

# A conceptual framework of cool for social marketing

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual framework of cool for social marketing through a comprehensive literature review and integrating extant literature on cool.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A comprehensive search and review of extant literature across social marketing, business disciplines, arts, psychology, social sciences and humanities was undertaken to develop an understanding of cool and its relevance to social marketing. The review permitted developing a comprehensive set of characteristics that are associated with cool.

**Findings** – A conceptual framework of cool organised according to the following dimensions is presented and discussed: deviating from norm, self-expressive, indicative of maturity, subversive, pro-social, evasive, and attractive.

**Originality/value** – This paper advances theoretical knowledge in the social marketing domain by offering a conceptual framework of cool, and by suggesting a set of guidelines to develop cool social marketing programs.

**Keywords** Social marketing, Marketing, Cool, Coolness, Social brand, Social campaign

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

“Cool” is a concept that is often used in a marketing context, commonly meaning – hip, fashionable, attractive, desirable or excellent (Rahman, 2012; Warren and Campbell, 2014). Identifying the influential presence and the gradual permeation of “cool” in modern society, commercial marketers have been engaging with the idea of cool in marketing since the 1960s, and investing in heavily focused market research on what is cool since the 1990s (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Fuller and Thygesen, 1997). The alcohol and the tobacco industries have historically used cool imagery to promote brands, and cool has been utilised in marketing socially visible products such as fashion accessories, sports accessories, electronics, consumables, music and music accessories (Hoek and Jones, 2011; Saxton, 2005). Focusing on cool in marketing elicits favourable responses from teenagers and young adults, and young consumers emulate behaviours that they consider cool (Gaskins, 2003; Saxton, 2005; Belk *et al.*, 2010). Studies have found that embedding cool in brands, and in products such as footwear and electronics can have a



positive impact on consumer attitude and behaviour (Sriramachandramurthy, 2009; Im *et al.*, 2015). Given the demonstrated influence of cool on consumer behaviour in mainstream marketing, understanding cool and embedding it in social marketing programmes holds the potential to induce pro-social behaviour (Bird and Tapp, 2008). Bird and Tapp (2008) identified the influence of cool on teenagers and young adults, and considered possible ways to embed cool into the design of social marketing programmes. In particular, Bird and Tapp (2008) identified that cool could often be the most relevant and attractive to young people who could also be more susceptible to thrill-seeking and risk-taking activities including harmful behaviours such as binge-drinking, smoking and drug-taking, to which social marketing has often been used.

A selection of social marketing programmes such as Truth®, VERB™, and the suite of Social Branding® campaigns delivered by Rescue Social Change Group (Rescue SCG) attempted to engage with cool to influence the behaviours of adolescents and young adults in relation to tobacco, obesity, alcohol and violence (Zucker *et al.*, 2000; Wong *et al.*, 2004; Fallin *et al.*, 2015b). However, whilst the initial writings on cool in social marketing by Bird and Tapp (2008) have suggested the utility of cool for social change programmes, there is a lack of thorough understanding on what cool is, and if and how it can be embedded into social marketing programmes.

In some contexts, “cool” naturally complements the attempt of social marketing to influence target markets in deviating from established norms of greater society – for example, the Truth® anti-smoking campaign encouraged rebellion when smoking was a fairly normative behaviour (Zucker *et al.*, 2000). However, this can work in the opposite direction if cool is used against behaviours that are not normative, and can work in opposition to what is considered cool. Whilst “deviating from the norm” is just one of many constructs that have been associated with cool, this example illustrates that understanding and appropriately using cool in social marketing is important. Furthermore, a comprehensive understanding of cool can also help social marketers to understand existing risky behaviours such as drug-abuse and unsafe sex among target groups.

Given the potential importance, yet current lack of understanding of cool in social marketing, this paper aims to address gaps in the knowledge-base in the following three ways. First, a comprehensive literature review identifies the key characteristics of cool. This helps in identifying elements of cool that can inform the design and delivery of social marketing programmes. Second, a conceptual framework of cool is presented, which helps social marketers wishing to consider the concept. Third, the article provides some relevant guidance for embedding cool in social programmes.

The article is structured as follows. The literature review considers the evolution of cool as a concept, and discusses why and how teenagers and young adults relate to cool. The emergence of cool as an important focus in marketing research is then discussed, followed by a discussion on the existing literature on cool in social marketing. This analysis identifies some important gaps in the knowledge-base that are discussed. The methodology undertaken for the literature review, and for the development of a conceptual framework of cool is then presented. The next section identifies and discusses the following key dimensions of cool that form the framework: deviating from norm, self-expressive, indicative of maturity,

subversive, pro-social, evasive, and attractive. The article then highlights the conceptual and practical implications of the conceptual framework, provides some guidance for social marketers for considering the use of cool in social change programmes and offers some ideas for future research.

### What is cool?

As cool has permeated modern society in many contexts, researchers across disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and marketing research have approached it from different perspectives. These perspectives include studying cool as a cultural phenomenon (Frank, 1997; Gerber and Geiman, 2012), as a stage in life (Danesi, 1994), as a personality trait (Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012), as an attitude (Pountain and Robins, 2000), and as a design attribute (Sundar *et al.*, 2014). The multitude of perspectives in the literature on explicating what cool is can create difficulties in grasping the concept. Cool is often considered an elusive concept by authors (Gurrieri, 2009; Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002). This seeming elusiveness of cool can be attributed to the fact that cool is socially constructed and bestowed upon an object or an individual by an audience; and an object or an individual is cool only to the extent that others consider it cool (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Gurrieri, 2009). However, recently presented context-specific models of cool by researchers such as Rahman (2012) and Sundar *et al.* (2014) espouse the belief that an underlying structure of cool in a broader context can be determined. Before considering the utility of a conceptual framework of cool for social marketing, the following sections consider the evolution of the concept, its relevance to consumers and particularly teenagers and young adults, and its current role in marketing and social marketing.

### The evolution of cool

Although cool can be traced back to the early-1400s in Nigeria where the term “cool” meant “grace under pressure”, the contemporary cool emerged from African-American jazz musicians (Belk *et al.*, 2010, p. 189). Many African-American jazz musicians of the 1920s portrayed cool subversion to the dominant Caucasian culture of the USA through their music, stage presence and life-styles. The associations of cool with marginalised and oppressed groups, authentic heritage, irreverence, irony, composure, self-grooming, mystique, confidence, and substance abuse can be related to this history of cool. The progressive Caucasian audiences of these jazz musicians embraced the composed expression of rebellion of the musicians to express their own individuality during the 1940s (Belk *et al.*, 2010). The liberal movements of the 1960s such as the civil rights movement and the sexual revolution permitted cool to evolve through the influence of hippie culture, and this associated cool with autonomy, rebellion, individuality, social justice, empowerment and enlightenment (Frank, 1997). The association of cool with the hippie culture permitted its identification with the ecology movement and the anti-commercial movement, and may also have provided cool with a broader access to the mainstream society. The efforts of commercial marketers to embed cool in marketing during the 1960s also led to the commercially mediated globalisation of cool (Belk *et al.*, 2010). Cool-focused marketing of the 1960s associated cool with driving aspirations, and being fun and attractive.

