



The Erosion of Tabayyun: Cancel Culture, Public Shaming, and the Crisis of Islamic Digital Literacy

Darul Naad^{1*}, Cut Syamsidar², Rubino³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan, Indonesia

Email: [^{\(1\)}darul3005243003@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:darul3005243003@uinsu.ac.id), [^{\(2\)}cutkreatif@gmail.com](mailto:cutkreatif@gmail.com), [^{\(3\)}rubino@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:rubino@uinsu.ac.id)

*Corresponding Author

Received: 30 January 2026

Revised : 4 February 2026

Accepted: 20 February 2026

Published: 21 February 2026

To cite this article: Naad, D., Syamsidar, C., & Rubino. (2026). The Erosion of Tabayyun: Cancel Culture, Public Shaming, and the Crisis of Islamic Digital Literacy. *Wasilatuna : Jurnal Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam*, 9 Special Edition (1), 28–44.

ABSTRACT

The rise of cancel culture on social media presents a critical challenge to Islamic digital literacy, particularly concerning the ethical principles of communication. This study investigates the erosion of the tabayyun (verification) principle amidst the normalization of public shaming, using the cancel culture phenomenon surrounding Indonesian public figure Gofar Hilman as a case study. Employing a digital netnography approach and thematic analysis, this research examines netizens' discourse, social media interactions, and digital public opinion mobilizations. The findings reveal that digital communities often bypass the verification process (tabayyun) and the ethical mandate of concealing others' faults (satr al-'ayb), favoring instant moral judgment and collective delegitimization. While cancel culture operates as a modern mechanism for public accountability, it frequently mutates into digital vigilantism that contradicts Islamic communication ethics. This study contributes to the contemporary discourse on digital religion by providing a theoretical framework that bridges social media phenomena with Islamic ethical norms. Ultimately, the research emphasizes the urgent need to revitalize Islamic digital literacy to navigate the complexities of digital public spheres responsibly.

Keywords: Cancel Culture, Digital Vigilantism, Islamic Digital Literacy, Public Shaming, Tabayyun.

INTRODUCTION

Social media, as a public communication space, has become a central feature of contemporary digital life (Bruns 2023; Van Dijck and Poell 2015). As a platform for interaction, social media enables the rapid, cross-border distribution of information and opens up participation to billions of users (Trivedi and Gautam 2025). With the development of digital networks, communication patterns and the formation of public opinion have undergone significant transformations, expanding the arena for debate and evaluation of individual behavior that emerges in the digital public sphere (online communication channels) and becoming a new tool of social control in digital society (Habermas 2022). This shift in social structure creates a new environment where moral, social, and even ethical discourse can be reproduced virally within hours through posts, comments, and hashtags on

social media platforms. (Rianto, Sulkhan, and Marantika 2024).

In the context of digital interactions, the phenomenon of cancel culture has emerged as an increasingly common social practice, particularly on social media. Cancel culture refers to the collective actions of digital communities condemning, rejecting, and ultimately "cancelling" support for individuals or groups deemed to have engaged in controversial behavior or violated public social norms. This phenomenon can lead to the termination of social support, public boycotts, and even the social delegitimization of its targets. In the Indonesian context, this concept frequently appears in social media discourse regarding the behavior of public figures, moral representation, and the authority of netizens to impose digital social sanctions. (Octovi, Effendi, and Febriana 2023).

Empirical studies of cancel culture in Indonesia reveal interesting dynamics related to social control through digital media. Previous research has found that cancel culture functions both as a social control against behavior deemed problematic and as a collective response to the dynamics of public opinion on social media, which is often influenced by the virality of issues and platform algorithms. For example, cancel culture in cases of domestic violence against celebrities and their relationship to public opinion on Instagram and YouTube illustrates how netizens can exert digital social pressure on the behavior of public figures deemed controversial. (Mayasari 2022).

Public perceptions of cancel culture also show that this phenomenon impacts not only the targeted individuals but also the broader structure of public communication. Other research confirms that digital communities tend to view cancel culture as a reaction to controversial actions, where netizens openly articulate their opinions and reactions in digital spaces. This practice often stems from a debate between the need for social accountability and concerns about freedom of expression and the potential for unbalanced silencing of opinions. (Salisah et al. 2025).

Theoretically, cancel culture is seen as a digital communication phenomenon that grows out of the complex interaction between public opinion, the structure of social media algorithms, and collective moral pressures in contemporary society. This phenomenon creates tension between social media's function as a space for freedom of expression and as a tool of digital social punishment. In many cases, the dominant moral narrative often determines how an incident is perceived and responded to by the digital public, making the social implications of cancel culture important to examine in order to understand this phenomenon within the framework of digital communication and culture. (Rianto et al. 2024).

The controversial case involving Gofar Hilman, a public figure on Indonesian social media, is a manifestation of this dynamic. Gofar Hilman came under public scrutiny after a number of claims and accusations sparked intense netizen responses on social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Instagram. The cancel culture communication activity against him reflects a pattern of netizen reactions that included not only verbal criticism but also digital social sanctions such as boycotts and delegitimization of his image. Preliminary research indicates that these responses are part of a digital social control mechanism involving intense mobilization of public opinion through hashtags, retweets, and various comments. (Đurđević, Lecturer, and Technology 2025).

