

# The Impact of Cancel Culture on the Wellbeing of Student Leaders in Far Eastern University

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**Abstract**—The study explores how cancel culture affects the wellbeing of student leaders at Far Eastern University (FEU) in Manila. With social media playing a big role in how we interact and form opinion in today's generation, cancel culture has become something that many college student leaders experience firsthand, especially in the digital age. The research focuses on how cancel culture is spread through social media; it studies how it impacts student leaders' social lives and what kind of psychological effects it may have. By interviewing 4 student leaders from various organizations inside Far Eastern University (FEU), the study shows that cancel culture brings anxiety, fear of judgement, and social isolation. Student leaders are pressured to act careful because anything they say may be used against them and become subjects of cancel culture. The study highlights how cancel culture can affect mental, psychological, and social relationships.

**Keywords**— Cancel Culture, Far Eastern University, Wellbeing, Mental Health.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In social phenomenon, cancel culture has become prevalent when it comes to influencing one's social identity and shaping the public discourse as well. The presence of online shaming, exclusion and the suppression of diverse perspectives has raised negative concerns to cancel culture, even though it implies accountability for an individual's action. Social media is the central part for college students in Manila when it comes to shaping opinions and interactions, thus in terms of group affiliations, self-perception and even the overall social identity of an individual can be significantly affected by cancel culture (Exala et al., 2024). Examining existing studies on cancel culture and its effects on the social identity of students in Manila would be highlighted in this paper.

“Calling out,” often known by individuals as “cancel culture,” is the act of pulling back from showing support from certain individuals, organizations, and companies which shown or have views, behaviours, or deeds that are contrary or not aligned with how majority's view matters or other reasons such problematic behaviours or unacceptable. This act or occurrence takes place on platforms specifically on social media, where people voice out their anger or dissatisfaction for these specific individuals or institutions in a way that it'll go beyond the algorithm of countless people and a highly visible audience that we'll make these people viral (Bakhtiari, 2020). Countless years have passed, and the culture of cancellation has become more and more prevalent and gained significant recognition especially among young people. Where it has become a movement wherein individuals who share the

same values, political views, and ideologies join forces to collectively criticize those who they've seen acted inappropriate or disrespectful towards others and are not responsible for their own actions. Most of the advocates of cancel culture argued that it is one of the efficient ways of resolving issues and unacceptable conduct by organizations and influential individuals and making them accountable for their actions and promoting fairness and justice. Meanwhile, others praised cancelled culture due to its ability to combat the status quo; heated debates are still blooming when it is put into the table of discussion (Bakhtiari, 2020).

A set of complex questions lies beneath the heart of cancel culture that is yet to be answered fully. The consideration of these questions is important, especially the number of politically and socially aware consumers are increasing in this age of time. Surrounding cancel culture, it has one of the central concerns where it allows people, specifically consumers, to construct both their social and personal identities, through the brands or individuals that are involved in certain scandals, individuals are symbolically distancing themselves from it. By severing ties with entities who they believe are disordered or immoral, people expressing their disapproval through certain agendas or scenarios was essentially enabled by the idea of cancel culture.

Consumers reject associations with those who have behaved in certain ways that they might not approve of or some ways they do not consider unethical for the reason of them protecting their values through this collective action. With a platform that provides consumers an opportunity or freedom to voice out their opinions and garner or rally support from others who also share their views, which is a significant role in this process that the internet has played. Through “call out” and demand accountability, these individuals are empowered through the use of social media for both corporations and public figures. People who want to promote a positive change processed this collective action by a sense of community and solidarity that was facilitated by them among like-minded individuals (Bakhtiari, 2020). The way how people make decisions, respond to social issues, and interact with each other is a result of understanding how consumer behaviour is crucial from individuals and social identities that shape it knowing that they are the ones who constantly influence that matter. (Champriss, Wilson & Macdonald, 2015).

The implementation and success of these guidelines face difficulties due to cancel culture, as individuals' actions are weighed against the people they are meant to impact. Potential

life-threatening situations can potentially be present in some cancelation scenarios, like abuse or harassment that violate platform guidelines that can be both applied for the canceler or the one who is cancelled involved. Yet enforcement of policies appears lacking. Therefore, the cancel culture materializes which gains influence from different social media platforms.

