

Your Honor, Hindi ko na po Maalala: A Validation of Samantha Haskell's Model of Cancellation Through the Lens of Alice Guo's Case in X

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ABSTRACT

The sharing of ideas and information forms the bedrock of human interaction, a process profoundly transformed by the digital age, enabling global connectivity while simultaneously giving rise to phenomena like "cancel culture." While local perceptions often deem it cruel, participants view it as a normal and progressive social mechanism. Recognizing its impact on the safe spaces of social media, this qualitative case study critically analyzes the cancellation process of Alice Guo on the X platform, utilizing Samantha Haskell's model of cancellation. This analysis aims to explain the specific mechanisms by which the cancellation unfolded, while also evaluating the applicability and limitations of Haskell's model in extensively covering and explaining this particular case. Utilizing thematic analysis, the researchers aimed to: (1) determine the specific cancellation process; (2) examine Haskell's model's applicability, noting similarities and differences; (3) identify the criteria and social conditions leading to public "cancellation" on social media; and (4) propose a modified cancellation model. This research contributes to a more complex understanding of cancellation cases and its implications for social dynamics in the Philippines.

Keywords: ACT model, cancel culture, cancellation process, communication, social media

INTRODUCTION

The sharing of ideas and information is essential for human interaction. It forms the foundation of relationships, both personal and professional. Today, the digital age has transformed communication, allowing people to connect with others worldwide. While this has brought benefits, it has also introduced challenges, including the rise of cancel culture.

In this day and age, communication has been positively impacted by new technological advancements, which allow everyone to connect on a global scale by bringing everyone together (Gupta et al., 2022). Findings from Global Social Media Statistics (2024) state that at the onset of July 2024, there were 5.17 billion social media users, or 63.7% of the world's total population. With this growing number, the practice of communication has been redefined, fostering wider global connections.

One of the new developments in social media is the rise of cancel culture. Atske (2024) defined the term "cancel culture" as a form of withdrawing support for an individual, group, organization, or company for their objectionable action or opinion. In their study, the main goal of the cancellation is to deprive someone of the attention and public influence they hold as a form of seeking justice for their wrongdoings. However, this does not encapsulate the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon.

While the majority of local respondents perceive cancel culture as cruel and aggressive, those who have participated in it tend to view it as normal, beneficial, and progressive. However, the rise of cancel culture has reduced the safe space provided by social media platforms, highlighting the need to critically analyze its influence on identity formation, group dynamics, and broader social institutions in the Philippines. To further study its process and impact, an analysis of Alice Guo's cancellation case was conducted through the lens of Samantha Haskell's model.

Alice Leal Guo, former Mayor of Bamban, Tarlac, has received a lot of cancellations after an interrogation during a Senate hearing, claiming that she does not remember much about her life (Manabat & Go, 2024). Untalan and Casucian (2024) reported that the senate hearing was conducted about the illegal activities of Philippine Offshore and Gaming Operations (POGO) in her province. Alice Guo, accused of possible links to the unlawful POGO activities, faced interrogation before the Senate panel on women, led by Senator Risa Hontiveros. During the hearing, Hontiveros asked about Guo's citizenship and raised suspicions about her being a Chinese spy. This probing resulted in the response from Alice Guo: "Your honor, hindi ko na po maalala" (Your honor, I cannot remember anymore). Her answer went viral overnight and received several opinions online across different social media platforms. It cultivated public discussions that sparked her cancellation.

X (formerly Twitter), became one of the leading platforms in the country that catered to this cancellation. One of its features is a hashtag, used for tagging and grouping thematically related posts by its users (Mondal et al., 2024). In an article by Romano (2020), cancel culture spread using this platform and was used as a reaction to someone who did a terrible action that broke personal standards of social norms. Cancellation in this sense is feared because of its potential to destroy lives dependent on a single action deemed objectionable to the eyes of the majority. While viral posts and hashtags are clearly instrumental in initiating cancellations on platforms like X, there remains a significant gap in fully understanding the precise process through which these cancellations gain widespread public support. Most existing research tends to concentrate on the effects of cancellation—such as the impact on individuals' reputations or broader social structures, but often falls short in describing the specific, step-by-step mechanisms by which a cancellation unfolds and gains momentum. This represents a methodological gap, as a deeper understanding of the process itself is crucial for comprehensive analysis. Samantha Haskell's model, while offering valuable insights, exhibits limitations in its extensive coverage of cancellation cases. This suggests that its applicability may not be universal, potentially varying significantly across diverse cases.

