



An Ethnographic Approach of Cancel Culture Against Abidzar in the Indonesian Movie Industry: Production and Consumption Perspective

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Abstract. This paper investigates the dynamics of cancel culture in Indonesia by analyzing the controversy surrounding Abidzar Al-Ghifari's casting in the Indonesian remake of the Korean drama *Business Proposal*. Drawing on digital ethnographic methods, the study explores how online K-pop communities engage in the processes of cultural critique and symbolic resistance. Through in-depth interviews with ten fans from digital platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, Telegram, and Facebook, the research examines how both media producers and consumers negotiate aesthetic expectations, moral judgments, and representational legitimacy. The findings show that cancel culture serves not only as a mechanism of social control but also as an arena of participatory discourse where cultural standards, global influences, and national identity are contested. Ultimately, this study highlights how fan communities, empowered by digital connectivity and cultural fluency, have the capacity to influence production decisions and redefine public accountability in the entertainment industry.

Keywords: cancel culture, communities, consumption, production,

INTRODUCTION

Cancel culture has emerged as a defining feature of digital life in the 21st century, particularly within online communities where media consumers are no longer passive recipients of content but increasingly active participants in shaping cultural discourses. As Jenkins, et al (2013) argue, the rise of participatory culture has redistributed power from traditional media producers to digitally networked audiences, giving rise to new forms of accountability, critique, and activism. In this environment, audiences leverage social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube not only to consume entertainment but also to influence narratives, challenge dominant ideologies,

and hold public figures and institutions accountable for perceived transgressions. This cultural shift has led to what is commonly termed “cancel culture,” a contested and evolving phenomenon in which individuals or entities face collective backlash, social sanction, or boycotts due to perceived moral, social, or aesthetic failures.

In Southeast Asia, and Indonesia in particular, cancel culture has found fertile ground within increasingly connected and media-savvy youth populations. Indonesia’s vibrant online culture, with over 200 million internet users is heavily shaped by young digital natives, particularly Gen Z, who are highly engaged in transnational media flows. The recent backlash against Abidzar Al-Ghifari, one of cast as the male lead in the local remake of the popular Korean drama *Business Proposal*, offers a rich case for studying cancel culture as a negotiated space of production and consumption. His casting sparked criticism from fans, particularly those in K-pop communities who are deeply familiar with the aesthetic, performative, and narrative nuances of the original Korean content. These fans, often deeply engaged in transnational media, used social media to critique the perceived misalignment between Abidzar’s persona and the expectations for the character. The resulting controversy illustrates what Lim (2013) refers to as “networked authoritarianism,” where online communities enforce social and moral norms through digital platforms, often beyond the bounds of traditional institutions.

Cancel culture in this context reflects not only dissatisfaction with production decisions but also broader anxieties about authenticity, representation, and cultural fidelity. Fans’ aesthetic expectations, shaped by polished Korean entertainment standards were disrupted by the casting of an actor seen by many as lacking in charisma, skill, or alignment with the original character’s aura. As Iwabuchi (2002) explains in his concept of “cultural odorlessness,” East Asian media, especially Korean dramas, carry distinctive aesthetic codes that global fans become attuned to and often demand in localized adaptations. And cancel culture can be a form of digital resistance that empowers marginalized voices but also risks devolving into exclusionary practices.

This paper uses an ethnographic approach to explore the multidimensional nature of cancel culture in Indonesia, particularly as expressed by K-pop fans in response to local film production choices. By focusing on both the production side (including creative rationale and commercial interests) and the consumption side (audience interpretation, moral judgment, and aesthetic response), we examine how cancel culture functions as both a media phenomenon and a cultural practice. Drawing from in-depth interviews with ten members of various K-pop fan communities, we analyze how aesthetic preferences, digital behavior, and moral values intersect to produce coordinated backlash.

