



**THE HONG KONG UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING**

# **Separating the Artist from the Art: Social Media Boycotts, Platform Sanctions, and Music Consumption**

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**Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2023 (Friday)**

**Time: 10:30 am – 12:00 pm**

**Venue: Room 4047, Lee Shau Kee Business Building, HKUST**

**Abstract:**

This paper investigates how the consumption of an artist's creative work is impacted when there's a movement to “cancel” the artist on social media due to their misconduct. While human brands face heightened reputation risks compared to product brands, there is limited understanding of how such behaviors affect the consumption of artists’ work. Using Synthetic Difference-in-Differences, we examine the demand for an artist's music following interrelated publicity and platform sanction shocks, notably the removal of songs from prominent platform-curated playlists on the largest global streaming platform. A cursory examination of music demand during these scandals would lead one to an erroneous conclusion that consumers are intentionally boycotting the artists. We propose an identification strategy to disentangle the platform curation and intentional listening effects, leveraging the variation in geographic demand and song-level delisting status. Our findings show that the decrease in music consumption is primarily driven by supply-side factors, such as the removal of artists' songs from sponsored playlists, rather than demand-side factors whereby consumers intentionally choose to stop listening to the artists' music. Additionally, we show that media coverage surrounding the scandals had positive promotional demand effects, suggesting that social media boycotts can generate additional publicity and achieve the opposite of some of their intended goals. Overall, we find consistent evidence that consumers can separate the artist from the art—they can condemn the artists for their misconduct but continue to consume their art.