

# I correct or canceling you. Political correctness and cancel culture on social media.

## The case of Twitter communication in Italy

### ABSTRACT

*This contribution studies the debated terms politically correct and cancel culture on Twitter, in particular, investigates the meaning that people give when they label something or someone as politically correct or indicate a case of cancel culture in the Italian context, where they are not yet widespread as they did in the USA and Britain. A textual analysis of a corpus of tweets selected through a set of hashtags was carried out to identify thematic clusters to understand features and meanings given to these expressions, along with their ways of using in the various situations and contexts. The main results show different meanings of the term, in the negative sense as a limitation of freedom of speech, and in a positive sense as the exclusion of some terms that may offend some people or groups. In this case, the meaning of a word is relative and depends on the situation and context in which it is used. Furthermore, the recourse in the discourses of cancel culture is only rhetorical, there are no actions of cancellation or boycott of someone or something.*

**Keywords:** Politically Correct; Political Correctness, Cancel Culture, Twitter, Textual Analysis.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Politically correct<sup>1</sup> (PC) is a term discussed, criticized, and in some cases satirized by commentators from across the political spectrum. First appeared in Marxist-Leninist vocabulary following the Russian Revolution of 1917, it became fully part of the politics, before being used wittily by liberal politicians to refer to the extremism of some left-wing issues, then spread in the civil rights movements born in the American colleges in the second half of the twentieth century. Today, PC is used to refer to language that seems intended to avoid offense to people, especially concerning race, gender, culture, and sexual orientation (Roper, 2020).

The act of ensuring social justice is not always limited to language but often leads to a form of activism to ostracize people or to remove them from prominent positions on account of an ideological breach or for violating social norms (Norris 2020). Cancel culture, as this phenomenon is better known, has a long tradition dating back to the 1950s as a strategy to boycott influential figures from black culture civil rights movements, and it takes place on social media.

The lack of a shared vision about the PC and cancel culture, often also seen as overlapped and interchangeable terms (Ben-Porath, 2017), make them highly contested (Granath & Ullén, 2019; Bouvier & Machin, 2021). This condition calls for works that shed deeper light on their meanings and features, along with the definition of contexts where they occur. In this light, the present study contributes to enhancing the understanding of the meaning that people give when they label something or someone as politically correct or report/indicate a case of cancel culture through an analysis of their conversations on social media. To accomplish this goal, a dataset of Twitter conversations featuring the phrases “politically correct” and “cancel culture” was collected; after, a textual analysis of the tweets was performed in order to identify thematic clusters that allowed better understanding in which contexts these terms was used. Social media

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “political correctness” and “politically correct” are often used interchangeably in this paper.

represent in fact the privileged space where these phenomena take place (Bouvier & Machin, 2021), in particular, Twitter plays a positive role in social justice campaigns (Bouvier, 2020).

This is an exploratory purpose but became more relevant considering that the debate in Italy is recently ongoing: if, on the one hand, the use of political correctness and cancel culture is growing, especially in the most recent news events, there have not yet been cases of cultural cancellation as well as it happened in the United States. The debate about this matter in Italy, in fact, only concerned the online disapproval for the "black face" of the TV show "Your Face Sounds Familiar" (Tale e quale show) but did not affect it that much, and, during the #MeToo campaign, the only Italian case more similar to the American cancel culture examples is that of the director Fausto Brizzi, but there was no cancellation because he started working again in the show business. In the Italian case, the opposition to "political correctness" is configured as several isolated episodes, mostly produced by single users whenever the debate is revived, rather than as a real cultural or political movement (Capozzi, 2018).

This paper is structured as follows: section two illustrates the origin and the framework of politically correct and cancel culture; section three describes the method adopted, while section four shows the results of the analysis. The last section concludes with some remarks about the undertaken work and future perspectives.

## **2. Political correctness and cancel culture on social media**

Political correctness is, in general, the rejection of language and behavior that could be offensive to others, especially relating to sex and race, suggesting for instance the use of "gay" instead of "sodomite" or "faggot", "African Americans" or "Black people" instead of "nigger".

The history of political correctness is complex. This expression had neither a linear nor continuous development, it picked up steam around 1990, peaks between 1991 and 1995, and gradually its diffusion reduced over time (Lakoff, 2000). Nevertheless, PC never is over or come back, remains very much a contested issue (Hartman, 2015). Also from a semantic point of view (Gallie, 1956; Connolly, 1993) "an agreed, clear, literal meaning [of PC] in the way that grammatical correctness or political corruption do" is lacked (Hughes, 2010:17).