The scope of this paper is centered around this specific case of Alice Guo's cancellation that took place in X. By analyzing the cancellation process through this specific case, researchers obtain the key aspects of how Alice Guo was canceled, as well as the specifics of the process of cancellation. The data used for the analysis of her case can offer a foundation for future studies about cancel culture. In this paper, the goal of the researchers is to first examine the data collected from Alice Guo's cancellation and determine its process. Second is to examine the applicability of Samantha Haskell's cancellation model using the findings from the case of Alice Guo, identifying their similarities and differences. Third is to determine the criteria or social conditions under which an individual is publicly labeled as 'cancelled' on social media. Lastly, it created a revised version of the cancellation by adding new factors and refining the stages based on future findings. The researchers used a qualitative case study method through a thematic analysis to address these objectives.

This study generally aims to examine Samantha Haskell's cancellation model through the lens of the Alice Guo case. The study was conducted from the first semester to the second semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Specifically, this study aims to explore how the netizens participated in Alice Guo's cancellation on X from May 7th to December 31st, 2024, particularly, examine the process of cancellation and identify the strategies used in the cancellation. The second specific aim is to examine the applicability of Samantha Haskell's cancellation model using the findings from the case of Alice Guo, identifying their similarities and differences. Third, it determined the criteria or social conditions under which an individual is publicly labeled as "cancelled" on social media. Lastly, it aimed to improve Samantha Haskell's cancellation model based on the case study of Alice Guo's cancellation.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative research in nature and researchers utilized a case study to examine the cancellation process in Alice Guo's case. Findings from this served as the foundation used in the validation of Samantha Haskell's model of cancellation. A case study is a comprehensive examination of an individual, organization, or event to seek patterns of complex situations (Cherry, 2024). The case of Alice Guo was used as a lens to understand cancel culture in action and served as the focal point for theoretical application of the phenomenon.

The corpus of this study comprises a meticulously selected collection of 450 X (formerly Twitter) engagements about the cancellation case of Alice Guo. Given the nature of the research, which primarily involves social media analysis, all data were publicly available and thus did not necessitate direct human participation. The digital research locale for data collection was the X platform, chosen for its comprehensive insights into public discussion. Using a purposive sampling technique, the researchers selected engagements that met specific criteria to ensure a balanced and representative dataset. The corpus is equally distributed across three distinct perspectives: 150 engagements from users supporting the cancellation of Alice Guo, 150 engagements from users resisting the cancellation of Alice Guo, and 150 engagements from users expressing neutral observations regarding the Alice Guo case. This balanced distribution aims to provide an equitable opportunity for all perspectives to contribute to a thorough understanding of the narratives surrounding the cancellation case. All selected engagements (posts, thread replies, and quotations) are expressed in English, Tagalog, or Taglish.

The data were specifically chosen based on the following inclusion criteria: the user's account must have a minimum of 10 followers and be following at least 20 accounts, the engagement must have been posted between May 7, 2024, and December 31, 2024, and the engagement must have been posted within the Philippines. Moreover, the engagement must either: contain any of the following keywords: "Alice Guo," "Guo," "Guo Hua Ping," "Mayor Alice," "Cancel," or "Canceled" or contain texts demonstrably relevant to the case of Alice Guo, even if not explicitly using the aforementioned keywords.

To examine the cancellation process in the case of Alice Guo, the researchers utilized news articles to obtain information about the timeline covering the entire issue, starting from May 7, 2024, when Alice Guo's face came to the public eye through the Senate public hearing led by Senator Risa Hontiveros about her possible link to the raided POGO hub in Bamban, Tarlac.

Following that, researchers retrieved 450 engagements from the X platform. By utilizing these engagements, the researchers obtained the data needed to validate Samantha Haskell's model of cancellation. The hashtag, thread and quote features of X enable users to effortlessly share and amplify cancel culture. Additionally, the use of these allows conversations to be tracked conveniently. Overall, these features enable the rapid dissemination of information, which is a crucial component of cancel culture.

Finally, to validate the cancellation process that was developed from Alice Guo's case, the researchers used Samantha Haskell's model of cancellation as a baseline. Findings from these were used to formulate a modified cancellation model.

