

Cancel culture in a developing country: A belief in a just world behavioral analysis among generation Z



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ABSTRACT

Cancel culture is a prevalent boycotting practice used to exert pressure, express disapproval, and enforce consequences online. While multiple studies have been done on cancel culture's history, evolution, and effects, none of them were focused on Cancel Culture for Gen Z, the most socially aware and digitally inclined generation. The study aimed to uncover the factors that influence Gen Z's intention to participate and actual participation in cancel culture by utilizing a newly established integrated framework of Belief in a Just World (BJW) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). A total of 677 valid survey responses from Gen Z respondents were collected to thoroughly evaluate the belief and behavioral dimensions of cancel culture through the utilization of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The study's results showed that attitude towards cancel culture, the subjective norm of cancel culture, and perceived behavioral control, are strong facilitating conditions that drive Gen Z's intent and actual participation in canceling behavior. It was seen that BJW has no effect on actual canceling behavior and a reverse effect on the intention to participate in canceling behavior. For the canceling methods, 97 % will unsubscribe or unfollow accounts and 94.68 % will block or mute accounts. It was also discovered that Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are the top social media platforms used by Gen Zs in the Philippines with at least a 94 % usage rate. The findings of this study may be utilized by businesses and policymakers on how to reduce the incidence and impact of cancel culture.

1. Introduction

Canceling, also defined by Merriam-Webster, is “to withdraw one's support for someone publicly and especially on social media.” Cancel culture can be traced back to the African American culture and its empowerment movements, especially the civil rights boycotts in the 1950s and 1960s. The term was originally used to empower the African American community to rebuff influential figures and works that promote damaging ideas (Romano, 2019). There are two main stances about cancel culture: one deems cancel culture as a positive step towards social and political justice, while the other regards cancel culture as just a form of virtue signaling (Bouvier, 2020). From the perspective of the former, cancel culture provides average citizens the collective power to demand accountability from powerful, influential, and well-insulated individuals and organizations. The most popular example is how the #metoo movement successfully canceled Harvey Weinstein, a former

film producer who owned the entertainment company Miramax. He has evaded allegations of sexual abuse and sexual assault for at least 30 years until the scale of the movement grew large enough to prompt more victims to come forward (Howie, 2023).

Howie et al. (2023) argued that cancel culture has also paved the path to an increased representation of marginalized groups, a platform of solidarity for the disempowered, and holding corporations accountable for cultural appropriation and labor exploitation (Kanai & Sharp, 2023). Owens (2023) has also argued that cancel culture is a way to practice free speech, especially for people who cannot always depend on government protection and intervention (Owens, 2023). Cancel culture places a spotlight on issues, such as sexism, racism, and abuse, that may push or encourage people to become informed on the gravity and nuances of the issue itself. It gives minorities and disempowered groups the opportunity to call out injustices online when they do not have the opportunity to do so offline (Celentano, 2021). In that regard, cancel

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culture makes it possible for people to be accountable for their actions in ways that were not possible before the internet and social media (D'Amour, n.d.).

Despite cancel culture successfully canceling powerful people, there is no significant trail of evidence that the practice leads to an overall positive change (Hassan, 2021). Even then US President, Barrack Obama, voiced his opinion on cancel culture, stating that it is an impractical and simplistic worldview that ultimately denigrates people with exposed flaws, all in the pursuit of purity in an ambiguous world (Rueb & Taylor, 2019). Canceling individuals and organizations may not be enough to secure lasting positive change or make the target of canceling change their position at all. It may even drive them to defend their position even more to protect their social identity, and, more importantly, their ego (Toler, 2022). Cancel culture, for some, may also just be a disguised vehicle for short-term catharsis (Romano, 2019). As such, cancel culture easily becomes a slippery slope towards cyberbullying, especially for teens, as the act may narrow down the path to empathy and forgiveness towards the errant individual or organization (Connors, 2020). In worst cases, cancel culture leads to threats of killing or physical harm, malicious exposure of private information, or actively driving the person being canceled into committing suicide, which is usually far worse than the remark or behavior being canceled (Hassan, 2021).

A report by the Manhattan Institute showed that while the younger generation is worried about getting canceled, they still accept the necessity of cancel culture to protect marginalized communities (Kaufmann, 2023). Generation Z, or Gen Zs, whose ages range from 11 to 26 years old in 2023 (Mulroy, 2023), grew up amid social media sites proliferating as an opinion platform and the surge of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual, non-binary, pansexual (LGBTQ+) rights. As such, their generation has become more empathetic of marginalized communities (Tondo, 2023). A survey on Gen Z and workplace bullying, ghosting, and cancel culture revealed that almost 20 % of Gen Z have attempted to or have canceled someone (Brenner, 2021). Cancel culture has become so pervasive that even brands are pressed to make reactive changes to avoid losing their customers.

In the Philippines, cancel culture has become more apparent on social media where public figures are shamed and deprived of their influence over erring remarks, actions, and opinions (Velasco, 2020). The Philippines tallied a total of 89 million active social media users in 2020, with almost half belonging to 13- to 24-year-old age group (Tondo, 2023). The same age group has reported to be spending an average of 4 h and 15 min per day on social media (Dela Cruz, 2022). A 2022 study conducted by Milieu on 1000 Filipinos ages 16 to 40 years old has shown that 20 % of Filipinos have participated in a cancel movement against a person or a group over erring actions, differing opinions, and controversies. The study has revealed that 76 % of Filipinos see cancel movements as a fair punishment against wrongdoers and 78 % see canceling as an effective punishment and Filipinos who have taken part in a cancel movement view the action as normal, helpful, and progressive, essentially making canceling an effective accountability tool against public figures (Marquez, 2022). A 2023 study conducted by Agile Data Solutions on 600 Filipino respondents that are at least 18 years old has shown that almost 50 % are using cancel culture to hold individuals or organizations accountable for their erring statements and actions and that 30 % of these respondents have avoided buying from 'canceled' companies (Manila Standard, 2023).

