The association between political identity centrality and cancelling proclivity

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ABSTRACT

Augmented by the rise of social media, contemporary culture has increasingly witnessed the phenomenon of "cancellation" – that is, a brand's swift and public fall from grace, catalyzed through digital platforms like Twitter and, in turn, traditional media. We are the first to examine individual difference predictors of cancelling proclivity. We explore the relationship between a novel individual difference, political identity centrality (the extent to which one's political identity [e.g., liberal, conservative] is central to self-concept), and individuals' propensity to seek retribution from a moral transgressor online (i.e., their "cancelling proclivity"). Additionally, we test the mediating roles of individual differences in moral exporting (actively promoting and supporting the proliferation of one's own moral beliefs), social vigilantism (the tendency of individuals to impress and propagate their "superior" beliefs onto "ignorant" others), virtue signaling (signaling one's virtuousness for public respect or admiration), and self-efficacy on the relationship between political identity centrality and cancelling proclivity. Using an online panel ($n = 459$), we uncover that political identity centrality is significantly and positively associated with cancelling proclivity operationalized as reaction strength to transgressions and calling-out (calling attention to a transgression) and piling-on a transgressor (mass public prolific addition of comments about the transgression and transgressor). Interestingly while both virtue signaling and social vigilantism were found to be significant mediators, they played distinct roles wherein virtue signaling mediates the relationship for strength of reaction to transgressions, and social vigilantism mediates the relationship for calling-out and piling-on. The current research illustrates that some individual behavior may be less about what someone believes and rather the importance of those beliefs to one's identity – a valuable insight not previously identified in the literature. We discuss theoretical contributions, implications for future research, and applied implications (e. g., how brands might recover from cancellations).

1. Introduction

Recently, Anheuser-Busch experienced significant backlash following paid promotions between Bud Light and trans-actress Dylan Mulvaney on social media. The criticism was broad, including figures such as Donald Trump, Caitlyn Jenner, and Kid Rock speaking out (Smith, 2023). The company lost nearly $5 billion in market cap in less than two weeks. In effect, they were "cancelled." A "cancellation" happens when the public calls out a brand with power or influence for some moral transgression in order to damage their reputation, reduce their power, and encourage the public withdraw their support (Goldsborough, 2020; Saldanha et al., 2022). While the motivations underlying cancelling have likely always existed, new tools and circumstances (social media, hashtags, algorithms, etc.) have enabled this new phenomenon. Although debate remains on whether the punishment fits the "crime" in such situations, losses experienced by cancelled individuals (Koblin, 2021; Statista, n.d.) and brands (Barraza, 2021) can be devastating. When discussing transgressors subject to cancellation, we

broadly use the term "brand" as both public figures (e.g., athletes, politicians, religious figures) and firms (e.g., Nike, Lay's) constitute brands (Thomson, 2006).

This phenomenon is not merely a fascinating social development but also substantive for researchers in various fields and largely unexamined by empirical research. Building literature in this area is valuable as scholars speculate that cancel culture may have unpredictable and detrimental effects on society (Bouvier, 2020) including on constructive public discourse and political polarization. By better understanding why people engage in cancelling, we can begin to understand the broader implications of these behaviors. Thus, the study we present examining individual difference factors contributes a consequential and necessary foundation for future work. In particular, we propose that political identity centrality–the extent to which one's political identity (e.g., as a "liberal" or a "conservative") is central to self-concept–will increase cancelling proclivity (the likelihood that an individual will engage in cancelling behaviors). Political identity centrality is independent of how radical one's beliefs might be (i.e., "extremism"). Rather, it reflects how dependent one's identity is on their political beliefs. Identity is likely to be highly relevant for cancelling proclivity as social media is an increasingly popular tool to build and express identity (O'Reilly et al., 2022). Thus, political identity centrality is of theoretical value as it is not dependent on any particular ideology and can assist with evolving the political ideology literature beyond its historically narrow focus.

Notably, cancelling behavior is commonly driven by a conflict of morals (Norris, 2023), and the public nature of cancelling behaviors implicates impression management may also be at play. Thus, cancelling behavior may occur indirectly through a desire to correct moral wrongdoing, intrinsic needs to shape and express one's identity to others, or a combination. Theory suggests that individuals with an identity strongly tied to a political ideology would be more motivated to apply their morals onto others (e.g., through disparagement; Enock et al., 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Mason, 2018) or signal those morals to augment their identity (Aquino et al., 2009; O'Reilly et al., 2022). Whereas prior work has examined specific instances of cancelling (Bouvier, 2020; Ng, 2020), empirical research on its psychological antecedents is sparse (Saldanha et al., 2022); thus, foundational work is needed for initial insights into who cancels and why. We address this need with novel, nuanced findings and facilitate future work exploring these behaviors' broader implications. In the following pages, we first present a brief overview of cancelling, develop the construct of political identity centrality, and propose novel mediators. We then present a large survey testing the new construct and mediated pathways. In so doing, we make a pioneering contribution to understanding a pervasive phenomenon, with implications for both research and practice.

