

Long-Term Effects of Cancel Culture on Brand Perception: An Analysis of Gen Z Perceptions of Brands and Controversial Advertisements

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Completed Research Student Submission

Abstract Cancel culture is a recent phenomenon increasing in societal prevalence. There is limited research about how cancel culture can affect brands and individuals in the long-term. To fill this gap, this study aims to explore how cancel culture affects members of Generation Z's perception of brands.

Keywords Cancel Culture • Brand Perception • Generation Z • Social Movements • Advertising • Public Relations

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Cancel culture is “a way of behaving in a society or group, especially on social media, in which it is common to completely reject and stop supporting someone because they have said or done something that offends you” (*Cancel Culture*, n.d.). With the prominence of social media and waves of social movements over the past few decades, brands, organizations, and people must watch the content they put out and screen it carefully. Because cancel culture is such a new topic, there is limited research about how it can affect brands, organizations, and individuals in the long-term. To fill this gap, this study aims to explore how cancel culture affects brands that have put out content that has been “canceled,” with those most heavily exposed to the phenomenon: Generation Z. Born from 1997 to 2012 (Dimock, 2022), members of Generation Z are both old enough to remember offenses and familiar enough to have an impact on brand success. Generation Z has seen numerous brands, influencers, and public figures go through controversy and the resulting consequences. Not only were they witnesses to cancellations on social media, but many played a part in the cancellation of one or more people or groups.

This study examines how Generation Z’s opinions are affected years after the occurrence of a controversy, well after the dust has settled. This mixed method research uses qualitative and quantitative data in the form of a survey and focus groups. The survey collects quantitative insights on general opinions of cancel culture, offensive advertisements, and connections to specific demographic features including race and gender. Results drawn from 150 college students, ages 18 to 24 show patterns of affinity among the subjects, as well as a range of intensity for, or against, specific brands. Focus groups interview 25 individuals and focuses on their thoughts and opinions on brands canceled due to controversial advertisements. Additionally, participants offer their opinions on how these targeting brands could have crafted better messages to resonate with their concerns. Finally, respondents discuss how likely the brands discussed are to recover from their misgivings, especially in such a competitive marketplace. Brands studied consist of *Dove*, *Nike*, *Carl’s Junior*, *Nivea*, *PETA*, *Gold’s Gym* and *Mr. Clean*. Respondents also give opinions on how the brands reacted to public criticism.

Findings will show how consumers continue to treat and perceive brands that may have offended them in the past, and how they approach the perpetrators now. This study gives brands and strategic communicators insight into what offenses have prompted Generation Z consumers to boycott a brand in recent years. These insights will allow professionals to understand how to best communicate with audiences about difficult topics.

Long-Term Effects of Cancel Culture on Brand Perception: An Analysis of Gen Z Perceptions of Brands and Controversial Advertisements

Cancel culture is “a way of behaving in a society or group, especially on social media, in which it is common to completely reject and stop supporting someone because they have said or done something that offends you” (*Cancel Culture*, n.d.). The premise of cancel culture dates back to 1997, when social activist Tarana Burke spoke to a young girl who was a victim of sexual assault. Only thirteen years old at the time, she felt isolated from her peers and unable to join conversations by saying ‘me too.’ In 2017, the movement shifted to Twitter under the hashtag #MeToo when actress Alyssa Milano spoke out about being sexually assaulted by Harvey Weinstein (Barraza, 2021). Cancel culture aims to ruin one’s influence on the public and render them “powerless by boycotting them financially, politically, or professionally” (Roos, 2020) as a consequence of one’s actions (Barraza, 2021).