Various studies have been made on the drivers and impacts of cancel culture. Jusay et al. (2022) studied the impact of cancel culture on its victims in the Philippines, which led to the conclusion that cancel culture, at least in the Philippines, is a prevalent form of online abuse. Tandoc et al. (2022) conducted a study in Singapore that involved a preliminary in-depth interview which then guided the subsequent national survey. The theory of planned behavior, which was expanded with the belief in a just world framework, was used to determine that

attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms are predictors of a person's intent to participate in canceling behavior, while the belief in a just world is negatively related (Tandoc et al., 2022). However, their study focused on intention to cancel, instead of actual canceling behavior, of the adult population of Singapore. The framework they used for belief in a just world (BJW) in their study is limited to the two general dimensions of BJW, General BJW and Personal BJW, while this study delved deeper into the procedural and distributive aspects of justice beliefs for self and others to elicit an in-depth understanding of the mechanics of canceling from the lens of four specific BJW perspectives.

While there are multiple studies made on cancel culture, none of them are studies that focus on the relationship between cancel culture and Gen Zs in the Philippines. In terms of brand management, there is a strong need to understand this relationship and its mechanisms considering that the Philippines leads in social media users (Manila Standard, 2023). In addition, the possibility of behavioral deviations as offered by Sadaba and Herrero (2022), which negates a one-size-fits-all approach to brand management in the Philippines. In the case of individuals getting canceled, Jusay et al. (2022) concluded that cancel culture is akin to online abuse and need to prompt further investigation into cancel culture in the Philippines in order to address root causes and symptoms before irreparable damage is inflicted, and the person being canceled is harmed in real life. Thus, overall behavior needs to be analyzed among cancel culture intention and participation.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a model that posits that an individual's decision to perform a specific controllable behavior is determined by the individual's level of intent to perform the specific behavior (Lindgren et al., 2021). While TPB has been the most utilized theory for behavior-related research for almost four decades, one of its most glaring limitations is its focus on the rational reasoning capacity of individuals over emotions, mood, past experiences, and other subconscious influences (Ryan & Worthington, 2021). To address the theory's weakness, the study of Tandoc et al. (2022) proposed the integration of TPB and the BJW. BJW, also known as the Just World Fallacy, refers to most people's innate belief that the world exacts justice or karma (Krockow, 2022). BJW, in this study's case, appropriately supplements the past experiences and subconscious influences gaps of TPB, especially since the actual behavior being analyzed is primarily rooted in justice.

The aim of this study was to assess the various factors that influence Gen Z's intention to participate in cancel culture and actual participation in cancel culture using the integrated framework of TPB and BJW. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study comprehensively analyzed the relationships among the factors that fall under the newly integrated framework. Based on literature reviews and analyses, this study is the first of its kind to consider the relational impact of BJW on Gen Z's intention to participate and actual participation in cancel culture in the Philippines. The resulting integrated framework may be further utilized and considered for different nationalities and generations to further understand the predictive factors of canceling behavior. The results of this study will benefit social science researchers as this will further their understanding of the mechanics of cancel culture among Gen Zs. Moreover, for businesses that may benefit from this study as this will help them understand the predictive factors of cancel culture, which will help them better protect, manage, and recover their brand reputation. Finally, this study is beneficial to policymakers as the insights gained from this study may inform them on better policies regarding online behavior, perceived justice, and applied punishment.

2. Conceptual framework

In recent years, the terms 'Canceling' and 'Boycotting' are used interchangeably. However, there is a conceptual difference between the two behaviors, especially in terms of target, methods, and intent. Boycotting is the withholding of resources to punish firms for irresponsible acts or pressure firms to change or adopt a particular strategy.

Cancelling, on the other hand, has a wider range as it can target individuals up to entire industries. It ostracizes the target, particularly through public withdrawal of support, as a form of just punishment for a target's perceived wrongdoing (Buchman, 2023).

Considering the wider range of Cancel Culture and its intent to punish for perceived wrongdoing, this study utilized an integrated form of the BJW Framework and the TPB to assess and identify factors that drive Gen Zs to participate in Cancel Culture. The proponents of this study deemed the integration of BJW and TPB as the most suitable theoretical model as it directly tackles a fundamental fallacy nurtured by most people and uncovers its driving factors based on the perspective of TPB. Unlike other analysis methods, which usually assume behaviors and actions are driven by logic and reason, this particular framework traces the effect of an unchallenged fallacy on negative and hurtful behavior. This approach offers a unique perspective that may complement other analysis methods and can even be used to determine the decision process of judges and juries on legal issues, and policymakers on reactive policies. Inversely, it can also be used to investigate the parasocial behavior of fans towards their idols.

A total of 9 hypotheses were generated that involved 6 different latent variables. First is the BJW, which is formed by procedural and distributive justice beliefs for self and others (Lucas et al., 2007). The rest are perceived behavioral control, subjective norm of Cancel Culture, attitude towards Cancel Culture, intention to participate in Cancelling behavior, and actual Cancelling behavior from the TPB. The developed framework is presented in Fig. 1.

BJW, also known as Just-World Hypothesis or Just-World Fallacy, is the fundamental human assumption that the world operates fairly, particularly in terms of behavior-based just rewards and punishments

(Yang et al., 2023). This theory is commonly used to assess how people perceive, react, address, and cope with injustices, thus it is primarily used as an evaluation of a subject's adaptive function (Bartholomaeus et al., 2023) and trust function (Ucar et al., 2022). The BJW framework used in this study is the expanded version proposed by Lucas et al. (2007), which is composed of Procedural Justice Belief for Others (PJ-Others) that deals with the fairness of rules and treatment to others; Procedural Justice Belief for Self (PJ-Self) which deals with the fairness of rules and treatment to self; Distributive Justice Belief for Others (DJ-Others) which deals with the fairness of outcomes to others; and Distributive Justice Belief for Self (DJ-Self) which deals with the fairness of outcomes to self.

Prior studies have shown that BJW is a significant predictor of a person's sense of control (Feng et al., 2019) and that a higher BJW leads to a higher sense of control (Ucar et al., 2022). Subsequent studies on young people from the US, China, Turkey, Germany, India, and Russia have also demonstrated correlations between BJW and TPB domains (Bartholomaeus et al., 2023; Tandoc et al., 2022). As such, it was hypothesized that:

H₁. *Belief in a Just World had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's Perceived Behavioral Control.*

Since Perceived Behavioral Control is one of the 3 key factors of TPB, which is also typically presented to be connected with Attitude and Subjective Norm factors of TPB, **H₁** has been subsequently extended to include Attitude and Subjective Norm.

