



Language Use in Cancel Culture Practices on X: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract. The widespread use of social media has given rise to cancel culture, a collective practice of publicly condemning or withdrawing support from individuals deemed to have violated social norms. While this phenomenon has grown increasingly prominent on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), the linguistic strategies underlying cancel culture discourse across multiple ideological positions remain underexplored. This study analyzes language use in cancel culture practices on X using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, covering three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. Data were collected through non-participant observation of 27 publicly available tweets, with 12 representative tweets analyzed in depth across four discursive positions: pro-cancel, anti-cancel, negotiated, and personal impact. The findings reveal three dominant language patterns at the textual level, including evaluative and imperative language, distancing and counter-discourse language, and sarcasm and internalized fear language. At the discursive practice level, intertextuality, social role performance, and internalized surveillance characterize how cancel culture spreads across digital spaces. At the sociocultural level, the discourse reflects ideological tensions around gender inequality, cultural context, and individual chilling effects. These findings contribute to research on online discourse and digital activism, and provide a basis for developing critical digital literacy awareness in digital society.

Keywords: Cancel Culture, Critical Discourse Analysis, Language Use, Social Media Discourse, Twitter (x).

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of social media has transformed the way individuals communicate, interact, and shape public opinion in the digital space. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter) enable users to actively express their views, make moral judgments, and mobilize support or opposition for specific individuals or groups (Castells, 2007). One phenomenon that has emerged from this dynamic is cancel culture, the collective practice of condemning, boycotting, or withdrawing support from parties deemed to violate certain social norms or values (Altamira & Movementi, 2023). Cancel culture has existed long before the digital age, but social media has significantly accelerated its spread, turning what was once a localized social sanction into a global and instantaneous phenomenon (Velasco, 2020). In this context, language plays a crucial role as a tool for constructing, strengthening, and disseminating social discourse that influences public perception (Fairclough, 1995; Mariana & Purwana, 2024).

Previous studies have examined cancel culture from various perspectives. Butyrina et al. (2024) demonstrated that cancel culture is a form of digital activism that develops through the relationship between text, discursive practices, and social practices, where user interactions create social pressure capable of influencing real actions in society, producing a "polyphony"

of voices that form collective opinions across various digital discourses. Jaafar and Herna (2023) further showed that the characteristics of social media, such as rapid information spread, unlimited reach, and high levels of user interaction play a significant role in accelerating the process of cancel culture, enabling society to collectively judge and impose social sanctions on individuals deemed to have violated norms. Altamira and Movementi (2023) also noted that in Indonesia, cancel culture remains closely tied to social media use, with celebrities and public figures being the most frequent targets of such collective condemnation (Hasanah et al., 2024).

From a linguistic standpoint, several studies have highlighted how language functions as a tool of moral judgment and social control in online discourse. Istiqomah et al. (2025) examined gendered moral policing practices in cyber discourse on X, finding that language is actively used to assess, control, and judge individual behaviour based on social norms and ideologies, with users employing evaluative, emotional, and normative language strategies to convey moral judgments in digital spaces. Similarly, Yasmin et al. (2025) found that online comments directed at social media influencers reproduce patriarchal values and gender inequality through specific discursive strategies, demonstrating that language in digital spaces is not neutral but deeply embedded with power relations and ideology. These findings are further supported by Durmaz and Yoğun (2022), who confirmed through their application of Fairclough's CDA model that language, whether written or visual, consistently carries social values and power relations that can be revealed through critical analysis (Nisa et al., 2024).

On the other hand, research on the use of social media data in discourse analysis shows that platforms like X are common and legitimate data sources in linguistics and discourse analysis research. Stommel and de Rijk (2021) highlight that data from public social media can be used to analyse language practices across various contexts without being limited to a single case or interaction. Clark (2020) also noted that cancel culture is uniquely shaped by the intersection of social media audiences and mass media demands, while Ng (2020) observed that it operates as a form of collective participation raising important questions about accountability and power in public discourse. KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) further reinforced that digitally mediated discourse actively reproduces ideological discrimination through specific language choices, underscoring the need for critical linguistic approaches in studying online communication (Rohmawati, 2025).