Born from 1997 to 2012 (Dimock, 2022), members of Generation Z are both old enough to remember offenses and familiar enough to have an impact on brand success through purchasing behaviors, making them uniquely important to understanding the effects of cancel culture on brand perception. Generation Z has seen numerous brands and public figures go through controversy and the resulting consequences, and many have also contributed to the cancellation of a person or organization, such as Kanye West, *Shien*, and *PepsiCo*. This study examines how Generation Z’s opinions and purchasing behaviors are affected years following a controversy, well after the dust has settled. Brands used in this study consisted of ***Dove***, ***Nike***, ***Carl’s Junior***, ***Nivea***, ***PETA***, ***Gold’s Gym*** and ***Mr. Clean***.

Literature Review

Social media as a tool for cancel culture

With the prominence of social media networks, particularly Twitter, social movements such as the #MeToo movement have found homes over the past few decades. With close to 450 million monthly active users (Ruby, 2022), Twitter has succeeded in becoming one of the top microblogging sites in the world. Twitter users are able to follow public figures, brands, and topics in real time. Additionally, users of the platform are able to message both those they know and those they may be otherwise unable to reach, such as celebrities and politicians. This open door to communication not only allows users to communicate with those they look up to, but it also allows the public to target the ‘elite’ (Barraza, 2021).

Communities come together on Twitter not only to keep up to date with the latest news related to their interests, but also to support or oppose those they feel strongly about. Twitter amplifies group voices, often in favor of those who are negatively impacted by discrimination. So many individuals coming together for a common goal also brings a sense of community to countless individuals across the globe and decreases the amount of time it takes for information to travel far distances and for social movements to accelerate.

Brand-consumer interaction on social media

From captions and photos to blogging and videos, social media has revolutionized how we communicate. Now, organizations, and public figures must monitor and screen content they put out to avoid driving consumers away. As Platon discusses in the Global Economic Observer (2015), social media is a space where consumers and brands act as guests and users rather than owners and customers. Here, brands must adapt their content to organically meet their audiences. Platon found that social media users can easily recall brands that they have encountered on social media in an impactful way. Thus, brands that promote their products or services on social media

have the opportunity to boost awareness and promote brand loyalty in a revolutionary way (Platon, 2015).

Despite the positive aspects of social media's impact on business success, businesses both big and small are approaching social media with more caution than ever before, becoming more afraid of speaking out about things they believe in on social media. It seems that no matter what side or viewpoint a brand aligns themselves with, they still risk facing a disconnect with the public. Little to no discussion is had when the public believes a brand to have stepped out of line. Instead, they are simply torn down and left unable to learn from their mistakes (Peralta, 2022).

On July 8, 2021, Heineken posted a Tweet reading "Cheers to the vaccinated. Time to join them. #FreshBeginnings" along with one of their commercials using the same tagline. If their consumers had not known before, Heineken was making it known that they were pro-vaccine. A portion of consumers disagreed with this, and took to Twitter to boycott the brand, while others voiced their approval. This controversy ultimately had little effect on the brand, but Heineken lost a portion of their consumers and caused high emotion on Twitter (Wilkinson, 2021).

Boycotts and brand response

While cancel culture is a new phenomenon brought on by social media, the idea of boycotting brands is not new. Boycotts are an integral part of consumer behavior and have become paramount for brands when balancing corporate social responsibility. Boycotts date back to the fourteenth century and often serve as a way for under-represented groups to leverage power (Klein, et. al., 2004). Sometimes, it can be difficult to pinpoint why certain brands are boycotted while others who have committed the same grievances go unscathed.

Klein and Smith (2004) found that consumers partaking in boycotts typically do so for one of two reasons. One, they are looking to make a difference, which may include lower prices, a change in employee treatment, donations being withheld from charities against consumers beliefs, or a change in business practices (Demarco, 2022). Second, consumers may boycott a brand in search of self enhancement. Self enhancement comes from boosting or retaining self-esteem by, for example, avoiding guilt and responding to social pressure (Klein, et. al., 2004). Consumer willingness to join in on a boycotting movement is related to their perception of public support for the boycott. The idea of ‘jumping on the bandwagon’ is nothing new and is so common due to people’s fear of being judged for not agreeing with the majority opinion.

