
Coolhunting, account planning and the ancient cool of Aristotle

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Abstract

"Cool" is a quality highly desired by consumers and, therefore, highly desired by brand owners, yet it is frequently supposed to be elusive and obscure. Scouting for cool is known as "coolhunting" and its pervasive influence has captivated brand owners and their agencies alike. Its claim to be able to predict future trends by researching cool individuals has been both an inspiration and an irritant to the account planning community. This paper argues that coolhunting is, in fact, self-defeating. The real challenge for brand owners is not to observe cool people, but to create new cool products, services and experiences. Account planning, with its mix of analytical and creative thinking, is uniquely placed to offer a framework for doing this. One such framework, based on Aristotle's ethical theory, is discussed.

Introduction

Coolhunting has been enthusiastically embraced by the client community because it seemed unerringly shrewd at predicting the future – and with that most ephemeral, fickle, will-o'-the-wisp of qualities, cool. Cool is the anvil on which many brands are made or broken. Cool is the currency all brands can profit from when they trade in it. The big brands that had bought in the coolhunters confirmed this: Reebok, Adidas, Nike, Coca-Cola, Levi's, Converse, Nokia, Gap, The North Face, Pespi and so on. These brands were either perennially cool, or widely admired for their ability to rediscover and re-ignite lost cool. Meanwhile big brand factories like Unilever, Coty Beauty and Seagrams all managed to get their taste of the cool as well.

In this climate, the coolhunters flourished. They were the high priests of cool. They alone understood cool's abstruse, obfuscated and opaque rules. If we paid sufficient attention, and money, to them they might just let us in on the secret.

Why planners should all care about the hunt

This mystique and hubbub meant that although coolhunting touched few of us in the account planning community directly it touched us all indirectly.

Some of us are blessed to work with large clients with large budgets to match who can afford the luxurious services of a coolhunters. However, most planners work with clients who do not have these resources. Yet these clients read of coolhunting and saw that it was good. They wanted the cool too – and so coolhunting became a yardstick for planning to deliver against. Coolhunting was

living proof that there were smarter people out there doing things in a smarter way. Planners' reactions to coolhunting were consequently conflictually enthusiastic and defensive.

Planners were captivated by the glamour of the coolhunt. No longer did we want to be the eggheads with the charts and graphs. We wanted in on the action, we wanted to be part of the hunt because we knew when we bagged our first piece of the coolhunt's big game we too would be cool.

Yet at the same time coolhunting was obviously usurping part of planning's traditional role. Where planning offered "consumer insight", coolhunting now offered insight into the only consumers that truly mattered, the cool. What is more, whereas planning offered a link between the consumer and creativity, coolhunting claimed to offer a link to consumers so cool and creative themselves that no such interpretive bridge was required.

Coolhunting threatened to completely replace and undermine the planner on accounts that valued coolness. Increasingly, this seemed to be all accounts. No wonder many aligned themselves with coolhunting agencies or re-styled themselves as coolhunters.

Coolhunting has also attracted considerable attention outside of the realms of research, advertising, and marketing. The coolhunters appeared to be manipulative and preternatural cultural puppet-masters, recalling *The Hidden Persuaders* Vance Packard made famous over 40 years ago (Packard, 1960). This too concerned the planner, who should be aware how the public debate and understand brand owners' activities.



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A brief overview of this paper's ambitions

This pervasive influence of coolhunting is the motivation behind this paper. Coolhunting, when properly analysed, throws the true concerns of planning as a creative discipline into sharp relief. This paper will argue that planning is the more robust way to arrive at truly creative solutions, and that coolhunting is ultimately self-defeating.

What follows is an analysis of how the coolhunt works. It looks to both question and interrogate coolhunting's explicit and implicit assumptions. Key amongst these assumptions is the belief that cool is in some sense beyond analysis. Cool is ineluctably recondite. It may be described but any attempt to develop prescriptive criteria must necessarily be jejune and insipid.

Central to this paper's argument is the contrary claim that cool is open to analysis. Account planning is a discipline designed to close the gap between analytic and creative thinking. Therefore, if cool can be analysed, planners should be able to help create cool.

Where exactly does Aristotle fit into this?

