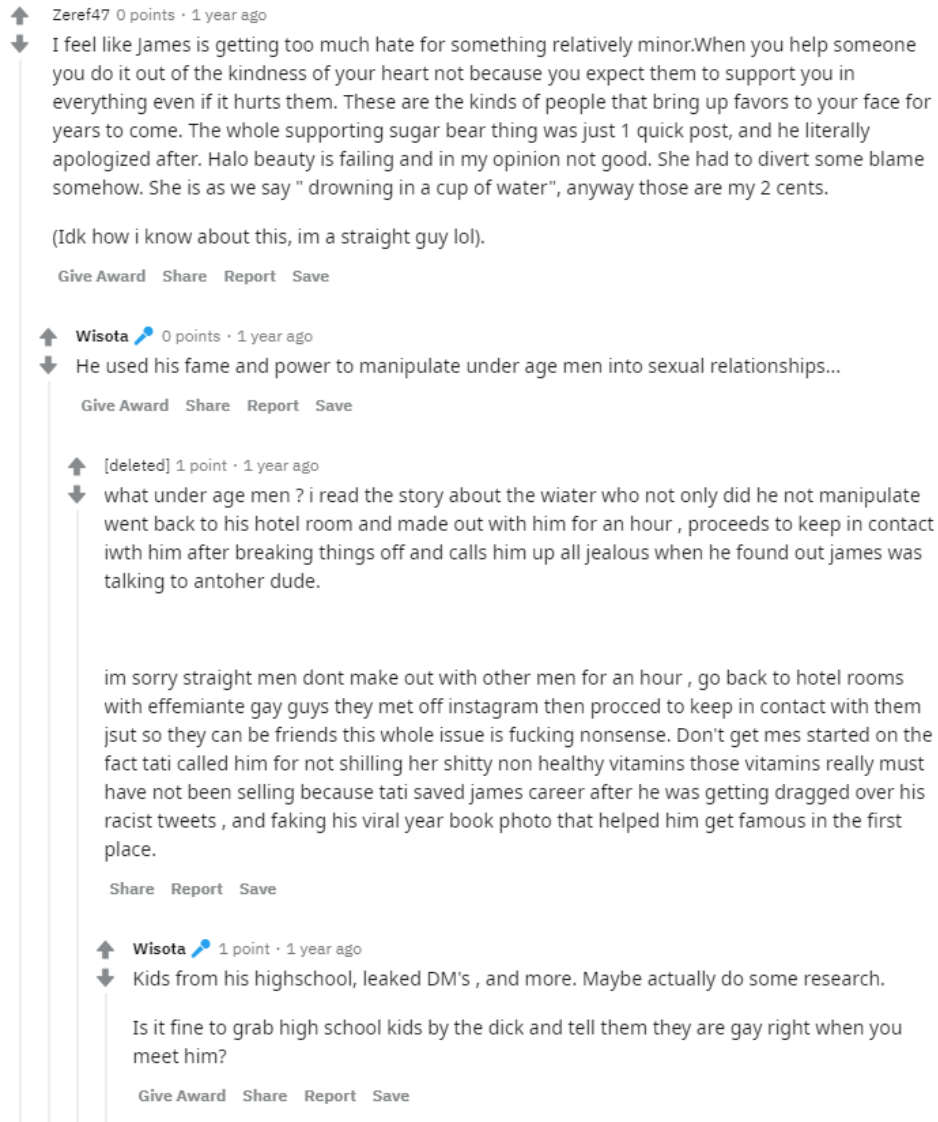


Figure 25: Reddit users arguing on a reddit thread in the r/videos subreddit (Zeref47 2019).

Immediately after shaming is mobilised, an equally immediate apology from the accused is demanded by the audience to, clarify the facts, assess the accused's genuine sincerity, and if the story is believable and entertaining (Moravec et al. 2019). The authenticity of an apology is important here (Lawson 2020), however, the immediacy of an apology does not necessarily correlate to its authenticity (Wynn 2020). Charles made two apologies. Charles' first apology, 'Tati' (Lauren 2019) hours after his call out, was met with disdain, and 2.8 million dislikes (Devlin 2019), being a truly horrific town square flogging spectacle. A few days later, he came out with another video, offering a systematic rebuttal of Westbrook's points while evidencing



this with receipts titled *No More Lies* (Charles 2019). The lack of emotion in Charles' response is important as he supports his claims with factual evidence being nuanced in apology video successes.

Charles refuted Westbrook's accusations which led to a renewed support for Charles, as he gained back some subscribers, and criticism towards Westbrook, not because the shaming had been effective but because the narrative had changed and became more entertaining for the micro-publics (Jerslev 2014). A hypothesis here pertains to the guilt of the micro-public as a collective behaviour of guilt from the crowd's psychology (Ronson 2015).

So, did shaming really work to change Charles' actions? In this circumstance, no, but it sure was entertaining as user-generated content in the form of memes and YouTube videos have circulated perpetually during the scandal and still garner attention years on (Figure 26). Shame backlash (Adkins 2019) towards Westbrook has affected her since this instance and will inform our next case study.

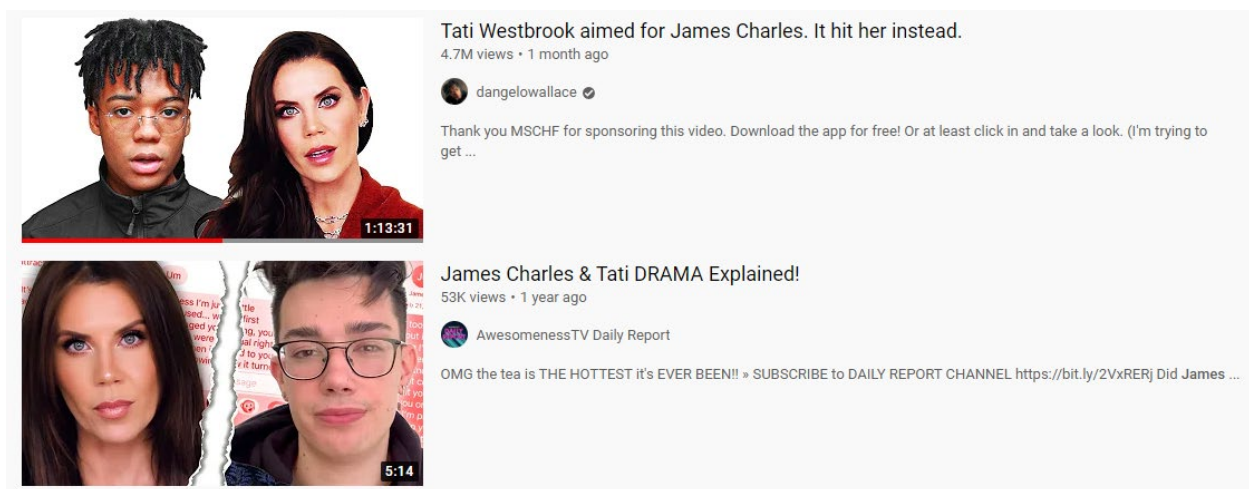


Figure 26: Comparison of YouTube videos from beginning of the scandal in May 2019 to October 2020 (Youtube 2020).

### 3.5 Crowding an Instant Influencer

The initial transformation of Charles and Westbrook's micro-publics and the overlapping 'crowd' was catalysed by Westbrook's call out. The collective behaviour circulated the scandal and mobilised shaming weaponising other beauty community micro-publics against Charles. Charles' mass unfollowing of 2.5 million, the size of Gambia's population of 2,438,211 million (worldometer 2020), is a collective behaviour that made history (SkyNews 2020). The 'crowd' of multiple micro-publics condemned Charles in unison, attempting to deplatform him. The power of this collective behaviour is due to multiple factors including: the large size of Charles' community; social media anonymity; the ability to quickly disseminate gossip; the spreadability of memes; the contagion of shaming behaviour; the collective identity of cancel culture; and the power of suggestion.

The mass collective thinking and hysteria in Charles' case begins through the crowd's collective behaviour of unsubscribing to Charles, a disastrous demonstration of groupthink (Mackay 1841). Ronson (2015, p. 77) describes the ability of this collective as:

*"remotely administered drone strikes, nobody needs to think about how ferocious our collective power might be. The snowflake never needs to feel responsible for the avalanche." - Ronson (2015, p. 77).*

The anonymity of individual crowd member's shaming as a snowflake quickly becomes an avalanche of public opinions. However, rather than snowing Charles under and ending his career immediately, they slowly suffocate him under the accusations as anonymity affords online shamers no repercussions. The "imaginal relationship" (Norlock 2017, p. 4) of the crowd causes them to shame Charles more viciously than justified as their anonymity and collective identity protects them from scrutiny. The anonymity of the individuals in the crowd accelerated Charles' shaming as behaviour became mirrored and transmitted (Gibbs 2004) through the rapid dissemination of information. The contagious demand for vilification in Charles' case took many forms of toxic behaviour (such as memefication discussed above) most notably in the

meta-data and metrics of his videos. Charles' videos were rated low as a form of YouTube's cultural currency and the story being told was entertaining enough for his millions of subscribers to keep on shaming, activating participation as remote collectives (Jenkins 2006; Burgess & Green 2018). The activity of Charles' subscribers is then important as the proportion that were active prior to this scandal did not align to the numbers that were active during and post scandal. For example, his video prior to his scandal, posted on May 8, 2019, has 55,000 comments (Charles 2019b) while his second apology video, posted on May 19, 2019, has over 403,000 comments (Charles 2019a).