A study done by LendingTree (2022) revealed that 25% of Americans are actively boycotting a brand for some reason. Brands’ choices for political donations are the top reason that consumers choose to take their business elsewhere, followed closely by employee treatment and brands’ stances on social issues. Consumer reasoning for boycotting appears to be influenced by their political affiliations. Democrats are more likely to boycott a brand for their decision to associate with a political figure or party, while Republicans are more likely to cite social issues. Most individuals studied stated that they would be willing to go back to the brand under the right circumstances, which differ by the person (Demarco, 2022).

Brand response to cancel culture is an integral part of image repair. In 2017, researchers from Fairfield University conducted a metaanalysis of 110 articles to determine success rates of corporate apology rhetoric after crises. From over thirty years of peer reviewed articles (1986-2016), they gathered insights on which strategies were most common and successful, as well as mitigation factors. Corrective action, the act of fixing problems and/or making changes following an offensive act, had a 57% success rate (Arendt, et. al., 2017), and is the most

successful act. While most of these cases of corrective action were used after tragedies such as terrorism or natural disaster, this strategy can be mimicked in the case of brand boycott.

Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) suggest that once an individual or organization is embroiled in a controversy, “retracting their statement and issuing an apology is unlikely to lessen the negative effect among those who opposed the brand's stand.” This theory is supported by Arendt’s finding that corrective action proves to be successful and denial is one of the least successful strategies used in times of crisis. Denial was the most commonly used tactic in Arendt and their fellow researchers’ study. In their examples, they cite cases of the few powerful people, such as politicians, who have used this strategy successfully (Arendt, et. al., 2017).

Emphasized by the Journal of Services Marketing (2009), trust is key for brands when it comes to crisis communication. In many cases, denial can further ignite controversy. An explanation and apology aimed at both employees and the public can go a long way in rebuilding trust. The media also plays a big role in brand trust, and is often the first place crisis communicators go to when experiencing a crisis. As this research was done before cancel culture’s rise, one can infer that the media and social media should be the focus of any apology or retribution (Mattila, 2009), as it is one of the best ways to communicate directly with their audiences and address issues quickly.

Immediate and long-term effects of cancel culture

Long-term effects on a brand’s perception does not always correlate with brand success. In September of 2020, Netflix released promotional materials for a movie coming to their service titled *Cuties*, which follows a preteen girls dance team whose dances and costumes were deemed inappropriate and perverted by the public. After the release of preview materials, #CancelNetflix began trending on Twitter. Public backlash was significant, resulting in Netflix releasing an

apology for their portrayal of the movie while simultaneously keeping the film on the streaming service (Wilkinson & Romano, 2020).

Regardless of the numerous subscribers publicly stating their plan to boycott the major streaming service, Netflix did not suffer a major loss in subscribers or revenue. Indeed, the major streaming service did experience a smaller increase in revenue during quarter four of 2020 when compared to the other quarter's linear increase in revenue. However, the following first quarter of 2021 saw a \$519 million increase in revenue from the final quarter of 2020. Since the start of 2021, Netflix has experienced a primarily linear increase in revenue, only experiencing a slight decrease in mid-2022 (Iqbal, 2022). Today, Netflix is considered the top global streaming service, holding over 200 million subscribers as of 2022, the most of all streaming platforms currently in service (Cook, 2022). This occurrence shows that while cancel culture tends to be incredibly powerful in the moment, the effects are not always permanent or long term. People tend to “forgive and forget” or even simply “forget” the incidents leading to a brand being ‘canceled’ in the first place and return to being active consumers of the brand.

Demarco’s study (2022) shows a link different generations and their tendency to maintain their cancellation or boycott of a brand. Members of Generation Z are the least likely to permanently maintain their boycott on a brand (Demarco, 2022). Generation X is the most likely to continue their boycott, as they often feel more passionate about their reasoning for ceasing support from the brand. This may mean that while the initial reaction may point to the downfall of a brand or company, if the majority of the criticism comes from the youngest consumers, there is a chance for the brand to recover from their controversies.

