

Assignment 1 - Qualitative research- Cancel Culture

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

Assignment 1 - Qualitative research

Cancel Culture

1. Introduction

The cancel culture is a modern form of shunning where an individual is pushed out of social and professional circles both on social media and in person. The shunned individuals are termed as canceled (McDermott, 2021). The term "cancel culture" is mostly viewed as a negative term and often comes up in debates about free speech. If a public figure, often a celebrity, acts or speaks in a questionable manner, they are called out and shunned. Cancel culture has gained momentum mostly on social media. Celebrities and brands are called out and canceled when they do or say politically incorrect things (Kato, 2021). Some people who are canceled often retain their positions in society and continue with their careers. Some cancellations are defended on the basis of freedom of speech.

2. Research Questions

The research, data collection, and analysis will be guided by these questions.

RQ1: What factors influence the rise of cancel culture? Has the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the trajectory of the cancel culture?

RQ2: Do people interact differently online than in person, and if so, how does this relate to practices of cancel culture? Are people more likely to be 'called out' or 'canceled' for their comments online than in person?

RQ3: What are the perceived social, emotional, and health consequences of cancel culture?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Factors influencing the rise of cancel culture

Cancel culture has grown rampantly over the last few years. Canceling individuals and entities give society immediate rewards, and the dangers of it are quite distant.

People do not consider the fact that they could be canceled next. They are fast to cancel others due to the feeling of group solidarity and immediate gratification (Henderson, 2021). The cancel culture helps people identify who is loyal to what, calling out people in public forces responses. Cancel targets are public figures who commit transgressions of different kinds but often have to do with something controversial. This makes the situation perfect for public participation, and people agree in unison whether to cancel the transgressor or not. When people agree on the fate of a transgressor in unison, it is hard to tell a friend from a foe. However, when some people agree, and others disagree, it is easy to know where loyalties lie (Henderson, 2021). Individuals who ask for evidence of the alleged transgression or question the cancel culture are identified as disloyal.

Cancel culture reinforces social bonds; it involves uniting people for a common purpose. They enjoy solidarity in joining a movement against a wrongdoer. While doing something positive increases the status of a public figure, one negative action can lead to failure. Uniting people for something good is hard. However, people enjoy broadcasting the transgressions of others. To them, it is fun and offers social solidarity at little or no cost. Even when they fail at canceling a person, they do not care because they had fun and upgraded their social status (Henderson, 2021). Cancel culture reduces competition. If one can elevate their social status by canceling their competition, they are likely to do so. The right way of elevating one's social status is by doing something good. However, that requires work, and there is a risk of failure. Fortunately, there is the option of broadcasting competitors' transgressions. The loss of one person's social status means that

another person is gaining. If one is a five on the social scenes, climbing to an eight is harder than bringing down an eight to a three (Henderson, 2021). People are slow to give commendation but fast to assign blame.

3.2 COVID 19 pandemic and the cancel culture

The covid19 pandemic has led to lots of cancellations; local, national, and international events have been canceled. Exams, flights, and events stand canceled; the pandemic has made the cancel phenomenon look normal. The practice has spread so much that the phrase "cancel culture" was the word of the year 2019, as per the Australian Macquarie Dictionary (Singh, 2021). While the practice has been around for a while, the pandemic has amplified it, possibly because people are frustrated about being under lockdown. Also, during the lockdown, people have a lot of time on their hands and no social activities to do. They end up seeking comfort on social media and following issues that they would not have cared for before the lockdown.

3.3 Do people act differently online than they do in person?

Yes, being online lowers one's inhibition, and the phenomenon is referred to as the online disinhibition effect. The results of this effect are people being meaner or sharing more than they would in person. When people are mean online, they create hostile environments referred to as toxic disinhibition. Conversely, opening up online can make people feel connected and supported by other social media users, creating positive environments referred to as benign disinhibition (Farrar, 2021). When one is anonymous online, they feel freer to open up about personal issues and less accountable about their actions. Also, one can misrepresent themselves online because it is not possible to read their tone or body language.

The content on social media is often short and lacks context. People tend to imagine the tones and characteristics of the given text based on their expectations and not the actual intent.

As such, there is a lot of room for misinterpretation, and this can lead to inappropriate responses. Most people view online as a game where common courtesy is not applicable. Finally, social media gives an equal platform to people from all classes, and people act as equals, and that is not applicable in real life. People are likely to be called out more on social media than in real life. The online disinhibition effect makes people less empathetic and more vocal on social media. In real life, wrongdoers are given a chance to explain their actions or apologize, and people are more receptive. Also, in real life, people understand the context and the real character of a person. Therefore, they judge individuals based on overall information.

3.4 Consequences of the cancel culture

The cancel culture is very effective at combating transgression, especially sexism, homophobia, and racism. It calls for social change and addresses inequalities. In 2016, some people in the film industry canceled the Oscars because of biases in nominations. This led to a social change; more people of color were nominated. Uniting and calling out bad behavior can influence positive changes. It makes people think before they act. However, the cancel culture has negative consequences as well. Canceling turns into bullying; people are mean to the perpetrator and aim to hurt them rather than to correct them (Toler, 2121). They are often verbally abused, trolled, and even threatened. The canceled party feels hated, isolated, lonely, and sad. Such feelings can lead to anxiety, depression, and suicide. One is not given a chance to apologize, and that makes them feel dismissed and as if everyone has given up on them. Instead of engaging in a conversation to understand each other, cancelers gang up on the perpetrators and not only rob them of a chance to apologize but also abuse them. The cancel culture affects the onlookers too.

