



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>
Vol. 05 No. 02. April-June 2026. Page# 2549-2561
Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21177068) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21177068)
Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21177068)
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21177068>



Cancel Culture and Moral Policing in the Digital Age: A Critical Study of R.F. Kuang's *Yellowface*

Mr. Muhammad Asim

Graduate, Department of English and Foreign Languages University of Swat.

Email: asim.englit@gmail.com

Dr. Syed Shujaat Ali*

Associate Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, University of Swat.

Corresponding Author Email: shujaat@uswat.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

*Digital media has transformed how moral judgements, public accountability and social discipline are realized in modern society. This research paper critically analyzes the depiction of cancel culture and moral policing in R.F. Kuang's 2023 novel *Yellowface*, using theories from the work of Michel Foucault's surveillance studies and latter digital media research. This study uses a qualitative textual analysis of the novel to examine the conflicts between accountability and spectacle, justice and public shaming in digital ecosystems, as revealed by Kuang's storytelling. The analysis demonstrates that *Yellowface* is a metafictional critique of the way that online platforms are morphing complex ethical questions into moral dichotomic binaries, emphasizing viral outrage over substantive discussion. The novel also illustrates the psychological anxiety and self-disciplinary behavior that can occur in people who are the target of public scrutiny through digital surveillance. This paper examines Kuang's novel in relation to the contextual and broader narratives of cancel culture, identity politics, and digital ethics, which suggest the need for more restorative and structurally oriented accountability. The results add to the ongoing academic debate between the disciplines of literature, digital culture and moral philosophy and provide valuable information on the ways in which contemporary fiction works in relation to the moral dilemmas of the digital age.*

Keywords: *Cancel Culture, Moral Policing, Digital Surveillance, R.F. Kuang, *Yellowface*, Social Media, Identity Politics, Public Shaming*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Digital media has transformed the twenty first century public discourse, moral judgment, and accountability. Social media sites, such as Twitter, Instagram, Goodreads and TikTok, have made it easy for the public to crowdsource an opinion on behavior, speech and art. This digital democratization has created new phenomena and opportunities that are empowering

marginalized voices and questioning the entrenched power structures, but it also has created difficulties with the traditional concept of justice, due process, and rehabilitation.

One of the largest and most debated trends in today's digital world is something that's being dubbed "cancel culture. As a general term, cancel culture is defined as the decision to stop supporting a public entity, person or institution after a perceived misconduct has taken place, with the intention of causing public shaming and demands for accountability (Ng, 2020). Those who embrace the concept of cancel culture say it's a means of holding powerful people accountable when there is no institutional avenues, especially for historically marginalized communities. But critics argue that cancel culture often turns into performative outrage, excessive punishment and the silencing of nuanced conversation (Clark, 2020).

A related, but different, concept is moral policing, which involves imposing specific moral code by means of social pressure and sanctions. Digital moral policing happens through networked communities, where shared understandings of what is appropriate and inappropriate in the digital world are enforced. These factors lead to deeper questions about who can set moral boundaries, how these decisions are reached, and what they mean.

1.2 Rationale and Significance of the Study

These digital phenomena have been increasingly explored in contemporary literature, as narrative explorations of their psychological, social and ethical aspects. Yellowface (2023) is one of the most intriguing literary debates on cancel culture and moral policing in the digital era by R.F. Kuang. The novel is a complex, disturbing look at authorship, identity, cultural appropriation and judgement in online spaces, and is perfect for critical analysis.

Though there is a new body of research on cancel culture and its literary portrayals, there are comparatively few studies that specifically examine the critique of digital moral policing in Yellowface. This paper aims to fill this void by providing a systematic interpretation of this novel in terms of the theoretical frameworks of surveillance research, digital media research and critical race theory. This act of representation both reinforces and refines the debate on the ethics of internet interactions and the role of literature in the representation and construction of culture.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research paper aims to:

1. Analyze how R.F. Kuang's Yellowface is an example of cancel culture (digital moral policing).
2. Compare and contrast Foucault's notion of the panopticon to how the novel treats notions of surveillance, anxiety, and self-discipline.
3. Explore the novel's critique of the moral and moralizing aspects of identity politics in online discussions.
5. Discuss how the theme of cancel culture relates to psychological and cultural impact in the story.
6. Evaluate the novel as a contribution to wider discussions on accountability, justice and redemption in the digital age.