The suspicion of his guilt was enough for the crowd to automatically chastise him as Westbrook's influential word, reputation, and persona exuded trust (Le Bon 1927). Charles' professional, presented persona, prior to his call out, was perceived to be pretentious, overconfident and snarky, which was echoed by individuals such as Star, Dawson and audience members, influencing his cancellation. Confirmation bias' influence in Charles' case is weaponised here to shame as an audience's only requirement to shame is to be entertained (Jerslev 2014; Nagle 2017). Once Charles shared his evidence and receipts, with his register of intimate persona being shared (Barbour 2015), the mobilisation stopped (Bayle & Rayner 2018). It was interesting how after facts were given, the crowd was willing to give up on their hard work of shaming Charles to go and shame Westbrook. Is it because they were bored or is it because the story was continuing and the entertainment that they were getting was a reciprocal of Charles' shaming? We will discuss more in the next case study.

### 3.6 Summary

Scandal, shaming and crowd psychology has identified the weaponised nature of scandal and gossip being amplified by the collective thought of social media micro-publics. The scandalisation of Charles demonstrates the power of suggestion in crowds and the rapid spread of collective behaviour and opinion through distributed networks. Charles' profuse shaming exemplifies the amplification of public shaming via memeification, hashtags and online discourse, which affected Charles' persona, brand, and vocation. This leads to the establishment of micro-publics leveraging the immediate dissemination of information via social media to instantly shift the suspicion of Charles' transgressive behaviour to evidence of his cancellation.

This case is the first example of a mass mobilisation against a micro-celebrity where Charles was almost shamed and deplatformed beyond repair. Until he posted his video with evidence. Charles' case of cancellation involves aspects of reformation but not in actively attempting to fix his transgressions, instead denying them with evidence. This has set the benchmark for future nuanced cases as will be discussed in other cases studies.

# Chapter 4

## Case Study 2: Tati Westbrook

### 4.1 Tati Westbrook

Tati Westbrook is an online beauty vlogger known for her glamorous makeup tutorials and honest beauty product reviews. In May 2019, she produced a video cancelling her friend and micro-celebrity, James Charles, in the hope to reform his transgressive behaviour. Westbrook became the figurehead of the biggest YouTube cancellation in history and reached a peak following of over 10.6 million subscribers (Weiss 2019), a rise of over 5 million pre *Bye Sister* (Lauren 2019). However, her weaponised cancellation caused what micro-publics call the 'UNO Reverse Card' of cancellations as Westbrook was a victim of "shame backlash" (Adkins 2019) after Charles evidenced his innocence. This resulted in serious repercussions including a slowly declining subscriber count and lack of micro-public support, a subdued form of cancel culture.

In this chapter, we will examine Tati Westbrook's scandal and shaming as a result of her falsely constructed narrative of Charles' behaviour. This chapter will be broken up into three sections with the process beginning with Westbrook's second video and Charles' second apology video, the scandalisation of Westbrook's performed persona as a result of shame backlash and the implications of micro-public and beauty community involvement.

This case differs greatly from Charles's case as micro-publics are given receipts to circulate and the option to be rational in their decision-making process and articulating their public opinion. This exemplifies how, although nuanced, cases of cancel culture can take on different forms.

### 4.2 Post Dramageddon 2.0: *The Uno Reverse Card*

Westbrook had support from her community and other micro-celebrities (such as Shane Dawson and Jeffree Star) during Charles' scandal (Figure 27). However, Westbrook responded

to this support and hate towards Charles with another video, *Why I Did It* (Awesomie 2019), detailing her discontent with the scandalisation of Charles. The production of this video was used to justify her actions and present her persona as saint-like (Wallace 2020a), until Charles refuted her claims in a 41-minute long video, *No More Lies* (Charles 2019c), which heavily criticised and proved that Westbrook’s claims of his predatory behaviour were fabricated.



Figure 27: Tweets from Shane Dawson and Jeffree Star supporting Westbrook in her claims (Wallace 2020a).

The shame backlash that Westbrook received for publicly humiliating her ‘YouTube Son’ destroyed her reputation as the unproblematic beauty guru (Wallace 2020a) and subsequently lost her over a million subscribers and eligibility for YouTube’s Diamond Creator Award.<sup>32</sup> Westbrook’s support network broke down as her scandal took the empty space of Charles’.

<sup>32</sup> An award given to YouTubers who hit over 10 million subscribers.

### 4.3 Scandalising The Vitamin Lady

Westbrook's scandal is a continuation of Charles' cancellation narrative. The initial event which caused this circulation was Westbrook's video, *Why I Did It* (Awesomie 2019) and was mobilised by Charles' video, *No More Lies* (Charles 2019c), as Charles rebuttals all the claims made by Westbrook. Charles' evidence driven circulation of information shifts the scandal's narrative and therefore the mobilisation of micro-publics (Rayner & Bayle 2018). Micro-publics scandalise Westbrook's 'warm' performed persona which Charles, with the help of his evidence and audience, slowly deconstructs and diminishes.

Charles and Westbrook have a self-proclaimed mother son relationship (Colbert 2019). Westbrook's video strategically positioned her performance as motherly, unproblematic and caring, veiling her call-out as a call-to-action for parents to censor what their children watch, indirectly calling Charles an irresponsible micro-celebrity (Awesomie 2019, 5:00). Westbrook calls for the "hate, abusive memes, and language" (Awesomie 2019, 1:35-1:50) to stop as her intention was to call-out Charles for his behaviour rather than the micro-publics to publicly shame and humiliate him, playing at her naivety of her power as a micro-celebrity. Westbrook socially navigates and controls this scandal with ease as her performed persona plays on the pathos and ethos of her surrounding micro-publics. However, Charles revealed, through the power of receipts, that Westbrook is not the perfect mother figure as she exaggerated the events which unfolded and shamed the 19-year-old.

The nefarious or problematic behaviour here is Westbrook's perceived dishonesty, greed, and lack of integrity as her performed persona is diminished and her reputation is destroyed. PewDiePie, who has more subscribers (and therefore influence) than Westbrook and Charles combined, suggests that Westbrook abused their power dynamic as "Tati is 37 years old, James Charles is still a teenager. For a mother figure to just completely drag this kid — no one has a problem with this?" (Safronova 2020). Westbrook's motherly persona is attacked here as Pewdiepie calls out her behaviour perpetuating a new narrative for micro-publics (Figure 28).

This narrative of Westbrook's cruelty and dishonesty shifted the perceptions of micro-publics, as a slew of sexist and ageist content (see Figures 29 & 30) was shot in her direction. This mobilisation via memes and public discourse smeared her concealer and persona, while showing what audiences thought was the woman behind the makeup. Pewdiepie's comment is the first of many comments which promotes this gendered string of insults to devalue her persona and encourages others to join in on the scandalising.



Figure 28: Tweet attacking Westbrook's age (FrostCa11 2019).





Figure 29: Twitter thread of micro-public infighting regarding Westbrook’s age (Itzzsandyy 2019).

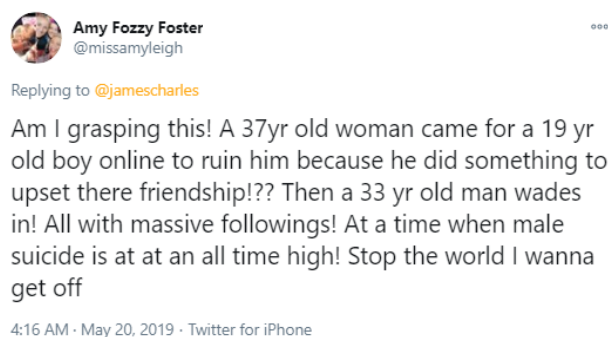


Figure 30: Tweet comparing Charles and Westbrook’s ages and situations (Foster 2019).

The publicly visible relationship that Charles and Westbrook share empowers scandal and gossip where the scandal's narrative surrounds their relationship fall out rather than their actions (De Backer 2005; Lam, Raphael & Weber 2018). Micro-publics invested in Westbrook and Charles' relationship had a possessive connection to each micro-celebrity (Barbas 2001) as the monetization of this parasocial relationship with fans allows publics to critique and comment on Charles and Westbrook as products (Barkow 1999). Charles leverages reputation gossip in a similar way to Westbrook as he utilises their connection to ensure his evidence and receipts are credible, flipping the narrative (Charles 2019b). This makes it difficult for audiences involved to form a unified public opinion or moral judgement regarding the scandal (Figure 31).

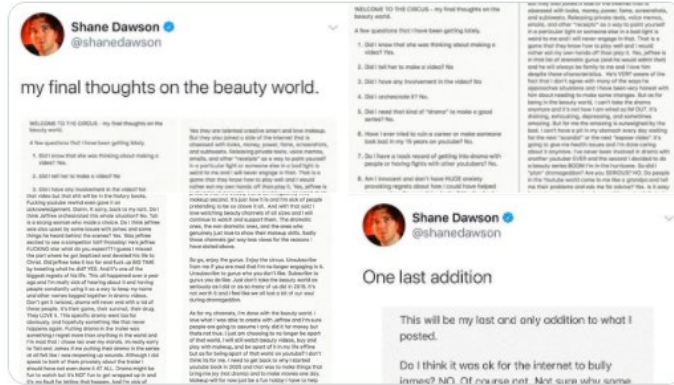


Figure 31: Tweet of confused micro-public members regarding Charles and Westbrook's feud (bloxburggeek 2019).

Charles' narrative encourages audiences to utilise the new information, in growing the dissemination, to repair his image, however, manifests in micro-publics reframing Westbrook as a villain who is jealous of Charles. Micro-celebrities, such as Star and Dawson, echo these claims (Figure 32) which attached their reputation and credibility resulting in a more believable narrative, solidifying the perception of Westbrook's villainous persona.



shane dawson RESPONDS to allegations that him and jeffree star planned the downfall of james charles last year. thoughts?