1.1. Cancelling

Cancelling is an attempt by individuals to leverage power and punish brands who transgress against perceived moral and social norms (such as making racist remarks, behaving unpatriotically, or supporting a controversial figure; Goldsborough, 2020; Saldanha et al., 2022). Cancellations generally share a similar pattern (Cook et al., 2021; Saldanha et al., 2022). Mesler, Howie, et al. (2022) outline a series of stages: (1) a transgression occurs that the person or brand was associated with, the wrongdoing may have been directly performed by the figure (recently or in the distant past) or by an associate to the figure; (2) a public call-out for retribution publicly identifies the figure (and their transgression) and invites others to join the conversation and amplify visibility; (3) Moral catastrophizing takes place, attributing the figure in a binary moral aspect. (i.e., good vs. bad); (4) individuals pile-on to join the movement and express their demands for action; (5) a fall-out occurs where the figure becomes publicly identified predominately by their transgression and negative personal consequences are experienced; (6) a potential resolution occurs, in which the figure loses status and experiences negative personal consequences (such as losing a job or experiencing a

boycott) to satisfy those engaging in cancelling behaviors. Individuals may participate in one or more stages of this process. It has been proposed that through these actions, individuals may achieve various benefits (Mesler, Howie, et al., 2022). These benefits could include reducing dissonance caused by the transgression, experiencing a sense of power over the target, acting in alignment with a core identity, confirming in-group identity, demonstrating competencies or expertise on a topic, and presenting oneself as a moral person (Mesler, Howie, et al., 2022). One group or set of beliefs that individuals have been known to act in accordance with is their political beliefs.

1.2. Political orientation and political identity centrality

Political ideology is shaped by how individuals think society ought to operate, founded on underlying moral values (Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2009; see also Graham et al., 2009; Kivikangas et al., 2021). While popular debate persists about whether liberals or conservatives are more prone to cancelling, empirical research on political orientation similarly offers puzzling, contradictory predictions about the relationship between political orientation and proclivity to cancel (Bhattacharjee et al., 2015; Cook et al., 2021; Jost et al., 2017; Kaufmann, 2022). For example, work by Bhattacharjee et al. (2015) suggests *conservatives* might "cancel" more. The studies revealed that when a public figure committed a moral transgression, *liberals* were more likely continue supporting the figure through moral reasoning strategies. In contrast, conservatives tended to withdraw their support in response to a moral transgression. Jost et al. (2017) present conflicting behavior by liberals in their study of boycotts, a tool often used in cancellations. Liberal consumers were more inclined to boycott when they disagreed with a corporate political stance as they feel more comfortable challenging corporations, due to their weaker system justification beliefs. In a separate project by Jung et al. (2017) conservatives' *stronger* system justification beliefs made them less likely to complain or dispute an issue with a company. Lastly, conservatives are more likely to experience customer satisfaction due to higher beliefs in their own free will (Fernandes et al., 2022). Thus, while it is evident that political ideology is at play in the manifestation and expression of dissatisfaction, political orientation itself may not be the most useful predictor. Considering this, we propose political identity centrality as an alternative.

Individuals possess multiple identities that exist in a hierarchy relative to a "core definition of self" (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 25). Thus, identity centrality reflects how prominent a single identity is within the hierarchy; for example, a person who strongly characterizes their "self" as a Buffalo Bills fan or an academic would have identity centrality for that identity. Identities can be situationally provoked, and more central identities possess a higher baseline salience (Mesler, Simpson, et al., 2022). Similarly, Aquino et al. (2009) find that the more central an identity is, the easier it is to activate and, consequently, the greater its potential to influence behavior. Thus, as an identity becomes more central, an individual will be more inclined to (1) act on the beliefs associated with that identity, (2) engage in behaviors to reinforce that identity, and (3) draw less on other identities like gender, race, or occupation (Aquino et al., 2009).

We propose that the significance individuals attach to their political affiliation in defining themselves (that is, their political identity centrality; Bai, 2020; Sellers et al., 1998; Settles, 2004) will heighten their proclivity to cancel brands for actions misaligned with these views. When individuals encounter a perceived infraction, their political identity centrality should determine how much attention is devoted to the situation and how much dissonance they experience (Aquino et al., 2009). For example, research on identification notes the importance of supporting in-groups and disparaging out-groups, which holds both for identities broadly (Enock et al., 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and political identity specifically (Mason, 2018). Notably, a study by O'Reilly et al. (2022) finds online sharing to be an effective tool for individuals to signal group membership – an outcome of particular value to those with

a firmly held identity. As cancelling offers a means to disparage and demote others who contravene one's beliefs, and also serves to signal group membership and elements of one's own identity, we argue that political identity centrality will be positively associated with cancelling proclivity.

1.3. Individual differences mediating cancelling proclivity

Those whose identity is strongly tied to their political ideology, composed of various values and beliefs, may hold a more "strict definition of morality that is unwavering and without compromise" (Peterson et al., 2009, p. 210). Cancellations typically arise due to perceived moral wrongdoing from a public figure (Norris, 2023), suggesting morality and moral value propagation as a possible driver. Additionally, engaging in cancellation behaviors is highly public, generally on social media platforms, which may implicate impression management as a motivation. Finally, the belief that one has the ability to achieve their morality-related goals may also influence individual responses to moral transgressions. We thus propose that individual differences in morality-related, self-expression-related, and self-efficacy-related motives will mediate the effect of political identity centrality on cancelling proclivity. We investigate moral exporting (actively promoting and supporting the proliferation of one's own moral beliefs), social vigilantism (the tendency of individuals to impress and propagate their "superior" beliefs onto "ignorant" others), virtue signaling (signaling one's virtuousness for public respect or admiration), and self-efficacy (one's belief in their ability to achieve their goals) as each tap into a different type of motivation that might be satisfied through cancelling.