Methodology

This study uses a mixed-method approach of primary research to gather and analyze Generation Z response to canceled brands. Methods of research include a quantitative survey and three qualitative focus groups used to gather insights into Gen Z knowledge of brands that have been canceled and opinions on the brand response after the dust has settled. Controversial advertisements were created and distributed by seven brands including *Dove*, *Nike*, *Carl's Junior*, *Nivea*, *PETA*, *Gold's Gym* and *Mr. Clean* at some point within recent years, sparking various global and local reactions.

Quantitative Survey

Conducted through Qualtrics XM software, a twenty-question survey was distributed by the study's researchers through personal social media accounts, direct messaging, and a mass email across The University of Oklahoma's Norman campus. Respondents were first asked a series of questions about their experiences with cancel culture, how past controversies have influenced their current consumer behaviors, and how different responses may change their perception of a brand. Respondents were asked to rank how offensive different grievances commonly found in advertisements, and which grievances they would be most and least likely to forgive a brand for committing. Answers to these questions give easily measured quantifiable data about Gen Z consumer beliefs towards cancel culture and their perceptions of brands who have been canceled by the public.

Next, participants were shown three different print advertisements that have sparked controversy in the past five years.. In an effort to encourage more people to switch to a vegetarian diet, PETA set out a billboard advertisement that stated "Save the Whales. Lose the Blubber: Go Vegetarian," which raised issues of body image and fat shaming (Goldstein, 2017) (**Figure 1**). Second, respondents were shown an advertisement from Procter & Gamble's *Mr.*

Clean (**Figure 2**) depicting a mother and daughter cleaning with a ‘Mr. Clean Magic Eraser’ next to an image of the brand’s mascot. The advertisement’s headline reads “This Mother’s Day, Get Back to the Job That Really Matters,” sparking concerns of misogyny and sexism, and drawing much attention from the public, especially on Twitter (*Terrible Ad Analysis*, n.d.). Finally, respondents were shown an advertisement from Beiersdorf Global AG’s *Nivea* promoting an antiperspirant deodorant (**Figure 3**). Simply headlined “White is Purity,” the brand received many comments and criticisms concerning racism (Wang, 2021) from audiences.

Respondents were asked to rate how offensive they found the advertisements listed above using a Likert scale, with the far left of the scale indicating respondents find the advertisements not offensive at all, and the far right meaning the advertisements were perceived as highly offensive. Next, respondents were asked to identify what aspect of the advertisement made it offensive: racism, misogyny, sexism, homophobia, tone deafness, or profiting off of tragedy. For those who did not find an advertisement offensive, they were given the opportunity to answer as such. Additionally, there were open response areas for those who wish to expand on their response or select a choice not provided by the researchers. These responses allow researchers to understand how different individuals find themselves affected by different types of advertisements, and what is most likely to lead to the respondents becoming offended. Finally, participants answered a short series of demographic and psychographic questions to gather complementary insights. This Qualtrics survey was open to responses for three weeks and yielded a total of one hundred and fifty responses.

Qualitative Focus Groups

To gain more in-depth insight Generation Z’s feelings towards advertisements and brands surrounded by controversy, three focus groups were conducted by the study’s researchers, who

alternated moderating the different sessions. Each focus group interviewed six to ten participants, totaling twenty two individuals, between the ages of 18-24 from various ethnic, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Participants were selected from a convenience pool, the majority of which had a personal relationship with one of the researchers on the study, but were informed that their choice to not participate in the study would not impact their relationship to either researcher.

To begin, participants were asked to explain what first comes to mind when they think of cancel culture, and their experiences with the subject. The moderator of the focus groups then gave the Cambridge Dictionary definition of cancel culture in order to assure that all participants had a clear understanding of what was being discussed. Participants were encouraged to share examples of cancel culture, both current and past. Discussion was then held about the examples given by different participants.

