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#BoikotScarlett Cancel Culture Movement

Virginia Meiske Ardiningrum¹, Jefri Audi Wempi Liwoso^{2*}

^{1,2*} Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Communication, LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Central Jakarta City, Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Indonesia.

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abstract

Crisis management is an important aspect in Public Relations (PR) practice, especially in the digital era when public perception can change rapidly due to the dynamics of social media. One phenomenon that often causes a reputation crisis for companies is cancel culture, a collective movement that rejects individuals or brands that are considered to be in conflict with certain social values. This phenomenon is increasingly widespread, one of which is affecting a local beauty company, Scarlett Whitening. The cancel culture movement #BoikotScarlett emerged due to a video uploaded by Scarlett Whitening's CEO on Instagram that was considered to be siding with Israel in the midst of the Israel-Palestine conflict. This sparked public criticism and calls for a boycott that spread widely on social media, thus impacting the brand's reputation and decreasing consumer interest. This study aims to analyze how Scarlett Whitening's crisis management is carried out in dealing with cancel culture, as well as the factors that encourage people's involvement in this movement. The theory used is the New Social Movement theory which explains how social groups gather and act to resolve issues that are considered important. The research method used is qualitative with a constructivism paradigm, and data collection techniques through interviews and literature studies. The results of the study show that the cancel culture #BoikotScarlett is a real example of how social media can mobilize public opinion and change a brand's image in a short time. Although Scarlett Whitening has made clarifications and crisis communication strategies, the response is considered less firm, making the boycott movement still continue. This study emphasizes that companies need to implement more effective and careful issue management strategies in their corporate communication practices to avoid the negative impacts of cancel culture and maintaining brand reputation. The results of the study show that most consumers who stopped using Scarlett products have various reasons, including perceptions of product quality that are considered mediocre and brand involvement in controversial issues that trigger dissatisfaction. Triangulation analysis shows that consumers expect rebranding and more transparency from Scarlett Whitening in dealing with circulating issues. Key recommendations for the brand include improving product quality, more effective communication strategies in dealing with crises, and more transparent policies on social issues that concern consumers. Thus, this study provides insights for companies in managing reputation and maintaining customer trust in the digital era."

abstract

Manajemen krisis merupakan aspek penting dalam praktik Hubungan Masyarakat (Humas), terutama di era digital di mana persepsi publik dapat berubah dengan cepat akibat dinamika media sosial. Salah satu fenomena yang sering menimbulkan krisis reputasi bagi perusahaan adalah cancel culture, sebuah gerakan kolektif yang menolak individu atau merek yang dianggap bertentangan dengan nilai-nilai sosial tertentu. Fenomena ini semakin meluas, salah satunya menimpa perusahaan kecantikan lokal, Scarlett Whitening. Gerakan cancel culture #BoikotScarlett muncul akibat sebuah video yang diunggah CEO Scarlett Whitening di Instagram yang dianggap berpihak kepada Israel di tengah konflik Israel-Palestina. Hal tersebut memicu kritik publik dan seruan boikot yang tersebar luas di media sosial, sehingga berdampak pada reputasi merek dan menurunnya minat konsumen. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana manajemen krisis yang dilakukan Scarlett Whitening dalam menghadapi cancel culture, serta faktor-faktor yang mendorong keterlibatan masyarakat dalam gerakan ini. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori New Social Movement yang menjelaskan bagaimana kelompok sosial berkumpul dan bertindak untuk menyelesaikan isu-isu yang dianggap penting. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan paradigma konstruktivisme, dan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara dan studi pustaka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa cancel culture #BoikotScarlett merupakan contoh nyata bagaimana media sosial mampu memobilisasi opini publik dan mengubah citra suatu merek dalam waktu singkat. Meskipun Scarlett Whitening telah melakukan klarifikasi dan strategi komunikasi krisis, namun respon yang diberikan dinilai kurang tegas sehingga membuat gerakan boikot masih terus berlanjut. Penelitian ini menekankan bahwa perusahaan perlu menerapkan strategi manajemen isu yang lebih efektif dan cermat dalam praktik komunikasi korporatnya untuk menghindari dampak negatif cancel culture dan menjaga reputasi merek. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar konsumen yang berhenti menggunakan produk Scarlett memiliki berbagai alasan, antara lain persepsi kualitas produk yang dinilai pas-pasan dan keterlibatan merek dalam isu kontroversial yang memicu ketidakpuasan. Analisis triangulasi menunjukkan bahwa konsumen mengharapkan rebranding dan transparansi yang lebih dari Scarlett Whitening dalam menangani isu yang beredar. Rekomendasi utama bagi merek tersebut antara lain peningkatan kualitas produk, strategi komunikasi yang lebih efektif dalam menangani krisis, dan kebijakan yang lebih transparan terhadap isu sosial yang menjadi perhatian konsumen. Dengan demikian, studi ini memberikan wawasan bagi perusahaan dalam mengelola reputasi dan menjaga kepercayaan pelanggan di era digital."

Corresponding Author. Email: 21110250536@lspri.edu 2.



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1. Introduction

Every company's Corporate Communication practice will definitely face issues and crises, which can impact brand reputation. Therefore, crisis management is a crucial element in Public Relations (PR) strategy to manage and reduce the negative impacts that arise from certain events (Coombs, 2022). So the phenomenon of cancel culture that is increasingly emerging in society must be understood by a Public Relations practitioner. One phenomenon that is increasingly causing crises for companies is cancel culture, which is a collective movement that rejects individuals or brands that are considered to have violated certain social norms. This movement emerged as a form of social sanction that aims to pressure those considered guilty to be responsible for their actions (Ng, 2020). This rejection movement is increasingly common in various countries today. However, how effective or disruptive the movement is depends on a variety of factors, including the socio-historical context in which the protests took place, the legal regulations related to freedom of expression, and the movement's relationship with existing political institutions (Abrutyn, 2016). The level of response of the authorities also affects the impact of this movement on the companies targeted by the boycott. Initially, this term was widely used in the context of film and television, but now it is more often echoed on social media.