To seek further understanding of the obtained data, the researchers first used thematic analysis to reveal common strategies that were used in the cancellation. Thematic analysis is a method that allows researchers to determine the focus and scope of the research by analyzing qualitative data and identifying common themes in them (Braun & Clarke, 2015). Following the thematic analysis, Alice Guo's case was further analyzed through the lens of Samantha Haskell's model, examining similarities, differences, and potential areas for improvement. Her study, "Cancel Culture: A Qualitative Analysis of the Social Media Practice of Canceling" (2021), outlines

the key elements and stages involved in a cancellation. It posits that cancel culture has both a process and a structure, acknowledging that no two cancellations are identical. This study emphasized the need to conduct research on the cancellation process to prevent mislabeling, which can undermine the potential usefulness and effectiveness of cancel culture. It offers an opportunity for people on and off social media to understand cancel culture as more than just a phrase used to threaten the livelihoods of those in the public eye.

The study provided a tool to determine if a cancellation is happening by applying the model to possible cancellations. It reveals what a cancellation process can look like and its multiple steps that determine whether or not a cancellation is happening. A thorough examination of cancel culture reveals a multi-phased process that begins with a *catalyst* event or action. This catalyst, often disseminated through social media, sparks discussions and mobilizes support or resistance. If the momentum for cancellation peaked in an engagement, a public declaration is made, often accompanied by hashtags and other digital markers. Once a cancellation is declared, it can involve various strategies employed by both *supporters and resisters*. Supporters may utilize tactics such as public shaming, isolation, and persistent online pressure to maintain the cancellation. Resisters, on the other hand, may attempt to discredit the victim, challenge the validity of the catalyst, or publicly express support for the cancellee (Haskell, 2021). Finally, a revised model is created based on the future findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section 1. Netizens' Participation in Alice Guo's Cancellation Case in X

1.1 Process of Cancellation

A March 2024 report from Rappler by Manabat (2024) detailed a raid by the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission (PAOCC) on an illegal Philippine Offshore Gaming Operator (POGO) hub, the Baofu compound, in Bamban, Tarlac. The Baofu compound is a complex housing dozens of workers who turned out to be victims of illegal trafficking. The raid stemmed from a complaint received by the PAOCC from a Malaysian national, who claimed that he and numerous others, including foreign individuals, had been held against their will. A few weeks after the operation, the Senate, during its ongoing investigation into the POGO industry, wanted to find out the links between Guo and the Baofu complex. That is where the name of Alice Guo first came to light.

In a Manila Bulletin report by Torregoza (2024) on May 7, 2024 – two months after the raid, the name of Alice Guo clamored up the social media space after attending a women's hearing on the illegal activities of POGOs. Stating the famous line "Your Honor, hindi ko na po maalala," she received various reactions from netizens online specifically on platform X that started the initial spark of cancellation.

The cancellation was accomplished in several ways. Most of the responses doubted and mocked the claims of Guo after her inability to answer questions about her personal background. The last development of the cancellation unfolded on September 4, 2024, when Alice Guo was reportedly arrested in Tangerang City, Jakarta, Indonesia, according to a report by the Bureau of Immigration (2024). Even after her arrest, people still strongly criticized her. They continued to accuse her of being a spy. Supporters of the cancellation demanded that she should be severely punished.

However, there were expressions of sympathy, which attributed the situation to systemic failures rather than personal fault. The perceived efficiency of Indonesian authorities, in

contrast to the perceived inefficiencies of the Philippines, prompted expressions of shame and embarrassment.

With these reactions expressed by the X-users a new momentum of the cancellation is created. Guo's arrest in Indonesia served to shift the focus of the cancellation narrative. This dynamic perfectly illustrates the principles of Agenda-Setting Theory by McComb and Shaw (1968), where the evolving news and official developments, amplified by key figures and events, effectively steered public attention on X from initial suspicions to her identity, then to issues of national security, and ultimately to broader concerns about governmental integrity and the justice system's effectiveness. The changing "salience" of different aspects of the Alice Guo case, driven by media and authorities actions, dictated what netizens "thought about" at various stages of the cancellation process.

1.2 Strategies Used in the Cancellation

Overall, researchers identified a total of 12 strategies employed by X users in the cancellation of Alice Guo. In supporting the cancellation, four strategies were used: cyberbullying, petition for removal, accusation, and suspicion. Five strategies were used to resist the cancellation: denial, exoneration, justification, sympathy, and shifting the blame. Finally, researchers also identified a new user response: neutral observation. Neutral observers employed three strategies: investigation, analytical observation, and balanced questioning.