Existing studies on cancel culture have predominantly been developed within Western sociocultural and legal frameworks, particularly those grounded in liberal notions of justice, individual accountability, and freedom of expression. In this body of literature, cancel culture is often framed as a mechanism of social control, public accountability, or digital activism, with limited attention to religious-ethical values that shape moral judgment in non-

Western societies. As a result, the dominant analytical lens tends to normalize public shaming and digital exclusion as acceptable forms of moral sanction, provided they align with liberal conceptions of justice and harm prevention. However, there remains a significant gap in scholarship examining cancel culture in Muslim-majority societies, such as Indonesia, where religious values play a central role in shaping social norms and moral reasoning. In Islamic ethical tradition, principles such as *satr al-‘ayb* (concealing others’ faults), *‘afw* (forgiveness), *hifz al-lisān* (guarding one’s speech), and the presumption of innocence often stand in tension with the aggressive, punitive, and viral nature of cancel culture practices on social media. This normative clash becomes particularly visible in high-profile digital controversies, where public figures are subjected to mass moral judgment before legal or factual clarity is achieved.

Grounded in Islamic ethical teachings, this study positions cancel culture not merely as a digital communication phenomenon, but as a moral and religious challenge in contemporary Muslim societies. The Qur’an explicitly warns believers against spreading unverified accusations and exposing others’ faults:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ

“O you who believe, if a wrongdoer brings you news, verify it, lest you harm people out of ignorance and then become regretful” (Qur’an 49:6).

Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized responsibility in speech and expression, stating: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Muslim). In the context of digital communication, this principle extends to the use of one’s fingers (*hifz al-aṣābi*) when posting, commenting, or sharing content online.

However, despite the increasing frequency of cancel culture in Indonesia, empirical research investigating how these digital practices erode fundamental Islamic ethical principles specifically tabayyun remains critically limited. Most existing studies tend to focus on the sociological impacts of cancel culture without addressing the underlying crisis of Islamic digital literacy. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by critically examining the erosion of tabayyun and the normalization of public shaming in digital spaces, utilizing the Gofar Hilman controversy as an instrumental case study. By shifting the analytical lens from secular social control to Islamic communication ethics, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on digital religion and the urgent need for Islamic digital literacy in contemporary Muslim societies.

METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the cancel culture phenomenon directed at Gofar Hilman on Indonesian social media (Goodman et al. 2014; Yaqinah and Antok 2024). This approach was selected due to its capacity to explore meanings, perceptions, and social experiences of netizens in responding to complex digital communication phenomena, particularly within the dynamic context of social media as public spaces. The case study design enables a focused and holistic examination of a single empirical case, allowing the analysis to capture the dynamics, narratives, and social consequences surrounding the controversy involving Gofar Hilman. Similar qualitative case study approaches have been applied in prior cancel culture

research to analyze processes of digital criticism and social exclusion in online environments. (Yolandha Rakatiwi, Rubino 2024).

The data were collected over a defined period, from June 2021 to February 2022, corresponding to the emergence, escalation, and resolution of the public controversy. Research data were obtained through digital documentation, including: (1) social media posts and comments related to the Gofar Hilman case on Twitter (now X) and Instagram, (2) tweets, hashtags, and discussion threads associated with cancel culture practices, and (3) online news articles containing public opinions and media framing of the case. Digital documentation was chosen as the primary data source because it represents recorded public communication that authentically reflects netizens' interactions, opinions, and moral responses in digital spaces. This data collection strategy aligns with qualitative studies examining cancel culture phenomena in Indonesian social media contexts. (Salisah et al. 2025).

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, involving the deliberate selection of data based on specific criteria, such as viral posts, hashtags with high engagement, and comments that clearly represent netizens' attitudes toward the case. This technique allowed the researchers to focus on data that were directly relevant to the research objectives and to capture a representative picture of public responses within the case study context. Similar sampling strategies have been widely applied in cancel culture research to understand public perception across digital platforms. (Salisah et al. 2025).

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns and themes within qualitative data. This method was particularly suitable for examining patterns of netizen responses, dominant moral narratives, and the construction of meaning within cancel culture discourse. The analysis process moved from data reduction to thematic coding, followed by interpretive analysis grounded in social and religious ethical perspectives. The entire systematic procedure of this research encompassing the stages of data collection, purposive sampling, thematic analysis, and data validation is visually summarized in Figure 1. (Yolandha Rakatiwi, Rubino 2024).

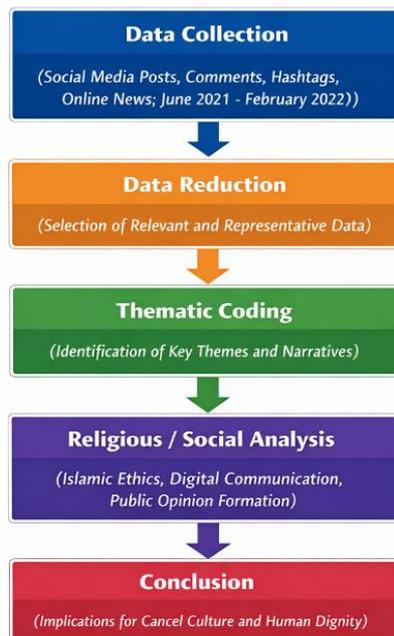


Figure 1. Research Flowchart of the Digital Case Study Analysis

As illustrated in the flowchart above, data validity was rigorously maintained through source triangulation. This process involved cross-checking, comparing, and connecting various types of data from social media posts, netizen comments, and online media coverage. This triangulation was crucial for strengthening the credibility of the research findings, ensuring that the interpretations and conclusions were not based solely on a single data source but reflected a broader and more objective representation of the phenomenon being analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chronology of the Gofar Hilman Controversy on Social Media

The cancel culture phenomenon against Gofar Hilman emerged in mid-2021 following viral allegations of sexual harassment circulated on social media. The accusation rapidly gained public attention and triggered widespread digital reactions, positioning social media platforms as central arenas for moral judgment and collective response (Picarella 2024a). The case illustrates how allegations can quickly reshape public opinion and social standing through virality mechanisms such as retweets, comments, and hashtags (Zahzuli et al. 2022). However, the accusation was later formally retracted in early 2022 through a mediation process, highlighting the volatility of digital narratives and the fragile boundary between public accountability and premature social punishment. A detailed timeline of key events is presented in Table 1 to provide chronological clarity without overextending the narrative discussion. (Dipta Ninggar Anjarini 2020).