12:24 AM · Jun 22, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

135 Retweets 44 Quote Tweets 2.3K Likes

Figure 32: Deleted tweets from Shane Dawson with his thoughts on the beauty community blaming Westbrook for the cancellation of Charles. Appendix 1 for all discourse (shook\_yt 2020).

The swapping of archetypal roles in this narrative is advanced by Charles and Westbrook's performed apology videos as the interpretation of their actions change (Jerslev 2014). In *Why I Did It* (Awesomie 2019, 4:49), Westbrook is remorseful and emotional, however takes no accountability for her actions, what Wallace (2020a, 27:00) finds as a disingenuous and manipulative appeal to audience pathos. This type of video is what Wynn (2020) notes as problematic when apologising, resulting in the video's swift deletion. Whereas, Charles' video was laced with evidence and receipts refuting Westbrook's claims substantiating that 'Westbrook is jealous and disingenuous' where the dissemination shifts it to 'Westbrook cancelled Charles as she was jealous and wanted revenge as he sponsored a competitor'. Westbrook transformed from a hero/victim to a villain via Charles' produced narrative. This again supports the notion that apology videos should be systematic, evidenced and unemotional to be successful as Charles has demonstrated. It also shows the dramatisation of a scandal's production that causes the character assassination of micro-celebrities where

Westbrook's persona, similarly to Charles, was attacked rather than her actions (Freeman 1976; Wallace 2020a).

#### **4.4 Shaming the YouTube Mum**

Westbrook was scandalised as her performed persona was presented as an elegant, mother figure, however, her performed actions gave her micro-public the perception that she was disingenuous and jealous of Charles. The social norm of women being warm and motherly has been broken here Westbrook's surrounding micro-publics begin to publicly denounce her through sexist and ageist tweets (Wallace 2020a).

Westbrook mobilised scandal and shaming to socially control the actions of Charles, the micro-public have now mobilised the same factors in an attempt to socially control Westbrook and hold her accountable to her actions. Once Charles' innocence circulated across social media mass confusion surrounding his narrative resulted in disorganised chaos within the beauty community (Figure 33). Charles now had newfound support and Westbrook was now experiencing shame backlash (Adkins 2019).



Figure 33: Tweet of micro-public confusion regarding the multiple, circulating narratives (parisxcx 2019).

The aggressive redirection of shame towards Westbrook is what Ronson (2015) attributes to the guilt of shaming as audiences attempt to justify their shaming with more shaming. The cognitive dissonance that audiences employ to justify their contradictory behaviour (Ronson 2015) is an assertion of shame backlash where it becomes acceptable for micro-public's to shame Westbrook without feeling shame themselves as they are doing so for the betterment of the community (Nagle 2017; Adkins 2019). However, this perspective is utopian. Micro-publics did not actively seek to reintegratively shame Charles or Westbrook, rather, the micro-publics sought retribution for Charles' unjust shaming as a moral judgement to justify the creation of entertaining content to shame Westbrook (Jerslev 2014), as evidenced by the plethora of memes and videos scattered on social media (see Figures 34 & 35).



Figure 34: Example of tweet memeing and dragging Westbrook (lonesomelovers 2019).

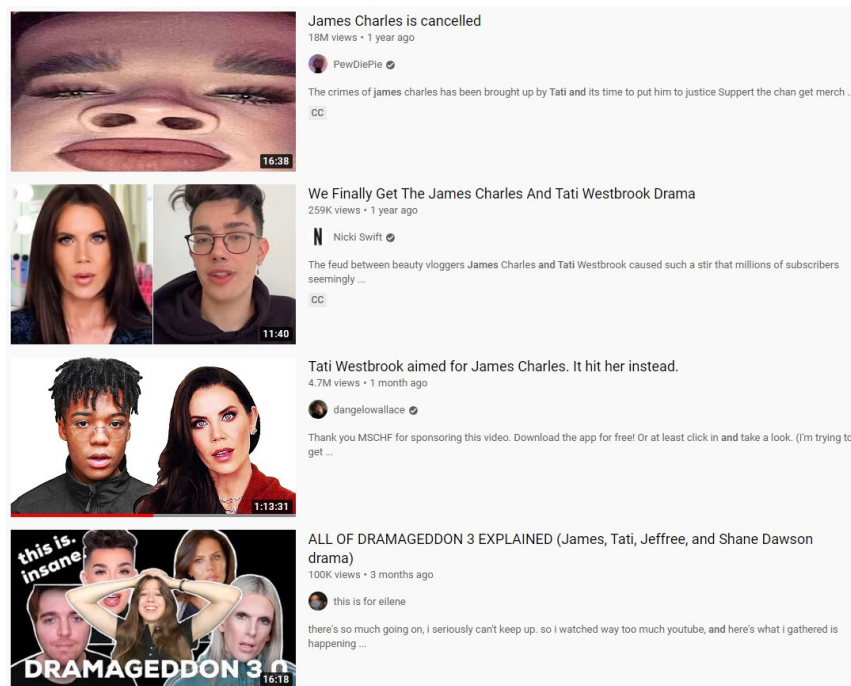


Figure 35: YouTube videos regarding the drama (Youtube 2020).

Collectively, the disintegrative shame backlash experienced by Westbrook becomes mobilised by micro-publics as a less aggressive cancellation shown via her slow bleeding subscriber loss (Figure 36).

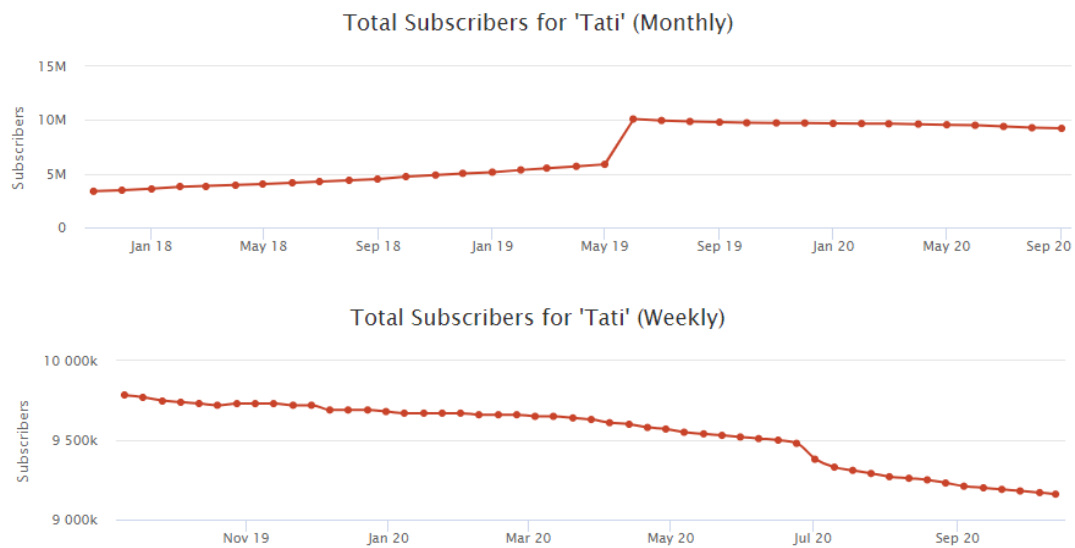


Figure 36: Westbrook’s Social Blade analytics (Social Blade 2020b).

Shame backlash as response to transgressions or bad behaviour normalises the public shaming of the individuals who have called-out problematic behaviour (Adkins 2019). The normalisation of Westbrook’s shaming is justified by audiences shaming as entertainment, rejecting imposed moralities of offline cultures that manifests in online cultures (Nagle 2017). Remote anonymity and amplified dissemination make moral reform for Westbrook impossible as distributed micro-publics weaponise gossip fueled online shaming, in the medium of memefication, to gain clout and cultural capital. The “more openly hateful culture” (Nagle 2017, p. 91) experienced by Westbrook occurs as audience members “lose themselves in the anonymous crowd” (Ronson 2015, p. 59) easily, facilitating the meme sharing and shame bandwagon. In this way, Westbrook’s circumstance challenges the egalitarian philosophy of reform and constructive public action (Jacquet 2015). Westbrook’s disintegrative shaming reaches a peak, where the social control that the micro-public exuded ensured that Westbrook was affected personally

and not objectively (Edelman 2017). Wallace (2020) chimes in here, noticing that audiences are 'dragging' Westbrook not for her actions but for her performed persona of an older woman concluding her actions are due to her senile age and thus shame her for it.

Westbrook has been affected both vocationally and mentally during her social media shaming as she lost support in subscribers and was mentally drained as evidenced by her YouTube break. Ronson (2015, p. 12) finds that shame is an "immensely powerful tool" where "constant shaming leads to a deadening of feeling" of the accused leading to their loss of identity (Adkins 2019). This also alludes to what Westbrook states in her future video, which will be discussed in chapter 5, *BREAKING MY SILENCE...* (Westbrook 2020), where Westbrook notes that she continues to worry regarding the implications of Charles' scandalisation (Westbrook 2020, 5:40-6:00). Public shaming here had an interesting effect on Westbrook, although the micro-public shamed disintergratively, there were reintegrative effects on Westbrook as she offered an apology to Charles.

#### **4.5 Crowding the Unproblematic Beauty Guru**

The shift in crowd psychology from shaming Charles to shaming Westbrook was catalysed by the mobilisation of Charles' evidence which circulated across many micro-publics (see Figures 37 & 38). The formation of this crowd also includes audiences from legacy media (Appendix 2).