The term "political correctness" is usually harked back to the second half of the 20th century in the Communist terminology used by the American New Left as a policy concept denoting the orthodox party line of Chinese Communism as enunciated by Mao Tse-Tung in the 1930s, and then used sporadically by the regime press to indicate opinions aligned with their respective dictates (Perry, 1992).

Albeit its diffusion in the social and political associations, the politically correct was not born as an ideological campaign, but as a pragmatic remedy for unsustainable situations following episodes of racism and intolerance on American campuses through by writing "speech codes", i.e. regulations aimed at sanctioning those who did not conform to the linguistic norm imposed by the academic world, a norm that it condemned racism, sexism, homophobia, and any discriminatory expressions. The debate on political correctness involves not only race, class, gender, sexual orientation issues, but also the themes like multiculturalism, disability, environment, culture, and animal rights (Johnson & Suhr, 2003; Hughes, 2010). At the same time, the "sensitivity training" programs run to these universities were also seen by some groups (for example, the National Association of Scholars) as threats to academic freedom, a form of orthodoxy disguised as tolerance.

The notion of PC emerged as a contested issue regards the polarized political discourse in the Left-Right, it is especially evident in the discourses surrounding social media movements for social justice. The fact that the discourse around PC takes place mainly on social media implies a modification of the social practices that involve avoiding or policing behaviour – usually speech – that is seen as derogating people in subordinated social groups (Aly & Simpson, 2019). Acting on social media would produce a form of social desirability in part influenced by politically correct itself: indeed, politically correct speeches are also used to perform considerate and respectful personae, to project a more desirable state of discourse (Wikström, 2016). This creates a sort of expectation of people behaving according to the social norms of the online media and its participant. In this view, what is politically correct to say or do, might not necessarily be true, rather could function as a kind of self-censorship given that people could hide their thoughts or reveal their real orientation (Loury, 1994; Herzogenrath-Amelung 2016).

Generally, different positions concerning the PC debate may be identified (Granath & Ullén, 2019). From the so-called "protesters" who charge PC with stifle public debate and limit free speech (D'Souza 1991; Johnson & Suhr, 2003), to the "deniers" who question the very existence of political correctness, just seen as a label systematically deployed by those on the Right-wing forces to discredit views challenging the status quo and the authority of the Left (Wilson 1995), and then a tool for concealing the truth (O'Neill, 2011). Conversely, other groups defend the assumptions underlying the PC (the "defenders"), seen as a set of positive values, or a consciously devised "way of talking about taboo topics" (Allan and Burrige 2006: 111), or a reasonable discursive practice (Cameron 1995; Lakoff 2000; Halmari 2011; Curzan 2014). Along with these positions, some insist that in addition to the study of the phenomenon in general ("analyst"), more attention should also be paid to the meaning given to it and which phrases are used in its discourse (Johnson and Suhr 2003; Toolan 2003). Despite PC being conceived as a myth or reality (Wilson, 1995), or a "spurious construct" (Fairclough, 2003), yet all these positions agree that it particularly affects public debate (Granath & Ullén, 2019).

The recognition of minorities in general and greater social justice is also the purpose of some movements that, instead of mainly claim a more respectful use of language, support radical actions, such as the boycott of someone or something, or the threat of "cancel" positions and behaviors considered not in line with the dominant culture. Better known as "cancel culture", it properly refers to public shaming initiated on social media to deprive someone of their usual clout or attention to make public discourse more diffused and less monopolized by those in positions of privilege (Clark, 2020). Specifically, this action born in queer communities of color, in particular on the Black Twitter - the meta-network of culturally connected communities on the microblogging site (Clark, 2015) - made the language of being "canceled" into an internet meme (Shifman, 2013).

Cancel culture is not new while related to call-out culture, doxing, and parallel to deplatforming<sup>2</sup> (Saint-Louis, 2021). The practice of cancellation can be more properly thought of as a form of political activism analogous to the tactic of using online consumer review platforms or of consumer-boycotts withdrawing support for perceived unethical brands and corporations (Lightfoot, 2019): in this sense the action of canceling aims to shame people to exert penalties, such as limiting their access to public platforms or damaging reputations (Norris, 2020). While online consumer review platforms can be used to propagate false information (Luca & Zervas, 2016), or boycott an organisation or an individual, however they seek to inform other consumers and not push sanctioning organisations to cancel other organisations and individuals (Saint-Louis, 2021).