Cool further evolved through the cool-focused marketing of the 1980s that targeted youth markets, and this associated cool with consumerism and cosmopolitanism

(Bookman, 2013; Frank, 1997). The advancement of communication technology, and the development of individually consumable technology contributed to further evolution of cool after the 1990s (Belk *et al.*, 2010). The association of cool with materialism may be related to these developments (Bookman, 2013). The emergence of hipster culture during the 2000s was associated with cool (Lanham, 2003), although hipster lifestyles are now often subject to pastiche – identifying the transient nature of cool. Some authors suggested that the evolved, overused, globalised and mass-marketed cool represented a weaker version of cool, incapable of connoting the strength of the meaning it once had had (Sundar *et al.*, 2014). Sundar *et al.* (2014) suggested that research on cool should aim at identifying the strongest expressions and perceptions of the concept. However, expressions of cool vary across different segments (Warren and Campbell, 2014) and explicating and defining cool in a broader context is likely to be more useful in understanding cool from a social marketer's perspective. To help understand the relevance of cool to social marketing, it is helpful to first discuss why consumers are motivated by cool.

### **Why consumers are motivated by cool**

Much of the work on consumer motivations for cool has focused on teenagers. O'Donnell and Wardlow (2000) suggested that attaining could be a universal motivation for behaviour adoption among adolescents. The physiological and psychological changes experienced during adolescence cause teenagers to develop new self-identities and new values, replacing their childhood identities and values that are shaped by family (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). Accordingly, teenagers are motivated towards self-expression, autonomy, and irreverence towards the existing authority figures and family. As teenagers identify the discrepancy between the new ideal self and actual self, they face a destabilisation of self-worth, which is known as “narcissistic vulnerability” (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000, p. 13). Narcissistic vulnerability motivates a teenager to attain stability of her self-worth through group affiliations and assurances from peers. Teenagers seek to attain attractiveness and popularity for affiliations of teenage sub-groups, as these are the most salient criteria for inclusion in these sub-groups (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). Gerber and Geiman (2012), and Gurrieri (2009) suggested that teenagers sought those groups for affiliation that were exclusive, separatist and had a sense of superior status. These sub-groups were often the cool groups, and affiliation of such a group provided a teenager the sought stabilisation of self-worth.

Teenagers also address the need for self-worth by seeking empowerment and by performing “grown up” behaviours (Cullen, 2010, p. 502; Kirkland and Jackson, 2009, p. 284). To address this need, teenagers use “omnipotence” as a strategy, whereby they deny vulnerability and adopt a false sense of bravado (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000, p. 14). This omnipotence may explain the association of cool with risk-taking and thrill-seeking behaviours such as drug-abuse and sexual permissiveness (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Bird and Tapp, 2008; Gurrieri, 2009; Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002; Pountain and Robins, 2000). The stabilisation of self-worth provides a teenager the confidence and composure that is associated with the “grace under pressure” or cool. Therefore, the preference for cool is driven by the needs for self-esteem, autonomy, and sub-group affiliation, to address insecurity regarding one's self-worth.

However, cool is not something that only teenagers aspire to and are motivated by to adopt behaviours. Gaskins (2003) suggested that cool could be relevant to and influence the motivations, attitudes and behaviours of adults in their late 20s and even 30s. The need for reducing insecurity of self-worth may explain why adults in their 30s may retain the preference for cool from their teenage. Importantly, research has found that cool trends often originate among consumer segments that are outside the mainstream, commonly the social minority, and often have a tendency to take risks (Southgate, 2003a; Maher, 2005).

Given that the existing literature suggests that consumers can be significantly motivated by cool, that it can influence consumer attitudes and behaviours, and that cool is particularly relevant among social minority groups, risk-takers and young people, the relevance of cool to social marketing becomes apparent. Many social marketing programmes focus on influencing pro-social attitudes and behaviours among youth, risk-takers and social minorities. Therefore, if social marketing programmes can successfully embed cool into their design and delivery, this holds potential to influence such consumers. To help further identify this potential, the existing literature on cool in marketing and in social marketing is discussed henceforth.

### Cool in marketing research

Reviewing the extant literature reveals that the understanding of and the integrative conceptual frameworks of cool are underdeveloped despite the interest of marketing in cool (Rahman, 2012; Warren and Campbell, 2014). Belk *et al.* (2010, pp. 190-191) identified that the initial understanding of cool for marketing was limited to the “black aesthetic”. Hence, marketers focusing on cool from the 1960s onwards searched for the expressions of African-American identities such as basketball, rap music and hip-hop, and embedded them in marketing (Belk *et al.*, 2010). As cool evolved, marketers developed an understanding of the unconventional nature of cool, which was readily available from the minority groups such as the hippies and countercultural groups. Consequently, marketers have promoted the cultural expressions of minority groups, and this process has been termed by some authors as the “stealing”, “hijacking” or “manipulation” of cool (Belk *et al.*, 2010, pp. 191-192; Southgate, 2003a, p. 8).

Gladwell (1997) and Nancarrow *et al.* (2002) related the wider adoption of cool trends to the Diffusion of Innovation Model by Rogers (2003). This model explains how, why and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures. Cool-focused marketing relies on “coolhunting”, on actively participating in developing the meanings of cool trends, and on promoting these trends to consumers (Gurrieri, 2009; Saxton, 2005; Southgate, 2003a). Coolhunting is a market research practice that focuses on the early identification of cool trends (Fuller and Thygesen, 1997; Gurrieri, 2009). Coolhunting research agencies identify and engage with trendsetters and opinion leaders to learn about emerging trends and carefully monitor what is seen as cool (Gurrieri, 2009; Southgate, 2003a). In the absence of a suitable conceptual framework of cool, coolhunting has become a thriving industry over the past two decades (Gurrieri, 2009; Warren and Campbell, 2014). Coolhunting agencies recently started facilitating the diffusion of cool by ensuring that expert cool consumers and coolhunters endorse cool trends for brands, in addition to performing their original role of identifying cool trends

(Gaskins, 2003; Gurrieri, 2009). Some authors suggested that cool-focused marketing in this manner reduced the time required to diffuse a cool trend in the market (Gaskins, 2003; Palla *et al.*, 2004; Southgate, 2003a).