H₂. *Belief in a Just World had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's attitude towards cancel culture.*

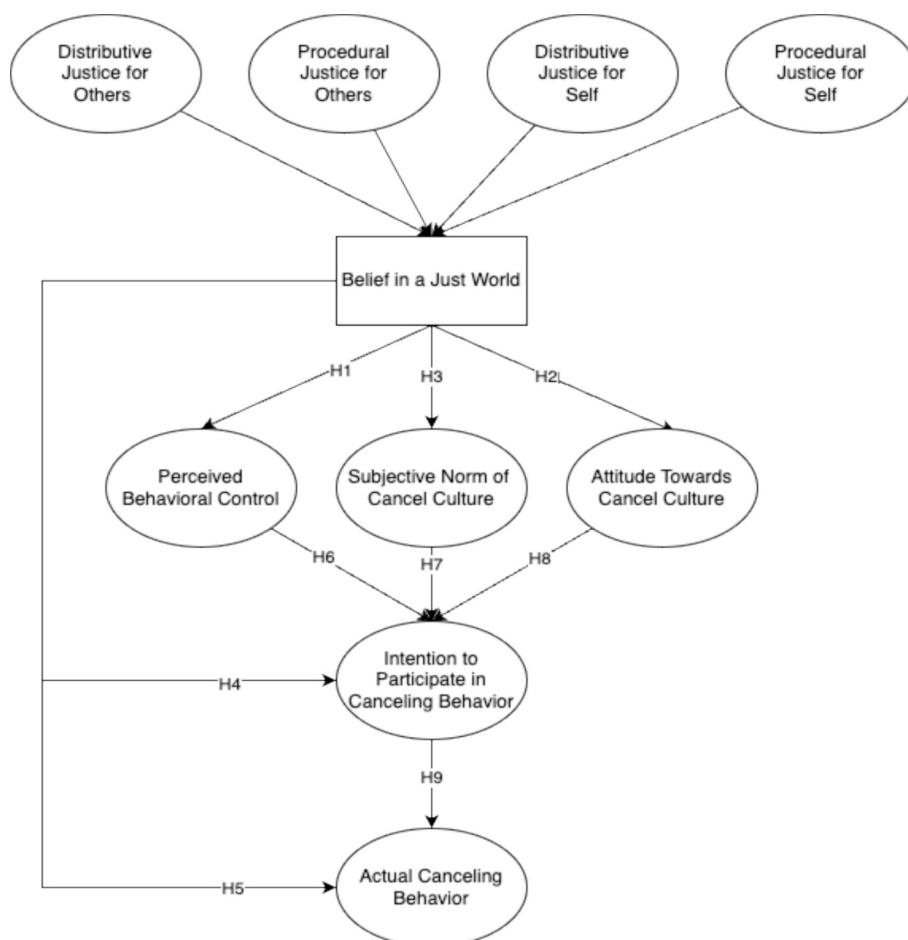


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

H₃. *Belief in a Just World had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's subjective norm of cancel culture.*

In some cases, behavioral intention and actual behavior may differ. For example, a study in Lithuania has shown that high BJW-Self is a predictive factor in actual bribery behavior (Stupnianek & Navickas, 2019). This stark contrast of intention and behavior from respondents in Lithuania suggests that BJW effect may vary depending on the respondents, the behavioral intention being observed, and the actual behavior being observed. As such, the following were hypothesized:

H₄. *Belief in a Just World had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's intention to participate in canceling behavior.*

H₅. *Belief in a Just World had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's actual canceling behavior.*

The TPB asserted that subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and attitude towards the behavior are strong predictive factors of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). Sequentially, the TPB posits that behavioral intention is a strong predictive factor of the actual behavior being examined (Ajzen, 1991). In particular, a study on cancel culture in Singapore, which has similarly expanded the framework of TPB with BJW, has shown that perceived behavioral control, attitude, and subjective norm are positively related to intention to participate in cancel culture (Tandoc et al., 2022). This is supported by another study in Thailand (Santre, 2022) that showed the domains are the strongest predictors of actual cyberbullying behavior. Thus, the following were hypothesized:

H₆. *Gen Z's Perceived Behavioral Control had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's intention to participate in canceling behavior.*

H₇. *Gen Z's subjective norm of cancel culture had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's intention to participate in canceling behavior.*

H₈. *Gen Z's attitude towards cancel culture had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's intention to participate in canceling behavior.*

H₉. *Gen Z's intention to participate in canceling behavior had a significant direct positive effect on Gen Z's actual canceling behavior.*

To conclude, this study relies upon the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the primary theoretical model to understand Gen Z's intention to participate in cancel culture and their actual canceling behavior since the theory suggests that behavioral intention is a direct predictor of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Belief in a Just World (BJW) is introduced as an accompanying theoretical component in order to examine how this fallacy in particular influences Gen Z's attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms as prior research has shown the predictive value of BJW in different behavioral outcomes (Bartholomaeus et al., 2023).

The proposed hypotheses is an attempt to reflect the relationships between BJW constructs and TPB constructs and how it influences Gen Zs intention to participate in canceling behavior and actual canceling behavior. By empirically testing these hypotheses, this study aims to contribute to the literature on cancel culture and extend the application of the TPB and BJW in the context of Gen Z's online behavior.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationships between Belief in a Just World (BJW), the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Gen Z's intention to participate in cancel culture, as well as their actual canceling behavior.

3.2. Sample and data collection

The target population for this study was Gen Z individuals (but only aged 18 years old due to minor respondents, until 26 years old) in the Philippines, which according to the 2020 Census of Population and Housing, comprised approximately 33,114,571 individuals. The required sample size was determined to be 400 respondents using the Yamane Taro formula with a standard 5 % error rate. Convenience and snowball sampling approaches were utilized to reach out to potential respondents who met the age criteria. An online survey was deployed primarily on Facebook groups and other social media platforms geared towards students from June 2023 to July 2023. A total of 677 respondent information was collected with consent, exceeding the minimum sample size required. As expressed in related studies, the use of convenience and snowball sampling under structural equation modeling is enough to provide generalized insight for a target respondent (Ong et al., 2021). This ensures that the collected data captures the intended measurement needed for analysis. In accordance, as proposed by Hair et al. (2021), the use of multivariate analysis provides a correlational research design that needs at least 250 respondents for the reflective construct analysis, which this study was able to established.