To provide an analysis of cool, this paper will turn to a maybe unexpected source, Aristotle. Aristotle's notion of cool is to be found in his ethical writings, most particularly the *Nicomachean Ethics*. A more extensive argument will be made later. However, a brief introduction to Aristotelian cool will be furnished here.

Aristotle holds to, indeed can be said to have founded, a school of ethical thought known as virtue ethics. This means that correct behaviour is judged in comparison to virtues such as courage, temperance, generosity, wit and truthfulness. According to Aristotle the correct pursuit of life is happiness. We can only be happy when we exercise each of the virtues in moderation. Thus, we must not lack courage, for this would make us cowards, nor have too much courage, which would make us foolhardy.

One might, therefore, typify this approach as one of taking an appropriate response to one's situation. It is this idea of appropriate response that finds rich parallels with the ideas central to the notion of cool; people who are cool are making the most astute decisions about their lives and their environments. This approach will later be used to show how it is possible to develop brands and

communications that can be inspired by the cool without having to join the coolhunt.

The ways of the hunt

The methodology of the coolhunt

The coolhunt methodology is typically three-layered.

At the bottom sit the cool. These are the small number of enlightened individuals in the general population who are cool and know cool.

In the middle are the coolhunters. These are the coolhunting agency's foot soldiers. They are "on the street" acting as the eyes and ears of their masters.

At the top are the executives of the coolhunting agency. They take reports in from the coolhunters and then follow them up as they see fit. Most also pursue a dogged coolhunt all of their own.

All three groups are united by one thing; they are all cool.

What makes coolhunting intriguing as a methodology is that it boils down to a sophisticated recruitment procedure. Important as interpretation no doubt is, the interpretive framework seems neither radical nor differentiated from other forms of trend analysis (e.g. little different to the Henley Centre's Social Trends publications). On the other hand the recruitment procedure is both new and central to the success of coolhunting. Shaping the recruitment procedure at every turn is the alleged elusiveness of cool itself.

The methodology is born of the very most central assumption of the coolhunt: only cool people can understand what is cool (one of Gladwell's "Rules of cool", see Gladwell, 1997). The executives of a coolhunting agency gain their power by brokering this transaction between the glistening language of cool and the mundane language of the befuddled and uncool client.

Coolhunters insist it is impossible to give rules for what is cool. In this way the usual understanding of recruitment is completely upset. The notion of writing a recruitment specification is rendered entirely redundant. There is, instead, much talk of "instinct", "a sixth sense", "gut feelings" and "people who just know".

Of course, the virtues of good recruitment are universally acknowledged. We all know that bad recruitment can completely undermine a study. Nonetheless, writing recruitment specs is often left to the more junior team members while recruitment itself is executed by recruiters who are a long

way down the traditional research world's chain of respect and reward.

By its own arguments, coolhunting simply cannot afford to proceed this way. Recruitment is done by a mysterious laying on of hands as one cool person identifies the next. Necessarily, the sagacity of these decisions will need to be constantly monitored.

Traditional research suggested that ordinary people saying ordinary things could be interpreted to be actually revealing insights about what they actually wanted brands to suggest to them. This led, in its extreme form, to the "depth men" and their researches made famous by *The Hidden Persuaders* (Packard, 1960). Agencies aimed to sell to us by harnessing impulses we were entirely unaware of and would never consciously or spontaneously voice.

This had been the traditional area of operation for planners. Planning relied on interpretation as much as observation. The demands of developing a simple and persuasive advertising proposition involved a process of reduction and refinement that planning specialised in. Consumers were unlikely to serve up such propositions perfectly formed.

Conversely, coolhunters talk to extraordinary people saying extraordinary things. The coolness of the respondents makes their pronouncements de facto predictions. One could easily feel that one would only have to write these pearls of wisdom down and the job would be done. A practising coolhunter goes as far as to say, "The judgement of whether it's important or not comes from them" (Gordon and Lee, 2001).

Indeed, the subscription reports offered by coolhunting agencies seem to draw much of their weight from simply aggregating the pronouncements of the cool. If enough cool people say the same thing this critical mass makes it a foregone conclusion the trend will break.