Moral exporting is the willingness to actively promote and support the proliferation of one's moral beliefs, introducing a strong action-orientated component to such beliefs (Peterson et al., 2009). Social vigilantism is an enduring individual difference reflecting the tendency of individuals to impress and propagate their "superior" beliefs onto "ignorant" others (Saucier & Webster, 2009).We propose that when that morality is violated, individuals higher on political identity centrality will seek to externally direct their morals and values through moral exporting (i.e., to proliferate their own beliefs) and/or social vigilantism (i.e., to impress their beliefs upon ignorant others), thus heightening their cancelling proclivity. This would also be in line research highlighting that consumers seek to disparage outgroups and enhance ingroups particularly when key identities are salient (Enock et al., 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Viewed from a different perspective, individuals may also (or alternatively) seek to externally signal their morals in hopes that others will view them as virtuous and also indicate a group membership core to their identity. Virtue signaling is "publicly signaling one's values or virtues in a grandiose way to garner attention and admiration" (Grubbs et al., 2019, p. 5). While group-membership alone can be an effective tool to increase self-esteem (Turner et al., 1987), more overtly asserting ones individual or group moral superiority would further these benefits to the self (Hewstone et al., 2002). Individuals who are highly attached to their ideological identity would be likely be motivated for others to view them as virtuous and in-line with their in-group.

Lastly, self-efficacy is "one's belief in one's overall competence to effect requisite performances across a wide variety of achievement situations" (Eden, 2001, p. 75). Individuals whose political identity holds greater centrality in their self-concept may experience increased self-efficacy in matters related to that identity. As a result, this heightened self-efficacy may increase their inclination to engage in cancelling behavior. Table 1 presents the comprehensive rationale for the mediations.

1.4. Aims and summary

In this study, we examine whether political identity centrality is

Table 1
Rationale for mediators.

Mediator	Rationale
Moral exporting	Considering individuals higher in political identity centrality are more likely to possess unitary political preferences, they may hold a more "strict definition of morality that is unwavering and without compromise" (Peterson et al., 2009, p. 210). Thus, they may be motivated to use moral exporting to cope with uncertainty. By actively promoting and supporting the proliferation of one's own moral beliefs, one can eliminate the dissonance induced by transgression. Since individuals with higher moral exporting will be less likely to accept moral diversity, they may be less tolerant of transgressions. More importantly, high moral exporting may "introduce a strong action-oriented component to their beliefs" (Peterson et al., 2009), increasing cancelling proclivity.
Social vigilantism	Individuals higher in political identity centrality are motivated to solidify their central identity and consider their political preferences more prominent than others (Bai, 2020). Thus, they may be more likely to derive counterarguments when faced with transgressions. That is, through counterarguing, they can both "maintain and disseminate their own superior attitudes and beliefs" (Saucier & Webster, 2009, p. 20), which is the manifestation of higher social vigilantism. Further, as individuals higher in social vigilantism "believe their views are right and counterargue to disseminate these beliefs" (Saucier & Webster, 2009, p. 20), they may be more likely to respond aggressively to transgressions for two reasons: (1) they may more easily find that the transgression violates their moral beliefs; (2) they want to propagate their beliefs to correct others' wrongdoings, and at the same time, express their belief superiority.
Virtue signaling	Individuals are motivated to appear prototypical of groups central to their identity, espouse the same rhetoric of the group, and denounce the same out-groups (Goldman & Hogg, 2016). Considering values and morals are a foundation of political ideologies, those with a strong political identity centrality may signal group values to demonstrate protypicality and potentially garner admiration. Thus, political identity centrality may increase virtue signaling needs which could be satisfied through cancelling behaviors.
Self-efficacy	People higher in political identity centrality may hold relatively limited and simple cognitive resources and be unaware of their limitedness. They may also perceive that they can exercise control of their mental resources. Therefore, we predict that political identity centrality can help to "strengthen people's beliefs that they have what it takes to succeed" (Bandura & Wessels, 1994). That is, political identity centrality will predict higher self-efficacy. Since perceived self-efficacy leads individuals to feel capable of approaching difficult tasks and exerting control over events, it may increase cancelling behaviors that influence the transgressor's current status.

positively associated with cancelling proclivity and assess whether moral exporting, social vigilantism, virtue signaling, and self-efficacy mediate this relationship. Specifically, we predict that political identity centrality will positively predict moral exporting, social vigilantism, virtue signaling, and self-efficacy. In turn, moral exporting, social vigilantism, virtue signaling, and self-efficacy should each positively influence cancelling proclivity (see Fig. 1 for a visual representation of the hypothesized relationships).