3.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire utilized an adapted measure item from related studies (appendix) to measure the various factors that influence Gen Z's intention to participate in cancel culture and actual participation in cancel culture. All the non-demographic questions have 5 constructs each and were measured using a 7-point Likert scale.

3.4. Demographics statistics

The descriptive statistics, as shown in Table 1, show the demographic makeup of the 677 respondents. 18-year-olds dominate the respondent pool at 43.13 %. There are more females in the study sample at 59.97 %. 70.75 % of the respondents have graduated from high school and almost all of them (97.05 %) are still students, which explains why 76.96 % have an income of P12,000 and below. For religion, 89.95 % are Roman Catholic, which reflects the religion makeup of the Philippines. In terms of frequency of practicing religious beliefs/traditions/customs, the answer 'sometimes' leads with 35.16 %. Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are the top 3 social media platforms respectively. Most respondents spend >6 h on social media per day at 46.53 %, closely followed by 3 to 6 h at 41.95 %. Finally, the top 3 canceling methods preferred by the respondents are Unsubscribe/Unfollow (97.19 %), Block/Mute (94.68 %), and Report Content/Account (49.04 %).

3.5. Structural equation modeling

The study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to investigate the relationship between Gen Z's sense of BJW and their canceling attitude and behavior, as well as the significant factors among the latent variables. From the study of Savari and Garechae (2020), they posited that SEM is a thorough statistical method that allows researchers to examine complex relationships between a model's variables and test out research theories. This assertion is supported by Schubert et al. (2023), who claimed that SEM is an adaptable modeling technique for explaining relationships between constructs and its relationships with observed variables, and Wang & Pan (2023) determined SEM as a suitable tool for displaying dependency relationships among variables. Considering that the study is using a factor-based model for its framework, the study will adopt Covariance-based (CB-SEM) as recommended by Dash and Paul (2021). CB-SEM is an integration of multiple multivariate techniques that allows simultaneous analysis of relationship and impact among variables, which makes CB-SEM particularly advantageous in terms of theory testing and confirmation (Dash & Paul, 2021).

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of demographics ($n = 677$).

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Age	18 years old	292	43.13
	19 years old	89	13.15
	20 years old	92	13.59
	21 years old	116	17.13
	22 years old	58	8.570
	23 years old	13	1.920
Gender	24 years old	7	1.030
	25 years old and above	10	1.480
	Male	270	39.88
	Female	406	59.97
	Other	1	0.15
	Did not graduate high school	6	0.89
Educational Attainment	High school	479	70.75
	College	192	28.36
	Masters or PhD	0	0
	Student	657	97.05
Employment Status	Unemployed	1	0.15
	Employed	11	1.62
	Self-Employed	8	1.18
	P12,000 and below	521	76.96
Income Level	P12,001 - P16,000	68	10.04
	P16,001 - P20,000	17	2.51
	P20,001 - P25,000	13	1.92
	P25,001 - P30,000	19	2.81
	P30,001 - P40,000	9	1.33
	P40,001 and above	30	4.43
Religion	Roman Catholic	609	89.95
	Christian	59	8.71
	Iglesia ni Cristo	2	0.30
	Jehovah's Witness	0	0
	Islam	1	0.15
	Atheist	2	0.30
How often do you practice your religious beliefs/traditions/ customs?	(Other)	4	0.59
	Always	109	16.10
	Usually	150	22.15
	Sometimes	238	35.16
	Rarely	163	24.08
	Never	17	2.51
What are your primary social media platforms?	Facebook	656	96.9
	Twitter	587	86.71
	Instagram	648	95.72
	Youtube	641	94.68
	Tiktok	587	86.71
	Reddit	48	7.09
Online content consumption	LinkedIn	31	4.58
	<1 h per day	2	0.3
	1-3 h per day	76	11.23
	3-6 h per day	284	41.95
	>6 h per day	315	46.53
	Unsubscribe/Unfollow	658	97.19
What kind of canceling method have you used on celebrities/influential figures online?	Block/Mute	641	94.68
	Dislike/Downvote	79	11.67
	Report Content/Account	332	49.04
	Make a public negative review/comment	86	12.70
	Make a meme/joke	21	3.10
	Share content with negative sentiment	16	2.36
	Like/Upvote a negative sentiment	133	19.65
	I haven't engaged in any of the above behaviors yet	12	1.77

Thus, this study employed CB-SEM for analysis of cancel culture behavioral analysis among Gen Z.

4. Results

The calculation of SEM involves the convergence determination.

Being able to encompass error rates, model structure, and any modification, Marcoulides (2014) explained in detail the calculation of SEM which enables users to provide and explore causal relationships for predictive purposes upon an adopted or developed framework. A three-step process includes:

1. Determination of convergence between correlation in an iterative manner of the variable estimation.
2. Loadings, path analysis, and mean estimates are then determined based on the coefficients calculated.
3. Deviations of the variables are then considered from the mean calculated.

From the process, this has been automated from various software. In this study, since CB-SEM was considered using AMOS, the calculation proceeds by considering maximum likelihood and bias, standardized estimates, modification indices, and the total effects – undergoing bootstrapping (Hair, 2010). Presented in Eq. (1) is the calculation considered for SEM and could be structured as Fig. 2 (Marcoulides, 2014).

$$\ln(\Sigma) + \text{trace} \left(\frac{S}{\Sigma} \right) - \ln|S| - X_n \quad (1)$$

Where: ξ and η are latent variables X_n are measure items Σ are parameter estimates S are sample correlations

Fig. 3 shows the initial SEM findings, including respective indicators, on the effect of BJW on Gen Z's intention to participate in canceling behavior and actual canceling behavior. The initial findings also showed PJO1 and PJO4, indicators with values of <0.500 , while Belief in a Just World's standardized direct effects on Actual Canceling Behavior failed to meet the two tailed significance threshold of <0.05 . As suggested by Hair (2010), removing PJO1, PJO4, and Belief in a Just World's effect on Actual Canceling Behavior will lead to a better SEM model fit. This action led to the creation of the final SEM, without the indicators, as shown in Fig. 4.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics results of all the indicators presented, as well as their initial and final factor loadings. Factor loadings are the variances of the latent variable constructs and, according to Hair (2010), values that are >0.50 are acceptable.