In literature, a shared agreement on what cancel culture is, instead more debated are its purposes. Some agree that cancel culture is a way of achieving social justice for those victims unable to get legal redress or public apology, as in the famous case of MeToo movement (Norris, 2020). Conversely, cancel culture, like political correctness, has also been framed as a form of intolerance against opposing views. Being designed for the digital age in the midst of hypersociality, the pervasiveness of the culture of cancellation does not enable debate openly, it is even seen as form of critique that is destructive (Velasco, 2020). Others show that in some cases the brutality of the campaigns cannot be in proportion to the original transgression (Kirk, 2018), or note that these campaigns could mainly be driven by the pleasure brought to those tweeting to work together, fight for justice (Bérubé, 2018). Dealing with social injustice may not be the real purpose of a cancel campaign, but just representing an opportunity to show to be morally good (Ditum, 2014). Or even, for many critics of cancel culture who sit to the political right, cancel culture would overlap to PC describing a kind of political correctness seen as a dangerous 'Cultural Marxism' (Furedi, 2020).

Beyond the differences of what cancel culture is or it involved, the common element required for cancel culture to be enacted is for there to be something offensive and therefore cancellable: i.e. typified by racist, sexist, or homophobic remarks. Fundamentally the subject of cancel-culture must be accessible in some way

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<sup>2</sup> Here it is used the more general concept "Cancel culture". Call-out culture refers to the mediation and exchanges between parties (Sills et al., 2016) where the contents and behaviour published by someone are denounced or are called attention. Doxing instead occurs when personal information about a person is released on the Web with the intent of causing harm (Douglas, 2016). Deplatforming is a platform's removal of an individual or a group's social media account following an infraction to the former's terms of services (Rogers, 2020).

through online media or not and even if one is not active on social media, their actions could be captured, uploaded, and thus archived, at any moment. Then it must be perceived as offensive by a large enough social group and garner enough support (in terms of more shares, reshares, angry faces, dislikes/ likes) from their intended audience to lead to the loss of one's positions in society, a role, a job, etc (Hooks, 2020).

In this light, it is inevitably necessary to take into account the resonance that social media give to the matter of political correctness and cancel culture because of the easiness with which content and in particular opinions towards problematic acts circulate rapidly on a large scale. The act of canceling often involves scouring through feeds, articles, interviews, videos, just think of BlackLivesMatters, MeToo, and the LGBTQ+ movements which use different tactics on social media to carry out a cancel culture, such as dislike, unfollow, up to the removal of the profile. Probably the most glaring examples of it are the TV show "The 100" where, following the death of an openly homosexual character, the showrunner of the series Jason Rothenberg, lost 14,000 Twitter followers within 24 hours; and the #MeToo movement has brought to public attention several testimonies of sexual and gender-based violence, which has led in some cases to the removal of the profile of some important characters.

Specifically, Twitter is the most used platform for denouncing the use of politically incorrect expressions and enacting cancel culture (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). Thanks to its feeds which can take a highly insular and nodal form, the users tend to use it to bring attention to various issues, ideologies, or acts (KhosraviNik, 2017). This, on the one hand, allows users to gather in affective communities driven by a common ideology, and, on the other hand, leads to the creation of tweets driven by the need to capture attention, likes, and retweets, which can create a push for those that provoke high emotion, polarity, sarcasm and humor (Breazu & Machin, 2019). Moreover, many studies highlight the ability of Twitter to give voices to marginalized parts of civil society, allowing them to unite, share ideas, and mobilize for a common cause (Castells, 2015). Twitter, therefore, becomes a place in which to expose social injustices and bring them into the wider public and hold accountable those who discriminate or exclude, leading to challenges of power relations (Bouvier & Cheng, 2019). Such wide exposure is enhanced by the fact that people enjoy coming together against a perpetrator because mobilizing can bring group members closer together; and, also, searching for the misdeeds of others can increase social status (Henderson, 2019).

This study contributes to make clearer the meanings of the contested expressions political correctness and cancel culture, identifying their borders and features in a context where they have not yet fully spread as they did in the USA or North Europe. To this end, the analysis of the Twitter communication can help to figure out how the politically correct and cancel culture in the Italian context is conceived, and then understand which events, speeches, actions, and so on, users refer to when they talk about these phenomena.

### **3. Method and procedures**

The research was conducted by using Twitter conversations. First of all, only tweets were used, this is because the interest was not so much to estimate the incidence of the PC and cancel culture on Twitter conversations but to identify how users define these phenomena. Moreover, given the purpose of this study, only tweets in the Italian language were selected.