In so doing, we aim to contribute to existing theory around a new social phenomenon and a novel construct, political identity centrality. Importantly, political identity centrality is not dependent on any particular ideology, but rather the extent to which one holds their ideology as central to their identity. Therefore, this lens can assist with evolving the political ideology literature beyond its typically Western focus, including underrepresentation of other cultures (Chan & Ilicic, 2019; Yang & Liu, 2021). This is important as cancellations happen cross-culturally (Shen, 2016). Consequently, this work also has implications for international practitioners managing a corporate brand, associated endorser brands, affiliated organization brands, and others. Understanding which individuals are motivated by what factors provides valuable insights for marketing specialists on how to avoid being
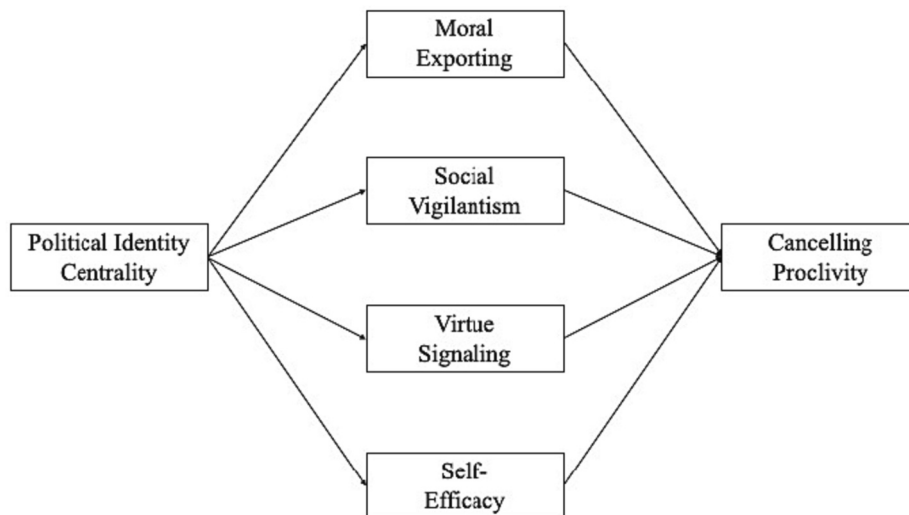
Fig. 1. Predicted model.

cancelled or respond to angry individuals in the event of a cancellation.

2. Method

This study was approved by the institutional review board prior to data collection.

2.1. Participants

Five hundred American participants were recruited from Prolific Academic to complete a survey. We set six attention checks based on prior research (Meade & Craig, 2012; Ward & Pond, 2015), which are outlined in full in the Methodological detail Appendix (MDA). Forty-one participants were removed due to inattention on one or more of these items, leaving a final sample of 459 respondents (M$_{Age}$ = 37.94, [SD = 13.03]; 44.7 % female, 52.5 % male; 50.8 % Democrat).

2.2. Measures

To measure political identity centrality, we utilized the identity centrality measure by Bai (2020; see also West & Iyengar, 2022) incorporating the political orientation the participants chose earlier in the study (i.e., "Republican" or "Democrat"; e.g., "In general, being a Republican/Democrat is an important part of my self-image"; 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree"; 4-items; α = 0.865; M = 3.21, SD = 1.27).

2.2.1. Mediators

Moral exporting was captured using a measure by Peterson et al. (2009; e.g., "When I meet someone who doesn't share the moral values that are important to me, I take the time to explain my views in an effort to convince them that they are worth living by"; 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree"; 4-items; α = 0.727, M = 4.13, SD = 0.98).

Social vigilantism was captured using a measure by Saucier and Webster (2009; e.g., "I feel as if it is my duty to enlighten other people"; 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree"; 14-items; α = 0.878; M = 5.23, SD = 1.33).

Virtue signaling was captured using a measure by Grubbs et al. (201; e.g., "My beliefs should be inspiring to others"; 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree"; 10-items; α = 0.812; M = 3.19, SD = 0.77).

Self-efficacy was captured using a measure by Chen et al. (2001; e.g., "I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself"; 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree"; 8-items; α = 0.956; M = 4.75, SD = 0.95).

2.2.2. Cancelling proclivity

The study measured cancelling proclivity in two ways: (1) calling-out and piling-on; (2) generalized reaction to transgressive events (details below).

2.2.2.1. Reaction to a transgression.
In line with recent work by Weber et al. (2023), participants were shown stances traditionally counter to their political ideology (provided earlier in the study with political identity centrality instrument). Participants read descriptions of a fictitious celebrity (for Democrats: "A tweet has recently surfaced where Celebrity X expressed an opinion that same-sex people shouldn't be allowed to legally married."; for Republicans: "A tweet has recently surfaced where Celebrity Y expressed an opinion that the government has the right to require all citizens be vaccinated to be employed."; see MDA). Gender, names, or other personal information about the celebrity was not mentioned. Individuals' reaction to the transgression was then measured by a five-item scale containing items focused on taking retributive action (e.g., "Feel like Celebrity X/Y should lose acting roles because of his actions."; 1= "extremely unlikely" to 7= "extremely likely"; α=.901, M=2.25, SD=.816;).

2.2.2.2. Calling-out and piling-on.
We first asked participants to recall an experience of calling-out and then measured their attitudes towards the call-out by two items (e.g., "Do you think it is appropriate to call out a public figure online for their misbehavior?"; 1= "very inappropriate" to 7= "very appropriate"). Piling-on was measured by one item based on participants' previous behaviors (e.g., "How often do you engage with [i.e., like, comment] on social media posts [i.e., tweets, Facebook posts] or news stories that point out the misbehavior of a public figure?"; 1 = "never" to 7 = "more than once a week"), as well as two items about their inclinations (e.g., "Think of someone you respect. If they made a social media post calling-out a public figure for some type of misbehavior, would you be inclined to share their post?"; 1 = "very unlikely" to 7 = "very likely"). These items were combined into a calling-out/piling-on measure (5-items; α = 0.728; M = 4.12, SD = 1.25).

2.2.3. Demographics

Participant age and gender were collected.