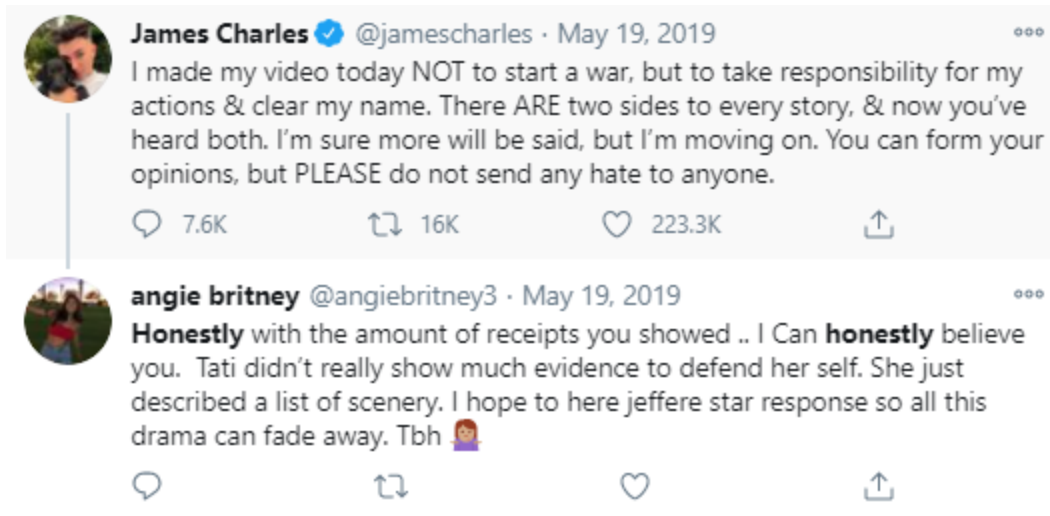


Figure 37: Reply to Charles' tweet after he released his rebuttal video (Charles 2019c)



Figure 38: Tweets from FaZe Banks, individual of the gaming community on YouTube, with his take on the drama (Banks 2019).

The shift in crowd targeting was amplified through social media, however the unity of the crowd was somewhat wavering. This resulted in a lack of mass transformation regarding Westbrook and Charles' micro publics as they were able to form rational, moral judgements with the evidence provided. These micro-publics were able to independently judge the two differing arguments where their initially mouldable nature becomes less malleable as the crowds personalities become less collective (Park 1982) creating an audience with attributes of

both a crowd and public (Lauren & Moller 2016). Although the majority of the crowd followed along with Charles' mobilisation, many remained with Westbrook regardless of Charles' evidence of Westbrook's exaggerated claims (Figure 39). The anonymous crowd becomes unified here in two distinct camps of with or against Westbrook and become difficult to reason with as information has already infected the crowd (Le Bon 1927). The contagious information of the prior narrative had infected a larger community populace due to the immediacy and size of its dissemination along with the crowds hunger for entertainment in wanting to believe Charles' scandal (Jerslerv 2014; Moravec et al. 2019). The resistance of some micro-publics in believing Charles' rebuttal becomes a result of the prior infection of information being solidified by confirmation bias and Westbrook's initial claims.



Figure 39: Tweet still supporting Westbrook's initial claims (fondlinson\_ 2019).

Westbrook's is slowly losing favour from her audience but remains engaged in YouTube's beauty community and their micro-publics which makes her cancellation much less dramatic than that of Charles.

## 4.6 Summary

The concepts explored in this case study has led me to believe that Westbrook's cancellation lacked the scale and drama of Charles', however, gave interesting insight into the concept of micro-public mobilised shame backlash. The scandal was a continuation of Charles' scandal and narrative which Westbrook perpetuated. Unfortunately, this caused Westbrook to experience backlash due to the evidence that Charles shared. The empowerment of Charles' reputation and persona through his evidence, as receipts, somewhat repaired his reputation as evidenced through his regaining of subscribers. This identifies that with a good apology video a reverse mobilisation of subscribers can occur.

The collective behaviour of moral panic in micro-publics in their interpretation of information identifies the lack of public consensus in these types of situations. What the micro-publics then mobilise is infighting where the accusations of the scandalised individual become synonymous with the individuals supporting their chosen side as shown via Twitter thread discourse. The confusion of the micro-publics regarding this cancellation exemplifies the different forms of cancel culture that Westbrook and Charles experienced.

# Chapter 5

## Case Study 3: Jeffree Star & Shane Dawson

### 5.1 Jeffree Star & Shane Dawson

The next instance of the Charles saga involves micro-celebrities Jeffree Star and Shane Dawson. Both individuals are long time YouTube personalities with over 21 million subscribers and over 17 million subscribers respectively and declining (see figures 40 & 41). Dawson is known for his documentary style series videos receiving Shorty and Streamy awards for his work *The Secret World of Jeffree Star & The Beautiful World of Jeffree Star* (Dawson 2019). Star owns Jeffree Star Cosmetics and shares his opinions on makeup brands, products and drama on his channel, being known for his controversial opinions.

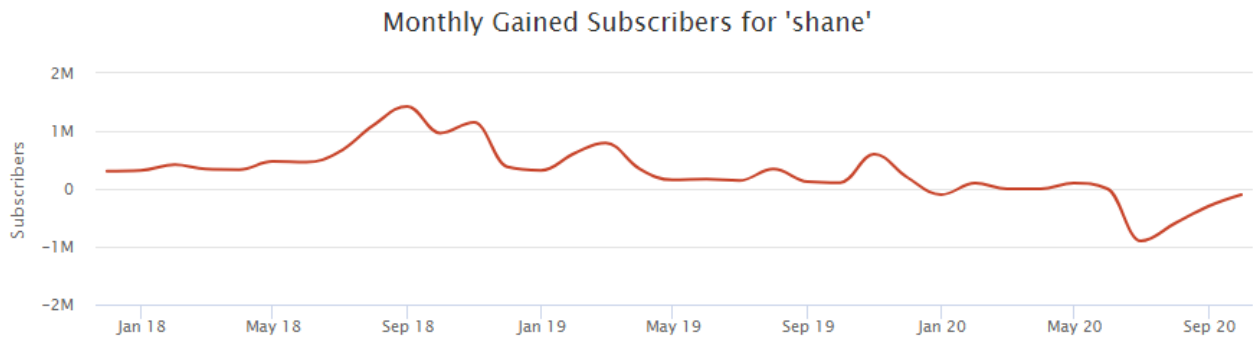


Figure 40: Dawson’s Social Blade analytics (Social Blade 2020c).

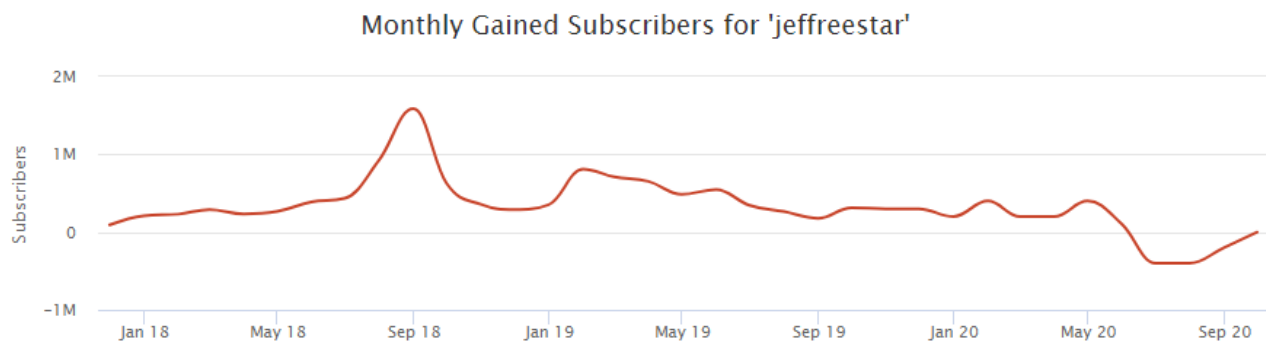


Figure 41: Star’s Social Blade analytics (Social Blade 2020d).

In June 2020, Star and Dawson (S&D) were called out by Tati Westbrook in her video, *BREAKING MY SILENCE...* (Westbrook 2020, 10:45) as she explained their involvement in the James Charles cancellation. The information in this video mobilised a collective action amongst micro-publics to scandalise, shame, memefy and investigate the actions of S&D's pasts to eventually cast their judgement. This resulted in Dawson's demonetisation, Star's scandalisation and Westbrook's persona memeification as all three again succumbed to cancel culture.

In this chapter, we will examine the circulation of scandal, guided by Westbrook, where micro-publics interrogated S&D's past to justify public shaming and mobilised collective action in anonymous, distributed crowds as a melding of the public mind (Gal et al. 2016, p. 1699). In this instance, the actions of both S&D will be discussed as catalysts for their cancellation, as micro-publics use this behaviour to justify their mob mentality, social cleansing and application of public shaming mechanisms to attempt to deplatform.

## 5.2 Dramageddon 3.0: *Welcome to the Circus*

The events following Westbrook and Charles' scandal resulted in severe shame backlash for Westbrook destroying her reputation, persona and therefore relevance in the beauty community making her vocation as a micro-celebrity vulnerable. To maintain her public identity, repair her reputation and regain her relevance, Westbrook released a video titled, *BREAKING MY SILENCE...* (Westbrook 2020), exposing the alleged actions of YouTubers Jeffree Star and Shane Dawson and their involvement in the production of Charles' scandal.