This paper engages with this duality, viewing cancel culture not merely as reactionary, but as a deeply cultural act shaped by power relations, media flows, and identity politics. Moreover, as Choi and Maliangkay (2015) observe, the globalization of Korean popular culture has produced highly literate and critically engaged transnational audiences who apply their interpretive frameworks when encountering hybridized or adapted content. By exploring this particular case of Abidzar and the remake of *Business*

Proposal, this paper contributes to understanding how cancel culture operates at the intersection of media globalization, celebrity politics, and digital participation. In doing so, we illuminate how fandoms act as cultural gatekeepers and how production decisions are increasingly accountable to digitally empowered publics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cancel culture refers to the collective and often public withdrawal of support for public figures or entities who are perceived to have engaged in problematic behavior. Globally, this phenomenon has been studied as both a form of digital accountability and a controversial practice that may inhibit dialogue and growth (Ng, 2020; Bakher, 2021). Bakher's (2021) critical discourse analysis highlights how cancel culture can marginalize voices under the guise of moral righteousness, while Ng (2020) emphasizes the participatory yet polarizing role digital media plays in sustaining such practices.

In the Indonesian context, cancel culture has gained traction as a form of social control, particularly through social media. Effendi & Febriana (2023) demonstrate how cancel culture can be activated as a collective moral judgment in high-profile cases, such as Rizky Billar's domestic violence controversy, which mobilized public outcry and called for accountability. Similarly, Wempi et al. (2025) examine the movement of "Peringatan Darurat" as a digital protest rooted in cancel culture strategies, signaling the growing power of netizens in shaping public narratives.

From a cultural reception standpoint, Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model is particularly relevant, as it posits that media texts are not passively consumed but interpreted within specific cultural frameworks. In the case of Abidzar, his casting in a Korean drama remake was decoded through the lens of K-pop fans who have internalized global standards of performance and representation. Endi & Fakhur (2021) provide valuable insights into how Generation Z, particularly in urban Indonesia, interprets "call-out culture" as a form of peer-based norm enforcement, suggesting a generational shift in how digital accountability is understood. Moreover, local cultural contexts and representation politics are crucial. Ayuanda et al. (2024) utilize Stuart Hall's representation theory to explore how Javanese culture is reframed in modern cinema. Their approach underscores the importance of representational fidelity—an issue that resonates with K-pop fans critiquing Abidzar's perceived failure to authentically portray a character rooted in the global K-drama framework.

In tandem, these studies provide a multidimensional understanding of cancel culture: as global discourse, localized social control, and cultural negotiation. Ethnographic and digital ethnographic approaches (Pink & Postill, 2012) are thus essential in capturing the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of audiences who actively participate in these cultural shifts, especially within fandoms and online communities.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative ethnographic methodology, focusing on digital spaces where conversations about the remake of *Business Proposal* and Abidzar's casting occurred in the *Business Proposal* adaptation, using Stuart Hall's model as the main

analytical lens. Ten participants were recruited from various online K-pop communities, including Weverse, Twitter/X, Reddit, Telegram, and Facebook groups. They were asked a set of semi-structured questions regarding their knowledge of Abidzar, their experience watching the original drama, their reactions to the remake, and their thoughts on cancel culture in this context. The research was conducted by attending directly to meet informants in person and collecting data through offline, face-to-face semi-structured interviews as well as observing relevant discussions in fan communities.

Data was collected mainly through these offline interviews, supported by field notes to capture context and relevant expressions during conversations. An interview guide was used to explore perceptions of adaptation authenticity, production quality, and ethical expectations toward producers and public figures. All collected data were analyzed thematically using Hall’s encoding/decoding model by categorizing responses into dominant, negotiated, and oppositional interpretations. To ensure the validity of results, the researcher used member checking by reconfirming statements with informants, triangulated interview findings with observation notes, consulted peers for interpretation checks, and documented all steps transparently to guarantee the credibility and trustworthiness of this study on cancel culture’s role in shaping production and consumption practices in Indonesia’s entertainment industry.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULT

The findings from interviews with ten Indonesian K-drama fans reveal a diverse range of perspectives on Abidzar Al-Ghifari’s casting in the local remake of *Business Proposal*. While all respondents had varying degrees of familiarity with the original Korean drama, their interpretations of the casting choice and their attitudes toward cancel culture reflect a complex negotiation between aesthetic expectations, cultural values, and digital behavior.

