

# 'Cool', Brands and 'Cool' Brands

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## ABSTRACT

*The term 'cool' is widely used expression in popular culture. This word is prefixed liberally with anything including people, behavior, place and brands. Notwithstanding ambiguity about what it stands there is complete clarity that it certainly adds value. 'Cool' in this perspective is precious resource which can be used in brand building. The authors' exploration into its genesis and meaning revealed interesting insights. The concept of 'cool' finds mention in theological discourses of religions including Buddhism, Hinduism and Stoicism. However the modern 'cool' originated during the time of slavery a coping mechanism of slaves which later drifted into popular mainstream as counter-culture with shades of rebellion. This study found four perspectives of 'cool' as composure, paradox, good, and cheeky. These use these strands of 'cool' are evident branding efforts of various companies that target the youth market.*

*Keywords:* Brand Community, Brand Identity, Consumption Culture, Cool, Cultural Resource, Polysemy, Symbolism, Value Addition

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A multi-level marketing company has made an entry into premium skin care segment with a new brand. The brand is being aggressively promoted on television. But unlike many cosmetic brands which employ 'ingredient-benefit' strategy this brand exclusively focuses on a particular user personality. One of the ads of the brands goes as follows: the setting is that of a fashion show and models in their high precision choreographed walk on the ramp are appearing one after the other. And then emerges a gorgeous model and camera zooms to show her meticulous and confident walk down the stage. She is probably the most admirable of all for the confidence and control of the moment and then there happens the unexpected. Her stilettos go loose and she tumbles. She smiles, collects her stilettos and holds them in her hands, claps, and stands up only to continue her walk up to the end of the ramp unruffled and perfectly at ease. The communication refrains from

making elaborate description of product and only introduces the name and who it is meant for. The brand seeks to connect with women, who can laugh at their own self. That is a person who can take imperfection, failures and stress with a characteristic ease.

In another case, a soft drink brand seeks to connect with its target consumer with the proposition that it is perfectly fine to be afraid of certain things. The brand communication shows the protagonist in challenging situations like jumping off a cliff into the sea. In one of its latest campaigns, the ads show a group of boys engaged in a rescue mission training on high seas. As other boys happily take the plunge, one of the boys upon being asked to take a jump is shown to be seized by fear at the moment of action. The protagonist then gathers himself, overcomes his inhibitions and takes the plunge to emerge victorious. The brand story focuses that it is perfectly fine to fear and be afraid of

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certain situations but success lies in overcoming fear to face a challenge. The brand's essence is condensed core proposition which says that victory is next to fear.

The above and many other brands provide testimony to the emergence of a new psychological makeup especially amongst the younger generation. The ideas that are closer to reality seem to be building up acceptance. Unlike tried and tested success formula which dichotomized between the 'reality' and the 'projected' to cultivate resonance based on the unreal, the new format is given to realism with all its flaws and defects. Now it is 'cool' to 'being' rather than 'becoming'. The term 'cool' captures a condensed distilled identity of new emergent young consumer which militates against the accepted idealized identity stereotypes.

## RATIONALE

'Cool' is irresistible property for a brand to have. Brands gain value if they are added with 'cool' property. But it is not easy to achieve because 'cool' is nebulous and hard to apprehend. This is the reason why phenomena of 'cool' merits attention.

### 'Cool' Adds Value

Notwithstanding the difficulty in understanding cool, being cool matters. It is associated with popularity and attractiveness which can endow a person considered to be cool with a wide range of benefits including personal, social and economic (Hamermesh, 2011; Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004). It is common understanding that some people and products are considered to be cool and being bestowed with this nebulous; hard to define property certainly gives them a position of advantage. For many people a brand like Apple is cool and this gives the brand in question a position of relative superiority in terms of brand desirability, price advantage and brand stickiness. Cool is especially important in children and youth segments. A lot of importance is attached to being cool. But consensus is difficult to reach as to what cool is

and what it is comprised of and who personifies it the best (Adler & Adler, 1998; Pountain & Robins, 2000). Cool does not lend itself to easy articulation. It is elusive but sought after and it is something to be coveted (Dick & David, 2000). The property of cool holds tremendous marketing worth especially during the time of dawning of commoditization.

Coolness is an appropriated property. It is not manufactured or assembled in factories. With the dawning of pervasive parity across product categories, brands are forced to tap into the culture reservoir to create differentiation. Being a cool brand can reverse the effects of free market system and provide escape routes by abstracting a quantifiable value into a symbol of expression and identification. Grossman (2003) called Cool as the 'most precious natural resource' which can make an otherwise substitutable product 'fantastically valuable'. Cool in this contextualization assumes position like a marketing resource which is used to drive consumer behavior. The phenomenon of cool in branding context is capable of influencing consumer response. It is through this consumer influence brands can gain significantly. Cool is key favorability driver across wide products and services and it is important across all age groups (Sturgess, 2013). The new globalised economy leaves very little scope to set one product apart from the other. Consider a pair of jeans or drinks or sneakers or automobiles, none differ substantively. Many brands like Rolex, Ray Ban, Aston Martin and Absolut defy commodity gravity by the power of 'Cool'. Becoming Un-cool is a sure run down the lane of oblivion.

The arrival of Cool in branding context is interesting and intriguing. Brand gains power by developing a perception of being Cool, which implies that it appropriates myths and mythology from a non-branding context. A brand achieves value transformation by tapping into meaning reservoir housed in socio-cultural construction of the society. Becoming cool is about dissolution of objective reality and subtly replacing it with a subjective and perceptual construction. It is about de-centering, shifting

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