Prior to Westbrook's video release and during Westbrook's cancellation, S&D blamed the production of Charles' scandal on Westbrook (Beauty 2020). Initially, this is believable as the face of Charles' cancellation stemmed from Westbrook's call out. However, in *BREAKING MY SILENCE...* (Westbrook 2020, 11:30-12:55), Westbrook notes that she felt gaslit, manipulated and coerced by S&D into producing *Bye Sister*. *Bye Sister* (Parker Productions 2020) gained

traction from the circulation of the masses and influential individuals who wanted Charles deplatformed such as S&D (Figure 42). Westbrook suggests that S&D collectively conspired against Charles due to their jealousy as competitors of Charles brand as very shortly after the scandal surfaced, they released their new product the Conspiracy Palette (Westbrook 2020).



Figure 42: Deleted tweet of Star calling out Charles (Twersky 2019).<sup>33</sup>

Westbrook also detailed her concern of Star's behaviour within the community stating how Star was capable of destroying the entire beauty community via blackmailing other micro-celebrities. Westbrook (2020, 19:10-19:20) says "prepare to not cancel everyone and give them a chance", acknowledging the power of cancel culture.

*"And I think we need to be prepared, to understand that we need to forgive the people that he is holding hostage with veiled threats of exposure. We need to be prepared to forgive them. Otherwise, this won't stop." - Westbrook 2020, 18:20-19:30.*

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<sup>33</sup> More of Star's public discourse can be found via Twersky (2019).

Becoming another piece of the problematic puzzle, Westbrook intentionally prepares audiences for the scandalisation and shaming of others perpetuating a narrative of Star as a puppet master and therefore manipulator. In this instance, Westbrook is attempting to frame S&D as villains, herself a victim of manipulation and Charles a hero and she does this successfully (Butler & Drakeford 2005).

The beauty community was provoked by Westbrook's video to resurface S&D's digital footprints of problematic behaviour to justify their scandalisation and shaming. However, before Westbrook's video I would like to note that Dawson was going through a scandal of his own.

### **5.2.1 Before Dawson's call-out in the Dramageddon Saga**

On the 20th of June, Dawson posted a statement to Twitter titled 'Welcome to the Circus' detailing his thoughts on the beauty community including toxic beauty gurus, his involvement with Star and Charles' young, egocentric and power hungry persona being deserving of a 'slice of humble pie' (appendix 1). The beauty community found this hypocritical as Dawson's past has been far worse, turning the spotlight back on him as a form of shame backlash where now the circulation of Dawson's cancellation began (Adkins 2019). Twitter began mobilising this scandal through archiving Dawson's problematic content displaying his controversial racism, paedophilia and bestiality, thus he made an apology video.

Dawson's (2020) video *Taking Accountability*, addressed his racial slurs, blackface and predatory behaviour while also apologising to Charles, however, the outrage was still being mobilised in the micro-publics. The threads plastered across twitter (Figure 43) highlighted his bigoted behaviour and sparked mass outrage where the result was Dawson cancelling himself, deleting his problematic videos as if his digital footprint would be erased (Figure 44). Spoiler alert, it was not. His attempt to stop the circulation and mobilisation of this scandal (Bayle & Rayner 2018) further perpetuated his surrounding micro-publics to seek this information and archive his scandalous actions to keep him accountable. As the scandal got larger, traditional

celebrities began to chime in. On June 27th, 2020, the Smith family became involved through tweets after a video of Dawson implying sexual actions with a poster of Willow Smith at age 11 went viral (Appendix 3).



Figure 43: Twitter thread of Dawson’s problematic behaviour (misshemlock 2020). Full thread in Appendix 4.



Figure 44: Dawson’s immediate drop of views due to his deletion of YouTube videos (Social Blade 2020c).



Dawson's apology, perpetuates a narrative of normalising his actions by utilising performative contrition to shift his register of performed persona from professional to intimate (Barbour 2015) as he calls for sympathy without apologising for his behaviour. This allows Dawson to abstract the narrative of his actions by avoiding to acknowledge his nefarious behaviour and repetitively communicates his empathy and willingness to reform without actioning on these claims. Of course, Dawson's mask was beginning to slip, and Westbrook's video was the tipping point.

### 5.3 Scandalising a Conspiring Duo

The initial event of S&D's scandalisation begins with Westbrook's video production and dissemination, mobilising cancellation via the beauty community. Westbrook (2020, 19:10-20:20) notes her intention for calling out S&D is due to their 'manipulative' and dangerous behaviour regarding micro-celebrity blackmailing. With this scandal Westbrook is attempting to; repair her image, regain her relevance through scandalised attention (Mills et al. 2015; Crawford 2015) and/or scandalise for monetary gain or revenge.

There were no clear nefarious actions that were evidenced or proven by Westbrook (2020) in *BREAKING MY SILENCE*. As this video held weak claims, the audience needed something to justify why S&D were being scandalised beyond Westbrook's accusations. In Charles' case, a lack of evidence was not a problem in the initial cancellation as audiences used the accused problematic behaviour to circulate and mobilise the scandal, however, this mobilisation is different. Micro-publics needed to show that S&D were bad people, not just that their behaviour was bad, and with S&D's past content, this was not too hard to find. Dawson was already being scandalised during this time so the trashing of his persona was already circulating (Freeman 1976, pp. 49), Star received a similar interrogation of his digital footprint which circulated on Twitter (Figure 45; Narula 2020). The mobilisation of this scandal then becomes the circulation of S&D's past problematic behaviour which *is* considered nefarious by online micro-publics. The behaviour in question is transgressions of racism, predation, paedophilia and

bestiality. The constructed narrative which micro-publics then mobilised was that these micro-celebrities are consistent in their problematic behaviour. The critique of their digital footprints are leveraged to justify S&D's scandalisation by recontextualising their actions past, present and future. The reason Westbrook's digital footprint has not been targeted is simply because she has no existing problematic behaviour online (Wallace 2020a), thus she is not scandalised but does get memefied as discussed in section 5.5.



Figure 45: One of many tweets interrogating Star's digital footprint (The Rap Agenda 2020).

Westbrook's weaponisation of gossip for this scandal frames S&D as villains and herself as a victim attempting to create social homogeneity (Nussabaum 2004; Sanders & Tsay-Vogel,

2015). Wallace (2020a) finds Westbrook's appeal to her audience's pathos, through her tearfully curated narrative, emotionally manipulative which caused an immediate reaction from Dawson in his Instagram live working in Westbrook's favour. Dawson's constructed, presented and performed persona breaks down, shifting from kind to unhinged as he says "[Westbrook] is a fucking... I don't want to say mean things about people" (Appendix 5, 1:18) almost breaking character during his emotional rampage (Barbour 2015). This was one of the triggers for the mythological dramatisation of this narrative which eventuated into the mobilised scandal of S&D's systematic racism, bigotry, predatory behaviour and manipulation. Therefore, the dramatised narrative, empowered by Westbrook's reputation and S&D's pasts, shifts the narrative from S&D are 'manipulative' and 'jealous' to S&D are 'manipulative' with a motivation to cancel Charles, along with being transgressive towards social norms.

The social norms transgressed here differ for both S&D and as such their cases of shaming are both very different as their micro-celebrity status is different in worth, value and performed persona.

#### **5.4 Publicly Shaming the YouTube Veterans**

Westbrook's call to action is not intended to reform S&D but to hold them accountable for their actions and veiled her desire to protect her micro-public through social control as S&D failed to consistently adhere and conform to the social norms of their respective micro-publics. The nuance here is that although S&D have been shamed and scandalised in the past the effects of such shaming have been ineffective.

##### **5.4.1 Shaming a Documentarian**

The evidence that micro-publics used against Dawson contorted his carefully constructed persona into a villain, incapable of change due to the consistency of his transgressions. The social norms which Dawson transgressed here were actions of racism, paedophilia, bestiality

and manipulateness as repeated actions of systematic bigotry being exploited for what Dawson describes as comedic purposes.

Dawson’s content regarding Hey Millie (Figure 46) and Shanaynay (Figure 47) exemplifies his problematic actions towards children and people of colour (Iqbal 2020; Wallace 2020b). Dawson never addresses this content which allows for extensive critique and aggressive backlash in both social media and traditional media spheres, demonstrated by the Smith’s shaming of him.



Figure 46: Tweet regarding Dawson’s character Millie as an example of paedophilia, child abuse, and sexualisation towards minors (kipelodeon 2020).



Figure 47: Tweet regarding Dawson’s character Shanaynay as an example of racist depictions of black women (librahoneymoon 2020).

Dawson’s thousands of hours of problematic content were used to mobilise his shaming, his unacceptable behaviour became a benchmark for the conformity of surrounding micro-publics to ensure that others do not act in the same way in an application of social control (Nussbaum

2004). Audiences then cling to the actions of Dawson when shaming rather than his persona, being reintegrative in nature for the betterment of the community, but disintegrative in mobilisation as Dawson receives critique that does not help him but helps the community. This is demonstrated in the mass circulation, dissemination and archival of Dawson's problematic clips which mobilised the amplification of his shaming and memefication. The archival of Dawson's transgressions (appendix 4) is a relentless public flogging to Dawson's persona, the scars of this shaming on his digital footprint will most likely never be repaired.

The final nail in Dawson's conspiracy filled coffin was YouTube demonetising all three of his YouTube Channels (Tenbarga 2020), effectively de-commodifying his persona and the parasocial relationship between himself and his micro-public.

Arguably, Dawson's most successful series from the perspective of his micro-public was his collaborations with Star. It was from here that Dawson has been accused of image rehabilitation regarding white creators in a way to normalising systematic racism on YouTube as discussed by Wallace (2020) and Johnson (2020) which leads us to Star's case.