The table below summarizes key responses, categorized according to four themes: familiarity with the source material, perception of Abidzar’s casting, attitude toward cancel culture, and cultural interpretation of the controversy.

Respondent	K-Drama Familiarity	Perception of Abidzar’s Casting	Attitude toward Cancel Culture	Cultural Interpretation
Ika	Watched	Understands casting logic, sees controversy as justified	Supports cancel culture for accountability	Public figures must reflect public values
Febrianti	Watched	Disconnected from character’s image	Disagrees with harsh criticism	Professional actors need guidance
Najwa	Watched	“Indie vibe” mismatched with CEO role	Critical of toxic backlash	A second chance should be given
Tiara	Watched	Skeptical but open-minded	Prefers growth over punishment	Cultural adaptation needs careful casting
Tari	Watched	“Wrong aura” for a CEO	Warns against mob mentality	Casting must match audience fantasy

Rani	Watched	Failed to convey original charm	Against cancel culture	Constructive critique is better
Arthur	Partial viewer	Believes casting is budget-driven	Reflects disappointment	Economic vs artistic quality
Vina	Watched	Visuals not up to standard	Agrees with boycott	Idol visual standard matters
Yuanka	Watched & read webtoon	Saddened by attitude	Understands cancellation	Respecting source material is key
Yuan	Watched	Casting disappointment	Disengaged from remake	Expectations unmet = rejection

3.2 DISCUSSION

3.2.1 Production Perception

Several respondents speculated that Abidzar was chosen primarily for market appeal and affordability rather than for his alignment with the role or acting excellence. Arthur (Reddit) commented: *"Alangkah baiknya pemeran itu bisa dipilih yang tingkatnya di atas dari Abidzar... mungkin karena bayaran lebih murah."*

This aligns with Effendi and Febriana's (2023) observation that casting and public approval often hinge on the balance between performance quality and social perception, especially in controversies involving mainstream figures. Some participants raised the issue of institutional favoritism and image branding in casting. Abidzar's lineage as the son of a religious public figure was believed to influence the casting choice, which many fans viewed as disconnected from the character's archetype. The reliance on celebrity familiarity rather than character fit was seen as an outdated strategy that failed to recognize how much audiences, especially younger digital natives value alignment between role, appearance, and performance.

For these fans, casting decisions are not isolated artistic acts but are culturally and emotionally charged choices that either validate or undermine their expectations. The production decision reflects a clash between traditional top-down casting logic and bottom-up audience-driven scrutiny, emphasizing the democratizing force of online fan culture in shaping narrative credibility.

As Cinta (Management student) statement, *"Produser harusnya tahu, kalau yang nonton bukan orang awam lagi, apalagi K-popers. Kita bisa nilai akting, visual, semuanya."* captures the increasingly critical role of audiences in today's media landscape. Particularly within globalized fan cultures like K-pop, viewers have developed high aesthetic and narrative expectations. They are no longer passive consumers but engaged evaluators who compare local productions against international standards. This shift reflects what Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) describe as participatory culture, where audiences take part in shaping the meaning and legitimacy of media products. In such cultures, casting choices are not just artistic decisions they are subject to audience approval based on authenticity, alignment with genre conventions, and respect for the original work. When producers overlook this sophistication, they risk backlash from fans who feel their voices and values are being ignored.

3.2.2 Consumption Critique: Aesthetic and Moral Expectations

Disappointment among fans stemmed from multiple layers: acting skill, visual performance, character misalignment, and public persona. Tari (K-Fashion & Makeup community) expressed: *"Harusnya cari yang auranya tuh elegan, tajir, misterius. Ini malah kayak tetangga yang nongkrong di warkop."* This criticism parallels what Bakher (2021) describes as aesthetic resistance, where audiences engage in discursive gatekeeping based on visual and narrative expectations formed by transnational media consumption.

Other respondents such as Rani (NCTzen) and Cinta (Management student) highlighted a lack of fidelity in character adaptation: *"Dia itu mau menciptakan karakter sendiri padahal harusnya ngikutin versi Korea."* Their reactions underline how fans approach remakes with intertextual expectations shaped by original narratives. The desire for consistency and homage to the source text reflects a cultural politics of respect and authenticity in adaptation. When remakes deviate from the beloved original, particularly without transparent creative justification, fans may interpret it as a form of cultural disrespect, further fueling disappointment.