The implication is that it is no longer necessary to probe universal human truths to find insights. Coolhunting has discovered a segment of the population who will serve up tomorrow's trends, if not ready digested then certainly heavily chewed.

Cool today, mass tomorrow

Despite the congenital ignorance that renders them uncool, there is one commercially magical fact about the uncool; the uncool will be doing tomorrow what the cool are doing today.

We are all familiar with the precepts of the model that divides the population into

innovators, early adopters, later adopters, the early and late masses, and the Laggards and Luddites at the end (Rogers, 1995). It has become a common place in research, brand and advertising agencies the world over.

In his role as both the theorist and documenter of the coolhunt, Gladwell points out that this model is based on sociological studies in "diffusion research" the most famous of which studied the spread of a new seed variant on Iowa farms in the 1930s and 1940s (Gladwell, 2000).

However, planners and coolhunters have not adopted diffusion theory because it is a useful description of how an innovation spreads through a population. For coolhunters, diffusion theory has the strength and power of a law of nature: universal, all encompassing, and irresistible.

This completes the damnation of the uncool. Once cool people have an idea, a chain of events is started that means all of us (even the uncool) will come to adopt it. Naturally by the time the uncool masses have adopted an idea it will have become necessarily uncool.

The elusiveness of the cool, combined with the inevitability of today's niche cool being tomorrow's mass uncool, underwrites the coolhunter's power. Client's needed them because, as an inevitable consequence of the way markets work, what was cool amongst the coolest would be mass, if uncool, tomorrow and only the coolhunters could guide them to these few individuals who determined all our futures. Planners and researchers, unable to offer such precise and determinate predictions, were left looking decidedly old-fashioned and out of touch.

Putting the heat on the coolhunters

However, the coolhunting process can be pulled apart. When this is done one arrives at a rather different view of what is cool. With this different understanding of what is cool we can take a very different approach to using cool as a guide and inspiration in building better brands and communications. We can also feel better about using the supposedly leaden research methodologies planners traditionally rely upon.

If cool was indeed so impenetrable to everyone except the cool, a quandary would arise for the coolhunter. Their model relies on people who are not cool adopting examples of cool practice and cool behaviour. The motivation for this cannot be just that the uncool believe that these things are cool – remember the uncool do not and cannot

know the cool. Instead there must be universal and shared desires and goals that both the cool and the uncool respond to.

The uncool must, therefore, be driven to adopt previously cool behaviour while dealing with some universal problem that cool people have already solved. This adoption doesn't, and cannot, make them cool, but it does spread the trend. The coolhunter, therefore, has to explain what are these parallel concerns that both the cool and the uncool share.

Cool and authenticity

The truest hallmark of cool behaviour according to coolhunters is Authenticity. Authenticity is a quality itself worthy of lengthy discussion (Southgate, 2003a). Nonetheless, we can gloss it here to equate to the people's desire to have ownership and autonomy over their own identities.

Grounding their enquiries in authenticity suggests due profundity and seriousness on the part of the coolhunter and suitably beguiles the client. However, the concept is rather too abstract for the coolhunter's practical street level purposes. Therefore, a more concrete translation is needed. The favourite is self-expression. The cool are always looking to express themselves in ever better, clearer and more evocative ways.

This drive for self-expression, coolhunters claim, is a natural part of what it is to be cool. Cool people need to be outwardly expressive and socially engaged. This is unarguably true of the teenage and 20-something audiences that coolhunters pre-occupy themselves with. These life stages are pre-eminently about social engagement and the kudos necessary to achieve successful and fulfilling engagement with one's peers while commanding their respect.

The cool are, on this analysis, on a hiding to nothing. Their status depends on their authenticity, and authenticity that can only be proved by self-expression. As we have already seen, the value of this self-expression will be chronically eroded when its ways are adopted by the mass. The cool person is given no choice but to move on. This gives another defining quality of the quarry of the coolhunt: the cool are driven by (and to) an endless quest for novelty.

Cool and novelty

A fine but important distinction needs to be drawn here. The kind of people who drive trends will tend to be drawn towards and fascinated by novelty. These are exactly the kind of people coolhunters observe. However, this choice is loaded with bias. Coolhunters are interested with discovering new trends

and the identification of new trends with what is cool should not be a foregone conclusion.