Cancel Culture remains an extensive and complex social occurrence that is tightly bound to online interactions, social identity, and discourse in public. Even if its main motive is to hold individuals or institutions who've done inappropriate acts accountable for that, the after situations brings serious issues due to online public humiliation. In this age of technology properly utilizing social media plays an important role in forming social beliefs and showing support to collective campaigns specifically to Manila College students. The adverse impact of cancelling culture to social identity is still a discussion for some, this study aims to provide a clearer perspective on this type of societal issues, thus, numerous research needs to be done for it to be more understandable to a wide range of people. Below, this study will be addressed thoroughly.

### *1.1. Introduction of the Research Problem*

Social media has become a useful medium for communication but also plays a pivotal role in shaping people's behaviours like the "cancel culture", where shaming individuals publicly was done because of their perceived wrongdoing. This phenomenon can have an extensive impact for college students who are currently at the critical stage of development considering that "cancel culture" is done to hold someone accountable for their wrongdoing yet it excessively affects one's social identity. The study sought to explore how the spread of cancel culture in social media among college students in Manila has an impact on their social and psychological well-being.

To answer the cited problem above, an answer to the following questions will be sought:

1. How do social media platforms spread cancel culture among college students?
2. What are ways that cancel culture may affect students' social well-being, including their sense of belonging, social interactions and relationships?
3. How do social media and cancel culture influence students' psychological well-being, specifically with mental health, self-esteem and emotional distress?

### *1.2 Scope of the Study*

The study seeks to analyze how cancel culture influences the social identity of college students in Manila, Philippines. The research will gather four (4) participants from Far Eastern University (FEU). The study will establish how cancel culture influences students' psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing, social relationships and self-identity.

The research will be conducted using qualitative methods via online interviews. The study will specifically explore the following key areas:

#### *1. Self-identity*

- Examine how cancel culture influences students' personal beliefs, values and self-perception through:
  - Focus on Individual Self-Perception: learn how cancel culture can affect a person's view of themselves within a broader social context.
  - Impact on Personal Beliefs: examine how the influence of cancel culture can shape students' personal beliefs and moral standards.
  - Social Media Influence: understanding how cancel culture on social media platforms can influence one's self-perception.
  - Changes in Self-Expression: learning how students' deal with cancel culture and the changes that comes in the way they express themselves.

#### *2. Social Relationships*

- Examines how cancel culture affects students' interaction with peers, family, and social groups through:
  - Peer Interactions: understand how cancel culture influences students' relationships with friends and family, specifically in terms of trust and beliefs.
  - Social Group Dynamics: learn how students explore social groups when cancel culture is involved, which groups are they comfortable with or not.
  - Impact on Social Support: examine whether cancel culture strengthens or weakens social groups, and bond among friends and family.

#### *3. Social Well-being*

- Examines how cancel culture affects students' feeling of exclusion and inclusion along with their overall social-well-being in the university.
  - Sense of belonging (Exclusion or Inclusion): understanding how cancel culture may affect students' sense belonging, specifically inclusion and exclusion on certain social standards.
  - Pressure to conform: learn how the experience of cancel culture may pressure students to conform to popular norms and opinions on social media platforms.
  - Impact on Social Engagement: understand whether cancel culture limits students' willingness to participate in social groups or online discussions to avoid judgement.
  - Mental health and Social Interaction: study how cancel culture can pressure students' ability to build meaningful social relationships.

#### *4. Psychological Impact*

- Examine how consequences of cancel culture may impact students' mental and emotional health.
  - Emotional Stress and Anxiety: understand how cancel culture contributes to emotional distress, such as anxiety, and the fear of being "cancelled".
  - Mental Health Impact: study how the experience of being involved or witnessing cancel culture may have impact on students' overall mental health and daily lives.
  - Effects on Self-expression and confidence: learn how students feel less confident on expressing their opinions due to the fear of being "cancelled".
  - Coping mechanisms: learn the ways students cope with the psychological impacts of cancel culture.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

Through this study, we aim to provide a better understanding on the impact of cancel culture on the social identity of college students in Manila, Philippines. With the rapid growth of social media, the term “cancel culture” has taken place. What does it mean to be cancelled? And what role does it play in our life? These are the values that we aim to define.

By understanding how cancel culture creates an impact on students, this study hopes to provide help to universities and students who may be impacted by the cancel culture. It will shed light on the way cancel culture pressures students to conform to social norms or face exclusion, impacting their mental health and social engagement. (Perez, 2023). Moreover, this study will determine whether cancel culture brings positive or negative change. The findings of this research can guide universities and students to create strategies to face these difficulties and promote a healthier environment and exercise caution when using social media.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The researchers will employ the qualitative research design, attempting to know the different perceptions of college students in Manila, Philippines about cancel culture. Specifically, a semi-structured interview will be conducted as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the participants’ perceptions, interpretations, and personal experiences of cancel culture. The researchers can ask additional questions during the interview if clarifications or further explanations will be needed. The participants’ subjective and objective perception about their personal experiences on cancel culture which is expected to form the core data of the study.