Through a culture of cancellation, people can collectively communicate their disagreement with the goal of "stopping" the party who is considered guilty, such as by boycotting the product, withdrawing support, or ending the collaboration. While the movement was initially aimed at holding people accountable, in some cases, there has been debate about the long-term impact on the target audience, be it companies, individuals, or public figures. Scarlett Whitening, a local cosmetics brand from Indonesia, has been in the public spotlight after becoming a target for cancel culture through the #BoikotScarlett movement. This movement started from a viral upload by Scarlett Whitening's CEO, Felicya Angelista, on her personal Instagram account on November 5, 2023. In the video, Felicya conveyed her views regarding the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The nearly two-minute video

triggered a strong reaction from a number of netizens who considered his statement controversial, especially because it was considered to support Israel amid the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Palestine. Furthermore, in the video, Felicya expressed her hope that there would be a ceasefire between the two sides so that peace could be achieved. "I want to convey my heart regarding the war between Israel and Palestine. I pray that there will be a ceasefire so that peace can be realized, and this war will end soon," said Felicya. However, this statement received sharp criticism from netizens because he was considered more supportive of Israel. This criticism arose because in the video, Felicya showed footage of the attack that took place on October 7, 2023, in which Hamas attacked Israel. The video footage used shows Israeli civilians running for their lives and a mayor who was killed in the attack. Felicya also showed a video clip showing an Israeli general admitting his inability to protect civilians from Hamas raids, as well as reports of the deaths of about 100 Israelis in the incident. This content is considered by some parties to be a form of covert support for Israel, which is contrary to the views of the majority of Indonesians who tend to be pro-Palestinians. The video quickly spread on social media to more than 828 thousand views, causing a wave of protests, which then prompted calls for a boycott of Scarlett Whitening products.

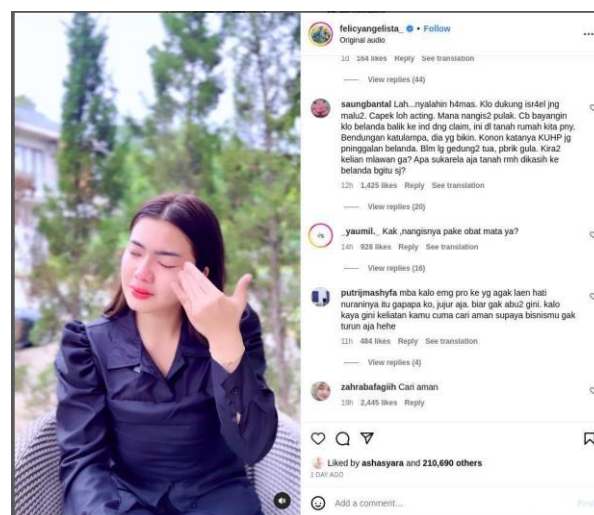


Figure 1. Comments on Instagram @felicyangelista

The #BoikotScarlett movement is also being talked about on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. The hashtag was used by netizens to redistribute Felicya's video, voice their criticism, and

urge the public to stop buying Scarlett Whitening products. This moment shows how in the digital era, the personal actions of company leaders can have a big impact on the image of the brand they lead. The public not only judges products based on quality, but also pays attention to the moral attitudes and actions of the company and the individuals who lead it.

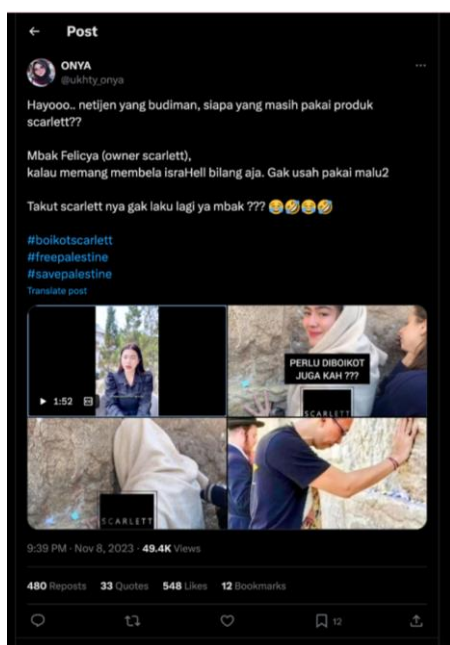


Figure 2. One of Account X's Tweets Regarding #BoikotScarlett Movement

Scarlett Whitening tried to respond to this situation by issuing an video that contain official statement. They sought to make it clear that Felicya did not intend to support either side of the conflict, but rather called for peace in general. However, for most consumers, this statement is not considered enough to stop the boycott movement. Some consider Scarlett Whitening's response too slow and does not address the core of the problem at hand. Meanwhile, there are also those who think that the cancel culture that occurs is excessive and unfair, considering that Scarlett's company and products are not directly related to global politics. Cancel culture movements such as #BoikotScarlett emerged as a public reaction to public actions or statements that are considered controversial or violate certain norms, such as the case of CEO Scarlett Whitening who allegedly supported Israel. This campaign reflects the dissatisfaction of people who are increasingly daring to express their opinions through social media. The

role of social media in accelerating and expanding the impact of cancel culture is also very evident in this case. According to the latest We Are Social (2024) report, there are 139 million identities of social media users in Indonesia as of January 2024. The number is equivalent to 49.9% of the total national population. This impacted hashtags such as #BoikotScarlett quickly spread and became trending on several platforms. Social media users used this hashtag to unite their voices, show solidarity with the Palestinians, and pressure Scarlett Whitening to take a more assertive stance. In the context of geopolitics and international relations, the Israeli-Palestinian issue is a very sensitive topic, especially in a country like Indonesia where the majority of the population supports the Palestinian cause. Therefore, even though Felicya's statement was aimed at neutrality, many netizens considered it to be on Israel's side. This led to great pressure on Scarlett Whitening, where most of the previously loyal consumers began to doubt the company's moral commitment. Some of them have publicly stated that they will no longer use Scarlett Whitening products, and many have advised others to do the same.

