

Coming back from cancellation



An ill-timed tweet can cause instant backlash

By Mary Walters

At 10:19 am on December 20th, 2013, Justine Sacco tweeted a brief message before getting on a plane to South Africa. When she landed eleven hours later, her tweet had been retweeted over 2,000 times. The next day, she was fired. The tweet, which said, "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white" sparked outrage on Twitter, went viral there, was reposted on BuzzFeed, and made Sacco an instant public enemy. By the

time her plane touched down, Sacco had been canceled.

Cancel Culture Now

6 years since Sacco's tweet, cancel culture still reigns. From influencers to authors to tv

personalities to political figures, no one is off-limits. One insensitive tweet or poorly-timed

comment can result in

immediate, widespread backlash. The existence of cancel culture is well-



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TAYLOR SWIFT

known and often discussed, and the immediate consequences of being cancelled are obvious - think angry comments on posts, retaliatory hashtags, and mass social media unfollowings. But the long-term effects are rarely talked about. What happens in the weeks, months, and years after someone is publicly canceled?

Taylor Swift, who was cancelled online during a feud with Kanye West and Kim Kardashian in 2016, later told [Vogue magazine](#), "When you say someone is canceled, it's not a TV show. It's a human being. You're sending mass amounts of messaging to this person to

either shut up, disappear, or it could also be perceived as 'kill yourself.'"

After her cancellation, Swift made a number of drastic changes to her online presence. She quickly disabled Instagram comments on her posts, and they remain disabled today. During the 2016 election, she refrained from endorsing Hillary Clinton, afraid she would be more of a [liability than an endorsement](#).

But cancellation, however psychologically damaging it is, may not be as permanent as death. A year after the hashtag #taylorswiftisasnake went

viral, Swift released *Reputation*, which sold 4.5 million copies worldwide.

A similar thing happened to J.K.

Rowling in 2019, when she was accused of being transphobic. The Harry Potter author posted a tweet supporting Maya Forstater, a woman who lost her job because she spoke out against legislation that would allow people to legally change their gender. Twitter users voiced their disapproval, and soon it was clear that JK Rowling had been canceled.

Rowling, however, seems unbothered.

She did not stop [tweeting](#), continues to

reply to comments and to voice her political opinions online.

The twitter community has not forgotten, though: on March 30th, 2020, Rowling tweeted “How are we all doing today?” and the top comments were all accusing her of transphobia. Still, if her nonstop tweets are anything to go by, Rowling is unaffected.

What Comes Next?

Recently, another celebrity has come under fire for what she posted online.

Vanessa Hudgens, during an Instagram live video, [made remarks about COVID-19](#) that many found insensitive.



Vanessa Hudgens was accused of mocking COVID-19, which has forced many to stay home for safety

“It’s a virus, I get it,” she said, rolling her eyes, “like, I respect it. But at the same time, like, even if everybody gets it, like, yeah, people are gonna die, which is terrible but, like, inevitable?”

People were shocked and appalled at her response to the coronavirus that has killed tens of thousands of people worldwide and threatens many more.

On Twitter, journalist Yashar Ali [criticized Hudgens’ remarks](#).

“What a horrible and heartless message for you to share with the younger people who look up to you,” he said.

Others seemed to agree. Numerous [articles online declare](#) that Vanessa Hudgens is cancelled. She has since [apologized](#) via Twitter, but the question remains: what will happen to her?

We can look to other celebrities for the answer. J.K. Rowling remains active on her Twitter, posting almost daily, and has 14.5 million followers. Although Taylor Swift wiped all of her social media clean in the months after her cancellation, she returned to posting regularly, has 129 million followers, and recently released another album. Even Justine Sacco has recovered from her

AIDS tweet and has [gotten her job back](#).

Vanessa Hudgens will be just fine. So long as she keeps a low profile and avoids any additional scandals in the coming months, her reputation will recover, her life will return to normal, and people will move on to the next injustice. This is the way of cancel culture -- although online backlash is swift and vicious, it is short-lived.