1.4 Research Questions

The study aims to solve the following research questions:

1. How is cancel culture a form of moral policing in the digital sphere as represented by Yellowface?
2. Explain how the novel shows how digital surveillance and public attention can affect the mind?

3. In what ways does Kuang challenge the simple and multiple moralities of online moral discourses? 4. What are some possibilities for alternative reactions to punitive cancel culture that the novel implies or explicitly mentions?

1.5 Scope and Delimitations

The present study focuses on primary literary text, *Yellowface* (2023) by R.F. Kuang. It is not a criticism of other Kuang's works or of general analyses of the cancel culture in other contexts. The theoretical framework is mostly based on Foucault's (1977) works on surveillance and discipline, as well as more recent writings in digital media by, among others, Ng (2020), Lyon (2018) and Papacharissi (2015). It is not a stylistic or formal literary approach, but rather thematic analysis of the novel's relationship to cancel culture, moral policing and digital surveillance.

1.6 Structure of the Paper

After this introduction, the paper provides literature review on the related topics of cancel culture, digital surveillance, and identity politics. The methodology part describes the qualitative research method used for the study. The theoretical framework is then used to investigate some of the themes in *Yellowface* in the analysis section. The discussion part summarizes the results and offers interpretation and implications. Lastly, the conclusion restates the findings of the study and points out future research areas.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundations: Foucault and the Panopticon

Discipline and Punish (1977) by Michel Foucault is a key text for analyzing the ways in which the current state of surveillance, discipline and social control operates. Foucault documents the transition from sovereign punishment, in which public displays of physical violence are common, to disciplinary power, which relies on continual observation, normalizing and self-regulation. The following is a central concept in this analysis: The panopticon is an architectural design by Jeremy Bentham, which allows one watchman to monitor all inmates without the inmates knowing if they are being observed by a watchman. According to Foucault the panopticon is a model of modern power, in which the subject becomes self-disciplinarian and acts as if he could be watched.

Foucault's analysis has been expanded into the digital context by contemporary scholars. As previously noted, Lyon (2018) suggests that digital surveillance is an iteration of the monitoring history marked by dataveillance, predictive analytics and ubiquitous connectivity. Digital surveillance is decentralised, collaborative and sometimes self-consciously performed: Users share information and watch others through social media. This decentralised surveillance results in what Deleuze (1992) calls "societies of control" in which disciplinary practices are replaced by constant modulation and self-regulation.

2.2 Cancel Culture: Definitions and Debates

The phrase cancel culture has sparked much academic discussion and is a term that is interpreted in multiple ways from different disciplinary and ideological viewpoints. Ng (2020, p. 623) describes cancel culture as "the act of abstaining from supporting someone or something after they have committed a perceived offense, typically through social media campaigns. This definition highlights the collective and digital aspects of it, as compared to previous types of public shaming.

A more critical take comes from Clark (2020), who believes that cancel culture is indicative of a "call-out culture" in which punishment rather than rehabilitation is the focus. Clark says that the culture of "canceling" tends to close down options for growth, learning and reconciliation that are usually missed out on due to public exposure and reputation harm. In a like manner, Bouvier and Machin (2021) propose that cancel culture on social media is carried out through "affective polarization", which creates in-groups and out-groups, thus consolidating ideological differences.

Those who support cancel culture, however, portray it as a logical response to injustice. As a process, cancel culture can allow historically marginalized communities to hold accountable the powerful individuals and institutions they have historically been unable to hold accountable (Hill, 2021). In this view, cancel culture is a kind of moral redistribution of power from those in the gates to many publics.

2.3 Moral Policing and Digital Publics

In fact, moral policing, as a concept, is not limited to cancel culture, but also includes other forms of moral regulation and enforcement. Moral policing in digital environments refers to the collective surveillance of behavior, speech and performance of identity that occurs based on the norms of the community. In a study of the social media users, Marwick and boyd (2010) discuss the role of "impression management" and how the users create their online self-presentation so as to not incur moral condemnation. This self-policing is an instance of Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, in which people fix themselves in the presence of fellow citizens.