2.3. Validity checks

We performed confirmatory factor analysis using the mediating variables to determine their distinctiveness. Using diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS), we found adequate fit (χ2(730) = 3228.432, *p* <

.001, CFI = 0.873, TLI = 0.865, RMSEA = 0.086, 90 % CI[0.083 to 0.090]). Details are presented in the MDA.

2.4. Statistical analyses

To test the proposed mediations, we used IBM SPSS Statistics and PROCESS model 4 with bootstrapping analysis (5000 replications; Hayes, 2017). Bootstrapping does not require a normality assumption (Hayes, 2017) and has been shown to perform better than normal regression methods (Taylor et al., 2008).

3. Results

Intercorrelations, alphas, means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for all variables are presented in Table 2. As predicted, political identity centrality is significantly if mildly correlated with both responses to a transgression ($r = 0.11$, $p = .03$) and calling-out and piling-on ($r = 0.21$, $p < .001$).

We next conducted the parallel-mediation model (Hayes, 2017, PROCESS Model 4) to test the effect of political identity centrality [X] on cancelling proclivity (reactions to a transgression [Y1] and calling-out and piling-on [Y2]) through moral exporting [M1], social vigilantism [M2], virtue signaling [M3], and self-efficacy [M4]. Regression results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

For the reaction to a transgression model ($R^2 = 0.0869$, $F(1,453) = 43.1362$, $p < .0001$), the direct effect of political identity centrality [X] on reaction to transgression [Y] was not significant (b=.0043, SE=.0323, p=.8939, CI[-.0591, .0677]), indicating mediation was present. Among the four mediators, political identity centrality only had an effect on reaction to transgression through virtue signaling (b=.0513, BootSE=.0182, BootCI[.0182, .0901]). Thus, virtue signaling mediated the relationship between political identity centrality and reactions to a transgression.

For the calling-out and piling-on model ($R^2 = 0.1749$, $F (5,452) = 19.1633$, $p < .001$), the direct effect of political identity centrality [X] on calling-out and piling on [Y] is not significant (b=.0601, SE=0.0466, p=.1982, CI[-.0316, .1518]), indicating that mediation is present. Among the four mediators, only through social vigilantism did political identity centrality have an effect on calling out and piling on (b=.0739, BootSE=.0223, BootCI[.0338, .1203]). Thus, social vigilantism appears to play a role in the relationship between political identity centrality and calling-out and piling-on.

4. General discussion

Overall, we found support for political identity centrality as a predictor of cancelling proclivity and partial support for the mediators examined, presenting an intriguing picture of why individuals may cancel. Recall that when measuring cancelling proclivity, we evaluated *both* how strongly individuals reacted to transgressions and their proclivity to call out and pile on. Interestingly, the tested mediators showed distinct patterns in separately predicting the dependent variables. Our findings suggest that political identity centrality leads individuals to react more strongly to transgressions (demand harsher punishments, posting negative content on social media, etc.), and this occurs through virtue signaling. Thus, the response to transgressions more broadly seems to be more about self-enhancing or signaling to in-group members rather than actually changing the situation in some way. Conversely, the relationship between political identity centrality and calling out and piling on occurs through social vigilantism, wherein individuals feel a duty to correct the beliefs and behaviors of potentially "ignorant" others. Thus, when it comes to joining the mob when a brand has transgressed, individuals appear to seize this as an opportunity to foist their own moral views upon others. Taken together, political identity centrality increases the likelihood that individuals will engage in cancelling behavior as they seek to signal their virtue or apply their values to ignorant others.

4.1. Theoretical implications

We present a pioneering examination of cancelling proclivity with a novel construct, political identity centrality, and make numerous theoretical contributions. First, the small body of literature on cancel culture generally falls into two categories: (1) case studies examining a specific instance of cancel culture (e.g., Bouvier, 2020; Ng, 2020) or (2) conceptual work (e.g., Clark, 2020; Mesler, Howie, et al., 2022, Saldanha et al., 2022). Thus, we present one of the first empirical examinations of how individual differences predict cancelling proclivity. Second, our conceptualization of political identity centrality may cohere previously ambiguous findings, as both liberals and conservatives have attributes suggesting a proclivity towards cancelling (Bhattacharjee et al., 2015; Cook et al., 2021; Jost et al., 2017). While what constitutes a transgression is likely to differ across party lines (Kivikangas et al., 2021; see also Graham et al., 2009), our work proposes that how central ideology is to an identity may more cleanly explain individual behavior in this substantive domain. In other words, the more important one's ideology is to their identity (regardless of what that ideology may be), the more likely they are to act when they perceive that aspect of their identity to

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations.

	Mean	SD	Items	Alpha	Skewness	Kurtosis		CP	RT	PIC	ME	SV	VS	SE
CP	4.1242	1.254	5	0.728	−0.167	−0.590	Pearson							
							Sig.							
RT	2.254	.816	10	0.799	0.417	0.002	Pearson	0.479**						
							Sig.	0.000						
PIC	3.206	1.274	4	0.865	0.016	−0.853	Pearson	0.209**	0.105*					
							Sig.	0.000	0.026					
ME	4.128	.983	4	0.727	−0.486	0.089	Pearson	0.301**	0.146**	0.296**				
							Sig.	0.000	0.002	0.000				
SV	5.233	1.327	14	0.878	−0.116	0.232	Pearson	0.385**	0.205**	0.298**	0.521**			
							Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000			
VS	3.193	0.771	10	0.812	−0.295	0.329	Pearson	0.332**	0.256**	0.388**	0.494**	0.613**		
							Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		
SE	4.745	0.946	8	0.956	−0.967	1.235	Pearson	0.101*	0.022	0.216**	0.146**	0.127**	0.189**	
							Sig.	0.031	0.640	0.000	0.002	0.006	0.000	

CP=calling-out and piling-on; RT = reaction to a transgression (higher = stronger reaction); PIC=political identity centrality; ME = moral exporting; SV=social vigilantism; VS=virtue signaling; SE = self-efficacy.