These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of online communication. The observed array of strategies reveals the complexity with which users articulate their opinion in digital spaces. This richness in online communication necessitates the development of more detailed analytical frameworks that move beyond basic digital communication analysis, allowing for a deeper appreciation of the complexities inherent in digital interactions.

Additionally, the emergence of "neutral observation" as a distinct and recognized user response is particularly noteworthy. This suggests an evolving landscape of online engagement where a growing part of X users approaches controversial topics not through supporting or resisting, but rather through a more detached, investigative, and analytical lens. This finding challenges traditional models that often categorize online users strictly as proponents or opponents, indicating a potential shift towards more critical and reflective forms of digital citizenship. For social media platforms like X, this implies a crucial need to consider how to better support and facilitate such neutral, fact-finding, and balanced discussions, rather than solely optimizing for engagement driven by strong opinions or emotional responses.

The detailed categorization of strategies—from aggressive tactics like cyberbullying and accusation to more nuanced approaches such as investigation and analytical observation—offers a deeper understanding of the persuasive techniques at play within cancellation cases. Finally, the study's findings indicate a potential end point for cancellation processes when a new story emerges. This new narrative causes a shift in online communication, effectively overshadowing the previous issue. This observation adds a vital element to the theoretical understanding of online social dynamics.

Section 2. The Applicability of Samantha Haskell's Cancellation Model Using the Findings from the Case of Alice Guo

Similarities and Differences

On top of these differences, the most notable is the emergence of neutral observers. These neutral observers employed distinct strategies in their approach. First, investigation. These users prioritized presenting factual information and objective observations, frequently

citing news sources to support their points. Second, analytical observation. Neutral observers utilizing this strategy engaged in a critical analysis of the situation, striving for objectivity without aligning themselves with either side of the debate. Third, balanced questioning. This group focused on gathering a comprehensive understanding of the issue by posing questions designed to consider all relevant information and foster constructive dialogue.

While Haskell's model accurately identifies the initial stages of a cancellation—the reveal of the catalyst and its subsequent discussion—the Alice Guo case demonstrates that these processes can be more complex than a singular, linear progression. The "reveal" in Guo's situation was a multifaceted series of interconnected revelations rather than a singular event. This suggests that future applications of Haskell's model, especially in contexts involving ongoing investigations, should account for such compounding revelations. Similarly, the declaration of cancellation was not a unified, singular event but a collective signal through varied actions and expressions, indicating a need for the model to accommodate more decentralized group communication online.

These findings challenge the nature of Haskell's proposed routes for X users. While the model correctly anticipates the presence of supporters and resisters, it did not foresee the emergence of neutral observers. This "third route" signifies a critical shift in online communication, where a segment of users actively participates through investigation, analytical observation, and balanced questioning, rather than strictly advocating for or against cancellation. This finding carries significant implications, suggesting that a portion of the online population adopts a more critical and reflective stance, moving beyond the typical online debate. For platforms like X, this implies a need to explore how to better facilitate and support such fact-finding discussions, moving beyond debates solely driven by strong opinions.

Section 3. Criteria or Social Conditions Under Which an Individual is Publicly Labeled as "Cancelled" on Social Media

In the case of Alice Guo, several factors emerged that contributed to her public cancellation. Through obtained data, specific criteria and social conditions were identified that outline the actions and behaviors of an individual in which they are publicly labeled as "cancelled" on social media.

Allegations of Serious Misconduct or Criminal Activity. In Alice Guo's case, her alleged involvement in illegal POGO hubs serve as the catalyst for her cancellation. Additionally, fingerprint analysis exposing her deception about her identity further tarnished her credibility that intensified public disapproval.

Violation of Societal Norms and Values. Alice Guo's alleged involvement with a POGO hub implicated in human trafficking directly violates deeply held societal norms against illegal activities and the exploitation of individuals. This violation is made even more significant because she held a position of public trust as the mayor of Bamban. The expectation for public servants to adhere to high ethical standards and legal obligations makes any perceived violation a significant trigger for a cancellation. However, her actions constituted a significant breach of trust, neglecting the duties of her position led the public to question her capabilities as a public servant.

Lack of Transparency and Credibility. In the case of Alice Guo, her claims of memory loss during senate hearings became a pivotal moment that sparked public skepticism. Her statement, "Your Honor, hindi ko na po maalala," not only failed to address the pressing questions but also perceived a lack of transparency and accountability. The inability to provide satisfactory explanations during such critical points amplified doubts about her credibility and intentions, which further fuels the public's demand for accountability and justice.