However, despite the growing body of research on cancel culture and online discourse, significant gaps remain. Most existing studies tend to focus on either the social dynamics of cancel culture as a phenomenon or the linguistic features of specific types of online aggression, without systematically examining how language strategies vary across different ideological

positions within cancel culture discourse itself. While Butyrina et al. (2024) approached cancel culture as a discursive event and Jaafar and Herna (2023) examined its spread through social media, neither study focused specifically on the linguistic patterns that distinguish pro-cancel, anti-cancel, and negotiated positions in online discourse. Similarly, while Istiqomah et al. (2025) and Yasmin et al. (2025) analysed language use in online moral judgment, their focus was limited to gendered discourse rather than cancel culture as a broader discursive practice. Research that specifically compares language use across multiple ideological positions within cancel culture discourse including support, rejection, and negotiation of the practice therefore remains limited (Haskell, 2021; Hizkia Silaban et al., 2024).

Based on this, there is a need to examine language use in cancel culture more broadly, taking into account various discursive contexts and ideological positions. This research offers novelty by analyzing various representations of language in cancel culture practices on X, not only from a single case, but from various posts reflecting different ideological stances, including support, rejection, and negotiation of the practice. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this study aims to identify how language strategies are used to construct meaning, influence public opinion, and reproduce power relations in the discourse of cancel culture on social media.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

This study uses Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its main theoretical framework, since it views language not just as a way of communicating, but as a social practice that reflects and reinforces power relations and ideologies in society. Fairclough (1995) divides discourse analysis into three dimensions: text, which looks at the language itself; discursive practice, which examines how texts are produced and consumed; and sociocultural practice, which considers the broader social context in which language is used (Durmaz & Yoğun, 2022). These three dimensions are closely connected, meaning that language does not simply describe the world, it also shapes how people think and respond to social issues. As van Dijk (1993) argues, CDA is particularly valuable when the goal is to understand how language reproduces dominance and inequality in society, which is precisely what cancel culture discourse tends to do. This framework is therefore especially relevant for studying cancel culture, since the phenomenon relies heavily on language to function and spread across digital spaces.

At the text level, CDA focuses on specific language choices such as word selection, evaluative expressions, and the use of pronouns, which carry significant social weight in cancel culture discourse. Fairclough (1995) argued that every text carries traces of the social conditions in which it was produced, and that analyzing those traces can reveal how power and ideology work through language in everyday life. In cancel culture, the use of pronouns like "we" and "they" can draw clear boundaries between those who support a cancelling and those who do not, while strong or emotionally loaded words can reinforce ideological positions and encourage collective action online. These language choices are not random, they reflect the values and assumptions that users bring into their online interactions, making cancel culture discourse a powerful site for constructing and reproducing social meaning (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018).

At the discursive practice level, cancel culture grows out of the ongoing interactions between many different users across various online spaces, where texts are produced, distributed, and consumed in ways shaped by social conventions and norms (Fairclough, 1995). Butyrina et al. (2024) describe cancel culture as a form of digital activism that develops through the connection between text, discursive practices, and social practices, where posts and comments gradually build up social pressure that can shape public opinion and sometimes lead to real-world consequences. Their study also highlights that social media discourse involves many different voices at once, what they call "polyphony" where multiple perspectives interact and accumulate into a shared public judgment, allowing cancel culture to spread across many different conversations online. Ng (2020) further supports this by noting that digital participation in cancel culture reflects broader patterns of collective action, where users engage not just as individuals but as members of communities with shared values and expectations.

At the sociocultural practice level, language is directly tied to how people make moral judgments and exercise social control in digital spaces, where discourse is shaped by, and in turn shapes, the social structures, norms, and ideologies of a given community (van Dijk, 2015). Istiqomah et al. (2025) demonstrated this in their study of comments on X, finding that the language people used reflected social norms and ideological assumptions, particularly around gender, and was actively used to judge and regulate others' behaviour. Altamira and Movimenti (2023) further noted that cancel culture tends to target public figures and is shaped by broader social values around reputation and accountability, while Saint-Louis (2021) points out that cancel culture operates as a form of normative sanctioning applied unevenly across social groups. Together, these findings confirm that cancel culture discourse is inseparable from the broader power structures and ideological conditions in which it is embedded. Stommel and de

Rijk (2021) and Durmaz and Yoğun (2022) further affirm that publicly available social media data offer a rich and legitimate source for this kind of critical analysis, and that Fairclough's model is well-suited for uncovering the layers of meaning, value, and power embedded in everyday digital communication.