### 2.1 Participants of the Study

The researchers will obtain responses from 4 selected participants from Far Eastern University (FEU) in Manila, Philippines.

The university was chosen due to their diverse student populations, significant engagement in public discourse, varied academic and social culture, including issues related to cancel culture.

### 2.2 Sampling Procedures

The researchers utilize purposive sampling, specifically criterion-based selection, to ensure that the participants have relevant insights into the topic. The following criteria were set for participant selection:

1. Currently enrolled college students at one of the five selected universities.
2. Have knowledge or experience of cancel culture, either through direct experience, social media exposure, or public discussion.
3. Willing and open to engage in a semi-structured interview.

With this method, the researchers ensure that the selected participants of the study have direct experience or informed perspective about cancel culture, which allows ample room for meaningful discussions. The format of the interview will be following a semi-structured one and will be conducted either via face-to-face or online modality depending on the

preference and availability of the participants. All throughout the study, the researchers will observe strict implementation of ethical protocols, including informed consent and participants’ confidentiality.

### 2.2.3. Data Gathering Method

The research will use semi-structured online interviews conducted via Zoom or Google Meet. An interview guide will be prepared to cover key themes while allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences.

The main topics of discussion will include:

- Self-identity – How cancel culture influences personal beliefs and self-perception.
- Social Relationships – Changes in friendships, peer interactions, and community engagement.
- Social Well-being – Feelings of inclusion, exclusion, or pressure to conform in social settings.
- Psychological Impact – Effects on mental health, self-expression, and confidence.

Before the interviews, participants will be briefed on the study’s objectives, and informed consent will be obtained to ensure ethical research practices.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, following these steps:

- Transcription & Familiarization – All interview recordings will be transcribed and carefully reviewed.
- Coding – Recurring phrases, patterns, and key statements will be identified and categorized.
- Theme Identification – Codes will be grouped into broader themes, such as identity shifts, social consequences, emotional distress, and digital discourse challenges.
- Interpretation & Validation – Emerging themes will be analyzed to draw meaningful conclusions.

Findings will also be cross-checked through member-checking (verifying with participants) and peer review to ensure reliability.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research approach, specifically exploring the emotional and social effects of cancel culture on individuals. This method was chosen to get deeper insights into the lived experiences of the student leaders who have witnessed and have been involved in situations of cancel culture, particularly with their position being a student leader.

### 3.2. Participants and Sampling Technique

The subjects of this research were four student leaders at Far Eastern University (FEU). They were chosen using purposive sampling because they are visible and actively participate in online platforms, which tend to expose them to the public as well as to the impacts of cancel culture. All participants had either direct or observed experiences with cancel culture in academic or in the digital world, which makes them ideal participants for the study. Their leadership positions in their respective organizations gave them better



knowledge into how online criticisms or being “cancelled” affects individuals.

### 3.3. Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, ethical clearance was asked and given by the research professor, Ms. Kristine Cerenado. Informed consent was obtained from the participants through google forms. The purpose of the study was explained to them, and they were assured confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. All data were stored securely to protect participants privately.

### 3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering was conducted through a Google forms survey, which was distributed online to the selected participants. The form contained a mix of open-ended questions designed to allow the participants to reflect and give a detailed answer regarding their views and experiences with cancel culture. Participants were given sufficient time to complete the survey and were informed of the purpose of the research prior to answering.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

The responses from google forms were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis method. The researchers first familiarized themselves with participants’ written answers and then manually generated initial codes by identifying words, phrases, or ideas. These codes were then reviewed and grouped into themes that addressed the research questions. Even though there were no interviews, the open-ended questions in the survey provided enough data for a meaningful thematic analysis. Each theme was then carefully reviewed and ensured to accurately depict the emotional and social effects described by the participants.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the analyzed responses of the four student leaders from Far Eastern University (FEU), collected using Google forms. Through Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, the researchers identified patterns in the respondents’ experiences with the questions. The findings are presented according to each Specific Problem (SOP), with both narrative discussion and summary tables to organize each theme and supporting participants insights.

### 4.1. How Do Social Media Platforms Affect Cancel Culture Among Student Leaders in Far Eastern University (FEU)?

The participants learned from what they knew to identify three dominant themes: Quick Public Judgement, Online Exposure and Misinterpretation, and Digital Stability.