Several authors suggested that developing conceptual models of cool would be more effective for marketing managers than relying on coolhunting (Sbarbaro *et al.*, 2011; Southgate, 2003a). The resources required for constantly monitoring and understanding cool, and the involvement of marketers who might not have appropriate insights and understanding of cool motivated these authors to favour conceptual frameworks of cool over coolhunting (Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002; Southgate, 2003a). Only recently, researchers have begun developing models that define cool for different marketing contexts. O'Donnell and Wardlow (2000) presented a Theory of Origins of Coolness to understand what motivated teenagers to attain cool. Gurrieri (2009) took a Cultural Systems Approach to explain how marketers embedded meanings in cool trends, whilst Gerber and Geiman (2012) demonstrated the use of Social Relations Model to show the dependence of coolness of an individual on the evaluation by others. Rahman (2012) presented a factor-based model regarding the meaning of the term "cool" to young cosmopolitan consumers, and Sundar *et al.* (2014) presented a factor-based model identifying the relevant characteristics for designing cool technology products. However, these existing models and conceptual frameworks of cool in marketing addressed context-specific interests rather than presenting a broader and integrative framework of cool. This suggests that clarification of the key constructs of cool, and development of an integrative conceptual model of cool, could assist both social marketers and mainstream marketers alike.

### **Cool in social marketing**

Despite the mainstream commercial marketers' interest in cool, and the perceived influence of cool on vulnerable teenagers and young adults, there is a paucity of work considering cool in the social marketing sphere. Bird and Tapp (2008) provided a general discussion on the concept of cool for social marketing, focusing on the possibility of developing cool social campaigns for teenagers and young adults by understanding the needs of and speaking the language of this segment. They also identified some conundrums of embedding cool in social marketing by identifying that cool might be "subversive", "rebellious" and "illicit" in nature (Bird and Tapp, 2008, p. 18), while social marketing agendas were identified as representing and maintaining the tone of authority in its communications. Identifying that cool might be motivated by the need to belong, to rebel, to appear more grown-up and to express individuality, Bird and Tapp (2008) suggested that focusing on social threat, rejection of authority and the importance of successful careers and relationships could be possible ways to prevent teenagers and young adults from uptake of risky behaviours. Bird and Tapp (2008, p. 26) cited the example of Truth® anti-smoking campaign, which tried to influence teenagers in rebelling against smoking by positioning the tobacco companies as manipulative authority figures.

Bird and Tapp (2008) also identified that the objective of social marketing required inducing pro-social behaviours and deviating from existing norms of mainstream society, e.g. for living sustainably when many people do not, or eating healthily when obesity is increasing across the world. A key characteristic of cool is deviating from the norms of mainstream society (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012; Im *et al.*, 2015),



and this may potentially complement social marketing efforts to change normative behaviours. Bird and Tapp (2008, p. 27) also discussed how teenage subcultures typically possessed a varying range of cool expressions, but did not explicate how social marketers could incorporate this information in strategising. Indeed, beyond the work of Bird and Tapp (2008), conceptual and discursive work on cool in social marketing is limited, and there remains a lack of insight on how cool can be used in social marketing practice.

Examining some examples of social programmes can identify insights as well as some challenges for cool in social marketing. As identified earlier, the Truth® campaign did align with the constructs of cool – particularly rebellion, subversion, rejection of authority, deviation from the norm, and pro-social change. The Truth® youth anti-tobacco campaign was launched in Florida, USA, in the late 1990s and was created as a pro-social brand. It used a counter marketing strategy to identify how the tobacco industry had lied and manipulated young people to start smoking. The campaign encouraged youths to rebel against the industry by not smoking. The Truth® campaign also sought to empower the youth and appealed to their need to appear grown-up by engaging them in social critique and advocacy to fight back against Big Tobacco (Zucker *et al.*, 2000). By incorporating ideas of rebelliousness, deviation from the norm of smoking and self-expression – Truth® used key constructs that are associated with cool. Furthermore, the campaign has been highly successful (Farrelly *et al.*, 2005), and has been influential in reducing rates of teen smoking in the USA from 23 per cent in 2000 to 8 per cent in 2015 (Miech *et al.*, 2015). The Truth® campaign is an example of the potential of creating a successful cool pro-social brand.

Other social campaigns such as VERB™ attempted to utilise cool to promote physical activity to “tweens” (9-13 year olds) in the USA. The VERB™ campaign aimed at establishing unorganised physical activity as cool, countering the normative belief of tweens that physical activity only included organised sports. Based on research on the target segment, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention decided to use marketing to promote being physically active as cool to tweens through VERB™ in the early 2000s (Wong *et al.*, 2004). The research identified the key values and needs of the market such as seeking self-esteem, approval of peer group, confidence, making independent decisions, being perceived as attractive, and avoidance of impositions by adults (Asbury *et al.*, 2008). The VERB™ chose media and marketing tools that are relevant to tweens – for example, using street teams to distribute branded products in locations relevant to tweens, partnering with brands favoured by tweens and using celebrity endorsement. The campaign also invested in experiential marketing such as a Nickelodeon Wild & Crazy Kids (WACK) tour (Heitzler *et al.*, 2008). The campaign implementation also included a “coolness tip sheet” for teachers and parents to ensure that they supported tweens in physical activity (Wong *et al.*, 2004). Impact analysis showed that 67 and 56 per cent of teenagers perceived the VERB™ brand as cool in the second and the third year of the campaign, respectively (Asbury *et al.*, 2008, p. S186). The impact analysis demonstrated that embedding cool could be effective in social campaigns that targeted young and vulnerable segments. However, the decrease in the perceived coolness from the second year to the third year could have resulted from an incomplete understanding of cool by the designers of the programme. The

support from adults for physical activity induced by the “coolness tip sheet” eliminated any hint of rebellion from the campaign affecting the coolness of VERB™. Furthermore, by promoting physical activity as a normative behaviour, the VERB™ campaign could have countered the “deviation from norm” that is required for coolness. Notably, no research in relation to the campaign explored the concept of coolness, although the VERB™ brand decidedly set out to be cool. This dearth of understanding regarding cool could have affected the social campaign. This identifies that care and strong conceptual and practical understanding of cool is important if it is to be successfully embedded into social marketing programmes.

The Truth® and VERB™ campaigns approached all tweens or teenagers with single brands, irrespective of their psychographic differences, whereas Bird and Tapp (2008) identified that expressions of cool varied for different subcultures. More recent social campaigns have acknowledged the importance of sub cultures when embedding cool in social marketing. The suite of Social Branding® campaigns of the Rescue SCG in the USA that targeted a range of behaviours including tobacco, obesity, alcohol and violence, used field research to understand the interests, lifestyles, influencers and habits of different subcultures among youth (Fallin *et al.*, 2015a). Based on psychographic segmentation research, Rescue SCG identified identity-based segments of teenagers in the USA such as Preppy, Mainstream, Hip Hop, Country, and Alternative (Jordan, 2012). The research insights on the segments provided an understanding of the identity demarcations and values associated to behaviours of the segments, and how relevant values could be used for behaviour change (Jordan, 2012). As an example, insights regarding hipsters identified that they possessed low levels of perceived health risk, valued personal freedom highly, appreciated the creative arts, were a tightly-knit community, supported being environmentally friendly and had negative attitudes towards capitalism (Jordan, 2012). These insights align with constructs of cool such as self-expression, anti-commercialism and being pro-social, and were used in the Social Branding® campaigns to encourage behaviour change. The campaigns used integrated channels such as mass media, digital and social media, events, social group influencers and street marketing to develop brands that addressed the unique values and subcultural rituals among different target segments.