Taken together, these theoretical and empirical foundations position cancel culture on X as a complex discursive phenomenon where language plays a central role in constructing meaning, reinforcing or challenging social norms, and shaping public opinion. By applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, this study aims to examine how language is used across various cancel culture contexts on X, and how those language choices reflect the ideological and power dynamics present in digital society.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, as the focus is on interpreting meanings and understanding patterns of language use in online discourse rather than measuring numerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consistent with this approach, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is applied as the analytical framework, which views language as a social practice that reflects and shapes ideology, power relations, and social values (Fairclough, 1995). This framework is particularly relevant because cancel culture emerges through language use in digital communication, where users actively construct, support, and challenge public judgments.

The data in this study consist of tweets collected from various public accounts on X, representing naturally occurring interactions in which users express opinions, criticisms, and reactions toward cancel culture as a social phenomenon. The data were not drawn from a single account or a specific user, but rather from multiple individual public accounts whose posts explicitly discuss or refer to cancel culture. X was selected as the data source because it is a platform characterized by high levels of public engagement and real-time discussion, making it a relevant and productive context for examining cancel culture as a discursive phenomenon (Stommel & de Rijk, 2021). Since the study focuses on publicly available content, social media users are treated as discourse producers whose language reflects broader social and ideological dynamics, rather than as direct research participants.

To ensure that the data are relevant to the research focus, purposive sampling was applied. This sampling strategy allows for the intentional selection of data based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2002). Two primary criteria were established for data inclusion. First, each tweet must explicitly contain the term "cancel culture"

or directly discuss the practice of cancelling someone, such as calls for public condemnation, boycott, or withdrawal of support. This criterion ensures that the data genuinely reflect cancel culture discourse rather than tangentially related topics. Second, the selected tweets must represent a diversity of discursive positions, meaning that the dataset should include posts that express support for, opposition to, and negotiation of cancel culture, as well as posts reflecting its personal impact on individual users. These criteria were applied to ensure that the data capture the ideological variation present in cancel culture discourse on X, rather than representing only one perspective.

Data collection was carried out through non-participant observation of publicly available tweets. Relevant data were identified by searching for keywords commonly associated with cancel culture on X, primarily the term "cancel culture" and related expressions such as "cancelled" and "boycott." Tweets that met the established criteria were then documented through screenshots and transcribed into textual form to facilitate analysis. A total of 27 tweets were collected from 27 different public accounts, with one tweet selected per account to ensure diversity of perspective. This number was considered sufficient for a qualitative CDA study, as the goal is not statistical representativeness but rather depth of analysis and variation in language use across different discursive positions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All data were subsequently organized into a structured dataset for systematic examination, and since they were collected from a natural online environment without any intervention, they reflect authentic language use in digital discourse (Stommel & de Rijk, 2021).

Prior to analysis, the 27 collected tweets were classified into four discursive positions: pro-cancel culture, anti-cancel culture, negotiated position, and personal impact. This classification is informed by the concept of discursive positioning, which refers to the ideological stance a speaker adopts in relation to a given discourse (van Dijk, 1993). According to van Dijk (1993), discourse producers always position themselves in relation to the topic they are discussing, either aligning with, opposing, or negotiating dominant social norms and values. This classification provides a systematic basis for examining how different groups of users employ distinct language strategies to construct meaning and influence public opinion. From the 27 classified tweets, 12 were selected for in-depth analysis based on their representativeness of each discursive category, ensuring that the most linguistically significant examples from each position were included in the analysis.

The analysis was then conducted using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, which consists of three interconnected levels (Fairclough, 1995). The first is textual analysis, which focuses on identifying specific linguistic features such as word choice, evaluative

expressions, intensifiers, and pronoun usage that reveal how users express judgment and construct meaning in their posts. The second is discursive practice, which examines how texts are produced, circulated, and consumed within the social media environment, including how different voices interact and build upon one another in the context of cancel culture discussions. According to Fairclough (1995), this level is concerned with the social and institutional processes through which texts are made and interpreted, and it helps explain why certain language patterns emerge and circulate in online discourse. The third is sociocultural practice, which situates the findings within broader social, cultural, and ideological contexts, exploring how the language used in cancel culture discourse reflects and reproduces social norms, power relations, and ideological positions (Fairclough, 1995). These three levels are presented as the organizing structure of the results section because they provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for moving from the surface features of language to the deeper social meanings embedded in cancel culture discourse on X.