Tweets were collected in the period between 3rd and 13th May 2021. The particular period was chosen closely with specific events that have given an even greater resonance to PC and cancel culture in the public debate. The debate already present has intensified, with the approval of the Zan law proposal, which involves measures to prevent and tackle discrimination and violence concerning sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability. Politically correct has placed itself at the center of a political dispute over the law, but has met with great interest from public opinion. This fundamental case was the trigger for three other events, which made the debate even more heated: the speech of the singer Fedez at the Labor Day of May 1st in Rome, where he denounced an attempt to censor his speech, which openly sided against some exponents of the Italian right who were against the aforementioned law; the news concerning the non-consensuality of the prince's kiss to Snow White in the homonymous fairy tale; and the monologue of the comedians Pio and Amedeo on the use of some racist or homophobic terms in different situations of the everyday life.

Regarding the data collection, tweets were gathered by using the TwitteR package of Rstudio and the Twitter API to scrape all tweets containing a selection of specific hashtags. The use of hashtags allows understanding

how users describe their discourses on Twitter. Indeed, a hashtag indicates a tag that sets up an attributive relationship between the tweet as a tagged token and the tag as its type (Zappavigna, 2011). This kind of relationship assumes that other users will use this tag as a keyword for a tweet on this topic. The selection of hashtags involved two stages. In the first one, hashtags that more directly recall the phenomena studied were included: “politically correct”, “political correctness” (both in the English and in the Italian language), “cancel culture”. In a second step, an analysis of hashtags occurrences and co-occurrences was carried out, and those that more frequently occurred together were used in order to better detect main topics and events that affected the debate (cancel culture and Snow White; politically correct and pioeamedeo; dictatorship and words; dictatorship and politically correct; censorship and words; politically correct, freedom and expression; left and politically correct; ddlzan and words; ddlzan and politically correct; ddlzan and polically correct)<sup>3</sup>. The final corpus contained 4860 tweets. The aim was not to construct a representative corpus of the linguistic activity on Twitter on PC, but instead to conduct a case study to afford a study on meaning-making in a specific context and time on Twitter.

A textual analysis of the tweets was performed by using Rstudio. We have previously handled messages by customizing the dictionary through two phases: the lemmatization and disambiguation of words with the same graphic form but different meanings, and the creation of uniform strings. Then, a lexical correspondence analysis was performed on the corpus first, in order to highlight the latent structure underlying the various Tweets examined by reducing the dimensionality of the space of representation of the linguistic variables; successively, a hierarchical cluster analysis was carried out to identify positions and opinions of Twitter users regarding the politically correct and cancel culture, along with the understanding of relationships between the meanings and the situations in which these terms are used.

#### 4. Emerging dimensions of meaning

The WordCloud<sup>4</sup> gives preliminary information by showing the most occurring words that most characterize the conversations about the politically correct and cancel culture on Twitter<sup>5</sup> (fig. 1).



The largest words placed in the middle of the WordCloud, "freedom" and "expression", are pinned as the most occurring words, with frequencies of 2056 and 1865 respectively, that form about 38% of the corpus. Politically correct is linked to the freedom of expression, the term "free-speech"<sup>6</sup> is used 37 times. Also

<sup>3</sup> The keywords were translated from Italian to English here.

<sup>4</sup> For better visualisation, all words searched for in the screaping phase have been removed.

<sup>5</sup> A threshold of frequency equal to 15 was fixed.

<sup>6</sup> The expression ‘free-speech’ derives from a replacement, i.e. it is a recoding made by aggregating the words 'express' and 'freely' into a single pattern.

“opinion” is one of the most recurrent words, right after "freedom" and "expression" with a frequency of 538. The issue of the freedom of expression is enhanced by the presence of words such as "limit"<sup>7</sup> (192), "censorship" (189), as well as "delete" (56), which underline the limitation in usage of certain words and the act of canceling people or events (3% of the tweets).

Some words identify the phenomenon from a legal and political point of view in the top frequencies, among these, "laws" and "rights" present the highest frequency (559 and 556, equal to 4% of the corpus); moreover, "democracy", "art", "constitution", "pluralism" and "civil" highlight a demand for civil rights that also brings with it the words "offence" (84) and "deny" (31). Along with this, other words are more strictly connected to the political sphere: there are words like "left"<sup>8</sup> (160), "right"<sup>9</sup> (153), "politics" (97), which can be considered the main agent of the discussion around political correctness in "Italy" (254). While some words (1% tweets) refer more directly the right and discrimination matter: "offence" (118), "discrim"<sup>10</sup> (76), "violence" (71), "hate" (56), "insult" (56). The words "homophobia" (66), "homosexuals" (35), "LGBT" (35), and far below 'minorities' (15), could be identified as the subjects of discrimination and demand for civil rights.