While these examples suggest some utility in using cool for social marketing to influence vulnerable teenagers and young adults, and suggest the importance of contextual insights, they neither provide a comprehensive conceptual understanding of what cool is nor elaborate how it can be used in social campaigns. Furthermore, as certain pro-social behaviours do become normative – for example not smoking, this can create a conundrum as deviant behaviours like smoking can be seen as cool, and have been promoted in the past as cool to hipsters by the tobacco industry (Rugkasa *et al.*, 2001; Burton *et al.*, 2015). Examining the current literature suggests that a strong understanding of cool and a conceptual framework of cool are absent in social marketing (Im *et al.*, 2015; Warren and Campbell, 2014; Sundar *et al.*, 2014). The full potential of designing cool social marketing programmes is thus yet to be realised. This article addresses this gap by identifying the key characteristics of cool and presenting a conceptual framework of cool that is developed by performing a comprehensive review and analysis of extant literature on cool across



various disciplines. The article also presents the conceptual and practical implications of the presented framework.

## Methodology

### *Literature review methodology*

A comprehensive literature search and review was undertaken following the PRISMA protocol for conducting such reviews (Moher *et al.*, 2009) across several disciplines to develop a holistic understanding of cool for social marketing. The review of literature was focused on developing a comprehensive understanding of cool, identifying the characteristics associated with cool and understanding the relevance and utility of these characteristics and the concept of cool for social marketing. The review also facilitated the development of a conceptual framework of cool to help inform future social marketing programmes.

The search parameters included published academic and grey literature including primary research, conceptual articles, literature reviews, commentaries and commercial reports concerning cool. The search included literature from the following databases: Emerald Insight, Business Source Complete, WARC database, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. A list of relevant search terms was created to help conduct the review. This involved reading a selection of seminal articles concerning cool to identify appropriate words, synonyms and contexts to be used in the literature searches (see Bird and Tapp, 2008; Danesi, 1994; Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012; Frank, 1997; Gerber and Geiman, 2012; Pountain and Robins, 2000; Sundar *et al.*, 2014). Combinations of the following search terms using Boolean logic (AND, OR, NOT) and including truncated and wildcard search term characters (e.g. \*) were used in the search strategy (e.g. cool\*, market\*, cultur\*, person\*, hip\*, brand\*, product, design and attitude). Searches were limited to publications in the English language only, and focused on all available literature with no date restrictions. The search for academic literature was undertaken first in May 2014, and again in June 2015 across the six databases to include a comprehensive range of literature.

The initial search returned 16,417 records that included literature from the scientific, technical, medical and social science fields. As literature from environmental sciences, health sciences, biological sciences, engineering and physical sciences commonly refer to cool in the context of temperature or heat; these disciplines were excluded from the search. This screening of disciplines yielded a total of 4,853 potentially relevant records (Table I). Citations of these 4,853 records were imported on EndNote for the subsequent literature selection process.

The literature screening and selection strategy following the PRISMA protocol (Moher *et al.*, 2009) is outlined in Figure 1. The screening of papers for duplication resulted in excluding 945 papers. The remaining 3,908 papers were screened for relevance based on their titles and abstracts, and 3,412 papers were excluded at this stage. The full text of the remaining 496 papers were imported onto EndNote and examined, leading to the identification of 211 relevant articles. In addition to the search using academic databases, a search for grey literature was conducted using Google advanced searches using the same search terms, date ranges and language parameters as the academic searches. This identified a further three relevant papers, giving a final total of 214 relevant papers that were included in the review and subsequently read,

Database	Brief description of database	No. of records returned <sup>a</sup>
Emerald Insight	The Emerald Insight database provides access to the full text of articles from journals, mainly in the subject area of management, marketing and consumer research	543
Business Source Complete	The Business Source Complete database offers comprehensive full-text and abstracts of articles for the most important scholarly business journals including marketing and consumer research	662
WARC (World Advertising Research Centre)	The WARC database provides access to advertising and marketing information from various sources. It include documents of organisations of various countries, monographs, conference papers, abstracts and the full-text of articles from various marketing journals	149
Scopus	The Scopus database is a multidisciplinary abstract and citation database. It contains over 18,000 peer-reviewed journals in the scientific, technical, medical and social science fields	2,156
Science Direct	The Science Direct database contains the full text of articles from journals and reference works and also includes citations and abstracts of articles of journals from life sciences, medical, technical and physical sciences, arts, business, management, social sciences and psychology	1,279
ProQuest Dissertations and Theses	The ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database contains full text of accepted research theses from universities worldwide	64
		4,853

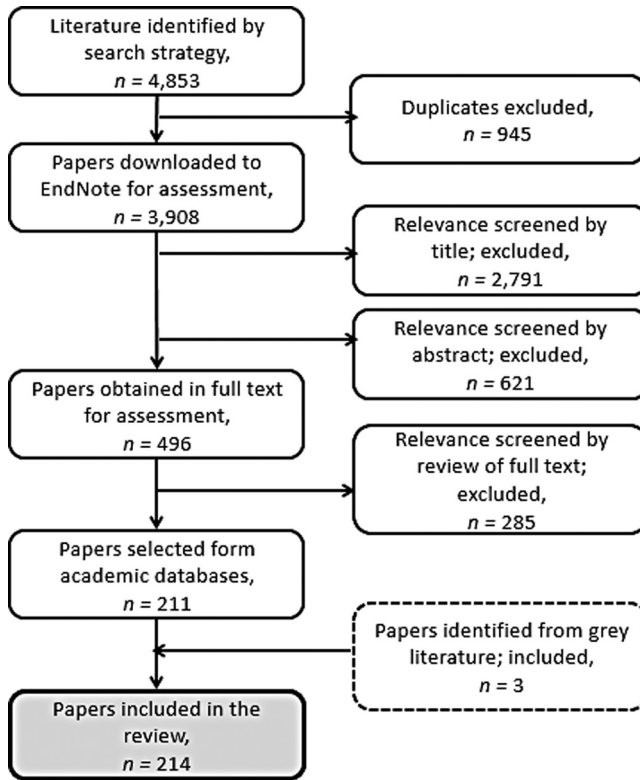
**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>Common search parameters used: search term(s): truncation of “cool” (cool\*) in conjunction with (AND) any of the following truncations market\*, cultur\*, person\*, hip\*, brand\*; OR with any of the following terms: product, design, attitude, stage, life (extant literature suggests that the construct of cool is the most relevant to social marketing in the contexts of culture, personality, design, attitude, stage in life and marketing. Hence the Boolean search included any of these terms with the term “cool”); subject areas included: all available subjects; document type: all available types; Fields searched: title, abstract, keywords; date range: all available years; language of text: English

**Table I.**  
Literature search strategy

analysed and interpreted to identify key characteristics of cool, and to help develop a conceptual framework of cool.