** Correlation significant at 0.01 (2-tailed).
* Correlation significant at 0.05 (2-tailed).

Table 3
Regression coefficients for reactions to a transgression.

Effect	Estimate	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Mediator model						
Moral exporting						
Political identity centrality	0.2279	0.0347	6.5678	<0.0001	0.1597	0.2961
Social vigilantism						
Political identity centrality	0.3061	0.0465	6.5861	<0.0001	0.2148	0.3974
Virtue signaling						
Political identity centrality	0.2309	0.0262	8.8093	<0.0001	0.1794	0.2824
Self-efficacy						
Political identity centrality	0.1618	0.0341	4.7398	<0.0001	0.0947	0.2289
Dependent variable model						
Reactions						
Political identity centrality	0.0043	0.0323	0.1335	0.8939	−0.0591	0.0677
Moral exporting	0.0052	0.046	0.1126	0.9104	−0.0852	0.0956
Social vigilantism	0.0466	0.0375	1.2424	0.2147	−0.0271	0.1204
Virtue signaling	0.2221	0.0652	3.4047	0.0007	0.0939	0.3504
Self-efficacy	−0.0253	0.0404	−0.625	0.5323	−0.1048	0.0542

Moral exporting: $R^2 = 0.0869$, $F(1,453) = 43.14$, $p < .0001$; social vigilantism: $R^2 = 0.0874$, $F(1,453) = 43.38$, $p < .0001$; virtue signaling: $R^2 = 0.1463$, $F(1,453) = 77.60$, $p < .0001$; self-efficacy: $R^2 = 0.0472$, $F(1,453) = 22.47$, $p < .0001$; call-out and pile-on: $R^2 = 0.0699$, $F(5,449) = 6.75$, $p < .0001$.

Table 4
Regression coefficients for call-out and pile-on.

Effect	Estimate	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Mediator model						
Moral exporting						
Political identity centrality	0.2293	0.0346	6.6313	<0.0001	0.1614	0.2973
Social vigilantism						
Political identity centrality	0.2339	0.0446	6.6964	<0.0001	0.2206	0.4039
Virtue signaling						
Political identity centrality	0.2339	0.0262	8.9423	<0.0001	0.1825	0.2853
Self-efficacy						
Political identity centrality	0.1628	0.034	4.7916	<0.0001	0.0961	0.2296
Dependent variable model						
Call-out and pile-on						
Political identity centrality	0.0603	0.0466	1.2935	0.1965	−0.0313	0.1519
Moral exporting	0.1248	0.0664	1.8773	0.061	−0.0058	0.2553
Social vigilantism	0.2372	0.0539	4.4017	<0.0001	0.1313	0.3432
Virtue signaling	0.165	0.0941	1.7539	0.0801	−0.0199	0.35
Self-efficacy	0.0303	0.0584	0.5193	0.6038	−0.0845	0.1451

Moral exporting: $R^2 = 0.0880$, $F(1,456) = 43.97$, $p < .0001$; social vigilantism: $R^2 = 0.0895$, $F(1,456) = 44.84$, $p < .0001$; virtue signaling: $R^2 = 0.1492$, $F(1,456) = 79.96$, $p < .0001$; self-efficacy: $R^2 = 0.0479$, $F(1,456) = 22.96$, $p < .0001$; call-out and pile-on: $R^2 = 0.1754$, $F(5,452) = 19.23$, $p < .0001$.

be threatened or find an opportunity to affirm it. More broadly, political identity centrality enhances the literature on political ideology by providing a framework to examine areas where the right and the left overlap. As demonstrating common ground has been shown to attenuate political polarization (Balietti et al., 2021), the commonalities identified herein or by future researchers may support efforts aimed at reducing such polarization. Importantly, political identity centrality is ideology-agnostic, applicable across countries or regions' ideologies, with the ability to examine multi-party systems. Thus, this construct may provide utility in expanding the literature on political ideology well beyond its traditionally Western (or western vs. "foreign"; Chan & Ilicic, 2019) scope. We present a novel lens to address this weakness within the literature. We anticipate the political identity centrality construct will be valuable in examining areas such as brand activism, misinformation refutation, responses to celebrity and endorser transgressions, and efforts at recovery from cancellation. Future work should also examine the interplay between transgression type, political orientation, and political identity centrality.

The findings presented add insights into the meaningful intersection of individual differences and identity (Verkuyten et al., 2022), with insights into how identity translates across the digital environment; future research should examine how these personal characteristics interact with situational factors around the cancelling situation. For example, transgressors could be an in-group member or an out-group member, wherein those with high political identity centrality may be tolerant of in-group members and retributive towards out-group members (Enock et al., 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, the brands that transgressors endorse or are publicly associated with may have ethical positioning (such as fair-trade labeling, philanthropic partners, etc.) that could either intensify or inhibit the inclination to engage in cancelling behaviors (Allard & McFerran, 2022).