Following the time of open discussion, to gather real-time reactions, participants were shown four different advertisements. Characteristics exhibited in the advertisements included racism, sexism, body-shaming, and political undertones. The first advertisement shown was from Unilever's *Dove*, and was shared on the brand's Facebook in 2017. The brand posted a video showing various women transitioning between each one by having each woman take off her shirt, which matches her skin tone, and 'transforming' into the next woman. The advertisement sparked much controversy, with audiences citing the racist undertones of the images depicted, as a young African American woman turned into a white woman within the video clip (Held, 2017). After, *Dove's* PR response was shown (**Figure 4**). Next, *Carl's Junior's* 2015 SuperBowl commercial was shown, which depicted a young woman walking through a street market. This advertisement utilized implied nudity to make audiences believe the young woman was unclothed as she walked around the market, and was only revealed to have clothing on in the

final scene shown (K, 2019). In order to assess how Generation Z responds to political controversy, the final commercial shown was *Nike's* commercial with famous football player Colin Kapernick, who became well known for kneeling during the National Anthem to promote Civil Rights. Partnering with Kapernick raised complaints and criticism from both Donald Trump and his supporters (Jungblut & Johnen, 2021). Lastly, a print advertisement from *Gold's Gym* (**Figure 5**) was shown to respondents, which showed a photo of a pear with the words "This Is No Shape For A Girl" (Johnson, 2016), as well as their response posted after the offense (**Figure 6**).

Participants were asked to share how they felt at the time of the advertisements' releases, if they were exposed to the controversies when the advertisements ran, and how they currently perceive the advertisements. After being told how the public reacted to the advertisements, participants were asked to share whether or not they felt the public response was appropriate. Participants who were not exposed to the advertisements at the time of their release were asked how they believe they would have reacted had they been familiar with the advertisements.

Respondents were then asked how they perceive studied brands following their exposure to the advertisements. Respondents were asked whether they believe the brands should have been able to recover from their controversies, or if they believe they should be boycotted by consumers; and to another extreme, whether respondents believe the brands should have failed following their offenses. Following this, respondents were shown how, or if, the different brands responded to the controversy and asked whether the brands' responses made up for their misgivings in the respondents' eyes, and if not, why. Additionally, participants were asked what they believe the brands could have done better to both avoid and resolve their controversies in

the eyes of the consumer. These insights allow the researcher's to better understand how different factors in controversies may influence a consumer's perception of a brand in a long-term sense.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Findings

When asked if they have ever taken part in canceling a brand or individual, 44 percent of participants said yes. Respondents were asked to clarify why they chose to boycott the brand or individual, for which the top answer was racism, followed by homophobic behavior. 55 percent of respondents confirmed that they refuse to shop with a specific company or brand following a controversy, showing some connection between brand perception and cancel culture. Top brands that participants have boycotted consist of *SHIEN* and *Chick-Fil-A*. *SHIEN* came under fire by the public in 2020, when internet user Melissa Grossman posted about the fast fashion company producing and selling a swastika necklace (Lonser, 2020). Shortly after, internet users uncovered additional problems with the brand, such as their poor treatment of workers. *Chick-Fil-A* first came under fire following homophobic comments made by the company's CEO in 2012 (Robinson, 2021), which has continued well into the next decade.

Even with their passionate viewpoints on topics which have resulted in controversy, this study's survey found that members of Generation Z do believe that brands should be forgiven for circumstances such as offensive advertisements following active steps toward improvement. 36 percent of participants confirmed that they believe brands should be forgiven following controversial or insensitive advertisements and 55 percent said that they may be willing to forgive the brand, under the right circumstances. Only nine percent stated that they do not believe brands should be given the chance for forgiveness. This confirms past studies findings

that propose Generation Z is one of the least likely generations to maintain their boycott, no matter the circumstances.