Regarding ethical considerations, since the data were obtained from publicly available tweets, informed consent was not required (Stommel & de Rijk, 2021). However, to ensure ethical responsibility, all identifying information including usernames was anonymized throughout the analysis. The data were used strictly for academic purposes and were not altered in ways that could misrepresent their original meaning, in line with the ethical standards for Internet research recommended by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the analysis of language use in cancel culture discourse on X, organized thematically across three analytical dimensions of Fairclough's CDA framework, drawing on language patterns that emerge across the four discursive positions identified in the data. These three dimensions are not examined in isolation but are treated as interconnected layers of analysis, where findings at the textual level inform the understanding of discursive practices, which in turn are interpreted within the broader sociocultural context in which cancel culture discourse operates.

Data Classification

Based on the analysis, the 27 tweets collected were classified into four discursive positions: pro-cancel culture, anti-cancel culture, negotiated position, and personal impact. From these, 12 tweets were selected for in-depth analysis based on their representativeness of each category. The selected data are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Selected Tweets for Analysis

Label	Discursive Position	Tweet/Post
User1	Pro-cancel	"I really wanna apply cancel culture to people like this, so no one follows suit again"
User3	Pro-cancel	"I don't like canceling but this bitch gotta go she objectively bad for the platform and for society. She needs to go cancel her useless ass. Fucking whore"
User15	Pro-cancel	"Just wanna remind ya, 'cancel culture' for people who cheat when they're already married and have kids needs to be tightened up, okay. Remember, the victims are plenty in a marriage that's already got kids. Don't go defending them just 'cause they're hot or handsome. That's straight-up flawed logic. Unless that person admits their guilt and repents. Not doubling down and getting all defensive instead. Especially if they've got millions of followers—they should be a 'role model' worth following. And for those who make a hobby out of stealing someone else's partner, don't act all smug 'cause you're hot or handsome. Y'all are home wreckers, aka destroyers of people's happiness and families. You're always gonna be the second choice no matter what—don't be proud of that."
User23	Pro-cancel	"Cancel culture needs to be done against shitty influencers like them. Unfollow all their social media accounts, block and report all their posts. They're the ones who are rich, while we're the ones crawling around trying to make a living."
User8	Anti-cancel	"'Cancel culture' is typical mechanisms of a capitalist society. If a public person turns out to do X things seen as bad, it's normal that the production wheels they fuel come to a halt. But this isn't an invention of the fucking wokies, it's an age-old phenomenon."
User9	Anti-cancel	"i genuinely believe 'cancel culture' harms your everyday average person more than it does the actual people who should be 'canceled' (those with money/power etc)"
User11	Anti-cancel	"if cancel culture was really about cancellation none of the abusers would've been performing kanye west wouldnt sell stadiums or chris brown couldnt start a tour but yall are chasing sabrina down"
User27	Anti-cancel	"At some point you gotta realize you're all retarded mentally ill cancel culture sheep and in the real world no one gives a fuck"
User12	Negotiated	"why doesn't social sanctions & cancel culture ever apply in indo? why is indecent talk always hurled at the female side? wanna be baffled but this is a country with 58% women who once had a pres and vp with fake degrees, plus a president who's a human rights criminal"
User21	Negotiated	"Cancel culture in Indonesia?? AHHAHAHAH no way, The one that was trending yesterday, last I checked had 30.6k followers, now it's up to 31k instead. hilarious af, that's why people like this never get tired of playing on social media cuz yeah, they're still accepted just fine"
User25	Negotiated	"How can there be people who've already been branded as bad by so many folks but still aren't ashamed to show their faces? True though, Indonesians just can't pull off cancel culture, no wonder your presidents are all wack"
User18	Personal Impact	"Im terrified of ever being cancelled, cancel culture changed my brain chemistry to be forever afraid of what i post online and what people think about me. Its like i need to know 24/7 what EVERYONE thinks of me"

This classification reflects the diversity of ideological stances present in cancel culture discourse on X, confirming that cancel culture is not a monolithic phenomenon but rather a contested discursive space where multiple voices interact and compete (Butyrina et al., 2024). Based on the selected data presented in Table 1, the following analysis examines language use across three dimensions of Fairclough's CDA framework.