4.2. Applied implications

The findings from this research will benefit organizational and public audiences by shedding light on what factors may lead to cancellation. Our work holds significant practical importance for organizational managers and researchers as it provides valuable insights into handling endorser transgressions and, more crucially, managing brand crises effectively. Foremost, ongoing consumer research should measure and track the political orientations with particular attention to the strength of identification with those orientations. This information is essential to gauge the likelihood of a cancellation in the event of a transgression. Second, managers could utilize our findings to design specific strategies for different population segments in the wake of wrongdoing. For example, marketers might focus restorative efforts on individuals who have high levels of political identity centrality as they will likely have the most adverse reactions. Finally, when making apologies, brands could emphasize that they have "learned" something from the individuals' angry comments to satisfy the individuals' social vigilantism

and acknowledge the "virtue" and high moral standards for those seeking virtue signaling. Alternatively, individuals with weaker political identities might have greater potential for recovery as their reactions should be less severe. Future research should examine if individuals respond differently to recovery attempts from cancelled brands based on their political identity centrality. Taken together, our empirical evidence also provides potentially valuable preliminary guidance for practitioners.

4.3. Limitations

While our study provides new theoretical understanding of a novel individual difference construct with implications for research and practice, it is not without limitations. For example, the online sampling method provided access to a diverse sample, but this approach presents concerns with bot responses, self-selection, and generalizability (Aguinis et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2016). To mitigate these concerns, we used both bot and attention checks (Huang et al., 2012; Meade & Craig, 2012; Ward & Pond, 2015) and utilized an online platform (i.e., Prolific Academic) previously suggested to yield more higher-quality data relative to others (e.g., MTurk; Peer et al., 2017; Palan & Schitter, 2018).

Additionally, while we examined four theoretically relevant mediators, the potential landscape of factors that may be at play in behaviors as diverse and complex as cancelling is vast. The mediators for this research were chosen due to their relevance for a moral and public context, but we recognize the potential limitations of this focus. Adjacent constructs in these areas may also be influential, as well as other individual differences, such as system justification (Owuamalam et al., 2023), social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994) and belief in a just world (Furnham & Robinson, 2022; Lerner, 1980). Future work should continue to establish antecedents, mediators, and operationalizations of the cancelling criterion within this substantive domain. Further, we did not consider other individual attributes, such as education level, socioeconomic status, or geographical location, which could moderate some of the effects observed herein. Future work should consider adding additional nuance to our understanding of the relationships herein.

This research took a bi-partisan lens to examine cancel culture proclivity; however, future research should examine the influence of factors unique to conservatives and liberals. While our results indicate that individuals of either ideology might cancel, they may differ on when, why, and how they cancel. Incidences of moral decoupling (Bhattacharjee et al., 2015), complaining and disputing (Jung et al., 2017), customer satisfaction (Fernandes et al., 2022), and myriad marketplace behaviors ranging from the attributes of a brand's logo (Chan, 2019), to responses to consumption regulations (Irmak et al., 2020), to the desire to punish transgressing consumers of ethical (but not conventional;

Allard & McFerran, 2022) brands all vary based on political orientation – which could provide suggestions for future work in the realm of cancellation and cancel culture. For example, work on luxury consumption highlights that conservatives value status maintenance (Kim et al., 2018), which may make conservatives less likely to cancel some public figures as it would attenuate their status. Moreover, heterogeneity within ideologies warrants examination as individuals differ significantly on potentially relevant constructs. For example, social conservatives rely more on intuition, which leads to increased deontological moral judgements, relative to economic conservatives (Chan, 2019). Both factors could influence which type of transgression motivates individuals to take action and the type of reparations they might seek.

5. Conclusions

Individuals with strong political identity centrality are more motivated to characterize themselves and view the world based on this identity, and actively work to confirm this core identity through actions like cancelling. Our research reveals mediators within the relationship between political identity centrality and cancelling proclivity and finds that individuals (1) attempt to signal their own virtues (virtue signaling) by strongly reacting to transgressions, and (2) apply their values to ignorant others (social vigilantism) by calling out and piling on. Taken together, our findings lay groundwork for future research on cancel culture broadly, and cancelling behaviors in particular. Furthermore, our study highlights that such behavior may be less about the content of one's beliefs and more about the significance of those beliefs to one's identity. We hope that this work will contribute not just to the better understanding of cancellation and cancelling proclivity, but in turn to social marketing and policies that support improved public discourse and reduced political polarization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A. Methodological detail appendix

A.1. Table: definitions of the constructs

Construct	Definition	Citation
Political identity centrality	Political identity centrality refers to the extent to which a person normatively defines himself or herself with regard to a certain political identity… In personal construct terms, central identities are analogous to superordinate self-constructs and noncentral identities are considered subordinate self-constructs (Gaertner et al., 2012).	Sellers et al., 1998, p. 25
Moral exporting	Willingness to actively promote and support the proliferation of one's own moral beliefs, introducing a strong action-orientated component to such beliefs.	Peterson et al., 2009, p. 207
Social vigilantism	An enduring individual difference that assesses the tendency of individuals to impress and propagate their "superior" beliefs onto others to correct others' more "ignorant" opinions.	Saucier & Webster, 2009, p. 19
Virtue signaling	Publicly signaling one's values or virtues in a grandiose way with a goal of garnering attention and admiration.	Grubbs et al., 2019, p. 5
Self-efficacy	One's belief in one's overall competence to effect requisite performances across a wide variety of achievement situations.	Eden, 2001

A.2. Attention checks

Table
Attention checks.