Participants were asked to gauge which communication tactics used following a controversy were most likely to make up for the offense in their opinion. “Visible changes being made to improve and become more self aware” was the most popular option with 54 percent of participants putting it in the number one spot. Donating money to communities impacted and firing those responsible were close for the next spots, with about 30 percent of participants ranking them in the second and third. Holding a press conference was in the fifth spot with 50 percent of participants placing above the last option: issuing an apology.

Participants were asked to rank different offenses from most likely to forgive (1) to least likely to forgive (5) following an apology. These rankings revealed that racism was an offense they were least likely to forgive followed by homophobia. Misogynistic comments fell directly in the middle of the list. Advertisements profiting off tragedy were the second most likely advertisement offenses to be forgiven, finally followed by tone deaf comments as the most likely offense to be forgiven. These opinions are further reflected in the answers regarding the three print advertisements included in the survey.

The *Nivea* “White is Purity” ad was found as the most offensive advertisement presented, with 37 percent of participants rating it as highly offensive on the Likert scale ranging from not offensive (1) to highly offensive (5) for racism and tone deafness. *PETA* also had an overwhelming majority of votes, 49 percent, stating the advertisement was offensive (4) due to various reasons; the top reason the advertisement was found offensive was body-shaming, which was chosen by 110 respondents. Similarly, 39 percent of respondents found the *Mr. Clean* advertisement to be offensive (4) for misogyny.

Qualitative Findings

When asked to share what first comes to mind when thinking of cancel culture, each of the twenty two participants spoke about social media and influencers, as well as major public figures. Taking place in late 2022, Kanye West, a popular rap artist who was facing major controversy over anti semitic comments, was the top mention following the prompt, followed closely by James Charles, a makeup artist popular on Instagram and YouTube. No participants mentioned a brand in this initial prompt. When asked what came to mind when thinking of brands and cancel culture, the top answer was Balenciaga. The luxury fashion brand faced major backlash following a holiday campaign released a week prior to the focus groups, which featured young children posing with teddy bears dressed in clothing of a sexual nature.

Most participants saw both positive and negative aspects of cancel culture. Most agree that keeping brands accountable is important, but they are cautious due to the unforgiving nature of the movement. All participants stated that repeated offensive behavior is where cancellation is warranted, but single offenses or past offenses that have not been repeated do not always require such swift punishment. Many participants confided that they have not and likely will not cease purchasing from their favorite brands following an offensive action altogether, but instead will continue to purchase the brand while also reserving the brand's offenses in the back of their minds. This indicates that members of Generation Z are most likely to not maintain a boycott on a brand, but rather 'forgive but not forget' brands they wish to continue purchasing from. These insights further show connections between the long term effects of cancel culture and brand perception, but a disconnect between long term effects of cancel culture and brand success.

After participants were shown the different advertisements, it became clear that Generation Z, or at least those involved in the study's sample, were less likely to be concerned

with political advertising than those of older generations, such as participants' parents and grandparents. Nineteen participants confirmed that their parents or guardians had reacted negatively upon seeing *Nike's* promotional content with Colin Kaepernick. However, participants themselves had only positive comments on the campaign, with two participants going as far to say "I got chills." In each focus group, Nike's commercial was labeled as the best advertisement.

Prior to conducting the focus groups, it was believed that most participants would find *Dove's* advertisement most offensive, due to the racism exhibited. However, only four individuals interviewed stated that they found the *Dove* advertisement to be most offensive. While many were familiar with the controversy when the video clip was first published, very few felt it changed their perception of the brand. Many respondents explained that they did not feel the video clip truly was offensive as it 'did not fit the brand DNA.' One participant stated "While I know I should find it [*Dove's* advertisement] more offensive, I think I just know that that is not who they are. They've done a lot for inclusivity and to fight racism, so I think I just know that it was an accident." Very few felt the apology made up for the mistake, one participant even stating it felt "disingenuous," but instead the actions that the brand took to fix the situation, such as their future "real beauty" campaign. These responses verify the study's survey responses in terms of what Generation Z feels makes up for brand controversies.