Textual Analysis

At the textual level, the analysis focuses on identifying recurring language patterns across the data rather than examining each discursive position in isolation. Three dominant patterns emerge from the data: evaluative and imperative language, distancing and counter-discourse language, and sarcasm and internalized fear language.

The first and most prominent pattern is the use of evaluative and imperative language, which characterizes both pro-cancel and negotiated position discourse. Pro-cancel users consistently combine strong moral evaluation with directives aimed at mobilizing collective action. User3 writes, *"I don't like canceling but this bitch gotta go she objectively bad for the platform and for society,"* where the disclaimer "I don't like canceling" softens the position before shifting to a harsh moral verdict. The derogatory term "bitch" combined with the evaluative phrase "objectively bad" reveals how emotional language is blended with pseudo-rational justification to legitimize the call for cancellation. User23 takes this further with explicit imperatives, *"Unfollow all their social media accounts, block and report all their posts"* positioning the speaker as a moral authority directing others toward collective action. This directive language reflects what Fairclough (1995) describes as the exercise of power through discourse, where language is used not just to express opinion but to mobilize behaviour, consistent with Jaafar and Herna's (2023) finding that social media enables users to collectively act as moral judges who impose social sanctions on those deemed to have violated norms. User15 similarly uses normative and prescriptive language disguised as friendly advice through the phrase "just wanna remind ya," drawing the audience into a shared moral framework through repeated second-person address (Istiqomah et al., 2025). User1 frames cancellation as social prevention rather than punishment, *"so no one follows suit again"* reinforcing the corrective and deterrent function of pro-cancel discourse (Yasmin et al., 2025).

The second pattern is distancing and counter-discourse language, which characterizes anti-cancel discourse and reflects a different kind of ideological positioning. User8 places quotation marks around "cancel culture," signalling critical distance from the term as a socially constructed label, while the phrase "fucking wokies" introduces hostility that undermines the otherwise analytical tone. User9 reframes cancel culture as a class issue, *"harms your everyday average person more than it does the actual people who should be 'canceled' (those with money/power)"* introducing a critique that delegitimizes the practice as misdirected and ineffective. User27 is more aggressively dismissive, using ableist language and the metaphor "sheep" to delegitimize cancel culture participants, while the phrase "in the real world" constructs a sharp opposition between online discourse and reality (van Dijk, 2015). These

strategies collectively function as a counter-discourse that challenges the moral authority on which cancel culture relies, echoing Butyrina et al.'s (2024) observation that cancel culture discourse is always contested by competing voices.

The third pattern encompasses sarcasm and internalized fear language, which appears in both negotiated and personal impact discourse and reflects how cancel culture is experienced from the margins of the debate. User21 uses exaggerated laughter ("AHHHAHAHAH") and informal expressions ("hilarious af") to convey disbelief and sarcasm about the ineffectiveness of cancel culture in Indonesia, while User12 employs rhetorical questions, *"why doesn't social sanctions and cancel culture ever apply in indo? why is indecent talk always hurled at the female side?"* that express frustration rather than seek answers, connecting cancel culture to broader issues of gender inequality (Altamira & Movementi, 2023). At the opposite end of the experiential spectrum, User18's language reveals how cancel culture produces fear rather than moral conviction, *"cancel culture changed my brain chemistry to be forever afraid of what i post online"* where the colloquial phrase "changed my brain chemistry" powerfully captures the psychological weight of living under the threat of cancellation. Taken together, these three language patterns demonstrate that cancel culture discourse on X operates through a complex interplay of moral authority, ideological resistance, cultural frustration, and individual fear.

Discursive Practice

At the level of discursive practice, the analysis examines how the language patterns identified above are produced, circulated, and consumed within the social media environment, and how they interact with one another to shape the broader discourse of cancel culture on X.

One of the most significant discursive features identified in the data is intertextuality, the way individual posts draw on shared cultural knowledge and reference other texts, events, or public figures to construct meaning. This is most clearly illustrated in User11's anti-cancel post: *"if cancel culture was really about cancellation none of the abusers would've been performing kanye west wouldnt sell stadiums or chris brown couldnt start a tour but yall are chasing sabrina down."* This tweet assumes familiarity with specific public figures and their controversies, positioning the reader as part of an informed community that understands these references without explicit explanation. This intertextuality confirms that cancel culture discourse does not exist in isolation but is embedded within a broader network of cultural conversations and shared knowledge (Butyrina et al., 2024). The same principle applies to the negotiated position posts, where references to Indonesian political figures and social events assume a locally informed audience, demonstrating that intertextuality operates differently across cultural contexts.