When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking? - Choose three for this row
Please write the fourth word in this sentence exactly as written.
Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement on the following scale: - Select four in this row
Thinking about these moral values, principles, attitudes, and behaviors, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. - On this row choose strongly agree.
Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: - Please select somewhat agree.
Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement. - For this row choose strongly agree.

A.3. Reactions to a transgression stimuli

Transgression 1 (Transgressive for Democrats):
A tweet has recently surfaced where Celebrity X expressed an opinion that same-sex people shouldn't be allowed to legally married.
How likely would you be to…
Post on social media saying negative things about Celebrity X.
Share or like posts from others with negative content about Celebrity X.
Feel like Celebrity X should lose acting roles because of his actions.
Perceive Celebrity X's overall character as more negative.
Desire other past behavior from Celebrity X to be revisited and scrutinized.

Transgression 2 (Transgressive for Republicans):
A tweet has recently surfaced where Celebrity Y expressed an opinion that the government has the right to require all citizens be vaccinated to be employed.
How likely would you be to…
Post on social media saying negative things about Celebrity Y.
Share or like posts from others with negative content about Celebrity Y.
Feel like Celebrity Y should lose acting roles because of his actions.
Perceive Celebrity Y's overall character as more negative.
Desire other past behavior from Celebrity Y to be revisited and scrutinized.

A.4. Table: confirmatory factor analysis

Factor	Indicator	Symbol	Estimate	Std. error	z-Value	p	95 % confidence	
							Lower	Upper
Moral exporting	ME_1	$\lambda 11$	1.098	0.04	27.522	<0.001	1.02	1.176
	ME_2	$\lambda 12$	0.976	0.038	25.633	<0.001	0.902	1.051
	ME_3	$\lambda 13$	0.717	0.032	22.25	<0.001	0.653	0.78
	ME_4	$\lambda 14$	0.555	0.028	19.958	<0.001	0.5	0.609
Social vigilantism	SV_1	$\lambda 21$	1.878	0.044	42.668	<0.001	1.792	1.965
	SV_2	$\lambda 22$	1.853	0.043	43.288	<0.001	1.769	1.937
	SV_3	$\lambda 23$	1.816	0.044	40.909	<0.001	1.729	1.903
	SV_4	$\lambda 24$	0.816	0.031	26.137	<0.001	0.755	0.878
	SV_5	$\lambda 25$	1.304	0.039	33.282	<0.001	1.227	1.381
	SV_6	$\lambda 26$	1.53	0.045	34.025	<0.001	1.442	1.618
	SV_7	$\lambda 27$	1.872	0.043	44.037	<0.001	1.789	1.956
	SV_8	$\lambda 28$	0.471	0.038	12.475	<0.001	0.397	0.545
	SV_9	$\lambda 29$	0.347	0.033	10.437	<0.001	0.282	0.412
	SV_10	$\lambda 210$	1.26	0.044	28.677	<0.001	1.173	1.346
	SV_11	$\lambda 211$	1.34	0.042	32.197	<0.001	1.258	1.421
	SV_12	$\lambda 212$	0.835	0.037	22.549	<0.001	0.762	0.907
	SV_13	$\lambda 213$	0.576	0.036	15.821	<0.001	0.505	0.648
	SV_14	$\lambda 214$	0.893	0.036	24.785	<0.001	0.822	0.963
Virtue signaling	VS_1	$\lambda 31$	0.843	0.026	32.223	<0.001	0.792	0.894
	VS_2	$\lambda 32$	1.008	0.029	35.208	<0.001	0.952	1.064
	VS_3	$\lambda 33$	1.044	0.028	37.47	<0.001	0.989	1.099
	VS_4	$\lambda 34$	1.153	0.031	37.741	<0.001	1.093	1.213
	VS_5	$\lambda 35$	0.319	0.022	14.805	<0.001	0.277	0.362
	VS_6	$\lambda 36$	0.202	0.018	10.959	<0.001	0.166	0.238
	VS_7	$\lambda 37$	0.132	0.018	7.276	<0.001	0.096	0.167
	VS_8	$\lambda 38$	0.186	0.019	9.663	<0.001	0.148	0.223
	VS_9	$\lambda 39$	0.643	0.026	24.607	<0.001	0.592	0.695
	VS_10	$\lambda 310$	0.852	0.028	30.644	<0.001	0.797	0.906
Self-efficacy	NGSE_1	$\lambda 41$	0.998	0.034	29.144	<0.001	0.931	1.065
	NGSE_2	$\lambda 42$	0.951	0.034	27.716	<0.001	0.884	1.018
	NGSE_3	$\lambda 43$	0.917	0.032	28.76	<0.001	0.854	0.979

(continued)

Factor	Indicator	Symbol	Estimate	Std. error	z-Value	p	95 % confidence	
							Lower	Upper
	NGSE_4	$\lambda44$	0.928	0.034	27.519	<0.001	0.862	0.994
	NGSE_5	$\lambda45$	0.899	0.033	27.349	<0.001	0.834	0.963
	NGSE_6	$\lambda46$	0.877	0.032	27.822	<0.001	0.815	0.939
	NGSE_7	$\lambda47$	0.924	0.032	29.149	<0.001	0.862	0.986
	NGSE_8	$\lambda48$	0.889	0.032	27.975	<0.001	0.827	0.951

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