
Social Media as a Stage: A Behind the Scenes Analysis of Performative Activism, “Cancel Culture,” and Effective Allyship

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Abstract

Activism on social media has become increasingly prominent, with individuals sharing content online to advocate for various social issues and marginalized groups. While social media has become a significant tool for global outreach, it has also brought about new social processes, such as performative activism and “cancel culture,” which warrant further examination in order to gauge their effectiveness. Within this paper presentation, we will investigate the increased prevalence of social media activism and the related phenomena surrounding these social processes. Performative activism occurs when those engaging in it treat activism as a trend, rather than collectively contributing to social movements (Lucie, 2021). “Cancel culture” occurs when individuals who transgress societal norms are called out or ostracized, often on social media (Saint-Louis, 2021). We want to explore the motivations that individuals hold to engage in these practices, and how external and internal factors might influence their decisions online. We are currently in the process of recruiting participants and collecting our data. To do this, we are using both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches in order to answer our research questions. We hope that the qualitative questions will garner individual narratives about the phenomena we are studying, while the quantitative questions will provide us with more objective findings about the sample population. Our questions will surround topics including population demographics, social media use, performative activism and “cancel culture.” We will conduct this research through an anonymous online questionnaire, which has been created on LimeSurvey, the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) sanctioned platform. The recruitment of our participants will be done through a third-party, the McMaster Student Union (MSU) and its affiliated clubs, committees, and societies, who will distribute the survey on our behalf. Once we have finished data collection and can continue with the research process, we will summarize our findings and distinguish any significant patterns or trends. We hope that this study will encourage its participants and readers to critically reflect on their motivations for engaging in activism, how they participate in activism, and whether they believe it is truly effective. We also hope our research provides us with meaningful findings that will inform us on the best ways to enact change, as well as engage in effective advocacy and allyship.

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References

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