Respondents also mentioned how casting decisions can feel like erasures of audience intelligence. Several noted that their loyalty to the original series was not acknowledged or respected, and that their voices as informed media consumers were overlooked. This contributes to a wider sense of alienation, prompting fans to engage in collective critique and mobilize against the remake. And this aesthetic critique was intertwined with moral scrutiny. Fans demanded not only performance credibility but also ethical alignment. Casting becomes a battleground for validating artistic integrity and upholding social values. These expectations are particularly intense in fandom spaces where emotional labor and identity investment are high.

Febrianti's reflection *"Kalau memang dia masih belum cocok, ya bisa diarahkan. Tapi jangan sampai yang belum siap langsung dikasih beban berat"* reveals a more empathetic strand within audience critique. Rather than supporting harsh exclusion, she acknowledges the potential for growth if the industry supports rather than overloads inexperienced talent. This perspective suggests that criticism, while valid, should be accompanied by institutional guidance and ethical responsibility from producers.

3.2.3 Cancel Culture as Cultural Regulation

Many participants viewed the public backlash toward Abidzar as justified within the context of holding celebrities accountable for both their artistic and ethical conduct. Ika (Weverse) stated: *"Cancel culture-nya sudah tepat... biar memperbaiki etika para aktor."* This reflects Wempi et al.'s (2025) argument that cancel culture in Indonesia often operates as a "peringatan darurat" or emergency warning system, where public sentiment escalates into social action when institutional mechanisms fail.

Beyond performance, respondents linked their disapproval to broader issues of responsibility, humility, and professionalism. They highlighted how actors in culturally significant roles should demonstrate not only talent but respect toward the audience and

original source. In this sense, cancel culture becomes a symbolic language of civic protest, a way for audiences to voice their cultural expectations and discontent in a digital public sphere.

However, there was also critical reflection on the speed and severity of online judgment. Tiara (Reddit) and Najwa (NZZen) noted: "*Cancel culture tuh kadang terlalu cepat nge-judge... harusnya dikasih kesempatan.*" This duality reflects the complexity of cancel culture as both a moral compass and a potential vehicle of public shaming. Some respondents advocated for constructive criticism and rehabilitation over harsh exclusion. They called for a shift from punitive to pedagogical responses where mistakes could be turned into growth opportunities rather than ending someone's career prematurely.

These nuanced perspectives align with the understanding that cancel culture in digital contexts is a volatile, emotionally charged process with both democratizing and destructive potentials. Overall, cancel culture in this context functioned as a form of community-driven regulation that expressed discontent with both individual behavior and broader institutional decisions. It also revealed how digital spaces become arenas of negotiation over artistic legitimacy, moral standards, and public voice.

Yuanka's statement "*Bukan cuma soal akting. Attitude juga penting. Kalau dari awal udah nggak respek, wajar kalau fans kecewa*" highlights how performance alone is no longer sufficient to win audience approval in the era of participatory media. Today's fans, especially those deeply invested in global pop culture, place equal importance on a celebrity's public behavior and perceived respect toward the fan community. For them, professionalism includes both on-screen talent and off-screen conduct.

3.2.4 The Role of Abidzar's Public Persona

Beyond performance, respondents emphasized that Abidzar's public persona and online behavior significantly contributed to the controversy. His early statements, perceived as dismissive of K-pop fandom culture, acted as a catalyst for outrage. Yuan (Twitter) remarked: "*Sikapnya saat promosi itu bikin kecewa. Harusnya bisa lebih bijak.*" This sentiment was echoed by Vina (ARMY), who chose not to engage with the remake due to her disillusionment: "*Saya nggak nonton yang versi indonesianya. Nggak suka saya.*" Respondents highlighted that in the current media ecosystem, public persona is inseparable from performance. An actor's engagement with fans, interviews, and behavior on social media all shape audience perception. The expectation is not merely to play a role convincingly but to represent the values and tone of the production both on- and off-screen.