Table 1. *The Trajectory of Public Shaming and Cancel Culture on Social Media*

Time Period	Key Event	Impact on Social Media
2018	Alleged incident occurred at a public event (initial claim)	Not publicly discussed
June 2021	Sexual harassment allegation posted on Twitter and went viral	Public outrage, moral condemnation, and cancel culture practices
June–July 2021	Wide dissemination through retweets, comments, and online media coverage	Significant decline in public image and social position
2021	Polarized public responses between support and condemnation	Intensification of collective moral judgment in digital space
February 2022	Allegation formally retracted with a public apology through mediation	Shift in public narrative, with lasting reputational effects

The primary platforms that fueled the virality of the case were Twitter (now X) and Instagram. Twitter became the initial arena for accusations due to its rapid dissemination of public opinion through threads, hashtags, and retweets, allowing the issue to immediately gain widespread exposure among diverse user groups (Hamama 2024). Meanwhile, Instagram became another medium where netizen reactions spread through posts, stories, and comments on posts related to the case. This development is similar to patterns found in other studies, where social media platforms have been confirmed to function as arenas for the collective formation of moral narratives, which can then reinforce cancel culture tendencies in the digital space. (Đurđević et al. 2025).

The initial momentum of public opinion formation was seen when the accusatory post was retweeted and shared massively by Twitter users, so that the hashtag and discussion about Gofar Hilman became the dominant topic of conversation for a certain period of time. The digital public was then polarized between those who condemned the alleged actions, demanding social accountability, and those who questioned the veracity of the accusations and emphasized the principle of "innocent until proven guilty." This opinion formation process reflects how cancel culture can develop through the process of digital public discourse, where moral, emotional, and algorithmic aspects interact to shape netizens' responses to public figures. (Salisah et al. 2025).

Social Media as a Space for Forming Digital Public Opinion

Social media plays a strategic role as a public communication space in shaping the opinions and perceptions of modern society. Changes in social interaction patterns influenced by digital platforms such as Twitter (X), Instagram, and Facebook have fundamentally changed the way the public responds to social issues. In the context of the cancel culture phenomenon, social media provides a facility for individuals to express attitudes, evaluate the actions of others, and mobilize opinions collectively in a very short time, thus creating a participatory and dynamic public narrative (participatory sense-making). This phenomenon aligns with research findings showing that social media has become the primary arena where public opinion is structured, developed, and ultimately can influence social decisions, including in the case of assessing the behavior of public figures in the digital space. (Noval et al. 2025).

One of the key characteristics of social media is its ability to accelerate the spread of information and opinions through algorithmic mechanisms and virality, often reinforced by retweets, hashtags, and content recommendations. A study of the dynamics of digital public opinion found that social media algorithms not only recommend popular content but also amplify narratives that generate high user engagement, regardless of their validity. This makes social media a space where debate, conflict, and societal moral judgments are openly confronted before a broad digital audience. (Picarella 2024a).

The process of forming public opinion on social media regarding the cancel culture phenomenon is also influenced by the heterogeneous social structure of users, which involves various social groups with different backgrounds, values, identities, and moral orientations. The interactions between these actors often elicit strong emotional responses, especially when the issues discussed relate to morality, ethics, or social values that are considered sensitive by the majority of users. Research shows that such emotional responses on social media contribute to the rapid and massive formation of collective opinion, which can then reinforce the narrative that an action or individual deserves social condemnation or even exclusion from the digital space. (Szwed 2025).

Furthermore, social media allows for broader public access and participation than traditional media, so that public opinion is not only dominated by formal narratives or mainstream media, but also by previously unheard individual voices. Netizens' contributions through comments, reshares, and hashtag support have become an integral part of the process of forming digital public opinion. In the context of cancel culture, this causes evaluations of public figures' behavior to be based on collective narratives that often reinforce each other, even when the underlying facts have not been fully verified. (Jusay et al. 2022).

Interaction and dialogue within social media also reflect the ongoing, two-way process of public opinion formation, where each post or comment can strengthen or change the direction of the public narrative. Research on digital communication demonstrates that the

active engagement of social media users through comments, hashtags, and likes plays a crucial role in validating or challenging a public narrative. Therefore, social media is not merely a medium for information distribution, but also a dialectical space where public opinion is formed through complex and mutually influential social interactions. (Noval et al. 2025).

Beyond the circulation of accusations, cancel culture in the Gofar Hilman case was sustained through discursive practices in which netizens actively constructed moral judgments via language. Social media platforms functioned not only as spaces for information exchange but also as arenas for the formation of digital public opinion, where moral criticism was articulated, amplified, and normalized. A discourse analysis of netizen comments reveals a recurring pattern in which moral outrage was expressed through emotionally charged and religiously inflected language, often detached from ethical restraint. One prominent discursive pattern identified in the data is the use of pseudo-religious diction. Netizens frequently employed terms such as “*karma*,” “*azab*,” “*tobat*,” and “*hukuman Tuhan*” to legitimize their condemnation of Gofar Hilman. Although these terms originate from religious or moral vocabularies, their usage in comment sections often lacked theological depth and functioned primarily as rhetorical tools to justify public shaming. In this sense, religious language was instrumentalized to confer moral authority on acts of verbal aggression, transforming complex ethical concepts into simplified labels for digital punishment (Zahzuli et al. 2022).