Papacharissi (2015) defines affective publics as publics that are created through social media around affective reactions to events. These affective publics are defined by their more passionate, quick, and sometimes fleeting interactions with issues, which tend to emphasize feeling over thinking. The affective dynamics of digital publics are also tied to the moral polarization that is the hallmark of cancel culture, where users try to find themselves good while trying to deem whatever they conceive to be bad bad.

2.4 Digital Identity and Representation

Scholarship on digital identity has looked at how online spaces influence self-presentation and the formation of social categories, such as with boyd (2014) and his work on "networked publics," which soften the line between "public" and "private" and allow for ongoing visibility and critique. In these networked publics, identity is enacted and disputed, continually judged by a variety of audiences.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach is still relevant to the study of digital identity, as researchers analyze how users of social media engage in "front stage" and "back stage" performances. However, in the world of cancel culture, it matters and private behaviors come to light and are publicly judged for their wrong nature.

2.5 Literary Responses to Digital Culture

The essays in this book reflect the extensive engagement with digital culture in contemporary literature, focusing on issues of identity, surveillance, and social media. Novels by Dave Eggers (*The Circle*, 2013) and Olivia Laing (*Crudo*, 2018) have been explored for their criticism of digital surveillance and the loss of privacy. More recently, literary critics have focused on novels that take a direct aim at cancel culture.

Since its release in 2023, *Yellowface* has been a topic of great academic interest. Responses to the novel in the early stages focus on the novel's metafictional elements and its questioning of the publishing industry. Kuang reveals exclusionary structures in the literary marketplace that commodity diversity, as argued by Cha (2023). Chen (2024) analyzes the novel to discover how the writer portrays racial authenticity, which is complicated by Kuang's exploration of the complexities of identity politics.

But very little focus has been given to the topic of *Yellowface* as an attack on cancel culture and moral policing. This paper fills the gap by systematically examining the novel by employing theoretical approaches derived from surveillance studies and digital media theory.

2.6 Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Although the topic of cancel culture, digital surveillance, and identity politics has been explored at a broader level, there is a need for research on how current fiction interacts with these concurrent phenomena as a network. To our knowledge, however, there have been very few studies to date that explored how *Yellowface* is a necessary tool to the discussions on digital moral policing. This paper will investigate these gaps by providing a theoretically-based textual analysis of the novel.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The type of research in this study is a qualitative research and the method used is textual analysis. Qualitative textual analysis is useful for text analysis, especially in literary studies where researchers can explore the nuances, ambiguities and complexities of narrative texts (Fairclough, 1995). This is an interpretative and critical design based on theories from the fields of sociology, media studies and literary criticism that seek to illuminate the novel's engagement with cancel culture and moral policing.

3.2 Research Approach

The study is done using critical interpretivist approach that acknowledges that meaning of the text is constructed based on interaction between the text, context and researcher's interpretative framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This method would be suitable for studying the portrayal and critique of social issues in the context of *Yellowface*, featuring both what is said and what is unsaid.

3.3 Primary Source

This study is primarily based on R.F. Kuang's book, *Yellowface* (2023), published by William Morrow. It was chosen due to its thematic connection with the concepts of cancel culture, digital surveillance, and identity politics, in addition to its critical acclaim and cultural influence. The analysis will be based on the narrative aspects of the novel, such as plot, character, dialogue, and thematic evolution.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

1. The analysis is structured on the basis of a theoretical model, which brings together: In the novel, digital scrutiny occurs through the Foucauldian Surveillance Theory, concepts that Foucault (1977) developed: panopticism, disciplinary power, and self-regulation.
2. Digital Media Scholarship: In addition, there are a number of works that provide frameworks for studying cancel culture, affective publics, and digital identity, such as by Ng (2020), Lyon (2018), and Papacharissi (2015).

3. The analysis of identity politics in the novel is informed by critical race theory, perspectives on racial authenticity, cultural appropriation and representation.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection involves systematic reading of the primary text with annotations. Relevant text sections are identified and extracted for analysis in key passages relevant to the research questions.