Abidzar's failure to navigate this dynamic effectively illustrates the increasingly blurred line between character portrayal and personal branding. His perceived lack of humility and preparation was interpreted as an insult to both the original work and its audience. In this sense, the backlash can be read not just as a rejection of his performance, but as a broader critique of how Indonesian entertainment figures engage with globalized fan cultures. Moreover, this case exemplifies the rising power of parasocial dynamics in fan culture. When audiences feel emotionally invested in a character or narrative universe,

they expect real-life behavior to mirror those ideals. Abidzar's inability to meet these expectations broke the illusion, leading not just to disappointment but to an active pushback aimed at protecting the cultural property and its integrity.

Rani's comment — "*Kalau udah tahu fans Korea itu detail banget, harusnya dari awal jaga sikap, bukan malah nyolot*" — reflects fans' expectations for cultural sensitivity and professionalism, especially when adapting content from globally respected media industries like Korea's. Her statement underscores the fact that Korean drama fans are not only emotionally invested but also attentive to details in performance, attitude, and cultural translation. When public figures fail to meet these expectations, fans view it as a breach of trust and respect.

3.2.5 Negotiating Global-Local Tensions in Production and Consumption

The case of Abidzar's casting reflects the broader global-local tensions in media adaptation as producers attempt to localize transnational cultural products while navigating the aesthetic demands of audiences influenced by global media flows (Jin, 2016; Straubhaar, 2007). Producers often face challenges in balancing cultural proximity with the expectations shaped by the polished visuals and narrative consistency characteristic of Korean dramas, which have set a high standard for adaptation in the eyes of audiences.

Consumers within Indonesian K-pop communities, having internalized these global standards, exhibit aesthetic sophistication and critical literacy, actively rejecting adaptations perceived as inauthentic, misaligned with character expectations, or lacking in production quality. This rejection is not merely an act of passive disapproval but often manifests as organized discourse within fan communities, where audiences articulate detailed critiques and expectations for cultural representation. This dynamic demonstrates that in the contemporary media landscape, audiences are not merely consumers but co-producers of meaning, shaping the production process through feedback, critique, and collective action within digital spaces (Bakher, 2021). As a result, the negotiation between audience expectations and production realities becomes a critical factor in determining the reception and cultural legitimacy of adapted media products, illustrating the increasing agency of audiences in influencing entertainment industry practices.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the intersection of cancel culture, audience agency, and media production through the case of Abidzar Al-Ghifari's casting in the Indonesian remake of *Business Proposal*. By applying an ethnographic lens to the reactions of Indonesian K-pop fans, the findings reveal that audience responses were shaped by more than just dissatisfaction with acting performance. Instead, they emerged from a complex mix of aesthetic standards, moral expectations, and the perceived (mis)alignment between Abidzar's public persona and the cultural weight of the original Korean drama.

The study highlights the critical role of participatory digital communities in shaping media discourse. Fans, particularly those who are globally networked and

culturally literate, are actively involved in the symbolic regulation of media quality and ethical behavior. Cancel culture in this context functions both as a grassroots critique of institutional decisions and as a form of cultural negotiation over authenticity and respect. As shown through the narratives of the participants, the audience is no longer a passive recipient of cultural products but an active stakeholder whose voice can amplify, redirect, or even halt the trajectory of a media figure's career. In the case of Abidzar, the backlash was not simply punitive, but expressive of deeper concerns over professionalism, adaptation fidelity, and the evolving standards of celebrity accountability in the age of digital fandom.

The backlash against Abidzar Al-Ghifari's casting reflects how audiences, as active co-producers of meaning, influence the entertainment industry through feedback and organized critique within digital spaces. Cancel culture, in this context, serves as both a tool for accountability and a form of social control, illustrating the audience's role in shaping cultural standards and ethical practices within media production. Based on these findings, it is suggested that media producers consider collaborative approaches with audience communities to ensure cultural sensitivity and authenticity in adaptation processes, which can enhance the acceptance and legitimacy of localized media products. Further research may explore strategies for constructive audience-producer engagement in adaptation projects to foster ethical, aesthetic, and culturally resonant entertainment within Indonesia's dynamic media landscape.

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