- **Quick Public Judgement:** The interviewees pointed out the quickness with which people on the social media react. Student leaders are attacked before they can even defend themselves. “People look at one post, jump to conclusions without seeking your side of the story,” according to one interviewee.
- **Online Exposure and Misinterpretation:** Student leaders are more likely to be misinterpreted since they are visible. Even short statements can become problematic when taken

out of context. A participant noted, “We get bashed for decisions that people don’t even fully understand.”

- **Digital Stability:** Students expressed how online content is permanent, even if deleted. Respondents expressed their concerns over screenshots and reposts that continue to circulate even after apologies are made. As one participant have said, “Even if you delete the post, someone probably already screenshot it.”

TABLE 1. Themes on Role of Social Media in Cancel Culture.

Theme	Description
Quick Public Judgement	Quick and harsh online reactions without full context
Online Exposure and Misinterpretation	Visibility of the student leaders made them more prone to public criticisms.
Digital Stability	Once something is online, it can always resurface and continue to affect reputations.

### 4.2. How Does Cancel Culture Influence Students’ Social Well-being?

Three primary themes were identified from the respondents’ comments: Social Isolation, Loss of Trust, and Strained Peer Relationships.

- **Social Isolation:** Students felt isolated after being victims of cancel culture. They described staying away from other people because they felt ashamed or were scared of being judged again. One of them responded, “I avoided org meetings for some time after that happened. I didn’t feel welcome.”
- **Loss of Trust:** Respondents mentioned that cancel culture damaged their capacity to have faith in fellow participants and even the system that permitted problems to go under the radar unsaid. They began fearing once building attachments because they did not know who would do them wrong. As a respondent put it, “You don’t know who’s on your side until something happens.”
- **Strained Peer Relationships:** Once participants had been “cancelled” or had accusations made against them, the subjects observed that things changed in the way they were treated. Their friendships drifted away from them, and there was a tense atmosphere in and around their respective student groups. “Even though we were fine before, now they treat me differently,” according to one participant

TABLE 2. Themes on how Cancel Culture Impacts Social Well-being.

Theme	Description
Social Isolation	Isolation from others due to public embarrassment
Loss of Trust	Fear of betrayal or being misunderstood by social relationships.
Strained Peer Relationships	Tensions and change in social relationships after facing cancellation

### 4.3. How Do Social Media and Cancel Culture Impact Students’ Psychological Well-being?

Three major themes are drawn from the data: Emotional Distress, Judgement Fear, and Increased Anxiety and Pressure.

- **Emotional Distress:** Participants explained how the public backlash of public criticism on social media affected their emotional well-being. They explained that public shaming

or being "cancelled" can lead to sadness, frustration, and helplessness. One student said, "Even if it wasn't a big deal, I couldn't stop thinking about it. It made me overthink everything."

- **Fear of Judgement:** The fear of being misunderstood made participants self-censor or overthink what they say particularly online or in public. This restricted them from expressing their opinions fully, even in situations where their intentions were good. "You have to be really careful now, or people will attack you" as per one participant.
- **Increased Anxiety and Pressure:** Being a student leader gave them a bigger sense of pressure. Participants expressed that cancel culture and social media backlash increased their anxiety to perform flawlessly. One student leader said, "You feel like you have to be perfect all the time because if you make a mistake, they'll cancel you."

TABLE 1. Themes on how Cancel Culture affects Psychological Well-being.

Themes	Description
Emotional Distress	Public shaming or being "cancelled" can lead to sadness, frustration, and helplessness.
Fear of Judgement	Self-censorship or overthink what they say particularly online or in public due to fear of public backlash.
Increased Anxiety and Pressure	Bigger sense of pressure, increased their anxiety to perform perfect to avoid being "cancelled"

## V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1. Overview of Key Findings

This study investigated the lived experiences of FEU student leaders in navigating cancel culture in the world of social media. The data collected gave rise to three major themes:

- **Emotional Costs and Identity Issues** – Student activists reported anxiety and fearfulness and vulnerability, particularly when criticized publicly. Their leadership identity was often shaken by the stress of having to project a perfect internet persona.
- **Performance of Leadership Online** – Participants stated that leadership wasn't only practiced face-to-face but also enacted through their social media profiles. They were acutely conscious of how their tweets and activities were being understood by their followers and peers.
- **Digital Silence as Survival** – Out of fear of backlash, student leaders have reported self-censoring or withdrawing from digital participation to keep away from being cancelled.

These topics are directly related to the research aim: to explore how cancel culture acts the leadership style and emotional well-being of student leaders in a university context. The results depict how the overlap of digital life and leadership duties generates specific tensions and coping strategies.