Table 3 represents the constructs' reliability and validity. For Cronbach's α , Belief in a Just World's values are considered excellent, Intention to Participate in Canceling Behavior is strong, and the remaining factors are considered reliable (Hair, 2010). In terms of composite reliability, all factors' composite reliability are accepted as valid as all values are >0.70 (Mundra & Mishra, 2021). The overall reliability and validity are further underscored by the average variance extracted which showed all factors to meet the 0.5 minimum requirement (Cheung et al., 2023). Lastly, the model fit for acceptance of the final SEM is presented in Table 4.

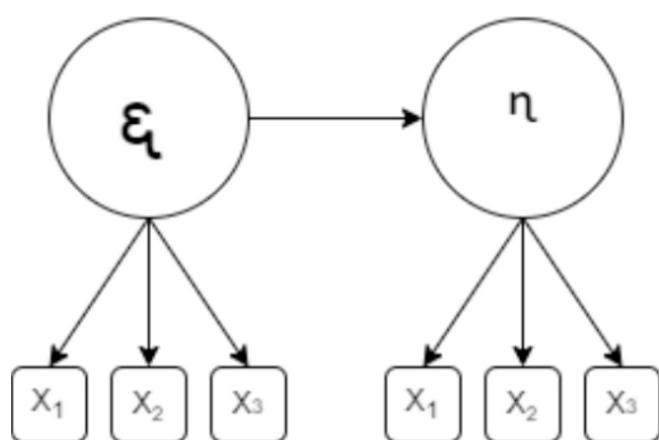


Fig. 2. SEM reflective construct.

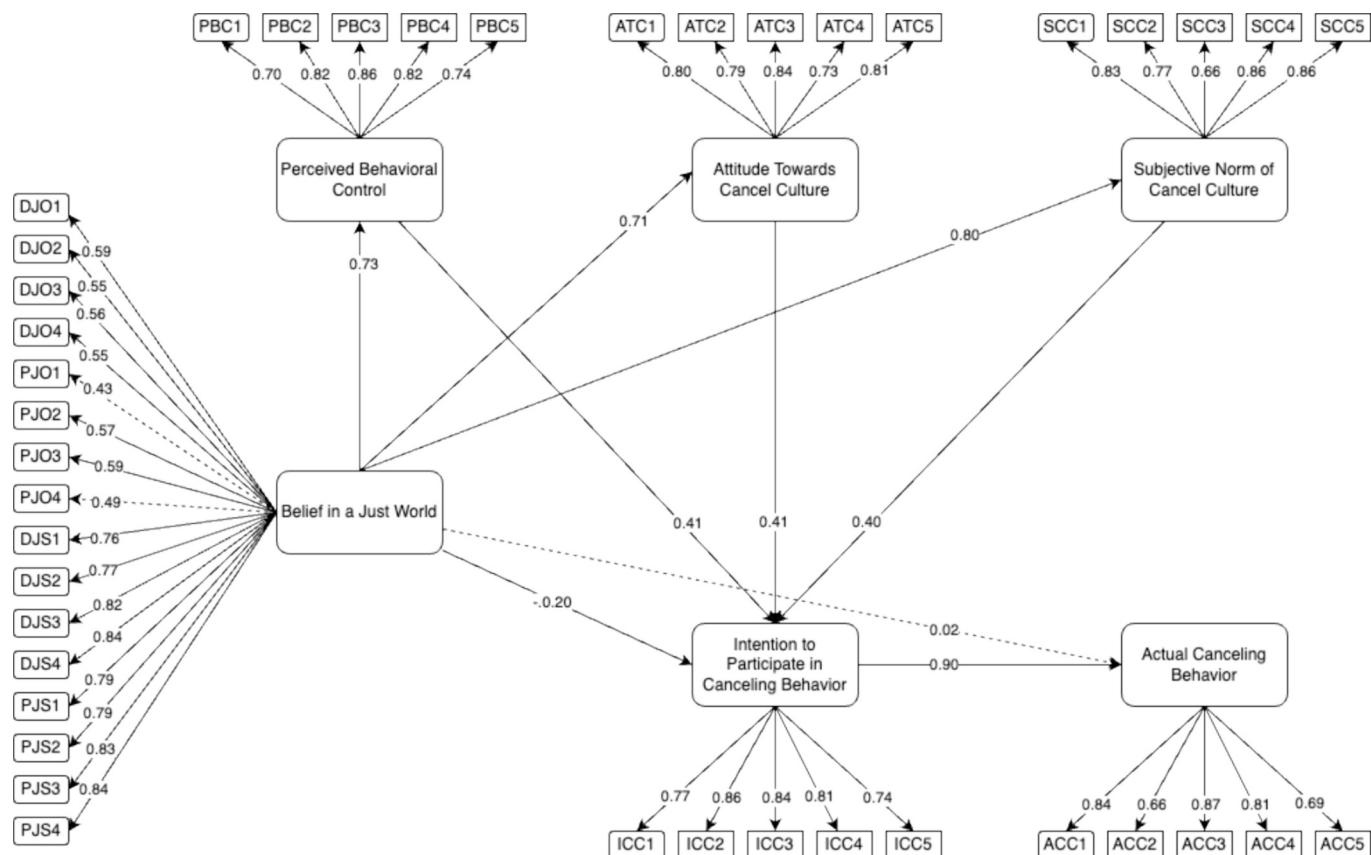


Fig. 3. Initial SEM with respective indicators.