Another salient feature of netizen discourse is the normalization of vulgarity as justice. Insults, mockery, and harsh language were frequently framed as morally justified responses in the name of defending victims and upholding social accountability. Within this discursive logic, verbal violence was redefined as ethical action, while calls for verification or restraint were often dismissed as complicity. This reflects how social media enables a form of moral spectacle, where outrage, emotional intensity, and algorithmic visibility converge to shape collective judgments. Consequently, cancel culture operates not merely through actions of exclusion but through language that converts moral criticism into a public performance of shame (Hamama 2024).

Thus, social media, as a space for digital public opinion formation, provides the conditions that allow the cancel culture phenomenon to develop intensively and rapidly, as occurred in the Gofar Hilman case (Hariyanto, Hamid, and Putrawan 2025). Participatory digital social interactions, combined with algorithmic mechanisms that strengthen user engagement, shape strong public opinion patterns and can have a significant impact on a public figure's image and social standing within the digital community. (Jusay et al. 2022).

Forms and Patterns of Cancel Culture towards Gofar Hilman

The cancel culture phenomenon against Gofar Hilman has given rise to diverse forms of digital responses from the public on social media. One key pattern is intense moral criticism and evaluative narratives against the alleged behavior, reflecting the dynamics of social judgment in the digital space. This type of criticism often appears in the form of harsh comments, expressions of anger, or sharp moral statements against actions deemed to violate common social norms. This aligns with studies that suggest cancel culture is often expressed as a form of moral and evaluative criticism of public figures, particularly on social media, which facilitates widespread netizen participation in shaping collective opinion. (Salisah et al. 2025).

Beyond moral criticism, the visible pattern of cancel culture is the push to cut off social

support and digital sanctions, such as calls to boycott content, delete digital connections (unfollow), or limit positive interactions with targeted public figures. This form of digital social sanction reflects the strategy of ostracism in the digital context, where netizens collectively attempt to reduce the social legitimacy of individuals deemed controversial. Other empirical studies have also found that one form of cancel culture is a collective effort to stop support for individuals or groups in response to behavior perceived as violating social norms of the digital community. (Hasna and Hendrastomo 2024).

Furthermore, the mobilization of narratives through hashtags and hashtag campaigns has become a key pattern in the cancel culture phenomenon. Hashtags related to the Gofar Hilman case were used as a tool to strengthen netizen engagement and broaden the scope of public response to the issue. This mechanism allows moral narratives or condemnation to become more dominant in the timelines of some social media users. This pattern is similar to research findings showing that the spread of hashtag campaigns on social media not only accelerates the virality of an issue but also helps shape a collective narrative framework that influences public perception broadly. (Jaafar 2023).

Furthermore, the dynamics of cancel culture also reflect the polarization of opinion among social media users. In the case of Gofar Hilman, some netizens took a strong stance in condemning him, while others emphasized the need for strong evidence before making a final judgment or asserted the principle of "innocent until proven guilty." This polarization is consistent with research findings on public perceptions of cancel culture, which illustrate a sharp difference in views among social media users in assessing this phenomenon—between those who see it as a mechanism for social accountability and those who highlight the risks of silencing opinions and premature judgment. (Salisah et al. 2025).

Overall, the forms and patterns of cancel culture that emerged against Gofar Hilman demonstrate the characteristics of a complex phenomenon, encompassing moralistic criticism, digital social sanctions, hashtag mobilization, and opinion polarization. These patterns further illuminate how social media can facilitate the formation of collective responses and moral mediation toward public figures in the digital age.

Public Opinion Dynamics and Digital Social Judgment

Public opinion on the Gofar Hilman case within the cancel culture phenomenon on social media demonstrates a diversity of responses and a sharp polarity of views among digital platform users. This dynamic reflects how public opinion is not formed statically, but rather the result of a complex interaction between moral narratives, emotional reactions, and the social structure of social media users themselves. In this case, public opinion acts as an arena for discursive battles between those who condemn the alleged actions and those who promote the principle of presumption of innocence (innocent until proven guilty) before comprehensive verification of the facts. Studies of public perceptions of the cancel culture phenomenon show that digital public opinion is often divided between these two poles of view, creating a negotiation process between demands for social accountability and protection of individual rights. (Salisah et al. 2025).

In the formation of public opinion, emotion and morality are powerful driving factors. Netizens tend to use social media to express moral values they deem important, so that narratives of criticism are often laden with sharp emotional sentiments and judgments based not only on facts but also on assumptions of collective social values. This phenomenon aligns with findings showing that public opinion on social media tends to be influenced by emotional stimuli, including anger, concern, or solidarity, which accelerate the formation of collective moral narratives in digital society. (Salisah et al. 2025).

Furthermore, the dynamics of public opinion are also influenced by social media platform algorithms, which tend to amplify content with high engagement. Content that generates strong comments, intense hashtags, or retweet chains often receives greater exposure by algorithms, thus influencing the direction of public opinion that appears dominant in users' timelines. This can quickly reinforce majority opinions and suppress minority voices, such as those emphasizing the importance of fact-checking, due to the lack of visibility of non-viral content. This is consistent with studies on the role of algorithmic technology in shaping digital public opinion, which have found that social media algorithms can exacerbate opinion polarization by displaying more sensational or emotional content more widely than neutral or analytical content. (Koestiono et al. 2026).