### 5.2. Interpretation in Context

FEU student leader narratives amplify the tension between public performance and authentic self-expression in the digital world. A student said the following: "It's not so much what I

do in school as much as it is about what I post. I think I'd be finished after a single mistake." This reflects how cancel culture collapses the distinction between public service and public judgment, particularly for student government.

The effect described by the participants—that varied from anxiety to loneliness—aligns with evidence in the literature that includes Ng and Gray (2021), which established that the inclination toward cancel culture contributes to psychological stress, particularly in youth perpetually grappling with online identity. Interestingly, the performance aspect of leadership fits into Goman's (1959) dramaturgical theory as people work to manage their presentation of self across a range of "front-stage" and "back-stage" contexts. For student leaders, social media represents an on-going front-stage requiring ongoing image management.

One new insight that was realized in the study was digital silence as a form of coping. While the bulk of the existing literature centers its attention on reactive responses to being cancelled, our participants identified withdrawal as a form of self-protection. This puts a new spin on how cancel culture not only incites pushback but also reduces participation and involvement among youth leaders.

### 5.3. Implications

#### 5.3.1 Theoretical Implications

These results add to the existing body of work in the areas of leadership and digital identity by explaining how cancel culture reconstitutes the boundaries of leadership ethics and labor. The research corroborates performative identity theory but expands upon it by demonstrating how cancel culture actively constructs or stifles that identity in student leadership contexts.

In addition to this, it opens the door to the potential of digital silence as a response to cancel culture as a theme to examine within leadership and communications theory. It also exemplifies a defensive adaptation in high-risk digital contexts that has not yet been delved into in prior approaches.

#### 5.3.2 Practical Implications

From an instructional point of view, the results indicate a pressing requirement for student leader digital literacy programs that include not only responsible posting but also how to deal with digital backlash, digital well-being, and in-depth ethical considerations when using the digital world. University organizations must have an even balance of accountability and empathy. Rather than punitive online criticism, a system of open discussion and restorative justice would enable responsible and strong leaders to be cultivated. For future study, the limitations of the study indicate the merit in widening the range of the sample and institutions. The use of multiple diverse schools and a mixed-methods approach would yield richer and more generalizable data about how cancel culture affects youth leadership in a broader range of education and cultural settings.

### 5.4 Limitations

While this study and the data gathered from the student leaders from Far Eastern University

(FEU) experiences about cancel culture and social media, there are still lapses and limitations occurring.

#### 5.4.1. Context Specific Nature

This paper is context specific since it solely focuses on the student leaders experiences of the Far Eastern University. The university's organizational structure, norms, and culture may recognize cancel culture differently due to the student leaders and the institution itself having leadership expectations or student habits digitally that control how they view criticism. Due to this, the findings won't be applied to other institutions and universities since they may be practicing a widely differing culture and student environment.

#### 5.4.2 Limited Sample Size

The number of students who participated and selected in this study is only (4) therefore the findings and result present a limited scope. Although the students provide sufficient and essential answers from their experiences and how they view cancel culture and those who experienced it, the results are not applicable to a wider population because of this study's small sample size. Moreover, the small sample size may risk the generalizability of the entire population of the student leaders of Far Eastern University and only a slice of the leadership experiences may be represented.

#### 5.4.3. Self-Reported Data

The data from the student leaders were gathered through Google Forms and they're self-reported information which possesses major limitations. This results in students tailoring their responses into more socially acceptable answers rather than truthful ones. Furthermore, the respondents are student leaders whose character and image should be on a good and acceptable side, with that they may be lessening the events or experiences they had to protect their ethical stances.

#### 5.5 Recommendations

This paper showed substantial information about student leaders of Far Eastern University (FEU) and how they were being influenced by cancel culture and social media. Below are the following suggestions for future research and practitioners considering the results and its limitations. This paper suggests that responsible digital literacy should be implemented by the university offices and organizations for

student leaders about the proper use of social media. Also, the student leaders should work towards a community that balances accountability and compassion, initiating an open dialogue and understanding rather than quick criticism to the students can lessen the negative impact psychologically and the impacts of cancel culture socially. For future researchers it is suggested to study a larger population and a diverse institution to widen the findings and gather more representative data of how cancel culture impacts student leaders within a wide range of educational institutions and culture. Also, incorporating a mixed methods, surveys and interviews or qualitative and quantitative method will provide efficient and rich data and a wider view. This also gives researchers and readers narrative details and measurable factors in terms of behavioural matters.

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