#### **5.4.2 Shaming a Star**

Star's behaviour is described by critical micro-publics as racist, bigoted and manipulative. Star attempts to actively reform his persona in his apology videos as he frames himself as being a victim of constructive shaming especially in Dawson's series. Star was presented by Dawson in *The Secret World of Jeffree Star* series (Dawson 2018) as reintegratively attempting to re-enter the beauty community after being profusely shamed. Thus, the digital footprint shaming was not as effective as it was on Dawson, as Star's actions and persona had been presented to the micro-publics as reformed. Star manipulated his perceived and performed persona to be approachable, misunderstood and extremely likable with the help of Dawson.

In this instance Star, again, neglects to take accountability for his racist remarks or Westbrook's accusations in *Doing What's Right* (Star 2020), however, he does apologise to Charles. Although this shaming appears to be reintegrative, as Star had no serious long-term repercussions and presents himself as reforming his persona and actions, he is being shamed disintegratively. Star's shaming is minimised in the light of his power, influence and money, this is to say that smaller micro-celebrities are forced to give up their vocation or leave platforms, like FEDmyster, as they do not have power or money to justify their actions.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it is difficult for the public to control his actions as the repercussions of shaming and scandal do not affect his business or current bank balance.

The amplification of Star's shaming isn't necessarily from the online micro-public but from Star scandalising others and sharing his problematic opinions with his audience perpetuating his shaming as he leans into other micro-celebrity drama. Star never takes true accountability for his problematic actions in his past apologies, he tends to flip flop on his allegiances, opinions and ideologies (Figure 48), which is the reason why he comes out with an apology video every year (Wallace 2020c; Johnson 2020). We come to a crossroads at the beginning of Star's shaming journey as to say, does shaming really work reintegratively for Star and the answer would be no. All other instances of Star's shaming results clearly outline that, in this instance, Star has not changed.

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<sup>34</sup> Federico Michael Gaytan, known as Fedmyster, was forcibly removed from the gaming content creation group OfflineTV as a response to his cancellation. He has since left YouTube and Twitch at his community's request (Liao 2020).



Figure 48: Timeline of Star's behaviour regarding other micro-celebrities (Wallace 2020d).

### 5.5 Crowding Problematic Individuals

The initial formation and transformation of the crowd was an amplified version of Dawson's already angry mob and those invested in the Charles Damedon saga. The mobilisation of these crowds in comparison to Charles differed slightly. Dawson has lost a million subscribers in a month whereas Charles lost this in a day. These mobilisations can be attributed to YouTube updating their subscriber count API, where live subscriber counts are disabled, and due to the complex narrative, that has been created by all the parties involved (Wallace 2020c). By YouTube removing these subscriber counts, contagious watch parties and mass un-followings were wiped from YouTube.<sup>35</sup>

Cancel culture's contagious nature amplified the archival of S&D's content, where the "democratisation of the tools of production" (Anderson 2008, p. 50) assisted in disseminating the narrative immediately as the anonymous crowds rallied together in solving collective action problems (Ullman-Margalit 1977). Micro-publics solved this problem by memefying each

<sup>35</sup> Subscriber watch parties were a common occurrence before YouTube made this change where Pewdiepie and T-Series were in constant competition with each other in subscriber counts (Alexander 2019)

individual involved in this scandal, even Westbrook, to exacerbate the public mind becoming unified (Figure 49).



Figure 49: Westbrook being memeified (Rennex 2020).

The micro-public's susceptibility to suggestion and suspicion evolved into fact finding and evidence based information gathering in an avid attempt to ensure both S&D were shamed effectively. Of course, this is also an entertaining narrative which further perpetuates other storylines to evolve with the power of suggestion (Jerslev 2014), such as Dawson's new boyfriend being PR damage control (Song 2020).

### 5.6 Gossip and Scandal promote building community and micro-publics

The power distance relationship between a micro-celebrity and their bleeding micro-publics, identifies that without the support of their community, a micro-celebrity is effectively destroyed. Discussing the notion mentioned in Chapter 2 that "gossip destroys community" (Baker 2005) then becomes problematic, rather, gossip facilitates the monetisation of cancel culture through the mobilisation of content that micro-celebrities and micro-publics circulate (Figure 50).





Figure 50: Micro-celebrities and their micro-publics discussing how cancel culture has created a new genre of YouTube content and videos which circulate the platform (Green 2019).

Jerslev (2014, p. 182) disagrees with Baker in that gossip “produces intimacy, emotionality and community”. In each nuanced case of this thesis the community of various micro-publics have not been destroyed, rather, these micro-publics gather together to shame, vilify and scandalise transgressors. When micro-celebrities are cancelled it is not their community that is destroyed, rather it is their reputation, image and ethos in the eyes of their community. Moreover, the social media manifests power distance relationships where although the micro-celebrity has a platform with followers, the audience has the power, as individual followers, to destroy them. The micro-celebrity is a vessel whereas the community will always exist in some form on the internet, assembled as many micro-publics that overlap (Moore, Barbour & Lee 2017).

These scandals did not damage the beauty community in the same way as it damaged Charles, Westbrook, Dawson and Star’s reputations. It strengthened the community as micro-publics that stood together against those who transgress their social norms. While gossip facilitates relationships and social homogeneity, it can have a disastrous effect on micro-celebrity reputation. These micro-celebrities are vulnerable and replaceable as the internet allows for

unlimited aggregation, production, curation and saturation of content from any individual in the world. The power of gossip and scandal then become not only about micro-celebrities having to navigate it but having to survive it through the process of cancel culture.

## 5.7 Summary

This case of cancel culture demonstrated the mobilisation of organised aggression towards Star and Dawson highlighting the evolving cultures of scandalising and shaming. These instances of controversial pasts are becoming more nuanced with established content creators, like Jenna Marbles. The relevance of digital footprints regarding micro-celebrity cancellations is becoming more prominent where the archival of information catalyses a perpetual shaming system. Micro-publics work together in this scenario to shame, scandalise and punish S&D for transgressing the social norms and seek to gain social control through cancel culture.

## Conclusion

Cancel culture is an emergent paradigm of supercharged scandalising and shaming perpetuated by the collective behaviour of online micro-publics. While the foundational application of this phenomenon has always existed through public boycott, public shaming, gossip magazines and scandals in the media, the scale of events via social media amplifies the effects of such boycotts on the shamer, shamed and audience. The parasocial, power-distance relationship between the micro-public and micro-celebrity is not similar to that of the unattainable traditional celebrity as micro-celebrities rely on public opinion and the monetization of their persona to remain relevant rather than the power of their talent or notoriety.

Through the examination of the four micro-celebrity personas and their experiences of cancel culture within overlapping micro-publics, it became clear that this emerging, supercharged call-out culture is encouraged and has evolved through online networks. The decentralised network model (Baran 1962) exemplifies the ability for individuals to remotely engage in cancel culture anonymously, viciously and in a unified public mind to publicly humiliate. In the cases of Charles, Westbrook, Dawson and Star, social media has given power to the masses with the ability to mobilise social movements for the liberation of minority groups and against transgressors within communities with devastating effects. This led me to my research question: Is a theoretical framework consisting of scandal, public shaming and crowd psychology effective in analysing nuanced instances of cancel culture? My answer in brief is yes, but it requires more extensive application and research to fully determine its potential and the benefit of the approach to understanding the nuances of cancel culture globally.

The initial cancellation was analysed through scandalisation and the circulation of information and mobilisation of action via social media networks. Building on persona studies foundations, it was found that micro-celebrity scandals form quickly and disseminate even faster where this immediate scandalisation becomes narrative driven rather than factual. The perpetuation of narratives saw each micro-celebrity succumb to a form of scandalisation where their actions and behaviour were judged as nefarious and problematic. These narratives, powered by gossip,

proved to be extremely important in audiences justifying their choices to publicly shame the accused transgressors. Gossip surrounding the micro-celebrities became high stakes regarding the social movements of the micro-publics due to the entertainment value of each narrative (Jerslev 2014).

The results of case studies echo Nagle (2016) in deducing that public shaming is much more vicious online as micro-publics shame on a larger, more toxic scale due to the Internet's anonymity and the ability to generate imaginal relationships (Norlock 2017) to form collective action against accused transgressors (Ullman-Margalit 1977). Social media platforms allow micro-publics to relentlessly shame micro-celebrities as online environments foster a more openly hateful culture of discourse (Nagle 2017) where public opinion becomes public consensus.

Micro-public consensus is a crowd psychology that when paired with anonymity becomes a powerful force in the cancellation of micro-celebrities over perceived transgressions. These dynamics of cancel culture are nuanced subsets of the larger emergent culture that we are seeing in online spaces as public boycott is achieved via memeification, antagonistic discourse and mob mentality being evident throughout the entirety of this thesis.

Attention to the combination of scandal, public shaming and crowd psychology reveals the shifting narratives of a cancellation, and assists the analysis of mobilised participation of micro-publics, which helps understand the effects of cancel culture. The perpetuation of cancel culture is encouraged by YouTube and Twitter as the platforms are destinations “for extreme content and their audiences” (Rogers 2020) no matter how destructive. The exploitation of cancel culture on these platforms to leverage the attention economy is a perspective worth exploring in the future. In reflection, the lack of attention to the field of fan studies limits this thesis in understanding individual fan behaviour, fan participation and their avid connection to celebrity actions where participatory cultures would have strengthened the analysis.