Understanding cancel culture is part of an important study in the study of issue and crisis management. However, academic studies on this matter, especially in the context of companies in Indonesia, are still very limited. Moreover, if the crisis faced by the company is triggered by global geopolitical issues. This research seeks to fill that void by focusing on providing a new perspective on how local companies, such as Scarlett Whitening, are under pressure from the cancel culture movement #BoikotScarlett. This movement shows a new dynamic in the relationship between companies and their consumers in the digital era, that a crisis can arise not only from products, but also from actions or statements from company leaders. This provides a new perspective on how crises can evolve and affect the outlook on a brand. The uniqueness of this study is that it is one of the first academic studies to examine #BoikotScarlett case. Thus, the element of novelty of this research lies in the research of the cancel culture movement that focuses on a local Indonesian company, namely Scarlett Whitening. The main objective of this study is to understand the process of the cancel culture #BoikotScarlett movement, such as what factors encourage community involvement, as

well as how companies deal with this crisis situation from the perspective of crisis management. Through this study, researchers want to explore information about "How does the #Boikotscarlett Cancel Culture Movement?". This research has theoretical contributions in the field of public relations and crisis management. Theoretically, this research enriches the understanding of how cancel culture operates in the realm of public communication and how a brand can manage its reputation when facing a boycott or massive criticism. This study also provides insight into an effective crisis communication model in dealing with cancel culture situations, including transparency strategies, proactive responses, and the role of social media in shaping public perception.

Practically, this research provides insight for public relations practitioners and brand management in designing more effective communication strategies when facing a crisis. The results of this study can be used as a reference for companies in formulating more adaptive communication policies, increasing transparency in business operations, and rebuilding consumer trust after experiencing cancel culture. By understanding the dynamics of cancel culture and its implications for brand reputation, companies can take more strategic steps to maintain customer loyalty and business sustainability in the digital era. Thus, this research not only contributes to the academic aspect, but also provides guidance for industry players in facing increasingly complex communication challenges. Furthermore, this study will discuss the methods used to analyze the cancel culture phenomenon against Scarlett Whitening and how the findings of this study can provide solutions for brand management in facing a reputation crisis.

2. Research Methodology

Cancel culture arises from people who have a desire to express disapproval or rejection of an individual or group. Cancel culture is a joint effort by a group of people to exclude someone or something that is considered offensive, usually through social pressure such as criticism on social media or boycotts (Norris, 2023). The goal is to stop support for the target. Furthermore, according to Velasco (2020), cancel culture has existed since centuries ago which began with public contempt for individuals. Now, this

movement has developed into not only withdrawing support for community leaders, cancel culture is also used to boycott an organization, including digital entertainment (Waani & Wempi, 2021). Usually, this movement is rooted in sensitive issues such as racism, sexism, or in this context global politics, which is then responded to by the public by demanding accountability. This study uses data validity through triangulation, which is done by comparing various data sources such as interviews, social media analysis, and literature studies to ensure consistency of findings. The constructivism paradigm is applied in data analysis by understanding how consumers form meanings towards the cancel culture phenomenon based on their subjective experiences. Furthermore, the New Social Movement theory is used to frame the research findings by highlighting how digital social movements contribute to shaping public opinion and influencing consumer behavior towards brands involved in controversies. Thus, this study not only contributes to the academic aspect, but also provides guidance for industry players in facing increasingly complex communication challenges. Furthermore, this study will discuss the methods used to analyze the cancel culture phenomenon towards Scarlett Whitening and how the findings of this study can provide solutions for brand management in facing a reputation crisis.

According to Clark (2020), cancel culture is a phenomenon that is uniquely created by two sides, namely capitalist demand, namely mass media, as well as from the side of the audience connected to social media. In this digital era, cancel culture movements are more often carried out on social media such as X and Instagram. In relation to cancel culture, social media becomes a platform to spread the movement or issue, to then be followed by real actions of other users (Altamira & Movementi, 2023). According to Dershowitz in his book entitled *Cancel culture: The latest attack on Free Speech and due process* (2020, para. 2), said that, "In today's culture of cancellation, perpetrators are often invisible, anonymous, and irresponsible. Social media is a judge and a jury. Accusations over the internet are developing on their own through Twitter, Facebook, and other largely unregulated platforms, where false accusers have the freedom to defame, destroy, and retract." As found in the #BoikotScarlett movement that is massively

spread through social media, this shows that social media plays a large role in the implementation of cancel culture. The phenomenon of this new trend of cancel culture is explained by Bromwich (2018) his article entitled "Everyone is Canceled". In his article, Bromwich said that almost everyone has been canceled or canceled by the public. For companies, the cancel culture movement can have an impact on brand loyalty and business reputation. As happened in the case of Scarlett Whitening, the actions or statements of CEOs that are considered controversial trigger #BoikotScarlett movements that seek to influence public perception of the products sold. This is because a company's reputation in the digital era is very vulnerable to public perception, so when a company leader takes an action that is considered problematic, the impact can extend to all business entities. In fact, according to the The Committee's Choice & People's Choice Word of the Year 2019 (2019) cancel culture movement was chosen as "the word of the year" because "it has become, for better or worse, a powerful force.