In the figure below, words linked to current news are presented. One of these is the story of Snow White: one could notice the words "kiss" (229) and "consensual" (158), and again the words "Disney" and "tales". The other topical news item is the one referring to the Pio and Amedeo affair: we can notice from the WordCloud the words "laugh" (50) and "satire" (38). And the last one refers to the case of Fedez, with "fedez" (143) visible in the WordCloud and "rai" (25) much less frequent. Ultimately, the news concerning Gervasoni regarding the insults made to President Mattarella is also discussed. In addition to the highlighted topics, some words account for the mood of the discussion: 'fuck' (99), 'bothered' (76), 'idiots' (40), 'fear' (41), 'absurd' (35), 'ridiculous' (33).

Then, a lexical correspondence analysis was carried out on the tweets corpus in order to get a representation of the relationships between the words and to identify the main dimensions of meaning.

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<sup>7</sup> The expression 'limit' is derived from a replacement, of the words 'limitation', 'restrict', 'limits' and 'limit' in a single pattern.

<sup>8</sup> 'Left' has also been recoded as 'pd'.

<sup>9</sup> 'Salvini', 'Meloni' and 'Lega' have also been recoded into 'Right'.

<sup>10</sup> The expression 'discrim' is derived from a replacement, of the words 'discrimination', 'discrimination', 'discriminator' in one pattern.



Figure 2: Correspondence Analysis.

Looking at the axes, it is possible to identify many areas that reflect the debate upon politically correct that emerged in the Twitter conversations. On the left-hand side, opinions on more strictly political issues, especially on the Zan bill, are placed; while, on the right-hand side, opinions arising from news events that have sparked off the debate are presented.

The first axis shows two different visions of freedom of expression. On the left side of it emerge the theme of freedom of expression as respect for others (expression, freedom, right, law, etc.): the discussion is around the defense and importance of the Zan bill for civil rights, showing themselves "in favor" of politically correct as a tool to restore equal dignity to all components of civil society. In particular, some words underline the consequences of this bill in limiting life (limit, crime, legitimate), while others emphasize the tendency to defend the law as a guarantee against violent behavior and gestures (behaviors, discrim). Instead, the right side illustrates the matter of the alleged violation of rights seen as a radicalization of the politically correct (snow white, get out of hand, madness).

The second axis is characterized by the discussion around the cancel culture. The conversations mainly refer to the discourse stemmed from the comedic duo of Pio and Amedeo and the Snow White fairy tale - with its respective *querelle* on the alleged non-consensual kiss. The terms around these themes show criticism of politically correct and its derivation of cancel-culture. Above all, we find terms denoting intolerance (bothered, fuck) towards politically correct, an intolerance that can be exemplified by the usage of the word 'dictatorship': a word that often returns in the discourse against politically correct. Here, cancel culture is only used in the conversations in a rhetorical sense there are no actions of cancellation or boycott of someone or something.

#### 4.1 Distinctive orientation groups

Starting from the analysis of the lexical correspondences, a hierarchical cluster analysis was carried out to detect groups of words and make the different positions and opinions of Twitter users regarding politically correct in general emerge. Keywords that fall out in each cluster allow to identify the specific theme and to label the cluster. Four clusters were found, so named: "the Public Debate", "the Anti-revisionist", "the Satirical", and "the Polemic". The first cluster describes the wide discussion about the phenomenon,

condensing public opinion and political debates. The second and third clusters are formed around topical issues and respectively concern the discussion on the Snow White cancellation and Pio and Amedeo's monologue on *politically correct*. The last cluster expresses a clear position against politically correct.