*Methodology for identifying characteristics and development of conceptual framework*  
The review and subsequent analysis of the literature on cool focused on - identifying key terms and language used to describe cool in extant studies and literature, developing a comprehensive set of cool characteristics, and developing an understanding of the potential interrelations and differences among the characteristics.

Document analysis methods can facilitate eliciting relevant understanding and meanings from the texts of different types of documents through various qualitative



**Figure 1.** Flowchart of academic literature selection process

analysis methods (Bowen, 2009). Here document analysis was conducted during the literature review to identify, collate, list and triangulate the key terms and language used to describe cool, and to develop the set of characteristics for cool. The initial analysis to identify terms associated with cool in the literature was complemented by conducting triangulation of the terms to identify potential repetition and synonyms to produce a list of 139 adjectives associated with cool across different contexts. This triangulation method required comparing different documents for cross-checking observed phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). The discourses and conceptual papers (see Gurrieri, 2009; Southgate, 2003a; O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000), qualitative studies (see Belk *et al.*, 2010; Kirkland and Jackson, 2009; Knobil, 2002; Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002) and the quantitative studies (see Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012; Sundar *et al.*, 2014; Warren and Campbell, 2014) were compared to triangulate the adjectives associated with cool. Excluding synonyms reduced this to a set of 78 adjectives. As these 78 adjectives collectively relate to cool in different contexts, each of these adjectives is not relevant to cool in every context. Hence, the adjectives were then grouped into seven core characteristics through an iterative process of review, regular discussions between the researchers, repeated consultation of the extant literature and reflexive thought to identify patterns and relationships between the adjectives of cool (Bowen, 2009). This process permitted identification of a parsimonious set of characteristics, which is helpful

in understanding cool when faced with numerous adjectives to describe cool. The difficulty of understanding cool from numerous adjectives is mentioned in the existing context-specific explication studies on cool (Rahman, 2012, p. 626; Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012, p. 177).

Two independent marketing experts outside the research team were then consulted to check the reliability of the set of characteristics. Each of these marketing experts had a PhD in Marketing, were active researchers in academia and had relevant industry experience. The first expert was asked to individually group the adjectives into the set of the seven characteristics, and inter-coder reliability check was conducted. The coefficient of agreement (the total number of agreements ( $n = 65$ ) divided by the total number of coding decisions ( $n = 78$ )) was 83.3 per cent at this stage. The second expert resolved nine of the disagreements, improving the inter-coder reliability to 94.9 per cent. Four disagreements on terms such as “competence”, “drive for success”, “aspirational” and “friendly” were not resolved from this exercise. These four associations were identified as somewhat questionable in describing cool in the literature by Dar-Nimrod *et al.* (2012), and they suggested that these associations were the results of commercial marketers’ efforts to market a more acceptable version of cool to the mainstream market. Apart from checking the reliability of the theme groupings, consulting the two independent experts also identified 17 adjectives as being repetitive with synonymous connotations. The resultant groupings of the adjectives indicating the core characteristics of cool are presented in Table II.

### **A conceptual framework of cool**

Cool can vary with context, across subcultures and over time, creating difficulty to define the concept. To explicate the concept of cool, one has to remove the layers of contexts and subcultural connotations from the cool expressions and identify the core characteristics of cool. Once these core characteristics are understood, contextual factors relating to the application and understanding of cool can be considered. Figure 2 illustrates a conceptual framework of cool that presents seven key characteristics identified from the literature review and subsequent analysis. These seven dimensions of cool are discussed next in the following sequence: deviating from norm, self-expressive, indicative of maturity, subversive, pro-social, evasive, and attractive.

#### *Deviating from norm*

Warren and Campbell (2014) empirically tested the relationship between deviating from norm and cool, and proposed “unconventionality” as the single most important characteristic of cool. Other authors identified this characteristic through terms such as – counterculture, extra-ordinary, non-conformity, fresh, innovative, creative, exclusive, niche and separatist (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Frank, 1997; Gurreri, 2009; Kirkland and Jackson, 2009; Maher, 2005; Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002; Southgate, 2003a; Sundar *et al.*, 2014). The empirical study by Warren and Campbell (2014, p. 551) suggested that deviations should be “bounded” to be cool, ensuring that these deviations did neither harmed others nor disrupted the social order. They further identified that the degree of deviations to attain cool was dictated by the subculture of the relevant social unit – a higher degree of deviations from the norms of mainstream society was proven as required to attain cool in a “countercultural” subculture (Warren and Campbell, 2014, p. 553). Hence, cool can be characterised by undisruptive deviations from the norms of

Characteristics	Adjectives associated with cool in literature	Suggestions to associate the characteristic with social marketing programmes	Example of suggested social marketing programme tactics
Deviating from norm	Unconventional, counter-cultural, non-conformist, rebellious, extra-ordinary, fresh, innovative, creative, exclusive, niche, separatist	Highlight that a competing behaviour is a mainstream norm Communicate the flaws in the existing norm Communicate that the desired behaviour change is deviating from the norm	Truth® highlighted that normative beliefs regarding smoking were based on manipulative claims by tobacco companies
Self-expressive	Individualist, unique, authentic, anti-commercial, personalised, improvised, oriented to self-esteem, sexually permissive, humorous, interactive	Provide social platforms and opportunities to target segments for self-expression Substantiate authenticity	Truth® engaged target segment in social critique and advocacy to fight back against tobacco companies VERB™ provided means for participants to develop games by themselves
Indicative of maturity	Autonomous, genuine, sincere, purposeful, composed	Use humour Allow unaided and independent evaluation of existing norm	Truth® did not use instructive messages, allowed target segments to make unaided and independent decisions Truth® involved target segments in tactic development
Subversive	Irreverent, confident, hedonistic, trend-setting, novelty oriented, transient, spontaneous, unpredictable, indulgent, thrill-seeking, risk-taking, abusing substance	Facilitate contribution of the target segment to the campaign Include suitable suggestions from the target segments Promote maturity as a feature of the programme Arrange exclusive attractive events such as small concerts or parties	Rescue SCG arranged concerts for target segments VERB™ arranged road tours for target segment
Pro-social	Pro-social justice, democratic, anti-exploitation, overcoming insecurity, self-development oriented and empowerment oriented	Communicate how the social programme and the desired behaviour change can be hedonistic and irreverent Communicate how the existing behaviours are not pro-social Promote how the desired behaviour contributes to pro-social objectives	Truth® highlighted that normative beliefs regarding smoking were based on manipulative claims by tobacco companies
Evasive	Calm, low-profile, subtle, mysterious, ironical, difficult to understand	Incorporate irony in messages Use selective media to communicate to target segment	Truth® developed ironical messages Rescue SCG used selective media to communicate to target segments
Attractive	Interesting, fun, good quality, aesthetic, fashionable, provides status within sub-group, popular	Arrange exclusive attractive events such as small concerts or parties Involve attractive celebrities chosen by the target segments Gain insight and understanding of sub-cultures and the relevant rituals and use activities that engage with these cultural elements	Rescue SCG arranged concerts for target segments VERB™ arranged road tours for target segment VERB™ used attractive celebrity chosen by target segment for endorsement

