

THE WEINSTEIN EFFECTS: FORECASTING THE GENESIS OF CANCEL CULTURE IN HOLLYWOOD INDUSTRY

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Abstract. The phenomenon of cancel culture has become a common, even effective, way of convicting people who are deemed to be deviant of social norms. The practice of cancel culture is massively emerging on the mainstream lens by the stimulation of Harvey Weinstein's cases in Hollywood discourse, or known as the Weinstein Effects. The article aims to examine cancel culture in Hollywood and the relation between this phenomenon with Weinstein Effects and point out a *hysteresis* in Hollywood celebrity culture due to this event. The research is conducted qualitatively by synthesizing information from various journal articles and online news regarding celebrity discourse. Furthermore, the basis of analytical discussion within this article is the Foucauldian premise regarding genealogy and Bourdieusian postulation on cultural *hysteresis*.

Keywords: *cancel culture, celebrity culture, Weinstein Effects*

INTRODUCTION

Cancel culture is an act of canceling or boycotting a public figure who has uttered controversial opinions or has had offensive behaviors in the past recorded on social media (Sills et al., 2016). As a result, the targeted individual would eventually lose his/her friends, fans, and supporters, deteriorating his/her career in the process. It is also regarded as an extension of "call-out culture", a culture in which the public urges certain figures to delete or retract insensitive posts (Bouvier, 2020).

Cancel culture is when someone famous that allegedly has done or said something objectionable or offensive being shamed and withdrawn of the fans' support. Most often than not, this particular term is performed mainly on social media. To cancel someone means boycotting all of one's works to effectively block one from having an eminent career, even when those works don't have any connection with the mistake one does at all. Videlicet, a catastrophic outcome must be faced by someone as a result of his/her past mistakes. One of the public figures,

that has had an immense impact until now in the celebrity culture, is Harvey Weinstein.

Throughout his career, Harvey Weinstein, apparently, took advantage of his position to commit sexual harassment; namely rape, sexual abuse, and assault. In 2017, several women claimed to be his victims as reported by *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, though Weinstein denied it. However, in May 2018, those reports turned out to be true. Weinstein was arrested in New York and charged with sexual offenses. Moreover, in March 2020, he was finally sentenced and put to imprisonment for 23 years. It resulted from him with cancelations; he was dismissed from TWC and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Thus, it forced him out of public view. Not only by professional associations, but the people also have their shares of cancelations of him. People started remarking the boycott of his movies, to stop watching his movies. Aside from his works being boycotted, many women also started a movement called *Me Too Movement* where they share their sexual harassment experiences. Consequently, this movement had immense butterfly effects. Many public figures and celebrities alike were alleged of sexual harassment because of the movement, leading them to be stripped off of their positions as, for example, actors or even directors. Thus, it made the term “Weinstein Effects” coined for those affected by the movement.

In examining the matter, the article has 3 aims. The first is to provide an overview of cancel culture’s essence and

system. Second, to examine the credibility of the cancel culture phenomenon based on the “Weinstein Effects”. And the third is to examine the reconstruction of celebrities’ personae in public perception as a part of hysteresis, which is built based on the first and the second aims.

METHOD

This article uses a qualitative approach as well as a critical discussion of the ideas that are carried out. In examining the celebrity discourse, several journal articles and other references related to this have been synthesized to reach an analytical conclusion that explains the prevailing contemporary social practice, especially in the realm of cancel culture that exists predominantly in Hollywood culture. In this context, the author examines the Weinstein Effects phenomenon which is so massive in the Hollywood industry in the scope of Foucault's power genesis and also cultural *hysteresis* in Bourdieusian understanding.

The practice of power, both in regulating the systematic episteme or political context, according to Foucault is a crucial part in identifying the epoch of a time (Raffnsøe, Thaning, & Gudmand-Hoyer, 2016). In his philosophical task, Foucault's practices dwell on the diagnostic discussion of contemporary society to coherently dissect social structures. The concept related to genealogy aims to find a phenomenon or event that reinforces the praxis of the episteme in question (Bevir, 2008), which in this context is the urgency to legitimize the cancel culture.