The polarization of public opinion on social media in the context of cancel culture also reflects a discursive competition between two distinct social logics: moral logic and legal logic. On the one hand, the public emphasizes moral and ethical aspects, judging actions deemed deviant as grounds for withdrawing social support for public figures. On the other hand, there are voices that emphasize legal and procedural aspects, reminding us of the importance of evidence and due process before social labels are imposed. Studies of public opinion formation on social media show that in sensitive issues, such as evaluating the actions of public figures, these two logics compete and influence each other, creating a dynamic of tension in the digital public sphere. (Errika Dwi Setya Watie, CitraSafira 2024).

Furthermore, the overlapping interactions of comments and narratives between supporters and opponents on social media contribute to the volatile dynamics of public opinion. For example, responses that emphasize sympathy for Gofar Hilman are often met with sharp criticism from netizens who feel that social sanctions are appropriate based on perceived violations of moral values. This pattern of interaction demonstrates that digital public opinion is not merely an aggregation of majority opinion, but rather an arena for social dialogue and conflict that continues to evolve in response to diverse user responses. (Salisah et al. 2025).

Thus, the dynamics of public opinion and the mechanisms of digital social judgment in the Gofar Hilman case reflect the nature of social media as a fluid and discursively competitive public space, where opinions, emotions, and social norms interact to shape collective responses. The sharp polarization of opinion, moralistic impulses, and the role of algorithms demonstrate that public opinion is not simply a representation of the majority voice, but the result of complex social communication processes in the digital space.

Cancel Culture as a Form of Social Control and Digital Punishment

The cancel culture phenomenon in the context of social media is not only an expression of public opinion but also acts as an effective informal social control mechanism in digital society (Picarella 2024b). Cancel culture serves as a social tool for online communities to evaluate, criticize, and even sanction actions deemed to violate collective values, ethics, or social norms. From a sociological perspective, such actions align with the concept of informal social control, where social norms are enforced not through formal institutions such as law or state institutions, but through social pressure emanating from the community itself. This phenomenon can be seen as a shift from traditional social control mechanisms to digital social control that is participatory, horizontal, and spontaneous. (Hasna and Hendrastomo 2024).

Several empirical studies in Indonesia explain that cancel culture acts as a form of digital social punishment, often occurring before or even without formal clarification processes, such as legal investigations or official statements. This occurs because digital

communities do not require formal mechanisms to impose social sanctions; simply by a massive public reaction on social media, a figure targeted by cancel culture can effectively have their reputation "cancelled" in the digital public sphere. In this context, digital social sanctions include content boycotts, denial of support, and social delegitimization imposed by online audiences, thus impacting the social and professional lives of targets more quickly than conventional legal processes. Previous research on cancel culture shows that the phenomenon is often used as a force of informal social control in the digital space, where netizens act as enforcers of societal moral norms. (Laili and Suharso 2024).

The role of cancel culture as a form of social control is also in line with the view that social media functions as a modern arena for social surveillance, enabling collective moral evaluation. This digital social control operates through the logic of "public accountability," which leverages mass engagement to pressure public figures to take responsibility for their actions or statements. In some cases, cancel culture is even seen as a public response to the weaknesses of formal legal mechanisms that are slow or unresponsive to the moral and social demands of society. Research examining cancel culture in viral cases also finds that netizens often take over the role of informal social control, accelerating the process of social evaluation and sanctions through massive and rapid digital interactions. (Syahiban et al. 2025).

However, the phenomenon of cancel culture as a form of digital social control also raises ethical and normative discussions about the limits of such mechanisms. On the one hand, cancel culture can function as a form of social control against actions deemed to violate shared values. On the other hand, spontaneous and participatory digital social sanctions can ignore the principle of innocence until proven guilty and have excessive psychological and social impacts on targeted individuals. Several studies have shown that cancel culture can cause excessive social pressure and disproportionate social exclusion for its targets, raising questions about the legitimacy of social punishment beyond formal legal mechanisms. (Halilullah 2025).

Thus, cancel culture as a form of digital social control reflects new social dynamics in the digital media era, where netizens play a significant role in enforcing social norms and collectively imposing social sanctions. This phenomenon expands the understanding of social control from the formal realm to the participatory digital realm, but also raises ethical and normative challenges regarding how such social control should be implemented proportionally and fairly.

The Implications of Cancel Culture on the Image and Social Position of Public Figures

The cancel culture that occurred in the Gofar Hilman case had a significant impact on his public image and social standing as a public figure in the digital space and the real world. This effect is not only limited to short-term public perception, but has broader implications for how the figure is viewed, followed, and responded to by audiences and other stakeholders after the controversy occurs. Empirical research shows that cancel culture often leads to changes in public perception of the public figure's personal reputation, which can impact fan support, job opportunities, and relationships with creative industry stakeholders. In many cases, this negative impact on image can go far beyond the initial incident that sparked the controversy, creating long-term effects that affect the public figure's career and social relationships. (Putri et al. 2024).

One way cancel culture impacts the image of public figures is through changes in the dominant narrative in the digital space. Once an issue is brought up by netizens and goes

viral, negative narratives tend to circulate widely, influencing broader public perception, including new audiences who may not have previously known the figure. Comparative research on cancel culture cases shows that society's initial ideals of public figures can change drastically due to dominant perceptions formed through social media discourse. Therefore, public figures affected by cancel culture often have to implement different reputation management strategies than before the controversy. (Putri et al. 2024).

These social implications also extend to public trust and the professional relationships of public figures. In many cases, the loss of public support can impact job opportunities, sponsorship contracts, and other professional collaborations, as many business entities or industries do not want to be associated with a negative reputation in the eyes of the digital public. Research comparing the effects of cancel culture on public figures in Indonesia and abroad found that social and professional reputations often experience a significant decline after the cancel culture phenomenon takes hold, which then has implications for decreased engagement, brand support, and media visibility. (Putri et al. 2024).