The theory of New Social Movement according to Anthony Giddens is a collective effort made by a group of individuals to achieve interests or aim to solve social problems, as well as hinder or slow down the development of certain social changes. This social movement then developed over time, which eventually gave birth to a new social movement (Anshori & Nadiyya, 2023). According to Melucci in Johnston & Klandermans (1995) the new social movement has a primary focus on cultural and identity change, not just political structural change. Therefore, the #BoikotScarlett movement not only focuses on the cessation of support by consumers, but also seeks to convey a moral message about the ethical actions that companies should take on sensitive issues which in this case are Palestinian-Israeli geopolitical issues. Thus, the new social movement provides a relevant and consistent theoretical framework for understanding how cancel culture moves in response to moral or ethical actions that are deemed inappropriate by the public. Social movements are important not only because they highlight human rights abuses and injustices against exploited and excluded individuals, but also because they often seek to end categorical inequality

(Castañeda, 2019). This shows that social movements are indeed aimed at the public interest rather than personal interests. New social movements also tend to be decentralized, meaning they do not have a single command center or leader. This makes it more flexible and adaptive to changes in social dynamics. The strength of this movement lies in their ability to rally people from different backgrounds but with the same lifestyle and values, thus forming a strong solidarity. Social movements or groups with similar lifestyles can be a force for great change in society, as they provide space for individuals to express their opinions, hopes, and beliefs (Giddens *et al.*, 2021). Movements such as #BoikotScarlett show the characteristics of a new social movement because it is based on the moral concern of people with different backgrounds towards Israeli-Palestinian global geopolitical issues (BDS Movement) which is then manifested in local actions, namely the boycott of Scarlett Whitening products. Globally, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement has grown rapidly since 2005, especially in terms of encouraging Muslims to reject foreign products that are not in line with the values embraced by Muslims (Barghouti, 2011).

New social movements often use powerful symbols and narratives to touch on the collective emotions of the people, which in this case has to do with solidarity with the Palestinians. In social movements individuals come together to try to recruit, persuade and inspire others, using all the tools they can find such as: money, media, stories, collective identity, jokes, cartoons, and sometimes weapons (Jasper, 2014). In the digital age, the new social movement finds a new ideal platform on social media platforms, which allows for rapid and effective mass mobilization. Social media has changed the way social movements evolve, where geographically separated individuals can come together in one virtual space to voice their views. In a sense, social media is the latest challenge to our ability to build significant online communities, relationships, and social movements (Lipschultz, 2023, p. 40). Movements such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, or in the Indonesian context, the #BoikotScarlett movement, are examples of how social media functions as a space to spread new social movements.

Blumer, Mauss, and Tilly in Macionis (2016) identify four stages in a social movement: (1) Emergence stage, which is a social movement that arises in response to the perception that there is an imbalance or problem in a system; (2) The Coalescence stage when the movement begins to form a clear identity and devise strategies to voice demands more broadly, often through collective action; (3) Bureaucratization stage, the moment when the movement develops into a more structured organization with a more formal administrative system and relying on competent staff; (4) The Decline stage, which is when the movement begins to weaken, but in some cases it can be accepted as part of the existing social system. This research is prepared qualitatively with the constructivism paradigm and the theory of new social movements. According to Sugiyono (2020), the qualitative research method is a research method based on the philosophy of postpositivism, used to research on natural object conditions, (as opposed to experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument, the data collection technique is carried out by triangulation (combined), data analysis is inductive/qualitative, and the results of qualitative research emphasize meaning rather than generalization. In this study, the object in question is the Scarlett Whitening brand. In other words, qualitative research is a set of interpretive ways to understand and describe the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

There are three main objectives in qualitative research, namely: providing an overview of the research object, revealing the hidden meaning behind the phenomenon, and explaining the phenomenon that occurs (Suwendra, 2016). Furthermore, according to Ronda (2018), the constructivism paradigm is a paradigm of knowledge that adheres to the view that objective knowledge and truth are the result of perspective. The data obtained was used to understand the cancel culture phenomenon that occurred to Scarlett Whitening through the #BoikotScarlett movement. The data collection technique used for this study is through primary and secondary data collection. Primary data were obtained from literature studies on books, journal articles, and mass media that have similar topics to this study, and observations of digital media texts such as from the analysis of documents in the form

of tweets on Twitter using hashtags #BoikotScarlett. According to Fink (2019), the most efficient way to study literature is to use online searches. Secondary data was obtained from semi-structured interviews with movement participants on social media, especially Twitter, Tiktok and Instagram, as well as digital media experts/researchers. These data allow researchers to explore the motivation of public participation as well as identify crisis management strategies taken by companies. Each piece of text related to #BoikotScarlett movement will be grouped into specific categories, such as the motive for public participation, the perception of the brand, and the company's response. After grouping, the data is analyzed to find relevant patterns as well as the direction of communication. The results of this analysis will provide an understanding of the dynamics of the cancel culture movement in the case of Scarlett Whitening. The data verification techniques used in this study are data validity and triangulation. According to Creswell & Poth (2024), validity in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the results of the study accurately describe the phenomenon being studied. By using triangulation, researchers can ensure that the interpretation of the data is more comprehensive and objective.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

Scarlett Whitening is a body care and beauty brand from Indonesia that is widely known for its products that are sold at affordable prices. The brand actively utilizes social media, especially Instagram and Tiktok, to market its products through *influencers* and digital campaigns that attract the attention of the younger generation. Scarlett Whitening's popularity in the local market has made it one of the most talked about beauty brands online. The #BoikotScarlett movement began in early November 2023 after Scarlett Whitening's CEO, Felicya Angelista, uploaded a video on her personal Instagram account. In the video, he conveyed his views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which is considered by some Indonesians to be less on the side of Palestine. This video then spread widely on social media, causing a wave of protests that grew every day. People began voicing criticism by using #BoikotScarlett hashtags on various digital platforms,

including Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. The public reaction became even more intense after several influential figures took part in this movement, accelerating the dissemination of information (Norris, 2023). This boycott not only had an impact on Scarlett Whitening's reputation, but also directly affected the sales of her products. As public pressure increased, the company finally released a clarification statement as their crisis management action. However, the clarification provided by the company and the clarification video made by the CEO were not well received by the public and instead triggered a greater reaction. In the context of crisis management, Coombs (2022) emphasized that a company's response to a crisis must consider the credibility of the message, transparency, and the level of public trust in the brand. If the communication strategy is ineffective, the crisis can escalate and worsen the company's reputation.