**Table II.**  
Characteristics of cool and relevant social marketing programme tactics



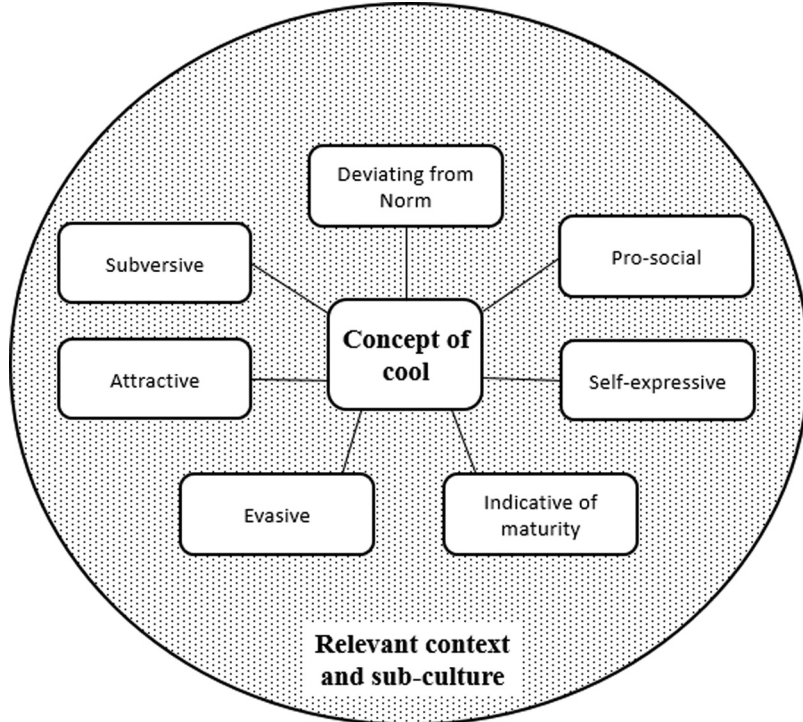


Figure 2.  
A conceptual  
framework of cool

greater society in a manner that matches the values of the relevant smaller social unit. Deviating from the norms of mainstream society can be interpreted as rebellion by mainstream society, and existing literature associated cool with rebellion (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Bird and Tapp, 2008; Kirkland and Jackson, 2009). However, cool is often desired by larger mainstream groups within society resulting in the gradual adoption of cool expressions by mainstream society (Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012; Kirkland and Jackson, 2009), and cool expressions gradually become the new norm and subsequently lose exclusivity to ultimately turn uncool. This results in a continuous quest for deviations from norms and indicates the transience of cool (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Bird and Tapp, 2008; Palla *et al.*, 2004). The discussion on the VERB™ social campaign highlighted the importance of understanding this characteristic for social marketers.

#### *Self-expressions*

Motivated by the desire to express an independent identity and to attain self-esteem, teenagers and young adults replace normative expressions with self-expressions. Expressions of individuality can provide uniqueness and authenticity to a deviation from norm (Rahman, 2012; Saxton, 2005; Southgate, 2003b). Several authors associated uniqueness and authenticity with cool (Drissel, 2009; Fuller and Thygesen, 1997; Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002; Southgate, 2003b). Social identities of individuals are formed through social interactions, which provide an audience the opportunity to evaluate the coolness of a person (Bookman, 2013; Drissel, 2009; Gurrieri, 2009). Belk *et al.* (2010)

suggested that cool individuals possess a certain mastery of social skills that help identify them. However, other forms of expressions are needed for individuals with limited social skills in a world where cool is increasingly globalised. Pastiche in clothing and music are forms of expressions of individuality or authenticity (Bird and Tapp, 2008; Fuller and Thygesen, 1997), but it is difficult to maintain individuality for a mainstream consumer by only consuming cool products in an age of mass-production. Saxton (2005) suggested that personalisation or improvisations of mass-produced products by a consumer could enable them to attain cool. The need for independent identity of teenagers and young adults was identified in the formative research for the Truth® campaign (Farrelly *et al.*, 2002), but was not addressed by the campaign tactics. However, VERB™ addressed this need by allowing tweens to develop games and explore their individual interests (Asbury *et al.*, 2008).

#### *Indicative of maturity*

The narcissistic vulnerability of teenagers and young adults motivates them to establish mature identities (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000), and the approval of seemingly more mature peer groups can confirm the desired mature identity socially. The meaning of cool as “grace under pressure” or composure is indicative of the relationship of mental maturity and coolness. A way to establish the mature identities for teenagers is by mimicking adult behaviour that are unexpected from or prohibited to teenagers. The need to be perceived as “grown-up” often leads teenagers to underage smoking, drinking and sexual permissiveness (Bird and Tapp, 2008; Cullen, 2010; Hastings *et al.*, 2004). However, a genuine and sincere expression of maturity is considered cool (Rahman, 2012; Sundar *et al.*, 2014), and cool is rarely attained by mimicry. Activities driven by pro-social purposes are often considered signs of maturity (Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002; O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000), and sincere self-expressions backed up by purpose are perceived as cool among teenagers (Drissel, 2009; Kirkland and Jackson, 2009; Maher, 2005; O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). The Truth® social campaign captured the need for maturity of the youth by allowing them to make their own informed decisions, and only focused on clarifying how tobacco influenced youth through manipulative marketing (Bird and Tapp, 2008). Truth® also captured the essence of maturity by involving the youth in making decisions regarding the campaign – such as choosing the theme “Truth” for the campaign (Zucker *et al.*, 2000). On the other hand, VERB™ actively provided detailed information to tweens regarding modes of participation in the campaign activities, and these were sometimes mediated by adults (Heitzler *et al.*, 2008). These strategies of VERB™ contradicted tweens’ need for maturity, and could have negatively affected the coolness of the campaign.