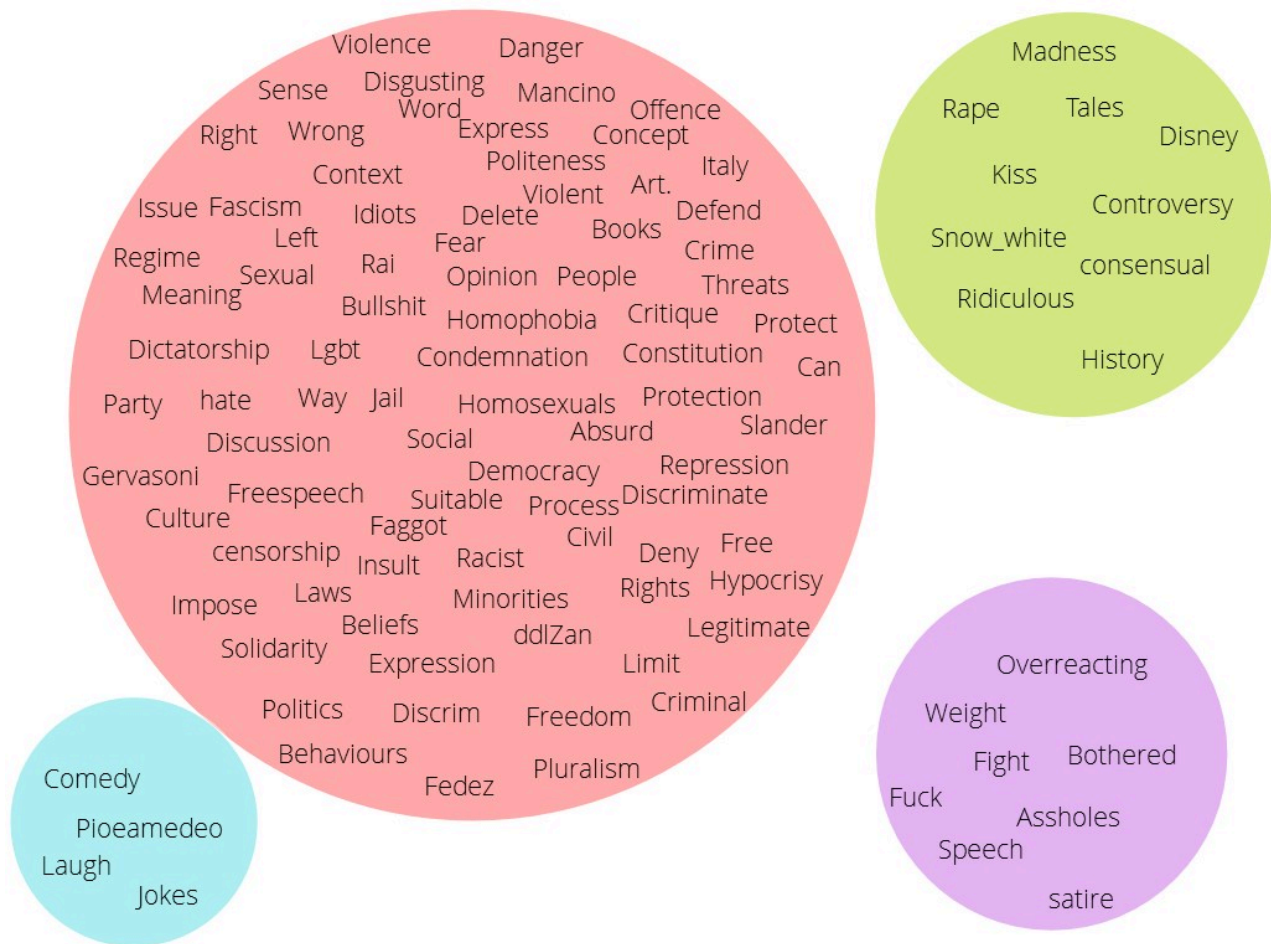


Figure 3: Cluster Analysis

“The Public Debate” cluster holds together a large number of words and a semantic variety that reflect the political and ideological contested debate upon the issue of politically correct. The cluster includes, at the same time, the issues of politics, the need for laws that protect and defend people who are verbally discriminated against or victims of physical violence, human rights, and, of course, freedom of expression (*solidarity, violence, protect, fascism*). However, the issue regarding the right to express oneself freely brings out two different ideological positions on that. Some people claim that the “freedom” of “expression” they feel has been taken away because of politically correct, which is experienced as “censorship” and not as a “protection”. Conversely, for others being free does not mean using whatever expressions, including those that may be offensive towards gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In this sense, the politically correct do not eliminate freedom of expression, but, on the contrary, strengthen it, defending the freedom of “minorities”.

The word “condemnation” refers both to the condemnation of politically correct and of those who reject it. In the first case, users claim the liberty to express themselves with certain words on behalf of them not being directly offensive; in fact, the word “sense” is present inside this cluster, together with “faggot” and “context”, showing how it is the sense entrusted to each word is important and the context where they are used.