This movement sparked intense discussions on social media, as one of the sources explained:

"Personally, I have seen on several social media about the hashtag movement of the boycott Scarlett."

(The informant learned about this movement from social media, which triggered his awareness of the issue). Social media plays an important role in shaping people's collective awareness of social issues, where exposure to information that repeatedly appears on digital platforms can affect individual involvement in a movement (Zhuravskaya *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the findings from the informant that showed that their awareness of the boycott movement arose due to exposure to social media content is in line with research that confirms that digital platforms have a major role in mobilizing public opinion and involvement in social action. By analyzing the results of interviews and tweets on Twitter using #BoikotScarlett hashtags and looking at the development of this phenomenon, the discussion of this research starts from four stages of social movement based on the theory of *social movement* by Blumer, Mauss, and Tilly in (Macionis, 2016): The Emergence stage is the initial phase where the issue begins to gain public attention. In this case, CEO Scarlett Whitening's statement became the main trigger that raised a sense of dissatisfaction among the public. This disappointment grows along

with the perception that the statement is contrary to the Indonesian public's support for Palestine. One of the speakers explained:

"When she was criticised for clarifying, she didn't want to say clearly that she supported Palestine, she just said 'I stand with humanity' and she also acknowledged that Israel is a state (country)."

From that statement, the informant felt that the CEO's statement was not firm in supporting Palestine, which further encouraged him to participate in the boycott. According to Tufekci (2019), in the digital era, the public response to the statements of public figures or companies can develop rapidly, especially when the statements are considered contrary to the dominant social norms. Clarity of attitude on sensitive issues has a profound effect on public reactions, where ambiguity often exacerbates negative sentiment and increases involvement in social movements. This is in line with the findings of Gold (1996), which explains that ambivalence in corporate communication on political or social issues can trigger public distrust and encourage collective action such as boycotts.

Thus, the lack of clarity of CEO Scarlett Whitening's statement is a factor that accelerates the emergence of a wave of criticism and boycotts on social media. Informants who observe the development of this issue through digital platforms show that the public response is not only formed from the content that is circulating, but also from the perception of the company's attitude in responding to the controversy. This confirms that in the digital era, partiality or neutrality in a sensitive issue can affect consumer trust and trigger broader collective action. At this stage, there is no formal coordination among disgruntled individuals. However, social media has become a channel for voicing personal opinions that ultimately attract the attention of a wider public. The initial discussion of the statement became the main material in the formation of collective consciousness. Many speakers also stated that social media provides a wide space to spread information quickly without having to go through traditional media. Awareness of the #BoikotScarlett movement began to increase after the issue went viral on various digital platforms, as revealed by one of the informants who knew about this movement through social media, although not

actively involved. This shows that social media has a significant role in shaping public opinion and accelerating the dissemination of information (Bennett & Segerberg, 2023). Several speakers also highlighted the importance of the influence of public figures in encouraging the emergence of this movement. The support or statements of public figures often strengthen the public's perception of an issue and encourage wider involvement in collective action. According to Bennett & Segerberg (2023), the involvement of public figures on social media can accelerate the mobilization of social movements by increasing the legitimacy and reach of the message conveyed. In this case, the participation of influential figures on social media further amplified the spread of the boycott narrative and encouraged more individuals to reconsider their support for the Scarlett Whitening brand.

In addition, a strong sense of solidarity with the Palestinian issue is an important catalyst at this stage. Another informant mentioned that although the decision to stop using Scarlett Whitening products is not entirely related to the boycott movement, exposure to this issue still affects her view of the brand. This shows that individual involvement in social action can be influenced by a combination of personal factors and social dynamics that develop in digital media. According to Castells (2015), solidarity in digital-based social movements is often formed through a network of interactions that reinforce the similarity of values and goals among the participants of the movement.

The second stage is Coalescence. At this stage, individuals who share similar views begin to work together to achieve more concrete goals. The #BoikotScarlett movement began to gain a more organized form with the active participation of various groups, including disillusioned consumers and social activists on digital media. Some informants emphasized that the company's non-transparent communication further strengthened their desire to engage in the boycott. As stated by one of the informants, Scarlett Whitening is considered to have failed in handling the controversy because she was not proactive and lacked transparency with the public:

"I think Scarlett is lacking in handling that because they should be more proactive and clear and should be more transparent to the public." (Informant 1).

This shows that a company's communication strategy can affect the sustainability of social movements in the digital era (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 295). In this context, more and more individuals are engaging in online discussions and voicing their opinions on this issue. In addition, social media has become the main tool in disseminating information and building solidarity against this boycott movement. Some informants stated that they use Twitter and TikTok as the main platforms to voice support for the cancel culture movement. One of the informants said that he invited his closest people to stop using Scarlett products first before spreading the information more widely:

"So I let him (informant's boyfriend) know about this boycott movement, because he also happened to have the same thought as me about this boycott. So we decided to stop using the product together." (Informant 2).

This process reflects how personal social networks can strengthen participation in social movements through digital communication mechanisms (Zhuravskaya *et al.*, 2020). With the involvement of active users on social media, this movement is gaining momentum and gaining attention from a wider audience. Support for the movement was also driven by solidarity with the Palestinians as a key factor that strengthened the community's involvement in the boycott. One of the informants said that his involvement in the boycott movement was not only due to dissatisfaction with Scarlett Whitening, but also as a form of solidarity with the Palestinians:

"Of course there is, sis, so that people don't have to use products from owners who support genocide. In addition, let it be a lesson for other owners so that they do not support Israel." (Informant 2).