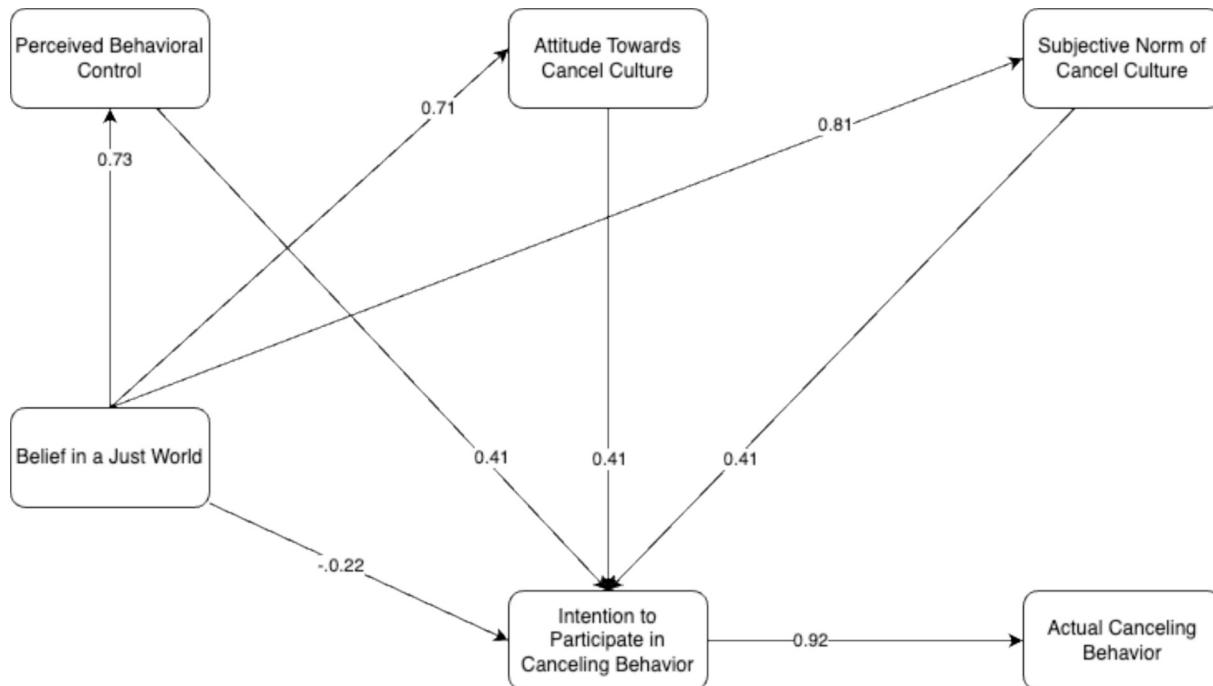


Fig. 4. Final SEM.

For further validation, a discriminant validity test was employed. Following the suggestion of [Dash and Paul \(2021\)](#), the tests should encompass both the Fornell-Larcker criterion (FLC) and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). As suggested by [Hair et al. \(2014\)](#), the FLC

calculation should have diagonal values (calculated as the square root of the AVE) higher than the correlational values, both in the vertical and horizontal areas. In this study, [Table 5](#) presents the acceptable output of FLC.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics result.

Factors	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Initial	Final
Distributive Justice for Others (DJ-Others)	DJO1	3.90	1.167	0.590	0.523
	DJO2	3.60	1.227	0.547	0.535
	DJO3	3.61	1.272	0.557	0.547
	DJO4	3.69	1.280	0.555	0.544
Procedural Justice for Others (PJ-Others)	PJO1	3.68	1.149	0.432	–
	PJO2	3.70	1.132	0.568	0.548
	PJO3	3.75	1.164	0.594	0.578
	PJO4	3.94	1.142	0.498	–
Distributive Justice for Self (DJ-Self)	DJS1	3.88	1.157	0.764	0.762
	DJS2	3.85	1.158	0.773	0.770
	DJS3	3.78	1.135	0.818	0.818
	DJS4	3.70	1.160	0.836	0.840
Procedural Justice for Self (PJ-Self)	PJS1	3.64	1.158	0.787	0.791
	PJS2	3.69	1.159	0.791	0.793
	PJS3	3.76	1.206	0.826	0.834
	PJS4	3.87	1.230	0.838	0.845
Perceived Behavioral Control	PBC1	3.78	1.240	0.696	0.696
	PBC2	3.74	1.246	0.820	0.820
	PBC3	3.67	1.248	0.858	0.858
	PBC4	3.60	1.230	0.816	0.815
	PBC5	3.42	1.314	0.739	0.740
Attitude Towards Cancel Culture	ATC1	3.48	1.309	0.800	0.801
	ATC2	3.23	1.357	0.788	0.787
	ATC3	3.41	1.303	0.842	0.842
	ATC4	3.63	1.260	0.733	0.731
	ATC5	3.65	1.237	0.807	0.808
Subjective Norm of Cancel Culture	SCC1	4.06	1.343	0.834	0.835
	SCC2	3.80	1.233	0.766	0.764
	SCC3	3.55	1.24	0.655	0.654
	SCC4	3.81	1.288	0.861	0.862
	SCC5	3.82	1.273	0.862	0.862
Intention to Participate in Canceling Behavior	ICC1	3.64	1.223	0.770	0.770
	ICC2	3.51	1.255	0.864	0.864
	ICC3	3.60	1.270	0.844	0.843
	ICC4	3.50	1.259	0.812	0.811
	ICC5	3.57	1.246	0.738	0.737
	ACC1	3.44	1.212	0.841	0.841
	ACC2	3.76	1.241	0.660	0.657
	ACC3	3.44	1.248	0.873	0.874
	ACC4	3.66	1.213	0.809	0.809
Actual Canceling Behavior	ACC5	3.76	1.224	0.694	0.693

Table 3
Construct reliability and validity.

Factor	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Belief in a Just World	0.936	0.931	0.500
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.887	0.891	0.621
Attitude Towards Cancel Culture	0.894	0.895	0.631
Subjective Norm of Cancel Culture	0.896	0.898	0.634
Intention to Participate in Canceling Behavior	0.915	0.903	0.650
Actual Canceling Behavior	0.894	0.884	0.608

Following which is the HTMT as presented in [Table 6](#). [Kline \(2011\)](#) explained that this should have a value <0.85 to support the discriminant validity declaration with FLC. This is calculated using the individual correlational items as presented in eq. 2 ([Henseler et al., 2014](#)) – where: the *numeration* is the average correlation of indicators across two comparable variables (A and B), and the *denominator* is the average correlation of indicators of within a variable (A) multiplied by the average correlation of indicators of within a variable (B).

Table 4
Model fit indices.

SEM Goodness of Fit Measures	Parameter Estimates	Minimum Cut-Off	Reference
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.969	≥ 0.80	Gefen et al. (2000)
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.970	≥ 0.80	Gefen et al. (2000)
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	0.952	≥ 0.80	Gefen et al. (2000)
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.847	≥ 0.80	Gefen et al. (2000)
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.810	≥ 0.80	Gefen et al. (2000)
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.063	< 0.07	Steiger (2007)

Table 5
Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	ACC	ATC	BJW	ICC	PBC	SCC
ACC	0.780					
ATC	0.711	0.794				
BJW	0.478	0.538	0.707			
ICC	0.721	0.745	0.527	0.806		
PBC	0.643	0.727	0.549	0.686	0.788	
SCC	0.587	0.587	0.683	0.556	0.618	0.796

Table 6
HTMT ratio.