#### *Subversive*

Teenagers embrace omnipotence or a “false sense of bravado” as a defence mechanism against narcissistic vulnerability (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). This leads to a tendency of subversion of others and the existing norms. Authors associated irreverence, confidence and hedonism with cool (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Bird and Tapp, 2008; Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012; Southgate, 2003b; Warren and Campbell, 2014), and these may express a teenager’s subversion of others. The subversion of mainstream norms may explain why cool is associated with novelty-orientation and trend-setting. Again, the spontaneous, indulgent, thrill-seeking and risk-taking behaviours such as

substance-abuse and speeding may result from the omnipotence of teenagers and young adults. Bird and Tapp (2008) related cool to illicit behaviour, which is related to this subversion and the omnipotence, and this subversive characteristic of cool can largely explain the discomfort of social marketing regarding cool. However, the analysis of the Truth® campaign suggests that if an avenue of directing this subversive nature of teenagers can be authentically established, social marketing can benefit from it. Truth® directed this subversion against tobacco companies, and substantiated the direction through educating teenagers on the false and manipulative claims of tobacco companies.

#### *Pro-social*

The possibility of having a positive impact on society and individuals can contribute to the coolness of a deviations from norm, although it might appear contradictory. The mainstream norms and beliefs that govern the rules and regulations of a society cater to the needs of mainstream society, and may be seen as irrelevant and unjust by minority groups. Cool expresses doubt regarding the legitimacy of mainstream norms (Pountain and Robins, 2000, p. 23). This understanding may explain why cool tends to originate in the subcultures of minority segments (Maher, 2005). Southgate (2003b, pp. 14-15) suggested that associating social justice with a brand can positively influence its coolness, and argues that a low-cost airline that instilled a sense of social justice with its brand was considered the coolest airline brand in the early 2000s. Dar-Nimrod *et al.* (2012) also identified the association of pro-social values with cool in their empirical research. The evolution of cool in the nineteenth century was associated with pro-social causes such as movements against marginalisation, against exploitation of minority, against war, against commercial exploitation, for civil rights, for freedom of expressions, for environment and for democracy (Belk *et al.*, 2010; Drissel, 2009; Frank, 1997; Gurrieri, 2009; Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002; Rahman, 2012). Cool's association with illicit activities such as drug-abuse, smoking, underage drinking or underage sexual permissiveness (Bird and Tapp, 2008; Cullen, 2010; Warren and Campbell, 2014) contradicts this characteristic of cool, but its associations with the attempts to indicate maturity, and with subversion explains the tension cool faces in between pro-social values and subversion. Warren and Campbell (2014, p. 551) proved that deviations from "illegitimate" norms are considered cooler than deviating from "legitimate" norms in their study. Social marketing attempts to induce pro-social behaviour, and hence the pro-social nature of cool is the characteristic that is the most compatible with social marketing.

#### *Evasive*

"Grace under pressure" is innately indicative of the evasiveness of cool, suggesting that a cool person is capable of displaying composure and a calm demeanour in a situation that is likely to elicit emotional outbursts. Belk *et al.* (2010, p. 183) called it the "unemotional mask". The evasiveness of cool, in addition to its pedigree in low-profile and hence unfamiliar minority subcultures may have contributed to the association of cool with mystery. Nancarrow *et al.* (2002) suggested that this mystery enhanced the desirability of cool to larger society. The evasiveness of cool is also displayed by subtlety, irony and indirect expressions, which have been associated with cool by authors (Bird and Tapp, 2008; Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012; Kirkland and Jackson, 2009;

Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002). Belk *et al.* (2010) and Nancarrow *et al.* (2002) suggested that understanding these subtle and ironical expressions required insider-knowledge of relevant subcultures or a certain level of mental maturity, and this insider-knowledge or maturity could facilitate exhibiting both evasiveness and subversion without disrupting social order. Fuller and Thygesen (1997) and de Chenecey (2003) advised marketers to use unconventional and low-profile media, and to avoid mass-media to market cool. Such avoidance of mass-media may instil a sense of insider-knowledge within cool subcultures while creating a sense of mystery in the mainstream market. The formative research for the Rescue SCG Social Branding® campaigns provided insider-knowledge to develop marketing relevant to the target segments, and segment-specific activities such as concerts (Fallin *et al.*, 2015b) provided a sense of protection regarding those insider-knowledge in the target segments. Although the Truth® campaign used advertising in mainstream media for communication (Bird and Tapp, 2008), the ironical and evasive expressions in the advertisements contributed to the coolness of the campaign.

### *Attractive*

Desirability is considered a consequence of cool, but there is a debate on whether attractiveness represents this consequence or is an antecedent to being considered cool (Warren and Campbell, 2014; Sundar *et al.*, 2014). Characterising cool by pro-social subversive deviations from norm for self-expressions that are indicative of maturity, and leaving out attractiveness, does not suffice in explaining why cool can be seen a fashionable. Several authors also suggested attractiveness as a separate characteristic of cool (Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2012; Gerber and Geiman, 2012; Rahman, 2012; Sundar *et al.*, 2014) that could be gained through other features such as aesthetics, fun, good quality, novelty, creativity, interesting interactions and styles of gestures (Im *et al.*, 2015; Maher, 2005; Myers, 2004). Bird and Tapp (2008) suggested that a sense of “forbidden pleasure” associated with breaking the mainstream norms might contribute to making cool attractive to teenagers. In addition, research insights of Rescue SCG suggested that cool crowds such as hipsters appreciated the creative arts (Jordan, 2012). This supports the association of cool with aesthetics and attractiveness. The elements of VERB™ campaign such as the use of relevant attractive celebrities or the enjoyable street events (Asbury *et al.*, 2008) also incorporated this characteristic of cool.

Figure 2 presents the seven characteristics of cool identified here, and also acknowledges the significance of contexts and subcultures in the development of cool expressions. Apart from possessing the presented characteristics, cool expressions are also influenced by a range of contextual factors including the languages and the meanings of expressions in a subculture. The understanding of the characteristics of cool presented here can help explain the innate tensions in between some of the discussed characteristics such as between maturity and subversion, between evasiveness and attractiveness and between deviating from norm and being pro-social. Understanding the effect of these tensions on consumers in light of their subcultures may provide insight for understanding cool expressions. Current marketing research techniques such as coolhunting can help identify the expressions of cool, but a previous lack of clear understanding of the concept of cool and its characteristics is a major limitation. Therefore, the conceptual framework presented here can go some way to address the limitations.

## Discussion

This article moves forward from the preliminary discussion of cool in social marketing by [Bird and Tapp \(2008\)](#) to provide an understanding of cool by presenting a conceptual framework of cool. It presents the key characteristics of cool, and also identifies their relation to and potential utility in social marketing. It further addresses the need identified by [Sbarbaro et al. \(2011\)](#) and [Southgate \(2003a\)](#) for a conceptual framework of cool in a broader marketing context. Some pertinent conceptual and practical implications of the conceptual framework of cool in social marketing are discussed next.