On the other hand, Bourdieu's postulation regarding *hysteresis* here intends to initiate a contemporary social dynamic related to the changing of "games" in a social field (Grenfell, 2014, p. 54). In the discussion that will be elaborated at the analysis stage, it has been theorized by academics through the celebrity culture discourse that celebrities play a significant role in society. Due to their status, their significance can even cross the boundaries of their celebrity world. In other words, their status as celebrities is also commodified for other purposes, such as politics or social activism. This dynamic has been going on for a long time and has become a social "norm". However, after the Weinstein phenomenon, some critics of Hollywood celebrities were voiced predominantly through various media. A crisis or a revolutionary moment can be classified in the context of the *hysteresis* as referred to by Bourdieu. A game and its rules have changed. In short, Foucault's paradigm is used to trace and offer a revelation related to the proliferation of cancel culture in the Hollywood landscape, while Bourdieu's paradigm is used to translate the existing contemporary conditions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Cancel Culture

As stated before, cancel culture is an act of canceling performed by boycotting public figures, particularly celebrities, who have done unethical or unacceptable acts or utterances (Sills et al., 2016). The cancellation mostly targets public figures who had stated opinions,

speeches, or any expressions that are insulting, offensive, or controversial from the perspective of social etiquette and norm. By doing cancellation to someone, it means that the people draw their support or admiration from the target of cancellation. Afterward, the act of canceling also may be performed in form of boycotting the public figures' or celebrities' works, such as music, movies, and even books.

The idea of cancellation to the person is arising in the last five years. It commonly emerges when a public figure deliberately, or not, expresses offensive utterances that might be in the context of racism, sexism, or even unethical acts like sexual harassment (Romano, 2019). With the role of media, the spread of the rumor is progressively arising and getting more attention from the public. This cancellation attempts to put the canceled celebrities away off from their influences and public platform. The cancellation would ruin the celebrities' image within the process. By canceling a person, the goal is to destroy or even to end their career. Although some public figures who are being canceled are truly canceled and it led to the downfall of their career, like what happened to Harvey Weinstein in 2018, however not all the results of cancellation may end someone's career. As an example of the cancellation of Kevin Hart in 2019, Hart was alleged over his past homophobic tweets in 2018, this cancellation led Hart to withdrew himself as the Oscars host. However, his movies still arose and success, after the responses and cancellation against him come to a standstill.

Cancel culture generally begins in the social media posts when someone or a group of people arose the news about the target's mistakes or is rumored as their mistake. The bad behavior done or unacceptable opinions spoken by the cancelation target may be found in the recent past time or even come from a reappear act that had been posted on social media in a very past time. The evidence of the controversy done by someone is typically found in the form of digital records such as screenshots from social media posts or in form of videos. Even the evidence may be found from the past works of celebrities like film and music videos. In this digital era, digital record in any form of recording like sound or visual is something that is important as the evidence and can be strong enough reliable sources of accusation to the public figures that are being canceled.

Cancel culture are done in a group when the other people find that the action of the public figure is offensive, unethical, illegal, or against the norm, a one powerless person taking power in the number of people by raising the rumor in social media and gain a lot of attention that may end up in support. For instance, the phenomenon of *Me Too Movement* was started by Tarana Burke in 2005, but the movement went popular in 2017 over the accusation tweet by actress Alyssa Milano about Harvey Weinstein being alleged by sexual abuse in the film industry. The tweet encourages any other women who are victimized by sexual harassment to stand up and share their own experiences. The scandal of Harvey Weinstein which arose

the Me Too movement gain many responses from other victims of sexual harassment and it unfolded many other scandals done by public figures.

B. Relation between Weinstein Effects and Contemporary Cancel Culture

Cancel culture can be classified as an act of online shaming for its nature and purpose that are similar to what online shaming poses. The act of canceling something generates several leverages with mostly verbal threats as the most common form in staging a cancellation process. Usage of gossip and accusation without a logical or truthful basis is unavoidable in the context of online shaming (Bazelon, 2014). Invasion of privacy and conveyance of experience about something that is factually dishonest are also signs of online shaming (Citron, 2014). Although it is suggested that cancel culture cannot be considered as a credible way to provoke justice to be fought, it is proven to be an effective way to call out someone to be responsible for acts they have or have not ever actually done in this contemporary era triggered by Weinstein Effects.