A second important discursive feature is the performance of distinct social roles through language. Pro-cancel users like User23 and User15 position themselves as moral authorities by issuing directives and prescriptive advice, while anti-cancel users like User8 and User9 adopt the role of critical intellectuals who question the practice from a position of analytical distance. Negotiated-position users like User12 and User21 position themselves as frustrated observers who are critical not of cancel culture itself but of its failure to materialize meaningfully in Indonesia. These roles are not fixed but are actively constructed through language choices, reflecting the polyphonic nature of social media discourse where multiple voices compete to define the meaning and legitimacy of cancel culture (Butyrina et al., 2024). Jaafar and Herna (2023) similarly found that social media enables the rapid accumulation of these competing voices, where individual posts gain meaning not in isolation but through their interaction with the broader discourse surrounding them.

A third discursive feature, unique to personal impact discourse, is the phenomenon of self-regulation through internalized surveillance. User18's post, *"cancel culture changed my brain chemistry to be forever afraid of what i post online"* reveals that cancel culture discourse is not only produced and consumed by active participants but also shapes the behaviour of those who observe it from the margins. The fear expressed here suggests that cancel culture functions as a form of discursive surveillance, where the mere awareness of its existence leads ordinary users to self-censor and monitor their own language online. This self-censorship effect demonstrates that the discursive power of cancel culture extends well beyond its direct targets, shaping how even non-participating users produce and regulate their own speech in digital spaces. These three discursive features, intertextuality, social role performance, and internalized surveillance, together explain how cancel culture discourse sustains and reproduces itself across digital spaces, and provide the foundation for understanding its deeper sociocultural implications.

Sociocultural Practice

At the sociocultural level, the findings reveal that cancel culture discourse on X is deeply embedded in broader social, cultural, and ideological structures that shape how language is used, interpreted, and experienced across all four discursive positions. The textual patterns and discursive practices identified above do not emerge in a vacuum, they reflect and reproduce the values, norms, and power relations of the communities in which they occur.

The most prominent sociocultural theme emerging from the data is the reproduction of gender inequality through cancel culture discourse. User12's rhetorical questions, *"why is indecent talk always hurled at the female side?"* directly expose the gendered dimension of

how cancel culture operates in Indonesia, where women are disproportionately subjected to public shaming and moral condemnation compared to men. This pattern reflects and reinforces patriarchal ideologies that hold women to stricter moral standards in public life (Istiqomah et al., 2025). This finding is strongly supported by Yasmin et al. (2025), who demonstrated that online discourse consistently reproduces gender inequality through specific discursive strategies, with women receiving harsher and more personally targeted criticism than men across different digital platforms. The evaluative and normative language used by pro-cancel users, particularly toward female public figures, further reinforces this pattern, suggesting that cancel culture in Indonesia does not operate as a neutral mechanism of accountability but is systematically shaped by existing gender hierarchies. This aligns with Clark's (2020) observation that the effects of cancel culture are unevenly distributed across social groups, depending on the cultural and ideological context in which it occurs.

A second sociocultural theme is the tension between global digital culture and local Indonesian norms, which is most visible in the negotiated position discourse. Cancel culture, as a predominantly Western phenomenon, carries assumptions about accountability, public behaviour, and digital activism that do not always align with local social and political realities (Altamira & Movementi, 2023). The frustration expressed by User21 and User25 who observe that individuals who are publicly condemned on X continue to gain followers rather than losing support, reflects a deep disconnection between the idealized function of cancel culture and its actual effects in the Indonesian context. Jaafar and Herna (2023) similarly found that while social media accelerates the spread of cancel culture in Indonesia, the rapid circulation of information does not always translate into sustained social consequences, as local community values and social hierarchies shape how public condemnation is received and acted upon. This cultural tension is expressed through language that is simultaneously self-aware and frustrated, acknowledging the gap between what cancel culture is supposed to do and what it actually achieves in Indonesia.