### *Conceptual implications*

Scholars have previously identified that there is a lack of clear understanding of what cool is as a concept ([Warren and Campbell, 2014](#); [Sundar et al., 2014](#); [Im et al., 2015](#)). The present study aims to help advance understanding of cool by presenting a conceptual framework that identifies the key characteristics of cool. This framework builds upon and integrates existing models that are only context-specific or only focused on the origins and vectors of cool. For example, the Theory of the Origins of Coolness by [O'Donnell and Wardlow \(2000\)](#) provided an understanding of the motivations for teenagers to attain cool, but did not define cool. The Cultural Systems Approach to cool by [Gurrieri \(2009\)](#) explained how marketers actively engaged in developing meanings to cool trends, and the Social Relations Model to measure cool by [Gerber and Geiman \(2012\)](#) showed the dependence of cool on the evaluations of an audience. These models neither attempted to explicate what cool is as a concept nor discussed its characteristics. The model by [Dar-Nimrod et al. \(2012\)](#) identified two dimensions of cool personality such as “cachet” and “contrarian” cool – highlighting the tensions within the characteristics of cool as a personality trait, without actually explicating what cool is. Empirical study by [Rahman \(2012\)](#) focused on the vernacular usage of the term rather than identifying the characteristics of cool. The explication of cool by [Sundar et al. \(2014\)](#) specifically addressed technological products, and did not provide an understanding of the characteristics of cool in a broader context.

The conceptual framework presented here builds upon and integrates the understandings from these models, along with the understanding from extant literature on cool from a wide range of disciplines, to explicate what cool is and how it is signified, i.e. what are the key characteristics of cool. The suggestion is that if social marketing programmes are to be effective in influencing teenagers and young adults as cool – they should engage with the presented characteristics. The presentation of a conceptual framework of cool for social marketing can inform future research and practice by offering an understanding of the key characteristics of cool, and where some of the tensions and conundrums for using cool in social marketing may exist. The conceptual framework indicates that characteristics of cool such as “deviating from norm” and being “pro-social” may naturally complement the broad social marketing objective of inducing pro-social behaviour change. Furthermore, the framework can help social marketers with an understanding of what cool is.

### *Practical implications*

Cool has the potential to be used to influence pro-social attitudes and behaviours in a range of social marketing programmes. In particular, social marketing programmes that target young people, social minority groups, and risk-takers may benefit from



embedding cool into their design and delivery, given that cool is often relevant to these groups. Whilst some existing campaigns have attempted to use elements of cool to influence consumers in relation to tobacco, obesity, alcohol and violence, such efforts have not been based on a comprehensive conceptual understanding of cool. Using the framework presented here can help social marketers gain a clearer understanding of the key characteristics of cool and how cool can be embedded in programmes. To develop cool pro-social campaigns, social marketers should try to identify how to best relate to the characteristics of cool – for example, identify how they deviate from the norm, facilitate self-expression, be indicative of maturity, be subversive, be attractive, highlight pro-social outcome and engage with evasiveness. Some practical suggestions for embedding cool in social marketing programmes are discussed henceforth and are summarised in [Table II](#). Practitioners should be encouraged to develop creative ways to associate social campaigns with the key characteristics of cool beyond the selected suggestions that are presented here.

Emphasising an existing harmful norm in a social campaign might seem redundant or idiosyncratic to social marketers, but cool social campaigns should clearly highlight that a competing harmful behaviour is a mainstream norm, and should also communicate the flaws in the existing norm with ironical messages. This will assist teenagers and young adults to question the legitimacy of the norm unaided and independently. Use of ironical informative messages instead of instructional messages can engage social campaigns to autonomy, maturity and evasiveness, while subtly communicating the pro-social objective. Cool social campaigns could provide platforms to teenagers and young adults – for example, through social media or forums to facilitate the expression of their concerns regarding an “illegitimate” norm, and to present their suggestions to counter the norm. This can provide the target segment the opportunity for self-expressions. The campaign tactics should incorporate the suitable suggestions from the target segments, and the contribution of the target segment in the form of participation or suggestion must be acknowledged. This will provide the recognition to the demonstrated maturity of the target segment. If possible, attractive events such as exclusive concerts and parties should be arranged to relate to the subversive nature of the target segments, and such approaches have been successfully used in the Social Branding® programmes targeting youth smoking ([Fallin et al., 2015a, 2015b](#)). Such events need to be small, and event information should be exclusive for a target segment, only made available through selective media, to align with the evasive nature of cool. If possible, social marketers should involve attractive celebrities chosen by the target segments in campaigns to make these more attractive for them.

When considering how to embed cool in social marketing, it should be acknowledged that it is important to understand the context and subcultures relevant to target segments for designing cool social campaigns. Therefore field research aiming to understand the context, and what subcultural values distinctly define the identities of target segments should always be carried out prior to developing tactics of a cool social campaign. Such research should identify the meanings of a desired pro-social behaviour, and of the competing behaviours within the target segments. The findings from such research should guide the development of the campaign tools, and the tone of all messages and communications with the target segment.

### *Future research*

Given that the proposed framework of cool for social marketing presented here is purely conceptual, research to develop, refine and test an empirical framework would be welcome. Qualitative or mixed-method research could be conducted to test the relevance of the key characteristics of cool identified in the conceptual framework presented here, and to identify if there are additional characteristics that may be relevant but have not been discussed in existing literature. Quantitative research could then further test and validate a model of the characteristics of cool. Further research may also attempt to identify the effects of the different cool characteristics on consumer behaviour – specifically on subjective or social norms. Research to develop a reliable measurement scale for cool could also be beneficial to social marketing for evaluating the coolness of different pro-social brands. Such a scale may also facilitate comparing the different tactics for developing cool pro-social brands and their effects.

### **Conclusion**

Cool has been shown in the extant literature to positively influence attitudes and behaviour adoptions of risk-taking vulnerable teenagers and young adults (Gaskins, 2003; Saxton, 2005; Sriramachandramurthy, 2009; Belk *et al.*, 2010; Im *et al.*, 2015). Heretofore, a comprehensive understanding of, and an integration of key characteristics of cool from the perspective of social marketing programmes, has been lacking. This article addresses the paucity in the understanding regarding cool in social marketing and presents a conceptual framework of cool. Based on the understanding of cool gained from a comprehensive literature review and subsequent analysis, cool is defined here as the attractive but evasive and subversive self-expressions to deviate from norm that signify maturity, and are justified by pro-social benefits of the deviations. Cool expressions vary across subcultures and according to contexts while conforming to this definition. It is hoped that the conceptual framework incorporating the key characteristics of cool, and the guidelines for developing cool social marketing programmes presented in this article may help enhance the effectiveness of social marketing programmes that engage with being cool.

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