Il peso delle parole dipende da chi e come le dice. Pio e Amedeo vanno contro il politicamente corretto, se non vi fanno ridere basta non guardarli. Io stasera, alla faccia vostra, li guarderò con il mio migliore amico.  
[#felicissimasera](#) [#pioeamedeo](#)

Moreover, they condemn political correctness because the recurring use of certain words results in 'emptying' them of their discriminatory meaning. According to this logic, using words like *faggot* or *nigger* means making them enter the common language as simple adjectives and thus destroying discrimination; to some, remarking offensive words is to make them customary and no longer offensive, implementing them in a context of normality and habit.

Secondo me il politicamente corretto in ogni cosa è un regalo per chi è razzista o omofobo per davvero. Usare frocio o negro fino a renderle delle parole vuote a furia di percolare chi le usa e chi pensa veramente quelle cose è l'arma migliore per distruggerle [#pioeamedeo](#)

5:13 PM · 1 mag 2021 · Twitter for Android

On the other hand, those who reject the assumptions of politically correct do not understand that this is the only way to condemn those who discriminate and, at the same time, to “defend” “minorities”.

Il "politically correct" è quella cosa che ti impedisce di discriminare minoranze in un contenuto pubblico: non c'entra niente la censura, è giustizia sociale. Se la tua arte ha bisogno di discriminazione forse è meglio che la tieni per te.

3:50 PM · 7 mag 2021 · Twitter Web App

The cluster also includes those words that refer to the political discussions surrounding civil rights, in particular about the proposed 'Zan' bill. Here, Mancino law is discussed, now in force in Italy, which is not considered enough to defend the 'freedom' of individuals regarding their sexual orientation. Therefore, new and greater restrictions and sanctions against discrimination would be needed. In this case, words like "jail", "wrong" and "absurd" are used.

Furthermore, this group also contains those words about the political issue: “dictatorship”, “democracy”, “regime”, associated with words such as “right” and “left”. Those opposed to politically correct speak of it as a dictatorship created by the imagination of the left-wing political parties - more historically oriented towards openness and to citizens of other nationalities. This ‘dictatorship’ is a regime of 'imposition' of language and actions. On the other hand, the proximity of words such as "fascism", "sexual" and "LGBT", shows how right-wing parties disagree with other various forms of sexual orientation, supporting alleged normality in love affairs/relationships as well as in identity.

The following three clusters are smaller in size than the first cluster but are focused on more specific aspects of PC.

The second cluster identifies the Anti-revisionist, those who are against the review of cultural products of the past according to the values of present-day society. It revolves around the discussion upon the “deleting” of the kiss received by Snow White in the Disney fairy tale as it could be considered non-consensual. The act of canceling may be seen as a form of extremization of politically correct. Defining the case of Snow White’s kiss as a “rape” is seen as a “madness” and a “controversy”.

#Biancaneve e il bacio del Principe: il #politicallycorrect ci sta sfuggendo un po' troppo di mano.

Secondo me questa è follia pura, bisogna sempre contestualizzare i fatti e i bambini guardano con occhi diversi degli adulti le cose

Supporto incondizionato a #pioeamedeo: "il politically correct ha rutt' u ca\*\*o!"

Io rispetto persone e culture, ma quando si tratta di scherzare, fare satira o raccontare una storia, non accetto che si debba sottostare ad assurde censure lessicali.

#politicallycorrect sucks!

7:34 PM · 1 mag 2021 · Twitter for Android

The Satirical cluster concerning Pio and Amedeo's monologue also brought to light the theme concerning comedy. The tweets containing the words “laugh” in this cluster support the importance of laughter as a way to respond to the use of certain language - which, according to the two comedians, does not necessarily imply discrimination against the people towards whom the message is directed. This posture refers to what Granath and Ullén (2019) named “protesters”.

Fermiamo i sostenitori del political correct, prima che si inizino a bruciare i libri ed a preparare i roghi. Non #politicallycorrect #Biancaneve #illuminismo

8:23 PM · 4 mag 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

The last cluster identifies the "polemic" behavior against PC and cancel culture. Here, the main interest is participating in the discussion only to express their contrary opinion, without providing arguments that can somehow enrich the debate. The cluster presents opposition to the deletion of words from everyday language, as well as to the censorship of films, books, or single extracts; in this regard, the most relevant terms are "bothered", "assholes", "overreacting" that express a sort of intolerance towards the acting of canceling the culture. A further important word is “weight”: those who are against the cancel culture affirm that the most important thing is the weight given to the words and the way of saying them.