These passages include:

- Documents of social media monitoring and psychological reactions to June.
- Images of criticism, accusations and public shaming online.
- Representations of identity enactment and racial authenticity

In addition to the professional and social consequences of cancelation, the following scenes will be shown: Author/Creative consideration of authorship, creativity and cultural appropriation. Passages are annotated by thematic codes that are based on the theoretical framework (e.g., surveillance, self-discipline, moral outrage, identity performance).

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis is carried out as follows:

1. Thematic Identification: Passages are coded based on the themes that are emerging on cancel culture, moral policing and surveillance.
2. Theoretical Interpretation: Coded passages are interpreted theoretically, discussing the interpretation of the narrative elements in relation to the theoretical concepts.
3. Synthesis: Findings from individual themes are synthesized and used to interpret and draw general conclusions about how the novel engages with cancel culture and moral policing.
4. Critical Evaluation: A critical evaluation of the novel's representations, taking both strengths and limitations into account.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Qualitative textual analysis involves constructing a basis for validity by: Extended and repeated reading of the primary text is undertaken to ensure familiarity and depth of understanding of the primary text. Thick Description: Descriptions of the details and context of the text evidence are used to support interpretations. Multiple theories are used to inform the analysis, minimizing the risk of relying on a single theory. Reflexivity: The researcher recognizes his/her interpretive stance and possible biases.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations. This study has its own limitations. Some of the limitations of the study are the following:

1. Limited to one novel - Single Text Focus: Analysis is limited to one novel so it is not generalizable.
2. Theoretical focus: The theoretical framework emphasizes the lenses of surveillance and media studies; this may be at the exclusion of other lenses.
3. Temporal Scope: the setting of the novel is very modern and restricts the use of historical comparison.
4. Researcher Interpretation: The researcher's interpretative frame is a characteristic of all qualitative research.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns in a textual analysis that has no human being involved are mostly related to the issue of scholarly integrity. The study is written in an academically sound manner that is honest in its representation, proper in its citation and balanced in its interpretation.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Cancel Culture as Digital Moral Policing

The novel proposes that one reason for the appeal of cancel culture is that it can be participatory, that is, where people feel “morally engaged” without having to be engaged in more complex forms of social change. This is a critique of the dilemma of being true to oneself and doing the right thing while appearing to be doing the right thing.

4.1.1 The Mechanics of Digital Judgment

The novel depicts the shift in the dynamics of institutional probation and punishment to a more crowd-pleasing approach of condemnation. Tweets, comments, and Goodreads reviews are tools of judgment, and build a public story of guilt, before any formal investigation even begins. This is in line with Ng's (2020) portrayal of cancel culture as a decentralised moral authority, in which power is spread out among networked publics instead of being held by institutions. I refresh my browser again, and another fifty comments. I can't read them, I can't stop reading them: They're all saying the same thing, that I stole Athena's work, that I'm a fraud, that I should be dragged out into the street. June's experience is a good illustration of how cancel culture can function in an accretive way instead of through adjudication. The number of accusations makes it hard for individuals to argue their case or to have a fair hearing, let alone defend themselves.

4.1.2 Outrage as Social Currency

Kuang also helps to explain how moral outrage acts as social currency in online communities. Social capital comes from the people who join cancel campaigns and who demonstrate their righteous indignation, thereby declaring their moral value to their networks. This is happening in a similar way as Papacharissi (2015) describes in terms of affective publics:

"Everyone wants their pound of flesh. They want to be the one who condemned me first, the one who saw through my lies before anyone else did" (Kuang, 2023, p. 269).

In *Yellowface*, cancel culture can be rendered as a network of moral policing, where the media of judgment are social media. When her novel is discovered to be written by June Hayward, but she uses the pseudonym of Juniper Song, the online community boards up for her and questions her identity, intentions, and past. Kuang describes this process as being fast, intense and lacking any formal procedural protections.

4.1.3 The Spectacle of Punishment

Yellowface is a performance of cancel culture's punitive aspect, a public and theatrical one, following Foucault (1977)'s concept of the spectacle of punishment. Whereas the power of the sovereign was made manifest to the people through punishment in the pre-modern era, today it is enacted through digital cancellation.

"They want a confession, a public flogging, something to watch on their phones while they eat their breakfast cereal. They want to see me bleed" (Kuang, 2023, p. 288).