Furthermore, the impact of cancel culture on public image is not only external, but can also affect the psychology and self-perception of public figures. In numerous studies examining the ethical phenomena and social impacts of cancel culture, it has been found that targeted public figures often experience serious psychological distress, feelings of social isolation, and decreased self-confidence, as the constant public criticism can create considerable emotional stress during and after the social evaluation process. The emphasis on moral aspects and the unbalanced demands for accountability often amplify these social impacts, even after the controversy has subsided. (Muhammad Irfan Djamzuri 2024).

Furthermore, cancel culture can also create a chilling effect on other public figures who see its impact. When a popular or influential figure experiences a significant decline in their image due to cancel culture, other figures tend to become more cautious in expressing their opinions and public behavior to avoid the same risks. This finding is consistent with the results of studies highlighting the social impact of cancel culture on individuals and groups even beyond the context of a single case which show that cancel culture has the potential to create a culture of excessive caution in public communication on social media. (Muhammad Irfan Djamzuri 2024).

Cancel culture is often analyzed primarily through the lens of image management and personal branding, especially in relation to public figures whose reputations are closely tied to media visibility. While reputational damage is a significant consequence, such an approach risks reducing individuals to mere digital commodities whose social value depends on public approval. In cases like Gofar Hilman, the rapid spread of accusations demonstrates how cancel culture can reconstruct a public figure's image instantaneously, often without adequate verification. This process not only alters professional standing and social legitimacy but also overlooks deeper ethical concerns regarding the treatment of individuals in digital public spheres (Raihany Nur Zahra 2023).

Beyond reputational loss, cancel culture raises fundamental questions about human dignity (*karāmah al-insān*), which remains inviolable regardless of social status or public perception. From an ethical and Islamic perspective, the public humiliation, stigmatization, and symbolic exclusion produced by cancel culture undermine the inherent dignity of the human person. When digital punishment precedes legal or moral clarity, public figures are subjected to a form of social degradation that exceeds accountability and enters the realm of dehumanization. Therefore, the implications of cancel culture should be understood not only in terms of branding and social position, but also as a moral challenge to preserving human

dignity, justice, and proportionality in contemporary digital culture (Prihandono and Amir 2024).

Thus, the implications of cancel culture on the image and social standing of public figures include changes in public perception, impacts on professional relationships and industry support, and broader social and psychological pressures. These impacts demonstrate that cancel culture is not merely a fleeting communication phenomenon but has significant consequences for the social, professional, and psychological lives of public figures in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of cancel culture against public figures on Indonesian social media, as seen in the case study of Gofar Hilman, demonstrates that the digital space has become a crucial arena for shaping public opinion and enforcing social norms. This case demonstrates how accusations emerging on social media can quickly trigger a collective response from digital communities, shape moral narratives, and encourage the emergence of social judgment practices before formal clarification or legal processes can be implemented. Social media, through its characteristics of virality, open participation, and engagement algorithms, plays a central role in accelerating the spread of issues and reinforcing polarized public opinion.

The discussion also shows that cancel culture is not only expressed verbally, but has also developed into a pattern of collective action, including boycotts, digital social exclusion, and the delegitimization of public figures. This practice emphasizes cancel culture's function as a form of informal social control in the digital era, where society plays an active role in upholding social values and norms through public opinion-based social pressure. However, this digital social control is often carried out spontaneously and emotionally, potentially ignoring the principles of justice, the presumption of innocence, and the proportionality of social sanctions.

The implications of cancel culture on the image and social standing of public figures have proven significant, including changes in public perception, a decline in professional trust and support, and significant psychological impacts on targeted individuals. In this context, cancel culture cannot be viewed solely as a form of social accountability, but also as a digital communication phenomenon with complex social, ethical, and professional consequences. Therefore, a more critical and balanced understanding is needed in responding to cancel culture practices, both by digital communities, the media, and other stakeholders, so that the digital public sphere can continue to function as an arena for fair, rational, and responsible discourse.

The case of Gofar Hilman illustrates how cancel culture on social media often operates faster than fact-finding and legal clarification. In this context, Muslim netizens are encouraged to adopt the principle of *tawaqquf*, namely restraining oneself from making judgments or participating in online condemnation until the facts are clearly established. This attitude aligns with the Islamic ethic of *tabayyun* (verification), which emphasizes the obligation to critically assess information before reacting or disseminating it. Practically, this means avoiding the immediate sharing of unverified allegations, refraining from hostile commentary, and allowing space for clarification and due process rather than amplifying public outrage.

Furthermore, Muslim netizens should uphold justice, empathy, and digital responsibility when engaging with viral issues. Cancel culture frequently turns into a form

of collective punishment that disregards the presumption of innocence and promotes digital harassment. From an Islamic ethical perspective, publicly shaming or dehumanizing individuals even those accused of wrongdoing contradicts the values of justice (*'adl*) and compassion (*rahmah*). Therefore, practicing self-restraint, managing emotional responses, and maintaining a balanced concern for both alleged victims and the accused can help transform Muslim participation in digital spaces into a more ethical, humane, and socially constructive engagement.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Scite to assist with language refinement and organization of ideas. After using this AI-assisted tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed, revised, and edited all content as needed and take full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, and originality of the final version of this publication.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Authorship contributions are reported following the CRedit (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) system.

1. **Darul Naad:** Conceptualization, Data Curation, Investigation, and Formal Analysis.
2. **Cut Syamsidar:** Methodology, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.
3. **Rubino:** Supervision, Validation, Project Administration, Writing – Review & Editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known financial interests, personal relationships, or competing influences that could affect the work reported in this paper. This study was conducted independently without institutional or external interference.