Avete rotto i coglioni voi e il politicamente corretto. Ma fatevi una vita, invece di svegliarvi ogni giorno con una battaglia nuova. Stamattina una persona mi ha salutato senza il mio consenso, dovei denunciarlo?chiedo per un amico #politicallycorrect

1:46 PM · 5 mag 2021 · Twitter for Android

Non staremo esagerando? Forse togliere la libertà di espressione rasenta il fascismo.

2:03 PM · 9 mag 2021 · Twitter for Android

The weight of the word and the meaning given to it depends on the 'discourse' around it, not the word itself. In this view, censorship is not the right way to solve discrimination.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The paper illustrated the features and the meanings given to politically correct and cancel culture by Twitter users in the Italian scenario.

The study confirms the contested and discussed nature of political correctness: there is no common vision among the users, but they tend to give different meanings and/or associate various political and social issues with it. In particular, PC includes two contrasting visions of freedom of expression: the one as a way of granting respect and rights to everyone, the other as a tool of limiting or, in extreme cases, of censoring people. The alleged violation of rights represents a kind of radicalization of the politically correct which translates into cancel culture. This result shows PC and cancel culture are two intertwined concepts. However, this kind of radicalization does not lead to a real cancellation of people or events, but it is mostly rhetorical. What emerged is the relativity of the speech around politically correct: any speech is not necessarily discriminatory *per se* but depends on the speaker's intentions. In this sense, the politically correct is seen as an unnecessary limitation.

The study presented here can contribute to the enhancing of that research strand aimed to improve the understanding of political correctness and cancel culture on social media through the detection of meanings and situations that characterize them. Along with this, this work makes evident one of the strengths of digital methods, namely the possibility of capturing data in real-time about a phenomenon that occurs almost

completely in the digital context, providing a precise snapshot of public opinion in the days when the debate on politically correct in Italy peaked. The analysis on Twitter shows that many tweets that debated politically correct have been stimulated by specific and often isolated events. If the politically correct is still a widely debated phenomenon, cancel culture has not yet seen its real/complete application in the Italian context, for these reasons it is still harder to give an unambiguous definition. In this regard, future research should investigate these controversial issues from a diachronic perspective to discover how they develop over time and from what further events they may arise, as well as to be more complete framed and understood.

The last issue regards the role played by social media in defining and affecting the meaning of PC and cancel culture. In this view, the study could be improved with new points of view by analyzing the same phenomena in different countries and on different platforms and social media. It could be interesting to investigate whether and how the various digital platforms affect ways of conceiving of politically correct, and of the perceived range of possible actions. In other words, it should take into account in deeper the role of affordances which can both facilitate and constrain the action (Bucher & Helmond, 2017).

The term “social media” is in itself deeply ideological in that it claims certain inherently positive qualities – user-centred community-building (Van Dijk, 2013: 11); therefore, any change brought about by these media seems to be necessarily social and hence positive. In the case of Twitter, some of its intrinsic features, such as the textual brevity of any individual post (140/280 words), the speed with which posts are disseminated, and the rapidity of online exchanges, would reveal a new form of instantaneity (Herzogenrath-Amelung, 2016), foster a kind of ideological rigidity and lack of nuance (Ng, 2020), usually enhanced by a reductive narrative based on opposing forces of good and evil (Papacharissi, 2015). These features, indeed, would encourage brief, deeply emotive outbursts (Papacharissi, 2015; Sampson et al., 2028), while leaving no space for the reflexivity that is crucial in deal with sensitive issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, disability, and so on, that are the target of politically correct campaigns (Bouvier, Machin, 2021). Indeed, engagement, such as likes and sharing, is often driven by sarcasm and cruel humor, along with memes and parody (Henefeld, 2016), which in fact can work as a form of self-promotion and attention grabbing (Udupa & Pohjonen, 2019). This is why the study of the meanings given to political correctness and cancel culture simply cannot overlook to take into account the features of the social media in which the discourses are placed, and question to what extent the features of the digital platforms may affect ways these phenomena are spread and are perceived by users. In this angle, the context would assume a dual nature: as a physical, social, and cultural environment where a digital phenomenon is located, but also as digital space, and here it is referred to the kind of social media platform, where people come into contact with it, exchange information and ideas, make groups or movements, and more, in general, produce different actions and reactions. Better framing of the context therefore would aid to disentangle the elements, values, and ideals that underlie political correctness and cancel culture from consequences of the intrinsic features of digital platforms in which the discourses are nowadays expressed.

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