Harvey Weinstein's sexual misconduct was first reported in 2017. An explosive article written by Ronan Farrow (2017) for *The New Yorker* mesmerized the public for its brutal and disturbing revelation. The bandwagon was initiated by Rose McGowan who successfully overthrew Weinstein's large power in Hollywood. This process was not done legally and the judiciary system first, McGowan chose to speak up in a form of accusation to the media to seek justice.

Since the accusation had been launched by McGowan, the dam of lots of other cases in regards to sexual misconduct burst with unfiltered nature. Plentiful actors and Hollywood executives were accused within the same narration as Weinstein was. Kevin Spacey, Louis C.K., and many more were named and positioned in the same situation as the Hollywood mogul was. The impactful nature of Weinstein's case resulted in a vigorous campaign to fight against sexual harassment through "MeToo" movement.

The thing which can be argued to justify Weinstein Effects as the trigger of convicted-without-a-trial culture is the origin of how Weinstein Effects have arisen. The accusation system in this case seems like an alternative to approaching certain pivotal societal problems, such as sexual matters. The effectiveness of this case is supported by celebrities' position within the hierarchy of relationships culturally built for defining the relationship between celebrities and the public, which of course through worshipping (Maltby, Day, McCutcheon, Martin, & Cayanus, 2004). It quickly accelerates an extensive amount of judgment and conviction towards several celebrities to be manifested within the proposition of cancellation for future projects involving them.

Most of the accusations are delivered through many social media platforms, such as Twitter. Social media platforms are original to be thought of as media for celebrities interacting with their fans, reflecting parasocial relationships

(Stever & Lawson, 2013). But, this function has expanded or branched out as a democratized platform to adjudicate a case. It can be viewed as entertainment to punish people virtually and freely online (Kohm, 2009). It also can be viewed normally as a practice or an application of non-legal norms in judging someone (Klonick, 2015). Whilst the obvious problem noted within this argument is more likely to be grasped as the inexplicable diverse function of social media, what lies to be further analyzed is what has psychologically driven people to be more reckless in canceling celebrities using non-legal forms, an exception of Harvey Weinstein. It is a matter which should be deciphered not only in the context of communal aspects (Skoric, Chua, Liew, Wong, & Yeo, 2010) but also applied to the celebrity culture.

It is undeniable that this case is not the first genesis to initiate a cultural phenomenon of cancel culture. However, the scale of this case and the role of Hollywood as the epicenter of entertainment in the global scope certainly triggered a massive cultural reaction as well. These social facts have sparked a massive and structured digital judgment movement. By applying Foucault's paradigm regarding the genealogy of a moment, the existence of cases of sexual harassment is not a historical nil case. But especially, in this case, a social momentum in the form of a cancel culture emerged digitally as if it was a contemporary social juridical system. It exists without any particular psychological or historical axis that builds it in a structured manner.

C. Hysteresis in Hollywood Celebrity Culture

Hollywood celebrities have long been positioned as role models in various and multiple aspects of cultures. Even in the utmost spheres of their realm, such as political and social humanitarian, they are actively pressing and constructing their images to the public as “the protagonistic party” in most of these sectors (Furedi, 2010; Müller, 2013). Not only that the public base their judgment towards celebrities on the perspective of their acts in political campaigns and charities, but they also embed a sense of value through celebrities’ personal information or identity. A judgment call of celebrities’ past behaviors (Hunter, Henri Burgers, & Davidsson, 2009), thus capitalizing them into the spotlight of an entertainment culture (van Krieken, 2012). Once the level of consumption of attention craved by the public reaches an excessive stage, what first to be called an act of “idolizing” quickly turns into a “worshipping” in a matter of seconds (Jenkins, 2006). However, it is important to note that the construction stages are not necessarily bounded and fixed as what was argued previously for it is a dynamic and cultural process (Stever, 2011). Then it can be concluded that the impacts of celebrities are fundamental and are internalized deeply in the root of society.