Acknowledgments

Appreciation is also extended to the academic community of the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan, for their guidance, insights, and scholarly support during the development of this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this research are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author. Data have not been placed in a public repository but may be shared for academic purposes upon request.

Funding Statement

This research received no financial support from any funding agency or institution. This study was conducted using the authors' personal funds.

Ethical Approval Statement

The authors affirm that this research adheres to the ethical research standards established by the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Medan. Ethics approval for this research was obtained through digital documentation in the form of social media posts, netizen comments, and online media coverage related to the Gofar Hilman case. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the case study design was obtained through relevant institutional procedures. No personally identifiable or sensitive information was collected or disclosed in this study.

REFERENCES

- Bruns, Axel. 2023. "From 'the' Public Sphere to a Network of Publics: Towards an Empirically Founded Model of Contemporary Public Communication Spaces." *Communication Theory* 33((2-3)):70–81. <https://academic.oup.com/ct/article-abstract/33/2-3/70/7199747>.
- Dipta Ninggar Anjarini. 2020. "Cancel Culture in the Frame of Comparison of Indonesia and South Korea." 6(1).
- Durđević, Marija, English Lecturer, and Faculty Technology. 2025. "Beyond Hashtag Activism : Exploring Cancel Culture on Social Media 1 Beyond Hashtag Activism : Exploring Cancel Culture on Social Media." 0–3.
- Errika Dwi Setya Watie, CitraSafira, Suhariyanto. 2024. "Pembentukan Opini Publik Di Media Sosial Pada Isu Pemaksaan." 2(1):131–44.
- Goodman, Jennifer, Céline Louche, Katinka C. Van Cranenburgh, and Daniel Arenas. 2014. "Social Shareholder Engagement: The Dynamics of Voice and Exit." *Journal of Business Ethics* 125(2):193–210. doi:10.1007/s10551-013-1890-0.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 2022. "Reflections and Hypotheses on a Further Structural Transformation of the Political Public Sphere." *Theory, Culture & Society* 39(4):145–71. doi:10.1177/02632764221112341.
- Halilullah. 2025. "Dinamika Sanksi Sosial Di Era Digital : Perubahan Mekanisme Kontrol Sosial Masyarakat (Studi Kasus Cancel Culture Terhadap Abidzar Dalam Film Business Proposal)." 6558–68.
- Hamama, Syifa. 2024. "Etika Komunikasi Dalam Media Sosial: Tantangan Dan Solusinya." *Selasar KPI : Referensi Media Komunikasi Dan Dakwah* 4(2):182–97.
- Hariyanto, Ishak, Ihsan Hamid, and Agus Dedi Putrawan. 2025. "Cancel Culture: Legal And Public Policy Challenges in The Digital Age." *Sociología y Tecnociencia* 15(1):154–75. <https://revistas.uva.es/index.php/sociotecno/article/view/8513>.
- Hasna, Asyifa Amalia, and Grendi Hendrastomo. 2024. "Cancel Culture Pelaku Pelecehan Seksual Di Media Sosial." 13(1):47–57.
- Jaafar, Graciela Bianca. 2023. "IKATAN SARJANA KOMUNIKASI INDONESIA." 8(January 2022):382–90.

- Jusay, Joseph Leonard A., Jeremiah Armelin S. Lababit, Lemuel Oliver M, and Jeffrey Rosario Ancheta. 2022. "We Are Cancelled : Exploring Victims ' Experiences of Cance l Culture on Social Media in the Philippines." 0–12.
- Koestiono, Fiqri, Ayu Paramita Hapsari, Romi Permadi, Mohammad Muchlis, and Dewi Metalia. 2026. "Pengaruh Media Sosial Terhadap Pembentukan Opini Publik Tentang Hukum." (1):1–10.
- Laili, Alfin Nur, and Pudjo Suharso. 2024. "Jurnal Antropologi: Isu-Isu Sosial Budaya |." 1.
- Mayasari, Fitria. 2022. "Etnografi Virtual Fenomena Cancel Culture Dan Partisipasi Pengguna Media Terhadap Tokoh Publik Di Media Sosial." 1(1):27–44.
- Muhammad Irfan Djamzuri, Agung Putra Mulyana. 2024. "Cancel Culture Di Era Media Baru : Analisis Komunikasi Atas Implikasi Sosial Dalam Kasus Overclaim Skincare." 9(2):523–34.
- Noval, Muhammad, Abdul Rozak, Sri Kusumo Habsari, and Eva Farhah. 2025. "Persecution of Non-Monogamous Offenders in the Cancel Culture Phenomenon on Social Media." 9(148):97–120. doi:10.26740/jsm.v9n1.p97-120.
- Octovi, Alfya, Azzahra Effendi, and Poppy Febriana. 2023. "Fenomena Cancel Culture Sebagai Kontrol Sosial Pada Kasus KDRT Rizky Billar Terhadap Lesti Kejora." 1:21–33.
- Picarella, Lucia. 2024a. "Intersections in the Digital Society : Cancel Culture , Fake News , and Contemporary Public Discourse." (March):2020–25. doi:10.3389/fsoc.2024.1376049.
- Picarella, Lucia. 2024b. "Intersections in the Digital Society: Cancel Culture, Fake News, and Contemporary Public Discourse." *Frontiers in Sociology* 9:1376049. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1376049/full>.
- Prihandono, Guntur, and Muhammad Taufiq Amir. 2024. "Implementasi Teknologi Informasi Dalam Meningkatkan Efisiensi Organisasi Dan Daya Saing Perusahaan." *Journal of Economics and Business UBS* 13(2):577–87. doi:10.52644/joeb.v13i2.1556.
- Putri, Vania Miranda, Ivana Octavia, Hery Tri Nuryanto, and Lestari Nurhajati. 2024. "Comparison Study on Cancel Culture as an Impact and Public Figure Scandal in Indonesia and Overseas." 11(1):120–33.
- Raihany Nur Zahra, Nina Yuliana. 2023. "Peran Komunikasi Yang Efektif Sebagai Kunci Menuju Kesuksesan Seorang Putri Juniawan." *Socius* Vol 1, No(December):169–74.