Moral aspects and human values are often factors that strengthen individual involvement in digital-based social movements (Castells, 2015). In this case, the consumer considers not only the quality of the product, but also the ethical position of the company that produces it. Therefore, social and political value-based solidarity can be a key element in maintaining the sustainability of social movements.

The role of public figures also contributes greatly in strengthening the impact of the #BoikotScarlett movement. Several influencers with large follower bases participated in voicing criticism of Scarlett Whitening, thus increasing the reach of this boycott campaign. One of the informants stated that he hopes that influencers in the beauty field can be more active in voicing this issue, considering that they have a great influence on people's consumption choices:

"I hope it's like a beauty influencer on Instagram or on TikTok who speaks up, because their followers are certainly people who like makeup or are looking to know about skincare or bodycare recommendations." (Informant 2).

Support from public figures often serves as a factor that accelerates the mobilization of social movements through increased legitimacy as well as wider exposure (Bennett & Segerberg, 2023). In many cases, influencer participation can change consumer attitudes and accelerate their decision to stop using a product. This is in line with the research conducted by Pradini and Wempi. The research was conducted at the Eat Happens restaurant which was able to attract the attention of consumers. Eat Happens stands with an *industrial-vintage* concept. This makes consumers able to give positive reviews, accompanied by sufficient reciprocity (Pradini & Wempi, 2019). As this movement grew, various forms of passive action appeared, such as individual boycotts of Scarlett products. Some informants revealed that even though they are not actively voicing their opinions on social media, they still choose not to buy Scarlett products as a form of support for this movement:

"Because I'm a person who lacks something, I'm aware of that thing (the boycott), it's just that I'm more... It's just that it's #BoikotScarlett, so I don't buy the product, but I rarely voice my opinion as a person." (Informant 1).

This phenomenon shows that involvement in social movements is not always explicit, but can be expressed through individual actions in daily life. In a broader context, collective action like this can exert significant economic pressure on affected companies. Therefore, social movements that start from digital media can have real consequences that

affect the economic position and reputation of a brand in the market. Furthermore, the third stage is Bureaucratization. In this third stage, the #BoikotScarlett movement began to be organized more systematically with a more structured campaign strategy. Online petitions and invitations to replace products are increasingly being shared on various social media platforms. Some digital communities have even begun to coordinate alternative brand lists that are more in line with the values they support. One of the informants assessed that this movement becomes more effective when there is support from various groups that have the same interests:

"I think Scarlett should now rebrand stronger and more honest, it should also be able to make new innovations that suit consumers." (Informant 1).

With a more planned campaign strategy, the impact of this boycott movement is wider and affects public opinion. According to Tilly & Wood (2015), organizations in social movements allow movements to be more effective and sustainable because of the division of roles and more directed strategies. Support from influencers and the digital community is an important factor in strengthening this boycott movement. Another informant highlighted that the more influencers who voice this issue, the greater the public's awareness of its impact:

"I hope it's like a beauty influencer on Instagram or on TikTok who speaks up, because their followers are certainly people who like makeup or are looking to know about skincare or bodycare recommendations." (Informant 2).

The presence of influencers in social movements can accelerate the dissemination of information as well as increase the credibility of ongoing campaigns. According to Chadwick (2017), social media and public figures have a great influence in shaping public opinion because they are able to attract the attention of the wider public and direct discussions towards emerging issues. With the active participation of individuals who have a large audience, this boycott movement becomes more targeted and able to reach various levels of society. Therefore, influencer involvement in social movements can amplify the campaign message and increase its impact on the company targeted by the boycott.

In addition to influencer support, the sustainability of this movement is also supported by discussions that take place on social media and mainstream media. Some informants revealed that the many negative reviews of Scarlett products further reinforce this movement:

"At that time, there were so many people who spoke up about this Scarlett product. In addition to the owner who supports Israel, many also give honest reviews that this product seems to be too overclaimed. So many people are aware and stop using the product." (Informant 2).

In many cases, a combination of social issues and criticism of product quality can amplify the impact of cancel culture on a brand. According to Henman (2022), digital social movements have the advantage of disseminating information quickly, making it easier to form collective opinions that can affect the image of a product or company. This shows that digital-based social movements do not depend on only one factor, but are also influenced by various elements such as consumer trust, brand image, and social solidarity. As this movement grew, some companies began to respond with more aggressive marketing strategies. Another informant highlighted that Scarlett seems to be trying to restore her image through more intensive marketing:

"If I look around, now more people are aware of the product, either on TikTok or Twitter, so the owner seems to give me a very royal marketing so that the image of the product can be reversed, in my opinion." (Informant 2).

In many cases, companies facing cancel culture often try to change their marketing strategies to attract consumers who have already left. According to Chadwick (2017), in the digital age, crisis communication strategies are critical for companies facing public pressure, as transparency and the right approach can help brands rebuild consumer trust. Thus, an increasingly organized boycott movement can encourage companies to evaluate their business and communication strategies to be more aligned with the values embraced by consumers. Ultimately, the movement #BoikotScarlett show how organized cancel culture can have a significant economic impact on a brand. In this stage of bureaucratization, movements that were initially spontaneous developed into more structured campaigns with various supporting elements, such as petitions,

product reviews, and campaigns on social media. Some informants revealed that they still choose not to use Scarlett products despite the company's image restoration efforts:

"If I prefer to find alternatives to other products, yes, because Scarlett has already received a negative stigma." (Informant 3).

