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Abstract

This presentation explores the phenomenon of cancel culture, examining its definition, historical roots, connection to social media, and its dual roles as both activism and a threat to free speech. It analyzes public opinions and outlines the consequences of cancel culture, including case studies of Korean celebrities. The goal is to provide a balanced view of this complex cultural trend.

Keywords: *cancel culture, social media, public shaming, activism, free speech*

1. Introduction

Cancel culture has become one of the most debated social phenomena of recent years. It represents a form of social ostracization, often driven by social media, in which individuals or entities face consequences for perceived wrongdoing. While some view it as a necessary means of accountability, others see it as an excessive form of public shaming that stifles free expression.

2. Definition

According to the Macquarie Dictionary, cancel culture refers to the tendency within a community to withdraw support from a public figure. It involves boycotting someone or something due to alleged inappropriate behavior or remarks, often spread rapidly through social media. Actions may include removing public figures from platforms, banning their work, or terminating professional roles.

3. The Origins of Cancel Culture

- 1991: The concept of "canceling" appeared in the film *New Jack City* by Mario van Peebles.
- 2005: Rapper 50 Cent used the term in his song "Hustler's Ambition."
- 2010: Lil Wayne continued the reference in the track "I'm Single."

4. Cancel Culture and Social Media

Cancel culture is largely driven and amplified by social media platforms. Twitter often sparks these movements, while YouTube and TikTok serve to amplify and fuel them. These platforms allow public opinion to spread quickly and widely, enhancing both support and backlash.

5. Cancel Culture as Activism

Cancel culture is often considered a form of activism. It involves encouraging boycotts when material or behavior is deemed offensive. Targets may include public figures accused of racism, sexism, homophobia, or unethical actions. While some campaigns are grounded in justice, others may be rooted in trivial or attention-seeking motives.

6. Cancel Culture vs. Free Speech

Opinions vary on whether to cancel culture limits or embodies free speech. Many see it as a form of "accountability culture" within democratic discourse. Critics argue it suppresses free expression. The U.S. Supreme Court once stated, "Any person with a phone line can become a town crier with a voice that resonates farther than it could from any soapbox," emphasizing the powerful role of modern technology in both justice and retribution.

7. Negative Effects of Cancel Culture

According to Refocus AU, cancel culture can have serious consequences:

- Psychological Impact: Anxiety, depression, and social isolation for those canceled.
- Career Consequences: Job loss and financial instability.
- Short-lived Satisfaction: Participants may feel momentary empowerment that fades as controversies continue or resurface.

8. Example Cases

Case 1: RIIZE Controversy

A member of the Korean band RIIZE, Seunghan, paused activities after private photos and videos showing him smoking and dating were leaked. While Korean fans criticized him, international fans viewed the behavior as benign. Despite efforts to return as a soloist, regaining his former popularity remains difficult.

Case 2: HyunA and the Burning Sun Scandal

HyunA was implicated indirectly in the Burning Sun scandal due to her marriage to Yong Jun-hyung in 2024. The scandal involved serious criminal activity and corruption. Though she wasn't a direct participant, her association led to fan backlashes, boycotts, and a notable decline in her popularity.

9. Conclusion

Cancel culture can result from both minor personal choices and significant ethical breaches. Before taking part in such actions, individuals should consider the severity of the situation and the long-term consequences for the person involved. Misjudging canceling can damage reputations, careers, and mental health—not only for the individual but also for their close relationships.

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