Public Discourse and Emotional Reactions. Netizens' emotional responses to Guo's actions, both resist and support, reflect the collective shaping of public sentiment. Their strong expressions of emotion, along with feelings of being deceived or "weirded out" by her statements and conduct, collectively contributed to her being labeled as "cancelled" on social media. The public hearings and subsequent media revelations greatly influenced social media discourse, leading to a collective judgment of Guo's character and actions.

The case of Alice Guo implies that online cancellation is not random; instead, it is systematically triggered by identifiable breaches of public trust and ethical norms, especially for public figures. This highlights how allegations of misconduct, violations of societal values, and a lack of transparency, amplified by public discourse, form a clear and predictable pathway to online condemnation. Consequently, this provides a crucial guide for public figures, underscoring the importance of upholding accountability, ethical conduct, and transparent communication to prevent such backlash.

Section 4. Modified Samantha Haskell's Cancellation Model Based on the Case Study of Alice Guo's Cancellation

Components of the Model

This revised model advances researcher's understanding of the cancellation process by highlighting its fundamental elements, including the strategies employed to either support or resist cancellation, and significantly, by introducing the emergence of neutral observers. This model emphasizes how these strategies can actively shape the outcome of the cancellation process. Rather than illustrating only the recurring cycle of cancellation, this model improves the approach by adding the concept of a narrative shift and how it can signal the potential for a cancellation to reach a conclusion.

The dynamics of online cancellation and narrative shifts are heavily influenced by the same underlying principles that determine what captures our attention in the news, as described by O'Neill and Harcup (2010) in their chapter entitled "News Values and Selectivity" from their book *Journalism: New challenges*. The initial cancellation gains attention because the triggering event is "newsworthy" in the context of X. The cancellee's response then serves as tactics to manipulate these "news values" to shift the narrative. Ultimately, a new story can overshadow the cancellation if it presents even more compelling or timely "news values" that capture the attention of the X users. Ultimately, a new story can overshadow the cancellation if it presents even more compelling or timely "news values" that capture the attention of X users, making a shift in narrative possible.

The modified ACT model, which incorporates both the emergence of neutral observers and the concept of a potential end to cancellation driven by narrative shifts, significantly advances Haskell's original cyclical view. This expansion deepens our understanding of digital citizenship, suggesting a move towards more critical and less emotionally driven forms of online interaction (support and resist). It also underscores the powerful role of broader media cycles and the limited attention spans of online communities in effectively concluding previous issues, offering crucial insight into how online cancellations can naturally fade, even without formal closure. This detailed categorization of strategies, from aggressive tactics like cyberbullying and accusation to more objective approaches such as investigation and analytical observation, offers a profound understanding of the persuasive techniques in cancellation cases, informing future studies on online community dynamics and guiding the development of interventions for healthier online communications.

Conclusion

The identified strategies employed by X users in the Alice Guo case explain the multifaceted nature of online communication, showcasing the complex ways opinions are articulated in digital spaces. This richness highlights the need for more detailed analytical frameworks beyond basic social media analysis, allowing for a deeper appreciation of the inherent complexities of digital communications.

Crucially, the Alice Guo case also implies that 'cancel culture' is not a random phenomenon but rather a response triggered by identifiable vulnerabilities tied to an individual's public role and conduct. This suggests that the mechanisms of online cancellation frequently originate from a perception that established standards or norms have been transgressed, offering vital insights into how such public figures might effectively respond to an issue.

Building on these engagement dynamics, the emergence of "neutral observers" is particularly noteworthy. This group engages with cancellation narratives through a detached, investigative, and analytical lens, directly challenging traditional models that predominantly categorize online users as either supporters or resisters. This implies a crucial need for platforms like X to foster balanced discussions, prioritizing healthy analytical conversations over engagement driven solely by strong opinions.

Furthermore, this study's findings indicate a potential end point for cancellation processes when a new narrative emerges. This new development causes a reorientation of online communication, effectively drawing attention away from the previous issue. Such an observation significantly enriches the theoretical understanding of online social dynamics.

Ultimately, the modified ACT model offers a profound understanding of how online cancellations can potentially end, driven by the emergence of neutral observers, and the narrative shift. This ultimately suggests a move towards more critical and less emotionally driven forms of online interaction and informs the development of interventions for healthier online communications.

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