	ACC	ATC	BJW	ICC	PBC	SCC
ACC						
ATC	0.805					
BJW	0.502	0.582				
ICC	0.845	0.830	0.572			
PBC	0.714	0.825	0.483	0.770		
SCC	0.737	0.566	0.536	0.518	0.473	

$$HTMT_{ij} = \frac{\frac{1}{K_i K_j} \sum_{g=1}^{K_i} \sum_{h=1}^{K_j} r_{ig} r_{jh}}{\left(\frac{2}{K_i(K_i-1)} \sum_{g=1}^{K_i} \sum_{h=g+1}^{K_i} r_{ig} r_{ih} - \frac{2}{K_j(K_j-1)} \sum_{g=1}^{K_j} \sum_{h=g+1}^{K_j} r_{jg} r_{jh} \right)^{1/2}} \quad (2)$$

5. Discussion

The study integrated the Belief in a Just World (BJW) Framework and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to evaluate Gen Z's intention to participate in canceling behavior and actual canceling behavior. The study utilized SEM to determine the effects of Belief in a Just World (BJW) on Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), Attitude Towards Cancel Culture (ATC), Subjective Norm of Cancel Culture (SCC), Intention to Participate in Canceling Behavior (ICC), and Actual Canceling Behavior (ACC).

Based on the Final SEM ([Fig. 4](#)), it can be seen that BJW had a significant direct positive effect on PBC ($\beta = 0.731, p = 0.030$), ATC ($\beta = 0.713, p = 0.019$), and SCC ($\beta = 0.806, p = 0.015$). This means BJW influences Gen Z's attitude, their perceived behavioral control, and their perspective on subjective norms when it comes to cancel culture. As such, hypotheses H_1 to H_3 are accepted. However, BJW has a significant direct negative effect on ICC (H_4) ($\beta = -0.223, p = 0.006$), similar to that of [Tandoc et al. \(2022\)](#). From this observation, it can be inferred that a higher BJW leads to a lower probability of a direct intention to

cancel an individual or organization. Furthermore, BJW had no significant direct positive effect on actual canceling behavior, which led to the rejection of H5. The lack of significant direct effect of BJW on ACC and its negative effect on ICC strongly suggests that Gen Z's karmic stance tempers the inclination to plan or actually hurt individuals or organizations through the use of online canceling methods.

Calculating the average score of measure items of BJW factors, it can be observed that none of the factors achieved an average of 4 or fell below 3.5, which suggests a moderate stance leaning towards a belief in a Just World. Considering how none of the BJW factors directly affect Gen Z's intention and participation in canceling behavior, it reinforces previous research that individuals make differing evaluations on fairness which mold key decisions and behaviors (Lucas et al., 2007) and that overall, any form of Belief in a Just World, whether for self or for others, leads to prosocial behavior (Guo et al., 2022).

Focusing on BJW, the measure items under Distributive Justice for Others implicate that Gen Z believes that other people generally earn the reward and punishment they get, receiving consequences on the outcome based on their action, and with due consideration. In this study, the average score of Gen Z respondents (3.7) for the measure items of Distributive Justice for Others suggests that the relatively younger age of the respondents reflects the study of Rottman et al. (2020) on children which showed that younger individuals prefer to distribute resources equally or by merit and that this behavior is amplified with interventions advocating for equal distribution.

For Procedural Justice for Others, an average score of 3.77 shows that the Gen Z respondents believed that the specific outcomes perceived wrongdoers receive are subjected to fair procedures; and they feel that people generally use methods that are fair in their evaluations of others. Relating to the study of Acar and Sivis (2023), which focused on children's judgments on procedural justice, it could be assessed that the relatively young Gen Z demographic reflects the same perspective where procedural justice is utilized as a resolution and that fairness assessment can be updated based on its results through the mediation of communal resources, reflecting the observations made by Rottman et al. in 2020.

For Distributive Justice for Self, the measure items relate to how the Gen Z respondents perceive how fair their life has been in terms of positive and negative outcomes. The study showed that this particular BJW factor ranked the highest at an average score of 3.8. This relatively higher score suggests that the Gen Z respondents in this study base their self-identity on their relationships with others, as the overall score shows that they react positively to outcomes from fair procedures.

On the other hand, Procedural Justice for Self's measure items are geared towards the Gen Z respondents' perception of how other people and systems have been fair towards them. An average score of 3.7 from the study suggests that the respondents perceive other people and systems to be rather fair.

In terms of behavioral effects, BJW was seen to have the highest direct effect on SCC. This relates to a meta-analysis of BJW by Kong et al. (2021) which posits that individuals with strong BJW are more likely to conform to social norms. It was also seen that BJW has a close direct significant effect on PBC and ATC. This effect is encompassed by the same observation of Guo et al. in 2022 where their study uncovered that any degree of belief in BJW leads to prosocial behavior, which implies an influence on attitude and perceived control on behavior.

The resulting integrated framework of Belief in a Just World (BJW) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) showed that BJW has no significant direct effect on Gen Z's intention to participate and actual participation in canceling behavior. However, the core components of the integrated framework's TPB, namely Attitude Towards Cancel Culture, Subjective Norm of Cancel Culture, and Perceived Behavioral Control, have proved to be strong mediators for canceling behavior. This implies that while people who believe in a Just World are not predisposed to plan or participate in canceling behavior, an encouraging environment may influence Gen Zs otherwise. This implication reinforces the stance on nature vs nurture, where the environmental

factors effectively facilitate a person towards its intended direction, and the person's nature, in this case, their inherent belief in a Just World, merely influences the extent of their belief and participatory behavior regarding cancel culture (Kandler, 2021).

This insight lends the idea that whoever controls the environment has a long-term impact on resulting behavior. In this study's context, this means whoever controls the online narrative may dictate how online users behave or feel about the target of the narrative. As mistakes are inevitable, businesses, brands, and influential figures being targeted by cancel culture are advised to swiftly address the issue with a formal, complete, and sincere apology with an action plan on reflection and improvement, as this may puncture the tide of an angry mob. Denying or ignoring the issue at hand increases the chance of the issue snowballing and leading to subsequent canceling behavior. Considering the significant mediating effect of environment, management is advised to be proactive in uncovering employees' attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control and leverage the information to ensure healthy discussions between management and employees, as well as securing a positive and productive work environment.