Cancel culture grants online audiences the power to collectively control micro-celebrity actions via the inherently volatile power-relationship they share. In this thesis, we have discussed examples of micro-celebrities losing their relevance in their surrounding micro-publics where they will scandalise, gossip and shame those around them to remain in the spotlight. I argue this weaponised form of cancel culture utilised by micro-celebrities has shown that not all the power lies in the hands of either the micro-celebrity or their micro-public. Although the micro-celebrity demands authority, credibility and ethos from their subscriber count, the demands of the micro-public are much more difficult to abide by as adherence to social norms requires a consistently professional performed persona (Barbour 2015). Based on this, I propose that audiences will continue to demand more from micro-celebrities in conforming to social norms as their presented persona becomes contextualised by their fans to the point of destruction. Regardless of what micro-publics, audiences and communities do to ensure conformity, it can be concluded that cancel culture is an incredibly powerful tool to hold individuals accountable and can become weaponised against those who transgress others or social norms.

Cancel culture allows online users to demand conformity and entertainment simultaneously. The balancing act of entertainment and transgression, perpetuated by YouTube as a platform, begins where maintaining relevance becomes about micro-celebrities slipping their performed mask just enough before they have scandalised, shamed and collectively cancelled themselves.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Shane Dawson twitter thread (misshemlock 2020).



Shane Dawson   
@shanedawson



my final thoughts on the beauty world.

WELCOME TO THE CIRCUS - my final thoughts on the beauty world.

A few questions that I have been getting lately.

1. Did I know that she was thinking about making a video? Yes.
2. Did I tell her to make a video? No
3. Did I have any involvement in the video? No
4. Did I orchestrate it? No.

Did I warn James about the video? No. Why? For reasons that I will never discuss. We've spoken privately on it and that's that. Do I think James is THE DEVIL? No. Do I think he was a young egocentric power hungry guru who needed to be served a slice of humble pie the size of the fucking Empire State Building? YES. Has he grown as a person since then? It really seems like it! And that's AMAZING. I'm truly happy if he's realized how his ego was effecting others which he did address in his no more lies video. Do I think Tati is a villain? No. I think tati was sick of being treated like shit by so many in the beauty world and finally snapped. And James did

Yes they are talented creative smart and love makeup. But they also joined a side of the internet that is obsessed with looks, money, power, fame, screenshots, and subtweets. Releasing private texts, voice memos, emails, and other "receipts" as a way to paint yourself in a particular light or someone else in a bad light is weird to me and I will never engage in that. That is a game that they know how to play well and I would rather eat my own hands off than play it. Yes, jeffree is in that list of dramatic gurus (and he would admit that) and he will always be family to me and I love him have stated above.

So go, enjoy the gurus. Enjoy the circus. Unsubscribe from me if you are mad that I'm no longer engaging in it. Unsubscribe to gurus who you don't like. Subscribe to gurus you do like. Just don't take the beauty world as seriously as I did or as so many of us did in 2019. It's not worth it and I feel like we all lost a bit of our soul during dramageddon.

As for my channels, I'm done with the beauty world. I love what I was able to create with Jeffree and I'm sure people are going to assume I only did it for money but

June 20, 2020 at 9:02 PM

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A few questions that I have been getting lately.

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3. Did I have any involvement in the video? No
4. Did I orchestrate it? No.
5. Did I need that kind of "drama" to make a good series? No.
6. Have I ever tried to ruin a career or make someone look bad in my 15 years on youtube? No.
7. Do I have a track record of getting into drama with people or having fights with other youtubers? No.
8. Am I innocent and don't have HUGE anxiety provoking regrets about how I could have helped everyone handle everything better? No. I've had a pit in my stomach since it all happened.

Now onto my final thoughts on the beauty world and my experience in it.

The conspiracy palette was one of the best experiences of my life. The series with jeffree changed my life and changed me as a person. It helped me be more confident and stand up for myself which I've always been bad at. So to honor the series and what I learned from it, I'm gonna say this:

The beauty gurus who are ALWAYS involved in scandals are ALL THE FUCKING SAME. They are all attention seeking game playing egocentric narcissistic vengeful two faced ticking time bombs ready to explode. And Im OVER it. **1**

Yes they are talented creative smart and love makeup. But they also joined a side of the internet that is obsessed with looks, money, power, fame, screenshots, and subtweets. Releasing private texts, voice memos, emails, and other "receipts" as a way to paint yourself in a particular light or someone else in a bad light is weird to me and I will never engage in that. That is a game that they know how to play well and I would rather eat my own hands off than play it. Yes, jeffree is in that list of dramatic gurus (and he would admit that) and he will always be family to me and I love him despite those characteristics. He's VERY aware of the fact that I don't agree with many of the ways he approaches situations and I have been very honest with him about needing to make some changes. But as for being in the beauty world, I can't take the drama anymore and it's not how I am wired so IM OUT. It's draining, exhausting, depressing, and sometimes amazing. But for me the amazing is outweighed by the bad. I can't have a pit in my stomach every day waiting for the next "scandal" or the next "expose video". It's going to give me health issues and I'm done caring about it anymore. I've never been involved in drama with another youtuber EVER and the second I decided to do a beauty series BOOM I'm in the hurricane. So did I "plan" dramageddon? Are you SERIOUS? NO. Do people in the Youtube world come to me like a grandpa and tell me their problems and ask me for advice? Yes. Is it easy for me to get wrapped up in something potentially toxic if I think someone I love is hurting or upset? Yes. It's an issue I need to work on and have been working on.

When she told me how upset she was in person I had the same reaction the world did when they saw her video. I felt awful for her and she seemed broken. So I tried to be there for her and be someone she could talk to about it. So was I shocked that she decided to make a video? No. Was I shocked that tati READ his ass for fucking FILTH? YES. I wasn't "acting". I didn't know it was gonna be that intense. Looking back, I still believe her on a lot of what she said and I believe she felt it was what she needed to do at the time. Does she regret it? Probably. Does it mean we should see james as some poor innocent sweet angel? No. Don't get it twisted. Him and jeffree have always been at the TOP of the dramatic guru list and i mean that with love. **2**

Did I warn James about the video? No. Why? For reasons that I will never discuss. We've spoken privately on it and that's that. Do I think James is THE DEVIL? No. Do I think he was a young egocentric power hungry guru who needed to be served a slice of humble pie the size of the fucking Empire State Building? YES. Has he grown as a person since then? It really seems like it! And that's AMAZING. I'm truly happy if he's realized how his ego was effecting others which he did address in his no more lies video. Do I think Tati is a villain? No. I think Tati was sick of being treated like shit by so many in the beauty world and finally snapped. And damn, did she fucking snap all the way off. Holy shit. She really said "FUCK IT" and beat her face for the gods and popped on that ring light and went full GAME OF THRONES on that shit. Say what you want about her or that video but that shit will be in the history books. Fucking youtube rewind even gave it an acknowledgement. Damn. K sorry, back to my rant. Do I think Jeffrey orchestrated this whole situation? No. Tati is a strong woman who made a choice. Do I think Jeffrey was also upset by some issues with James and some things he heard behind the scenes? Yes. Was Jeffrey excited to see a competitor fall? Probably! He's Jeffrey FUCKING star what do you expect?? I guess I missed the part where he got baptized and devoted his life to Christ. Did Jeffrey take it too far and fuck up BIG TIME by tweeting what he did? YES. And it's one of the biggest regrets of his life. This all happened over a year ago and I'm really sick of hearing about it and having people constantly using it as a way to keep my name and other names tagged together in drama videos. Don't get it twisted, drama will never end with a lot of these people. It's their game, their survival, their drug. They LOVE it. This specific drama went too far obviously, and hopefully something like that never happens again. Putting drama in the trailer was something I regret more than anything in the world and I'm mad that I chose tea over my morals. I'm really sorry to Tati and James if me putting their drama in the series at all felt like I was reopening up wounds. Although I did speak to both of them privately about the trailer I should have not even done it AT ALL. Drama might be fun to watch but it's NOT fun to get wrapped up in and it's my fault for letting that happen. And I'm sick of being trapped in the middle of it. Do I think this will be the LAST drama involving these people? Hahah no. No I don't. Do I want to be involved ever again? FUCK NO.

3

Remember to not expect these gurus to maintain some high moral code. And we shouldn't have some "they must be perfect or they're cancelled!" mentality. The reason you watch these people is because they ARE SO EXTRA. They are dramatic. And if you keep cancelling them and wanting them to go away THEN who will you talk about? You don't go to a circus to watch the hay on the ground. You go to watch the over-the-top performers who just want to be liked and want to do whatever they can to get your attention. If you don't want to feed into it, then don't. But before all the drama-free gurus pop off at me and say "well I'm not involved in drama and I'm perfect" GURL PLEASE. Your top viewed videos are probably "top makeup FAILS" and "Anti-hauls" with vomit emojis all over the screen. And that's OK. I LOVE those videos. But let's not pretend that the beauty world isn't negativity first, makeup second. It's just how it is and I'm sick of people pretending to be so above it all. And with that said I love watching beauty channels of all sizes and I will continue to watch and support them. The dramatic ones, the non dramatic ones, and the ones who genuinely just love to show their makeup skills. Sadly those channels get way less views for the reasons I have stated above.

So go, enjoy the gurus. Enjoy the circus. Unsubscribe from me if you are mad that I'm no longer engaging in it. Unsubscribe to gurus who you don't like. Subscribe to gurus you do like. Just don't take the beauty world as seriously as I did or as so many of us did in 2019. It's not worth it and I feel like we all lost a bit of our soul during dramageddon.