In the long run, the impact of this movement is not only seen on Scarlett's reputation, but also on the changes in their marketing strategy. Thus, bureaucratization in the digital social movement can create greater pressure on targeted companies, as well as encourage changes in their business strategies to better match the expectations of consumers and the wider community. As time goes by, #BoikotScarlett movements begin to decrease in intensity. This signals the start of the fourth stage, namely Decline. The main factors in the movement's demise were the shift in public attention to other issues and Scarlett Whitening's response to the crisis. One of the informants stated that this movement was quite massive at first, but over time it began to lose momentum:

"It seems that for the movement to boycott Scarlett, it is quite massive, and also quite effective as well. Because at that time the news about it, and for some reason the owner Scarlett may have been a blunder or somehow, suddenly she supported Israel." (Informant 4).

According to Norris (2023), social movements based on social media trends often experience a rapid life cycle, where their popularity can decline drastically when public attention shifts to new issues. Therefore, although the movement initially gained a lot of support, the shift in public attention led to a decline in participation in the boycott campaign. Although the intensity of this movement has decreased, its impact on Scarlett Whitening is still felt. Some consumers still maintain a negative view of the brand, especially because of the image that was already formed at the beginning of the boycott movement. One of the informants revealed that although the company has tried to improve their image, the impact of this movement is still felt:

"Maybe if you come here and there, there may have been an image improvement, but maybe it has not recovered 100% like before." (Informant 4).

According to Saldanha *Et al.*, (2023), brand images affected by cancel culture often take a long time to recover, especially if they are not followed by an effective communication strategy. Therefore, even though Scarlett Whitening has made various efforts to restore its image, some consumers still maintain a negative view of the brand. Some consumers have even expressed their unwillingness to return to using Scarlett products even though the boycott movement has subsided. This shows that cancel culture, although it can be temporary, can still have a long-term impact on consumer behavior. One of the informants confirmed that he has no intention of returning to using Scarlett products because he has lost trust in the brand:

"No, if I don't want to use it anymore. That's it, I've lost my respect." (Informant 4).

According to Dershowitz (2020), in many cases of cancel culture, consumers who feel disappointed are less likely to return even though the company has clarified or rebranded. Thus, even though this movement loses momentum, its impact on consumer behavior remains significant. However, some consumers are also starting to reconsider using Scarlett products, especially if the company is able to provide better added value. One of the informants stated that even though he doesn't use Scarlett products at the moment, he might reconsider them if there are any new innovations of interest:

"For scrubs, maybe if Scarlett releases a new variant like a new fragrance, maybe I'll try it, but so far I haven't tried again." (Informant 4).

This is in line with research conducted by Kaur & Kvåle (2024), which shows that in some cases cancel culture, consumers can return to a brand if the company manages to create a new, more attractive product or show a change in their value. Therefore, the product innovation strategy can be one way for Scarlett to improve its image and attract back consumers who previously boycotted. Overall, the #BoikotScarlett movement shows how cancel culture can cause a crisis that have a significant impact on a brand's image and consumer behavior. Although this movement has decreased in intensity, its long-term effects can still be felt in the form of a shift in consumer loyalty. Some consumers have maintained their boycott stance, while others have

begun to consider using Scarlett products again. According to (Norris, 2023), although cancel culture tends to lose momentum over time, affected companies must still evaluate and improve their strategies to ensure that they do not lose their consumer base permanently. Thus, this movement is an important lesson for companies on how they should respond to social issues and maintain consumer trust for the long term. It is important to distinguish between the CEO and the company as two separate entities. The CEO is an individual who represents the company, but that does not mean that his personal decisions or statements always reflect the company's overall policies (Argenti, 2023). In some cases, the crisis that arises from the CEO's statement can be resolved with a communication strategy that separates the CEO's position from the company. For example, in the case of Starbucks in 2018, where CEO Kevin Johnson directly apologized and took real action in the form of inclusivity training after a discriminatory incident at one of its stores. Unlike Starbucks, Scarlett Whitening did not take firm steps to defuse the crisis, so that the cancel culture movement continued to grow. Compared to the case of Dove's "Racist Ad" Controversy in 2017, which also sparked a global boycott, Dove's crisis management was more responsive. Dove immediately removed the problematic ad, admitted the mistake, and improved its marketing strategy to be more inclusive (Grégoire *et al.*, 2010). Meanwhile, Scarlett Whitening did not take proactive actions that could mitigate the impact of the #BoycottScarlett movement, so that negative sentiment towards the brand continued to grow.

It should be noted that when the author tried to contact Scarlett Whitening to get an official statement regarding this case, the company refused to give an interview. This attitude shows that Scarlett Whitening chose a passive approach in dealing with the crisis, which according to the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) from Coombs (2007), can worsen the company's image if the public considers it a form of avoiding responsibility. This event reflects how the power of social media in initiating and strengthening social movements in the digital era (Clark, 2020). Inaccuracy in communication strategy can prolong the crisis and increase the negative impact on the company. Therefore, effective

crisis management must include a clear, fast, and transparent communication strategy in order to restore public trust in the brand. This study found several important things related to the cancel culture #BoikotScarlett movement as follows: (1) The role of social media plays a central role in the spread of the #BoikotScarlett movement. The issue grew out of discussions on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, where users are actively spreading information and organizing boycotts. This phenomenon supports the theory that digital media can accelerate the mobilization of social movements in a broader and more effective way (Zhuravskaya *et al.*, 2020). (2) The solidarity movement is able to trigger or be the main cause in the emergence of *cancel culture*. In this case, many individuals felt compelled to participate in the boycott as a form of support for Palestine, not just because of dissatisfaction with Scarlett Whitening. These findings confirm the research of (Castells, 2015), which highlights that modern social movements are often driven by values-based solidarity and collective identity. (3) The long-term impact on brand image and declining consumer confidence. Although there was a decrease in voice #BoikotScarlett, the impact of consumer loyalty also had a long-term impact. Some consumers stated that they would not return to using Scarlett products, while others began to reconsider if there was a change in communication strategy and better product innovation. This is supported by (Saldanha *et al.*, 2023)) research, which states that cancel culture can have a long-term impact on brands, depending on how companies handle reputational crises.