5.1. Implications

While the proceeding recommendations apply to all generations, Gen Zs, in particular, are strongly recommended to avoid bite-sized information on sensitive matters that are typically posted on TikTok, Facebook Reels, and YouTube Shorts. These social media sites' products should be preferably consumed for entertainment instead of being a basis for making quick judgments on issues that require nuanced takes. At the very least, sensitive topics should be fact-checked using trusted and reliable information sources with no apparent leanings instead of taking celebrities' and influencers' take as gospel. It is also recommended to avoid groups and media that function as an echo chamber of hate, as these may negatively influence attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioral control.

5.1.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the existing literature by integrating the Belief in a Just World (BJW) framework with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to understand Gen Z's intention and actual behavior regarding cancel culture participation. The study's results demonstrated a negative direct effect of BJW on Gen Z's intention to participate in canceling behavior and no significant positive direct effect of BJW on Gen Z's actual participation in cancel culture. This finding challenges the assumption that individuals with a stronger belief in a just world are more likely to engage in punitive or retaliatory actions against perceived wrongdoers. Instead, the study's findings suggest that Gen Z's belief in a just world may temper their inclination to participate in cancel culture, potentially due to their belief in fair procedures and outcomes.

Overall, the study's findings provide new insights into the applicability and limitations of the integrated framework of BJW and TPB, how Gen Zs are affected and influenced by the BJW fallacy, and a baseline understanding of cancel culture in the post-pandemic era in order to effectively track the evolution of cancel culture.

5.1.2. Practical implications

Since Belief in a Just World has no significant direct effect on intentions and actual participation in canceling behavior, it is recommended that social science researchers explore whether the fallacy has a significant direct effect on positive behaviors such as donating to influencers or purchasing their merchandise. For researchers who intend to further analyze the mechanics of cancel culture, an investigative framework based on Social Learning Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Social Identity Theory, Attribution Theory, or Cognitive Dissonance Theory is recommended.

For social media platforms and policymakers, clear and concrete regulations and legal policies that actively impose incentives and

penalties to ensure matters are handled privately through legal means instead of in public should be made and routinely promoted. Enacting such policies should dissuade instigators and reduce opportunities for participation in an activity where nobody emerges unscathed.

For businesses, brands, and public figures, the study emphasizes the importance of promptly addressing issues or controversies with sincere apologies and action plans for improvement. Denying or ignoring potential cancel culture incidents may exacerbate the situation and increase the likelihood of Gen Z participating in canceling behavior. Proactive communication and transparency could help mitigate the negative impacts of cancel culture.

5.2. Limitations and future research

Despite the significant findings and the proponents' utmost effort to conduct the study thoroughly, the current study still poses limitations that future researchers may address. Firstly, the respondents in this study were mostly high school and college students based in Luzon, the aggregate level of BJW and canceling intention and behavior may vary if the respondent concentration is Gen Z graduate students and employees, or if the respondents are from outside Luzon or outside the Philippines. Another thing to consider is that the model analysis was limited to Covariance-based SEM. Using machine learning techniques, particularly deep learning, future research may detect unseen patterns that may improve the contextual analysis of BJW, TPB, and cancel culture. In addition, the religious and gender factors weren't fully explored in this study, which may procure interesting findings. Thus, it is suggested that the study be extended by expanding the geographical scope to make the respondents more representative of Gen Z. Moreover, the use of machine learning techniques may lend to discoveries of interesting patterns that may bolster new research angles on the effect of belief models on Gen Z and their relationship with cancel culture.

6. Conclusion

Cancel culture has long been a part of online culture since the proliferation, monetization, and weaponization of social media platforms. While multiple studies have been done on Cancel Culture's history, evolution, and effects, none of them were focused on the facilitating conditions and underlying motivations of Cancel Culture for Gen Zs in the Philippines. There is a pressing need to understand what drives Gen Zs to plan and actually cancel their targets, as Gen Zs are the most socially aware and most digitally inclined generation.

By integrating the BJW framework and TPB, this study provides valuable insights into the complex relationships between Gen Z's beliefs about justice and fairness, their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, their intention to participate, and their actual participation in cancel culture. The findings reveal that while BJW does not directly influence Gen Z's intention or actual canceling behavior, it has an indirect effect mediated by the TPB's factors: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Collecting a total of 677 valid responses, the study's results show that Intention to Participate in Canceling Behavior (ICC) was the most significant factor affecting Actual Canceling Behavior (ACC), while Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), Attitude Towards Cancel Culture (ATC), and Subjective Norm of Cancel Culture (SCC) have virtually the same direct positive effect on ICC. BJW has a direct positive effect on PBC, ATC, and SCC, but it has the reverse effect on ICC, and it has no effect on ACC.

Interestingly, the study's results challenge the long-held notion that a stronger belief in a just world directly translates to punitive or retaliatory actions against perceived wrongdoers. Instead, the study's findings show that Gen Z's belief in a just world actually tempers their inclination to participate in cancel culture, potentially due to their belief in fair procedures and outcomes. However, the study's result also shows this default response of Gen Zs can be swayed by facilitating conditions,

which they are vulnerable to since they spend at least 3 h on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

This finding contributes to the existing literature by offering a nuanced perspective on the role of BJW in shaping online behavior, especially among Gen Zs, and effectively extends the applicability of the TPB in the context of cancel culture. Moreover, there are many opportunities for future research to further advance our understanding of cancel culture: First, by extending the respondents to other generations such as Millennials using the same theoretical framework. Second, by exploring the effects of other driving factors such as personality traits, intellectual ability, social identity, and moral disengagement. Third is by conducting a longitudinal study to investigate how cancel culture evolves and how it plays against major social media platform changes such as new dramatic social media platform changes, introduction of new social media platforms, and the removal of prevailing social media platforms. Finally, by using or adding theoretical frameworks such as Social Learning Theory and Social Exchange Theory. New research that will incorporate any of the suggested improvements may offer a more comprehensive understanding of cancel culture.

Ethical statement

This study was approved by the University Ethics Committee (FM-RC-23-01-73).

Participant consent

This study obtained written consent and were recorded among participants (FM-RC-23-02-73).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Cheselle Jan L. Roldan: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ardvin Kester S. Ong:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Dhonn Q. Tomas:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104378>.

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