- Rianto, Puji, Khumaid Akhyat Sulkhan, and Nurhana Marantika. 2024. "Budaya Pembatalan : Mempromosikan Keadilan Ataukah Penindasan ? Cancel Culture : Promoting Justice or Bullying ?" 8(2).
- Salisah, Nikmah Hadiati, Azha Putri Auwaly, Candy Aulia, Putri Umu, and Cindy Ayu Kusuma. 2025. "Persepsi Masyarakat Terhadap Fenomena Cancel Culture Di Platform Digital." 4(3):595–608. doi:10.54259/mukasi.v4i3.4615.
- Syahiban, Fauza, Fauzy Ardiansyah, Dini Pristia, Nadira Syifa, Wahyu Arif Syahputra, Khairina Azira, and Br Purba. 2025. "Jurnal Intervensi Sosial (JINS) Refeodalisasi Ruang Publik Virtual : Sentimen Netizen Sebagai Instrumen Kontrol Sosial Informal." 04(02):41–47. doi:10.32734/intervensisosial.v4i2.23.
- Szwed, Robert. 2025. "Public Opinion in the Era of Post-Rationalism: The Role of Social Media." 17(53).
- Trivedi, Mansi, and Jitendra Kumar Gautam. 2025. "Transforming Cross Border Trade with the Advancement of Digital Platform: An Analysis." *Journal of International Economics* 16(1):33–44.
https://search.proquest.com/openview/8a69e0e12da396a3e60cb23857a62c91/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2030548&casa_token=2NEZdvS9O6sAAAAA:yYNW7gcY0CFZGrXO90VnIhMFBvFzOg-J2Ficae67Q0KISyHJG5nWGVBR2nhirfeQW7idZNXgtqveJg.
- Van Dijck, José, and Thomas Poell. 2015. "Social Media and the Transformation of Public Space." *Social Media + Society* 1(2):2056305115622482.
doi:10.1177/2056305115622482.
- Yaqinah, Siti Nurul, and Ishak Hariyanto Antok. 2024. "Analysis Of Islamic Communication About Oxymora Cancel Culture On Virtual Media In Indonesia." *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 9(2):351–92.
<https://ejournal.uinsaid.ac.id/al-balagh/article/view/9569>.
- Yolandha Rakatiwi, Rubino, Mailin. 2024. "Mekanisme Cancel Culture Dalam Gerakan # Stoptoxic : Studi Transformasi Kritik Ke Isolasi Digital Di Platform Twitter." 4(3):931–42.
- Zahzuli, Adzah, Salsa Wulandari, Faiza Alifia, Nur Amaliyah, and Yayat Suharyat. 2022. "Etika Berkomunikasi Dalam Islam." 04(01):1–8. doi:10.55352/kpi.v4i1.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Darul Naad, was born in Langsa City, Aceh Province, on July 13, 2001. Armed with a linear academic background in communications, he completed his Bachelor's degree (S1) in the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program at the Islamic College (STAI) Aceh Tamiang. His interest in the dynamics of messages and media led him to pursue a Master's degree (S2) in the same study program at the State Islamic University (UIN) of North Sumatra. As a young academic, Darul actively contributes to scientific publications

focusing on the intersection of da'wah, Islamic communication, and media studies. His research focuses on how communication values transform amidst the rapid development of digital technology.

Darul Naad can be contacted via email: Darul3005243003@uinsu.ac.id

Cut Syamsidar, was born in Medan on May 25, 2000. She completed her Bachelor's degree in Social Studies (S.Sos.) in 2022 in the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Medan (UIN SU). She then pursued a Master's degree in Islamic Communication and Broadcasting at the same university. In addition to her Master's degree, Cut Syamsidar also worked for a private company in Medan as a Project Manager. Her strong interest in media and project management has led her to be involved in the planning, management, and supervision of various projects, particularly those related to communication and media development. Her research interests include media, da'wah studies, and Islamic communication.

Cut Syamsidar can be contacted via email at cutkreatif2@gmail.com

Dr. Rubino, S.Ag., M.A. was born in Sipare-pare Village on December 29, 1973. He completed his Bachelor's degree (S1) from the Faculty of Da'wah (Islamic Propagation) at the State Islamic Institute of North Sumatra (IAIN) in 1995, his Master's degree (S2) in Islamic Communication in 2007, and his Doctorate (S3) in Islamic Communication and Broadcasting in 2017.

His academic career began as a staff member of the Faculty of Da'wah (Islamic Propagation) at the State Islamic Institute of North Sumatra in 1999. He served as Head of the Laboratory of the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting (2002–2004), Secretary of the Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting (KPI) (2007–2011), Head of the Department of Islamic Communication and Communication (2011–2016), Head of the Laboratory of the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication (2017–2020), and Vice Dean for Academic and Institutional Affairs at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication (UIN) North Sumatra (2020–2023). Currently, he serves as the Head of the Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Masters Study Program at UIN North Sumatra since August 2023.

Orchid-id : <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0536-8210>