Traits, constructed as if they were relatable to the public and embedded within celebrities’ persona, are intriguingly framed by various media to be consumed excessively by the public. Whether it is a

negative piece of story or a positive one, a sight of yearning is definitely and inexplicably appeared within society (Hanukov, 2015). The purpose of this kind of activity is not solely to serve the wheel of capitalism or provide a new kind of option of bravura, it needs far more comprehension than that. The efforts that are made by media are expected to be the bridge between celebrities and the public maintaining the reciprocal, although indirect, relationship (Hanukov, 2015; Lull & Hinerman, 1997). The notion of “virtue” or relatable that is held by celebrities is arguably being questioned since the Weinstein Effects firstly emerging. What previously seemed to be the glamour and festive culture of Hollywood celebrities are now subverted into a territory of hypocrisy and falsity. Moreover, the majority of the public presumes that Harvey Weinstein’s cases concerning matters of sexual assault is an open secret of Hollywood. Condemnation towards major Hollywood celebrities that are believed to know this issue is unavoidably occurring continuously, with public’s voices in words like “they all knew” (Wolff, 2017).

Weinstein Effects are not only uncovering dark secrets of Hollywood and then later forcefully recasting their culture but also the effects severely damage Hollywood celebrities’ image in the eye of the public. As time progresses since the case was firstly publicly reported, several movements and activities are quickly followed by strings of negative responses by public. For example, the pivotal “MeToo” movement is thrillingly launched not without major doubts from the public.

The “actors” that generate this movement in more contemporary problems, since this movement was firstly generated in 2006, are also accused of the same problems that “MeToo” movement is intensely fighting. A clear example of this problem is multiple accusations toward James Franco and Aziz Ansari, two of whom are part and parcel of “MeToo” movement. The irony of this case leads to an increasing level of skepticism against Hollywood celebrities’ true nature. Although it must be noted that “MeToo” movement is also considered effective in sustaining and even strengthening the idea of irrationality towards rape culture (PettyJohn, Muzzey, Maas, & McCauley, 2019). Furthermore, various previous researches have described the benefits brought by “MeToo” movement in several societal aspects (Bhattacharyya, 2018; O’Neil, Sojo, Fileborn, Scovelle, & Milner, 2018; Tippett, 2018).

Another example of celebrities’ activities that garner wide criticism from the public is a rendition of “Imagine” by John Lennon done by several celebrities. This song is covered in the context of the lockdown period due to the outbreak of COVID-19. This rendition is critically panned in the argument that celebrities and the public are not situationally alike (Caramanica, 2020). The public view that celebrities are insensitive about what is globally known to be the problem of many people. Not only concerning to health, but economic and career aspects are also at risk due to total shutdown, yet celebrities are singing about “Imagine”, which contains some inappropriate messages to convey according to public. The level of

accusation posed such as the narration of “celebrities are out of touch” or even “they live in a world that is secluded from the rest of the world” signifies an assumption that celebrities’ image is waning. Not only it creates segregation, but this problem also further justifies the notion of a hierarchical system in this relationship. It is previously argued that celebrities have the power to dictate the practice of life according to their visions in several particular aspects (Furedi, 2010), and from this argument it can be implied that celebrities have the right to give the public order, thus positioning them in a higher level of hierarchy than the public. Yet, the high criticism towards several new acts done by celebrities reflects the possibility of the revolving position between celebrity and public in this hierarchy. It is also possible to interpret this problem using an argument by Willis (1990), where he posed that there will always be a challenge for the powerful by the powerless.

CONCLUSION

Weinstein Effect is a monumental phenomenon that occurs within Hollywood celebrities’ arena. It shakes the core system of Hollywood celebrities’ culture and forces a shifting model of representation within this very system. What is previously hidden in the Hollywood industry has started to emerge on a massive scale towards the public’s eye. A glamour lifestyle wrapped in a sense of professionalism, within the same understanding as what commonly define, is now altered to a more unlawful cavity with someone onerously dictating how the system goes. The moment when disclosure of “the truth” takes place, can be inferred as an epoch for this fragile system of

Hollywood celebrity culture. It perpetuates and offers easiness for people to decide whether certain celebrities should continue to work or renounce their career for they have done something in which the public agrees is offensive or even barbaric. The systematic is gradually altered as the public configure the morality, the “game”, for celebrities to uphold in preserving their status.

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