Changes in consumer attitudes towards brands, factors influencing the decision to boycott, and how brands react in responding to crises are received by the public. These patterns indicate that consumers tend to be more critical of a brand's transparency and credibility after being involved in a controversy. These findings are then analyzed in the context of the New Social Movement theory to identify whether these patterns support or challenge the theory used. Thus, this study provides a deeper perspective on the relationship between cancel culture, brand reputation, and communication strategies in dealing with crises. Thus, this study not only contributes to the academic aspect, but also provides guidance for industry players in facing increasingly complex

communication challenges. Furthermore, this study will discuss the methods used to analyze the cancel culture phenomenon against Scarlett Whitening and how the findings of this study can provide solutions for brand management in dealing with reputation crises.

Discussion

The #BoikotScarlett movement illustrates how social media plays a central role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing collective action against corporate entities. The controversy began with an Instagram post by the CEO of Scarlett Whitening, which many interpreted as showing support for Israel during an ongoing humanitarian crisis. This post triggered widespread public backlash, particularly in Indonesia, where support for Palestine is strong. The backlash evolved into a structured digital movement, embodying the characteristics of cancel culture as a form of participatory public communication in the digital age. As Ng (2020) points out, cancel culture enables individuals to express disapproval publicly, often targeting those perceived as violating shared social values. In the context of crisis communication, a company's response is critical in influencing how a crisis unfolds. Coombs (2022) argues that effective crisis response must be timely, clear, and aligned with stakeholder expectations. In Scarlett's case, the company's clarification was perceived as delayed and inadequate, further intensifying public dissatisfaction. This aligns with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes that misaligned communication strategies can exacerbate reputational damage (Coombs, 2007).

Cancel culture, while a recent term, is not a new phenomenon. Velasco (2020) conceptualizes it as a form of virtual collective consciousness intended to purge public discourse of figures or brands that contradict dominant moral codes. Clark (2020) elaborates that cancel culture often lacks formal organization and operates within algorithmically driven social media systems that amplify controversy. The viral spread of criticism toward Scarlett Whitening exemplifies how rapidly public sentiment can turn when amplified through digital platforms. The #BoikotScarlett movement is also effectively interpreted through the lens of New Social Movement theory. Giddens *et al.* (2021) note that modern social

movements are increasingly driven by identity, values, and morality rather than structural political change. In this case, consumer rejection of Scarlett was not merely a response to product dissatisfaction, but also a reflection of ethical concern about the company's perceived stance on a geopolitical issue. This moral positioning translated into market behavior, as consumers withdrew support to signal alignment with humanitarian values. According to Abrutyn (2016), the strength of contemporary social movements lies in their ability to leverage communication networks to respond to social or ethical disturbances. Castells (2015) refers to digital media as the engine of "networks of outrage," enabling solidarity around global issues to manifest in local actions, such as product boycotts. In the case of Scarlett Whitening, social media served not only as a channel for expression but also as an organizing force that galvanized a decentralized movement.

The role of public figures further amplified the movement. As Kaur and Kvåle (2024) observe, influencer participation in cancel culture can significantly shape consumer behavior due to their perceived credibility and large followings. Public condemnation by well-known figures added legitimacy to the boycott, broadened its audience, and encouraged greater engagement. This finding is consistent with Saldanha *et al.* (2023), who argue that cancel culture can produce long-term damage to brand loyalty, particularly when consumers believe that a company's values diverge from their own. Importantly, the Scarlett case demonstrates that reputational crises are rarely triggered by a single factor. Instead, they result from an intersection of social, ethical, and brand-related concerns. Many participants in the boycott cited both the controversial video and dissatisfaction with product quality. This suggests that cancel culture movements are often compounded by pre-existing consumer grievances, which gain new momentum when ethical violations are perceived. Moreover, the movement's fluid and decentralized structure is characteristic of what Waani and Wempi (2021) describe as a new form of social activism one that does not rely on formal leadership but grows organically through online networks. The absence of a centralized command allows such movements to remain resilient and adapt to changing digital discourse. This also

makes them difficult for targeted organizations to suppress or redirect without meaningful reform or engagement. From a corporate communication perspective, the case underscores the need for heightened sensitivity to public concerns. Argenti (2023) emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between a company and its spokesperson, noting that public perception often conflates the two. Failure to separate individual actions from corporate policy, as seen in Scarlett's response, can deepen the crisis and entrench negative sentiment. In contrast, companies that acknowledge mistakes and engage transparently tend to regain trust more effectively. Ultimately, the #BoikotScarlett case reveals that cancel culture is not merely an impulsive or emotional reaction, but a reflection of shifting power dynamics between consumers, corporations, and public values. As Norris (2023) points out, cancel culture can serve both constructive and destructive purposes depending on how it is managed by the stakeholders involved. In Scarlett Whitening's situation, the lack of an open, consistent communication strategy contributed significantly to the erosion of consumer trust and prolonged the reputational damage.

4. Conclusion

The #BoikotScarlett cancel culture movement shows how social media can be a powerful tool in mobilizing public opinion and building collective action that has an impact on the image and reputation of a brand or company. This movement goes through four stages of social movements according to Blumer, Mauss, and Tilly (in Macionis, 2017), namely Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization, and Decline, where the controversial statement of CEO Scarlett Whitening was the initial trigger. However, it is important to distinguish between CEOs and companies, because although individual actions can trigger a crisis, the impact spreads to the brand as a whole. In the context of Public Relations (PR) crisis management, the company's response to public pressure greatly determines how the crisis develops. Ineffective mitigation efforts, such as poorly received clarification statements, indicate that poor communication strategies can worsen the situation. Therefore, companies must be more careful in their corporate communication practices, especially in

choosing spokespersons and designing communication strategies that are responsive to sensitive issues. In the fast-paced digital era, proactive issue management is key to preventing crisis escalation that has the potential to harm the company in terms of reputation and finances.

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