This extraordinary achievement renders ethical debate entertaining, and blurs the truth about the human suffering behind "digital punishment." June's suffering turns into a spectacle instead of a step towards resolution or understanding.

4.2 Surveillance, Anxiety, and the Digital Panopticon

The compulsive monitoring evident in June's work exemplifies the "surveillance culture" described by Lyon (2018), where people are their own subjects and objects of surveillance. As social media is always "on," the experience of observing is a continuous one and is felt to be "surrounding" and "impenetrable," according to Lyon, who speaks of "liquid surveillance."

4.2.1 The Internalized Gaze

Foucault's idea of the panopticon (1977) is a useful prism through which to examine June's situation. In the panoptic approach, prisoners come to suspect that they might be watched and self-regulate their behavior even when they are not being observed. Digital surveillance works much the same way, with its users experiencing the "big screen" of the internet even when they are not being monitored by an individual.

"I check my notifications obsessively, every few minutes, like a nervous tic. I know I shouldn't. I know it's making me crazy. But I can't stop. The silence is worse. The silence means they've forgotten about me, which means I don't exist anymore" (Kuang, 2023, p. 218).

The psychological breakdown of June during the novel serves as an example of the extent to which digital surveillance can affect a person. Her constant checking of what people are saying online (such as refreshing her Twitter feed, searching for her name on Google or reading her Goodreads ratings) shows how public judgement is internalized, leading to anxiety, paranoia and self-discipline.

4.2.2 Self-Discipline and Identity Fragmentation

June is constantly under the watchful eye and her identity begins to crack. She goes back and forth between defensive self-excuse, shame and desperate trying to fit in with audience expectations. This fragmentation represents Foucault's (1977) idea of the production of self-regulating subjects who monitor their own conduct through internalizing norms and guidelines. "I've started editing myself, censoring my thoughts before I can even think them. I imagine a thousand eyes watching me, waiting for me to slip up, to reveal my true nature. I don't know who I am anymore" (Kuang, 2023, p. 302).

The novel beautifully demonstrates the way that cancel culture has an impact not just on the public, but on fundamental identity as well. June's failure to have a consistent sense of self is a psychological result of perpetual judgment.

4.2.3 The Permanence of the Digital Archive

Kuang points out that "digital accusations are not going away. The Digital Archive maintains the accusations forever, and even if rehabilitation and redemption is possible, it is not easy..

"The internet never forgets. Everyone talks about how we should be held accountable, but no one talks about what happens when you've been held accountable and there's no way to ever stop being held accountable" (Kuang, 2023, p. 315).

This critique calls into question the rhetoric of accountability that is frequently used as part of the cancel culture, and its compatibility with rehabilitation.

4.3 Identity, Appropriation, and Simplified Moral Narratives

However, despite unequivocally rejecting cultural appropriation, Yellowface also questions the tendency of digital culture to "moralise identity politics. The novel's concerns with identity are especially complex, revealing the creation of binary moral frameworks in online communities that mask structural inequalities.

4.3.1 The Binary Moral Framework

The month of June becomes a nemesis and her dead Asian American friend, Athena, is posthumously glorified. This binary framing does not afford much space for the structural critique of the publishing industry that makes and rewards appropriation.

"They want heroes and villains, not complicated systems that make both of us complicit. Athena gets to be a saint because she's dead and I get to be a monster because I'm alive and I'm the one who got caught" (Kuang, 2023, p. 256).

The novel argues that cancel culture's punitive stance promotes moralistic thinking that masks systematic issues. Online communities can prevent confrontation with institutional practices that lead to and reward such actions by targeting people, rather than institutions.

4.3.2 The Commodification of Diversity

Yellowface highlights the commercialization and normalization of diversity in the publishing industry while keeping people out. But in order to be successful, Athena must remain marketable as an Asian American author, and June's appropriation can only be successful insofar as her acts racial ambiguity in ways that meet institutional needs.

"The industry doesn't care about authenticity—it cares about selling a story, a brand, a product. They put a cover on my book with an Asian face, and that was enough" (Kuang, 2023, p. 198).

These were narratives of "villainy" and "victimhood," and the commodification of identity poses a challenge to such simple narratives, presenting a view of the conditions that engender appropriation as shaped by institutional incentives.