By witnessing the cancel culture, onlookers become fearful (Anderson, 2018). They can be overwhelmed with anxiety and be afraid of something from the past coming back to bite them. They avoid any attention by staying silent and withdrawn. Some onlookers feel guilty for not saying something when they could.

4. Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

My approach will explore the cancel culture and why it has become rampant. How has the Covid19 pandemic influenced the cancel culture? I will also explore how people behave online versus how they behave in real life; I will look at why people are more unforgiving online than in real life. Finally, the cancel culture affects mental health. I will explain how the call-out culture affects different parties. The key concepts I will use in my analysis include; "cancel culture," "call-out culture," and "disinhibition effect." Cancel culture is modern-day ostracism; people withdraw their support from the individual or brand they have canceled. Call-out culture is similar to the cancel culture. However, unlike in the cancel culture, one is given a chance to learn and apologize in the call-out culture (Toler, 2021). The disinhibition effect happens when one is less aware of themselves; it often happens when one is online and makes one meaner or more open than usual.

5. Method

The search phrases I used are: "What is the cancel culture," "What factors influence the rise of cancels culture," "How covid19 has influenced the cancel culture", "Why are people meaner online," "Is canceling easier online than in real life," and "cancel culture and mental health." The search phrases led to The New York Times Article "Those People We Tried to cancel? They're All Hanging out Together" by McDermott, "The endemic growth of 'cancel

culture' during the pandemic" by Singh, "What is cancel culture, everything to know about the toxic online trend" by Kato, and "5 Reasons Why People Love Cancel Culture" by Henderson.

5.1 Selection of data and storage

I collected data from publicly available sources. I chose international news websites because the cancel culture is global, and to stay relevant to my region, I chose a couple of Australian sites. There was no ethical violation in the collection of data; all data sources have been cited.

6. Analysis and Discussion

In view of my research questions, the objective of my research is to

1. Understand what the cancel culture is and why it is so rampant.
2. Understand the implications of the cancel culture and the way

forward

Shunning and ex-communication have been used in human history as a way of enforcing social conformity. Modern ex-communication is called canceling or calling out. It is not clear when the term "canceling" began to be used but in the 2010s, people began to highlight the imperfections of public figures "calling them out." In 2017 and 2018, the cancel culture grew even bigger, and the cancel culture moved to the mainstream media (Hassan, 2021). the culture has been accepted by some people because it has provided a platform for marginalized individuals to silence powerful who act inappropriately. Powerful individuals who would otherwise not face any consequences for their actions are exposed and punished. The culture has also been criticized because it encourages

quick judgment and overly harsh punishment. Also, canceled individuals are not given a chance to apologize or learn from their mistakes.

Some instances, like the "me too movement" that led to high-profile individuals being held accountable for their actions, can make people believe that a cancel culture is a good tool for change. However, although the transgressors have had well-deserved punishment, there is no evidence that such a move has influenced social change. Former USA President at his summit in 2019 cautioned people against using the cancel card. He said that the culture is simplistic and reduces good people to the worst choices they ever made. The lack of tolerance is unrealistic and good people make mistakes (Hassan, 2021). The cancel culture leaves no room for negotiation or investigations, which is unfair. It is toxic, leads to life threats, and drives people to suicide. People may want to believe that it influences change, but that is far from the truth. It encourages bullying and dismissiveness as a substitute for negotiation. The internet benefits from evoking emotion and reactions; the cancel culture fits into that model. People online experience the disinhibition effect and act irrationally, becoming bullies and trolls. Canceling is a self-sealing act that protects commenters from opposing opinions and criticism.

Moving forward, people should learn how to set boundaries by becoming more aware of what is good or offensive. Canceling people and brands does not drive them away (Toler, 2021). Publicly shaming people that one does not know personally is not likely to change their character. Advanced societies adopt the rule of live and let live. It is acceptable to advocate for people to advocate for themselves but not by attacking and destroying others. The purpose of the cancel culture is not to correct behavior but to undermine transgressors (Heffer, 2021).

7. Conclusion

From my research, I found out that cancellations happen in very similar ways. A person says something controversial, and people on social media react swiftly. The fate of the perpetrator is in the hands of the masses; if one is canceled, people withdraw their support. Anyone can be canceled, but in most cases, the cancel culture targets celebrities. Many times, they bully and are abusive towards the perpetrator. There is no chance of apologizing or engaging in a conversation. Once a person is canceled, nobody cares about their opinion and such feelings can lead to anxiety, depression, and even suicide (Bacon, 2021). The cancel culture has risen significantly during the pandemic. People are frustrated and are looking for avenues to release their frustrations. Also, due to the cancellation of social norms such as flights, school, and events, the cancellation has become a thing. Critics suggest that the cancel culture is unhealthy as it instills fear of expression. People cannot have honest conversions; they say what is safe and politically correct. Others argue that the cancel culture is good because it encourages accountability from the wealthy, powerful, and those in authorities. Any rational person understands that prejudice is destructive. However, the cancel culture often looks for faults where there are none (Switzer, 2021). Targets are mostly expressing their inoffensive but different opinion.

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