The Toxicity of Cancel Culture

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INTRODUCTION

- Cancel culture refers to a modern form of social ostracism, in which a controversial individual or group receives public backlash for a behavior that is deemed inappropriate or unforgivable.
- This backlash entails shaming a targeted individual or group out of professional and social circles as a means of effectively “canceling” their offensive presence.
- Any behavior can be canceled and labeled “cancel-worthy.”
- Most often, cancel culture targets celebrities and other individuals with power, and occurs on social media platforms such as Twitter.
- Cancel culture is seen as a radicalized form of public shaming and call to accountability.
- Cancel culture aims to highlight the social injustices committed by an individual or group to establish a greater degree of intellectual conformity and social accountability.
- Cancel culture specifically ties to African American culture:
  - The first notable use of the term “canceled” (in terms of how it is understood today) came from the 1995 film New Jack City.
  - The term was then popularized on Black Twitter after cast member Cisco Roseland used it in a 2014 episode of Love & Hip Hop New York to break up with someone.
- Cancel culture is largely recognized as a liberal movement, one that’s inspired by a desire for social justice and accountability.

RESULTS

- Individuals targeted by advocates of cancel culture are most commonly cited as being: misogynistic, racist, religiously intolerant, homophobic, transphobic, or ignorant.
- One of the biggest trends can be seen through the Me Too movement, which specifically targets individuals who have a track record for sexual violence or sexually inappropriate behavior.
- Another common trend has been the removal of blackface from any television programs to feature it, which critics of the practice cite as historically racist and harmful to overall perceptions of the African American community.
- Additionally, individuals practicing cancel culture for purposes not directly related to television are met with heavy criticism and calls for their “cancellation.”
- In the case of Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, who had a photograph surfacing of him at a blackface party from 1984, a near statewide movement emerged on social media demanding him to resign from office.
- However, in 2015, the former governor and later won a standing ovation from a mostly black crowd as he reflected back on his actions and marked the 40th anniversary of the arrival of African slaves.
- Actor Ted Danson, who showed up on blackface to perform in the role of Whopo Goldberg (this girlfriend at the time) in 1993, was met with both criticism and laughter.
- He also used racial slurs such as the n-word more than a dozen times throughout his performance.
- His career didn’t fail as a result of his racist humor “in fact, he just finished filming his most popular show,” one of NBC’s most popular and critically acclaimed shows.
- A shot in The Office episode, “Dre Yacht,” was removed for featuring a character dressed in blackface as Zwanet Pat.
- The sequence in The Office episode, “The Dundies,” in which Michael Scott appears in yellowface remains on all platforms.
- Specifically, Michael puts on false teeth and glasses with squinted eyes on them while speaking in a stereotypical oriental accent (see Figure 1 below).
- Despite becoming a target of cancel culture for comments that were deemed offensive, J.K. Rowling experienced a surge in popularity within Great Britain.
- The publisher, Bloomsbury, said its consumer publishing arm grew by 20x.
- After admitting to the sexual misconduct claims made against him in 2017, comedian Louis C.K. returned to the stage and sold out venues.
- People cite the limitations it places on free speech and the toxic discourse environment it exacerbates as its most problematic issues.
- Cancel culture ignores any notion of intellectual development.
- The distribution of justice for cancel culture is highly uneven.
- Certain controversies will go unnoticed while others of a similar or lesser magnitude are demonized.
- Cancel culture can often have the opposite effect it intends to have.
- “Canceling” is seen as a necessary form of public shaming, but oftentimes it leads to increased polarization and a mob mentality.

CONCLUSION

- Although people note its benefits, cancel culture is still viewed negatively by a majority of the general public.
- People cite the limitations it places on free speech and the toxic discourse environment it exacerbates as its most problematic issues.
- Cancel culture ignores any notion of intellectual development.
- The distribution of justice for cancel culture is highly uneven.
- Certain controversies will go unnoticed while others of a similar or lesser magnitude are demonized.
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REFERENCES


OBJECTIVES

- The main goal with this presentation is to highlight the negative impact that cancel culture has on social discourse and academic debate.
- Specifically, cancel culture often leads to a hostile environment with little chance of generating a meaningful discussion on an issue of public importance.
- Additionally, there’s an uneven and hypocritical distribution of social justice that occurs within cancel culture—those without enough power or fame are far more likely to suffer backlash consequences than those with it.
- This also brings the effectiveness of cancel culture into question, as there have been several instances of unintended consequences arising as a result of attempts to “cancel” an individual or group.
- Finally, this presentation aims to expose how this social phenomenon exacerbates ideological intolerance, comedic subjectivity, and political polarization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- Several lists detailing prominent examples of cancel culture were analyzed in order to determine any common trends in controversial behavior.
- These examples were also examined in-depth to reveal the exact scope to which an individual or group was effectively “canceled” and to record the discourse environment that was frequently stimulated.
- Articles and public opinion polls on cancel culture were examined as well.

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