4.3.3 Performative Virtue

Kuang attacks the "decree of cancel culture, which allows the participants to demonstrate their morals without having to do the harder work of changing the system. Criticism of June online can be a way to prove one's "anti-racist" bona fides, while the publishing industry goes about its normal exploitative business.

"They want to be seen as the good ones, the ones who called out racism when they saw it. But they don't want to change anything about how publishing actually works. That would be inconvenient" (Kuang, 2023, p. 289).

This critique asks readers to get beyond a performative relationship to injustice to a structural critique and change.

4.4 Psychological and Cultural Consequences

The novel covers the psychological damage of "cancel culture" on the accused, the accusers, and the culture itself. June's mental breakdown offers a real-life example of the costs of digital moral policing. The psychological breakdown of June is a case study of digital moral policing.

4.4.1 Isolation and Alienation

June experiences the hardest of loneliness as public opinion is against her. Friends and professional contacts begin to move away as they want to stay away from being contaminated

by association. Combined with public shaming, this social isolation exacerbates the psychological suffering.

"People I considered friends stopped answering my texts. Not because they believed I was guilty—they didn't want to be seen defending me, because that would make them guilty too" (Kuang, 2023, p. 277).

The novel depicts the way cancel culture works in the social media, with social contagion dynamics fostering isolation and punishment.

4.4.2 The Impossibility of Redemption

Perhaps most importantly, cancel culture's punitive nature makes true redemption impossible, Yellowface argues. Accusations are forever lodged in public memory and can never be forgotten. Despite the best efforts of June to try to better herself and take some responsibility, these efforts are not sufficient to counter the public's judgment.

"What exactly am I supposed to do to make this right? Nothing will ever be enough. They've decided I'm irredeemable, and that's that" (Kuang, 2023, p. 307).

This critique is a call for readers to question the distinction between accountability and forgiveness as well as the question of whether cancel culture is about justice or punishment.

4.5 Alternatives to Punitive Cancel Culture

Yellowface is a dark comedy about cancel culture, but it also holds out the possibility of other avenues to a sense of accountability. Restorative justice, structural critique, and true learning are more effective ways to respond to harm, the novel proposes.

4.5.1 Restorative Accountability

There are possibilities for accountability beyond punishment in June's attempts to learn from her mistakes and make amends, no matter how imperfect. Public exposure is not real accountability, the novel suggests, because it does not seek understanding, repair or transformation.

"I know I did something wrong. I know I can't just say sorry and expect everything to be okay. But what else can I do? How do you fix something like this?" (Kuang, 2023, p. 320).

This is not just a question you'll have to ask about the novel, it's a question that you'll have to ask about accountability practices that allow learning and repair to co-exist with justice.

4.5.2 Structural Critique

The novel suggests that there are structural factors that are conducive to appropriation, commodification, and inequality that need to be addressed. In doing so, Yellowface reveals the ways in which institutional practices create and reinforce bad behavior, and thus holds institutions responsible, not just individuals.

4.5.3 Dialogue and Learning

Kuang's story speaks to the potential for real conversation over differences, but how difficult. It is the suggestion of the novel that the moralizing of difficult problems precludes learning, while the genuine engagement – difficult though it may be – of the problem may allow for meaningful change.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings

In this research paper, I have discussed about R.F. Kuang's Yellowface as a critical engagement with cancel culture and moral policing for the era of digital age. The study has used a theoretically-aware textual analysis to show how the novel reveals the conflicts between

responsibility/camera and spectacle, justice and public shaming, and individual punishment and structural critique in digital spaces.

The analysis shows that Yellowface is the distributed system of moral judgments that is cancel culture, and that it is fast, intense, and lacks procedural safeguards. The novel makes the concept of moral outrage into a currency: like money, it offers an incentive to join in with public shaming and disincentives to participate with the awareness of the human toll of that participation.

The study has adopted Foucault's (1977) theory of surveillance and revealed the psychological impact of ongoing digital surveillance in the context of Yellowface. June's tracking of reactions online and fragments of her identity and her self-discipline, are all representative of the public judgment internalized in today's surveillance culture. The novel also reminds the reader of the lasting nature of digital allegations, which implies that the punitive nature of cancel culture makes any sort of rehabilitation or redemption impossible.