The advertisements from *Gold's Gym* and *Carl's Junior* were seen as most offensive. The majority of female participants found *Gold's Gym's* print advertisement to be most offensive due to the blatant objectivity of women and disregard to common body types. One participant attempted to rationalize the brand's word choice, theorizing that the advertisement was meant to encourage women to stop comparing themselves to objects such as fruits, but the overall consensus was that the advertisement was in poor taste due to poor execution. Regardless of the

apology issued (**Figure 6**), participants felt a strong, negative reaction towards the brand. stating they would likely never become a consumer of the brand after seeing the advertisement.

Each male participant found the *Carl's Junior* advertisement to be the most offensive. Participants lamented that the advertisement objectified and stereotyped women under the male gaze in an incredibly public setting—the Super Bowl. Those who found issue with the commercial felt it was worsened by the lack of brand response—regardless of the fact that apologies have not made a major impact in the past—and that the use of sex appeal is deeply ingrained in the brand's marketing strategy, even following public criticism.

Limitations

Respondents were selected through convenience sampling, meaning results may not apply to all who are 18-24 years old. This study focused on a small sample of advertisements that have been deemed controversial. The advertising industry is continuously moving, and current events are always shifting. Due to the incredible pace at which controversial events occur with the strategic communications industry, many events occurred after or during the formation of the research questions, which affected answers in both focus groups and the quantitative survey.

Furthermore, the general understanding of cancel culture is different for all. While all participants were given the *Cambridge English Dictionary* definition of 'cancel culture,' it is possible for participants to have different ideas of what the term means. Many participants stated that they did not support companies due to certain attributes, such as unfair wages and fast fashion, but these factors were not fully accounted for in the cancellation definition used in this study. Finally, a portion of this research was conducted online, making it possible for participants to be impacted by external factors out of the researchers' control.

Conclusion

Cancel culture is the act of withdrawing support for a brand or person following controversy (*Cancel culture*, n.d.). With strong opinions and loud voices on social media, Generation Z is a group at the center of this phenomenon. This study aims to explore how cancel culture affects brands in the long run. The immediate effects of cancel culture are easy to track through social media platforms such as Twitter. Cancellation happens quickly and on a large scale, but does not always have lasting effects on brand perception and consumption.

The results indicate that while Gen Z is quick to point fingers at the time of a scandal, that does not mean they are unwilling to forgive brand offenses when proper measures are taken to rectify the situation. In fact, the group shows a dislike towards the idea of completely ceasing support for a brand or individual whenever it is apparent that they are attempting to take steps towards rectifying the situation. This study has shown that apologies are not always the best path for brands facing controversies to take. Instead, Generation Z, the most valuable consumers of today's market, appreciates authentic brands working to improve their impact on the world.

As brands continue to navigate the world of advertising on social media, this study can aid professionals in making informed decisions on content they choose to put out. Furthermore, this study gives brands and strategic communicators insight into what offenses have prompted Generation Z consumers to boycott a brand in recent years and how these situations phase out in the long run. This is a complex topic that will continue to change with social trends over the years, but patterns uncovered in this study reveal that there is a level of predictability one can expect from Gen Z in the face of a controversy.

Appendix

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

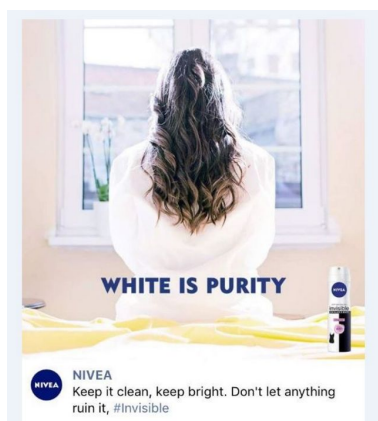


Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



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