A third sociocultural theme, which emerges specifically from personal impact discourse, is the chilling effect of cancel culture on individual freedom of expression. User18's expression of fear, *"Im terrified of ever being cancelled"* reflects the broader sociocultural consequence of living in a digital environment saturated with cancel culture discourse. This is not simply a personal psychological response but a sociocultural phenomenon in which the pervasive threat of public condemnation leads individuals to internalize the norms of cancel culture and regulate their own behaviour accordingly (van Dijk, 2015). This chilling effect reveals that cancel culture functions not only as a tool of collective social control directed at public figures but

also as a form of broader ideological discipline that shapes the communicative behaviour of ordinary users across digital spaces.

Taken together, these three sociocultural themes, gendered inequality, cultural tension, and individual chilling effects, reveal that cancel culture discourse on X is far more complex than a simple mechanism of online accountability. It is an active site of ideological contestation where language constructs, challenges, and reproduces social norms and power relations across multiple levels of social life. As Fairclough (1995) argues, discourse is never simply a reflection of social reality, it is itself a social practice through which reality is actively constructed and reproduced. The cancel culture discourse analysed in this study demonstrates precisely this dynamic, showing how language on X simultaneously reflects and reinforces the deeper ideological structures of digital society.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined language use in cancel culture discourse on X using Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework, analyzing 12 selected tweets drawn from a dataset of 27 publicly available posts. The findings reveal that cancel culture discourse is not a uniform phenomenon but a complex and contested discursive space in which users adopt different ideological positions and employ distinct language strategies to construct meaning, express judgment, and negotiate social norms.

At the textual level, three dominant language patterns were identified across the data. Pro-cancel users employ evaluative, imperative, and normative language to legitimize collective condemnation and mobilize others toward action, reflecting the exercise of discursive power through moral authority. Anti-cancel users, by contrast, adopt distancing and counter-discourse strategies to challenge the legitimacy of cancel culture, reframing it as an ineffective or harmful practice. Negotiated-position users express frustration through sarcasm and rhetorical questioning, particularly in relation to the perceived failure of cancel culture in the Indonesian context, while personal impact discourse reveals how the pervasive threat of cancellation produces internalized fear and self-censorship among ordinary users.

At the discursive practice level, cancel culture discourse on X is characterized by intertextuality, the performance of distinct social roles, and the phenomenon of internalized surveillance. Individual posts draw on shared cultural knowledge and interact with a wide network of other voices and conversations, confirming that cancel culture develops and sustains itself not through isolated acts but through the cumulative accumulation of discourse across many different users and contexts. At the sociocultural level, the discourse reflects deeper

ideological tensions around gender inequality, the tension between global digital culture and local Indonesian norms, and the chilling effect of cancel culture on individual freedom of expression, demonstrating that cancel culture is deeply embedded within the specific cultural and ideological conditions of the communities in which it occurs.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing body of research on online discourse and digital activism by demonstrating the analytical value of applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to cancel culture discourse across multiple ideological positions simultaneously. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on a single case or a specific type of online aggression, this study captures the ideological diversity of cancel culture discourse by examining pro-cancel, anti-cancel, negotiated, and personal impact positions within a single analytical framework. This approach reveals that cancel culture is not simply a practice of collective condemnation but a complex discursive phenomenon in which language simultaneously constructs moral authority, challenges social norms, and reproduces ideological structures across multiple levels of social life (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2015). The findings also contribute to the growing body of research on cancel culture in non-Western contexts, particularly in Indonesia, by showing how global digital phenomena are shaped and mediated by local cultural values, gender norms, and political dynamics (Altamira & Movementi, 2023; Jaafar & Herna, 2023).

Practically, the findings of this study carry important implications for digital literacy education and online communication. The identification of specific language strategies used in cancel culture discourse including evaluative, imperative, sarcastic, and fear-based language, can serve as a basis for developing critical digital literacy programs that help social media users recognize how language is used to construct moral judgment, mobilize collective action, and reproduce power relations in digital spaces. Furthermore, the finding that cancel culture produces a chilling effect on ordinary users highlights the need for greater awareness of how digital discourse shapes not only public opinion but also individual communicative behaviour online. Future research may consider expanding the dataset to include a wider range of platforms and cultural contexts, or applying other discourse analysis frameworks alongside CDA to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cancel culture operates as a global and locally mediated discursive phenomenon (Butyrina et al., 2024; Yasmin et al., 2025).

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