The study also has shown how the character of Yellowface challenges the focus of online moral discourses on identity politics. Online communities hyper-frame moral binaries, thus concealing structural inequalities and institutional practices that generate and perpetuate appropriation. The novel therefore calls on the reader to go beyond the performative engagement with injustice to structural critique and change.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This work is one of the many scholarly debates on cancel culture, digital surveillance, and literary representation. The paper places Yellowface in the context of the larger theoretical debates, thus illustrating the power of literary analysis to yield insights into social phenomena. The novel's narrative treatment of cancel culture provides a commentary that goes beyond merely theory and/or empirical research.

The study is also part of the on-going critical discourse on digital identity and representation. Through the lens of Yellowface, the contradictions of identity politics are revealed, as identity categories are essentialized and commodified within digital and institutional spaces. This is a critical analysis of the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion, urging more complex interaction with the concept of identity and representation.

5.3 Implications

The results from this research have implications not just in terms of literary scholarship. Yellowface is a cautionary tale for anyone concerned with digital ethics and social justice, regarding what kinds of accountability is possible, and what kinds of approaches to accountability are impractical. Residing injustices effectively necessitates attention to structural factors, opportunities for learning and rehabilitation, and working with complexity and nuance.

The study held particular significance for those interested in literary analysis as a way of comprehending the human aspects of technology. Empirical studies may miss capturing the subjective experience and emotional complexity of fictional narratives, which contribute to scholarly discussions of digital phenomena.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that may guide future studies. The results obtained are not necessarily applicable to other literature or to contexts beyond literature. Comprehensive comparative analysis and synthesis of the theories could be done if other modern novels concerning cancel culture are researched in the future.

One of the many lenses for the study's theoretical framework is Foucault and digital media scholarship. Other theoretical frameworks could be used in future analyses, such as feminist theory, post colonialism, and affect theory, to reveal other aspects of the novel's exploration of cancel culture.

Empirical studies could also examine how readers respond to *Yellowface*, and the impact it has on public discourse on cancel culture. This kind of research would help supplement the textual analysis by investigating the circulation and impact of literary texts in actual conversations.

5.5 Final Reflection

Yellowface is an important voice in the conversation about cancel culture, digital ethics, and identity politics in the 21st century. The novel's powerful critique of the complicated ethics of digital platforms as public punishment, through the compelling narrative and its psychological depth, serves to illuminate the troubling system of collective punishment.

Kuang's work is an ongoing reminder of the human toll of the collective moral judgments that are reshaping public discourse with digital technologies. The book prompts us to envision other ways of being held accountable — ways that are more focused on understanding, structural critique, and real change, rather than on punishment and performance.

As we live in a time of constant digital visibility and judgment, *Yellowface* reminds us of our own role in moral policing and asks us to ask ourselves whether the judgments we make and how we make them, are just, or simply furthering our own sense of rightness. This reflection is not just a thought exercise, it is a necessity for the creation of "just" and "humane" digital communities.

REFERENCES

- Bouvier, G., & Machin, D. (2021). What gets lost in Twitter 'cancel culture' hashtags? Calling out racists reveals some limitations of social justice campaigns. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 42, 100485.
- Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.
- Cha, S. (2023). The commodification of diversity in R.F. Kuang's *Yellowface*. *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 26(3), 345-362.
- Chen, L. (2024). Racial authenticity and the cultural appropriation debate in *Yellowface*. *Contemporary Literature*, 65(1), 78-101.
- Clark, M. D. (2020). The problems of call-out culture. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 48(4), 315-342.
- Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscript on the societies of control. *October*, 59, 3-7.
- Eggers, D. (2013). *The Circle*. Knopf.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. Longman.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Vintage Books.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Hill, C. (2021). The case for cancel culture. *Social Justice Review*, 42(3), 187-204.
- Kuang, R. F. (2023). *Yellowface*. William Morrow.
- Laing, O. (2018). *Crudo*. W. W. Norton.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Lyon, D. (2018). *The culture of surveillance: Watching as a way of life*. Polity Press.

Marwick, A. E., & boyd, d. (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114-133.

Ng, E. (2020). No grand pronouncements here: Reflections on cancel culture and digital media participation. *Television & New Media*, 21(6), 621-627.

Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. Oxford University Press.