As for my channels, I'm done with the beauty world. I love what I was able to create with Jeffrey and I'm sure people are going to assume I only did it for money but that's not true. I just am choosing to no longer be apart of that world. I will still watch beauty videos, buy and play with makeup, and be apart of it in my life offline but as for being apart of that world on youtube? I don't think its for me. I need to get back to why I started youtube back in 2005 and that was to make things that bring me joy (not drama) and to make movies one day. Makeup will for now just be a fun hobby I have to help with my anxiety... like slime, or emotional eating. And that all sounds really good to me right now.

4



**Shane Dawson** ✓  
@shanedawson



## One last addition

This will be my last and only addition to what I posted.

Do I think it was ok for the internet to bully james? NO. Of course not. Not sure why some people would took that away from my post. I literally said it was "too far" and should "never happen again". I didn't want to get too dark in my post which is why I didn't go more in detail on that. We all know collectively that the internet was too mean to james. I didn't think I needed to reiterate that. Me saying he needed to be humbled isn't mean it's honest. And he said that in his own video. Should the humbling have happened OFF camera? Yes. Which I said. But I guess I didn't word that right. And I'm sorry if my humor regarding tati's video seemed like I was making light of the situation. Humor is how I deal with stuff especially when it involves the insanity of the beauty world.

K that's it. leaving twitter for a few months. It's bad for my brain. I feel good in my heart about what I said and that's all I can do. Sorry it wasn't the tea people wanted but I'm officially done with tea.

## Appendix 2: Google Search of Charles and Westbrook Legacy Media Publications

filmdaily.co › news › james-charles-and-tati-westbrook ▼

### James Charles and Tati Westbrook drama: All the tea being ...

Jun 25, 2020 — **Tati Westbrook and James Charles** have been shocking the beauty side of YouTube with **drama** for over a year now. The two iconic beauty ...

www.thecut.com › 2019/05 › what-to-know-about-the-ja...

### What to Know About the James Charles and Tati Westbrook ...

May 17, 2019 — How did the **James Charles–Tati Westbrook** feud begin? The **drama** between Tati and James began on April 22 while James was at Coachella, ...

www.capitalfm.com › news › james-charles-tweet-tati-w... ▼

### James Charles Breaks Silence Over Tati Westbrook Apology ...

Jul 6, 2020 — **James Charles** has finally addressed **Tati Westbrook's** 40 minute YouTube ... content, but has taken a week off after the fresh wave of **drama**.

www.buzzfeed.com › benhenry › james-charles-reveals... ▼

### James Charles Opens Up About Tati Westbrook Drama

Nov 28, 2019 — **James Charles** Revealed What Went On Behind The Scenes Of That **Tati Westbrook Drama** For The First Time. "What that statement implies is ...

www.eonline.com › news › james-charles-vs-tati-westbr... ▼

### James Charles vs. Tati Westbrook 1 Year Later: Retracing All ...

May 10, 2020 — **James Charles** vs. **Tati Westbrook** One Year Later: Retracing the **Drama** & Where They Stand Today. This time last year, two of the biggest ...

www.vox.com › james-charles-tati-westbrook-feud-drama...

### James Charles and Tati Westbrook: the beauty YouTuber drama

**Tati Westbrook and James Charles** are two of the biggest names in YouTube's beauty community. But the ...

May 18, 2019 · Uploaded by Tati

Appendix 3: Smith's discourse and Dawson's problematic content.

 **DESTIN TROYCE**  
@TROYCETV

Video of Shane Dawson resurfaces of him playfully masturbating to willow smith poster in 2010 🤔🤮



0:02 1.9M views

12:01 PM · Jun 27, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

**463** Retweets **388** Quote Tweets **2.2K** Likes

(TROYCETV, 2020)



**Jaden** ✓  
@jaden



SHANE DAWSON I AM DISGUSTED BY YOU. YOU SEXUALIZING AN 11 YEAR OLD GIRL WHO HAPPENS TO BE MY SISTER!!!!!! IS THE FURTHEST THING FROM FUNNY AND NOT OKAY IN THE SLIGHTEST BIT.

4:19 PM · Jun 27, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

**183K** Retweets and comments **1.1M** Likes



**Jada Pinkett Smith** ✓ @jadapsmith · Jun 28  
To Shane Dawson ... I'm done with the excuses.



6.1K

90.2K

747.5K



(Wallace 2020b).



## Appendix 4: Dawson's problematic behaviour twitter thread.

 **small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26 ⋮

first it should be noted that he was in his MID-TWENTIES in these clips. he was a full adult man and needs to be held accountable as one.

here we have a young teenager fangirling over favorite youtuber. he immediately abuses that power dynamic to do this:



0:20 1.8M views 0:10 / 0:30 🔊 ↗

💬 245 ↻ 2.1K ❤️ 23.8K ↗

[Show replies](#)

 **small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26 ⋮

this second clip is already very widespread, but i'll include it anyways for those who have yet to see. on a podcast, he describes a 6-year-old he met as sexy and admits to googling CP



From **baby soup**

💬 585 ↻ 8.2K ❤️ 28.6K ↗



**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26



regardless of how times change, talking about r\*ping kids is not funny

From SaucyS

0:06 1.6M views

Tweet your reply

From i want a nap

112 2K 17.4K

Show replies



**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26



this behavior is unacceptable. "times were different" or "it was just for shock value" is NOT a valid excuse.

this SHOULD NOT be dismissed as "cancel culture" or "drama."

this is video evidence of a grown man showing sexual, predatory behavior towards young girls.

41 2.3K 32.7K

Show replies



**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26

...

pedophile or not, these are girls who are REAL and have to see him go on to be one of the most famous YouTubers.

if he was confident enough to do these things online for his amusement, what do you think he said to kids behind closed doors to be "funny"?

16 959 19.7K

[Show replies](#)



**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26

...

he loves to talk about how gross he is for wearing 1 shirt and having ass infections or whatever the fuck, but in reality its everything in this thread that makes him a gross person. ill be dropping any clips i think demonstrate this as i continue my rant



From **ava**

101 1.2K 14.5K

[Show replies](#)



**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26



huh... if he sees dogs and babies as the same what does that mean considering we've just seen what he does with dogs?



From **AllegedlyLevi**

144 1.7K 14.1K

Show replies



**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26



ableism! so funny haha!



From **streBBed**

31 410 8.4K



**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26

...

funny that practically all the people "forgiving" shane dawson for his past racism are white

it was never even targeted towards you in the first place! its not your place to forgive shane for hate that doesnt affect you and tell POC to get over it.



From **miyuh' loves saihaj** | VIC DAY

98 2.3K 19.2K

Show replies



**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26

...

its like he made a bingo card of all the problematic things he could say and managed to fill the whole thing up



From **timothée**

24 625 10.7K

**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26  
and despite all that... i know there will be people who say "he's changed so much he's such a good person now. people can grow from their mistakes"  
  
let me just clarify, the person you are so adamantly defending is the multimillionaire who pretends to be poor as an aesthetic?

30 1.1K 22.4K

Show replies

**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26  
a man who uses his massive platform to host problematic white people like Jake Paul, Tana Mongeau, and Jeffree Star and try to get the public to "forgive" them for being shitty people? that's literally a summary of 95% of his videos these past years.

24 1.1K 20.8K

Show replies

**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26  
yet ya'll are so determined that he's changed so drastically that we should forgive him for everything above! because he totally uses his platform to host POC voices right?  
  
or maybe big-hearted Dawson only acts like an "empath" when its convenient and will make him likeable?

11 509 12.4K

Show replies

**small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26  
despite all we now know about shane dawson, there will STILL be some people who will say "it's just jokes, he'd never be sexual towards an actual child in front of him."  
  
well, i saved the worst for last. shane dawson sexually exploiting a real-life child:



201 3K 15.3K

Show replies

 **small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26 ⋮  
shane dawson acting extremely inappropriately to a 12 year-old child:



53 1.3K 10.7K

Show replies

 **small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26 ⋮  
him and his ex having an explicit conversation with a 12 year old without her guardian's consent and asking incredibly creepy questions.  
[twitter.com/KRMGDN/status/...](https://twitter.com/KRMGDN/status/...)

115 1.2K 10.4K

Show replies

 **small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26 ⋮  
if you got to the end im surprised, thanks for looking through this compilation and i hope you understand that supporting a person like this is sick.

feel free to add anything i may have missed. spread the word, this man should not have a platform.

33 435 14.3K

Show replies

 **small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 26 ⋮  
him and his ex having an explicit conversation with a 12 year old without her guardian's consent and asking incredibly creepy questions.  
[twitter.com/KRMGDN/status/...](https://twitter.com/KRMGDN/status/...)  
💬 115 🔄 1.2K ❤️ 10.4K 📤

[Show replies](#)

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feel free to add anything i may have missed. spread the word, this man should not have a platform.  
💬 33 🔄 435 ❤️ 14.3K 📤


[Show replies](#)

 **small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 27 ⋮  
he claims he has been so regretful for so long about his racist and pedophilic actions yet only apologizes AFTER the contents of this thread go viral?  
  
its obvious he used jenna marbles' apology to frame his own since he saw how well it went down.  
  
you won't be forgiven shane.



💬 37 🔄 970 ❤️ 15.2K 📤

[Show replies](#)

 **small cat** @misshemlock · Jun 27 ⋮  
he vaguely mentions his 12y/o cousin as an afterthought as if it wasnt him being a LITERAL PREDATOR. theres ignorant jokes and then theres ASKING A LITTLE GIRL FOR A LAPDANCE.  
  
i dont care if you think he's changed. he can ask for forgiveness for words, but actions cant be undone  
💬 13 🔄 543 ❤️ 11.8K 📤

[Show thread by small cat](#)



## Appendix 5: Shane Dawson Instagram live (w 2020).



[\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHj6-CJ-ZC4\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHj6-CJ-ZC4)