It is one thing to say that cool people often set trends. It is another thing to say that trend seeking is a necessary condition of being cool. Coolhunters provide no argument for this being the case. The problem lies at a deeper level. Ironically, it is also a product of the very success of the coolhunt.

Brand owners (brand owners who ultimately make their money by selling things) pay the coolhunter. The coolhunter, therefore, is not truly interested in understanding or documenting what cool is. The coolhunter is, instead, interested in documenting cool consumerism.

Hopefully, it is self-evident that consumer behaviour is only a subset of all human behaviour. It is possible to be cool in all of one's behaviour. Therefore, if one limits one's search for cool only to when it is demonstrated through consumption, or something that can be made consumable, then the remit of the coolhunt will fall short of a full investigation of all that is cool (Southgate, 2003b).

It is coolhunting's championing of cool consumerism that attracts the ire of so many critics. It is also why planners should treat it with suspicion. If planning is to provide a creative springboard for the creation of better brands and better advertising coolhunting's endless mimicry seems inexorably stultifying.

The coolhunt saboteurs: critics of the coolhunt

The critics' complaints of the coolhunt fall under three subheads.

First, there is an emotional rejection of the very idea that cool can be hunted down and mounted up as a trophy on the Corporate Boardroom wall for the suits to enjoy (Albom, 1998).

The second complaint is that coolhunting is the most pernicious form of marketing that Corporations engage in today (Frank, 1995; 1997; 2002; Klein, 2000; Lasn, 2000).

Finally, the third complaint grows from this accusation of exploitation by brand owners. These critics level the complaint that brand owners who wish to profit from cool would both make more money and more friends if they went to the effort of inventing new kinds of cool rather than manipulating and hijacking existing forms of cool (Rushkoff, 2001; Shalit, 2001).

This final criticism is of most interest to planners because they are the people charged

with providing the inspiration and insight for new kinds of cool. However, the nature of this objection is best understood in light of the second criticism of coolhunting's pernicious and exploitative nature.

The perniciousness of the cycle of cool

Naomi Klein punctures coolhunting's cool by arguing it is a euphemism for something rather more unpleasant:

As designer Christian Lacroix remarked in *Vogue*, "It's terrible to say, very often the most exciting outfits are from the poorest people". Over the past decade, young black men in American inner cities have been the market most aggressively mined by brandmasters as a source of borrowed "meaning" and identity. The truth is that the "got to be cool" rhetoric of the global brands is, more often than not, an indirect way of saying "got to be black". Just as the history of cool in America is really (as many have argued) a history of African-American culture ... for many of the superbrands, cool hunting simple means black-culture hunting (Klein, 2000).

On this analysis, the coolhunter is a stooge of white-corporate America making sure that even if black culture is going to influence what Americans wear, the profits will still flow where they always have done.

For critics like Klein and Kalle Lasn, founder of *Adbusters*, what is to be lamented here is the colonisation of public space and ideas. We should demand to have arenas of argument and discussion free of "content" from corporate sponsors. Lasn sees this as part of a broader problem that he dubs "The ecology of mind" (Lasn, 2000). This corporate invasion results in a decline of "infodiversity". Coolhunting is guilty because it co-opts ideas and force-feeds them to us reducing their chance to flourish and our chance to choose. Lasn writes:

Cultural homogenisation has graver consequences than the same hairstyles, catchphrases, music and action-hero antics perpetrated *ad nauseam* around the world. In all systems, homogenisation is poison. Lack of diversity leads to inefficiency and failure. The loss of a language, tradition or heritage – or the forgetting of one good idea – is as big a loss to future generations as a biological species going extinct (Lasn, 2000).

Coolhunting can hardly consider itself let off the hook because other graver sins are being committed. This problem of coolhunting killing the very thing it studies has not escaped the attention of coolhunters themselves – although they feel differently about the problem.

The ever quotable Gladwell dubs this problem "The first rule of the coolhunt: the

quicker the chase, the quicker the flight" and continues:

The act of discovering what's cool is what causes cool to move on, which explains the triumphant circularity of coolhunting: because we have coolhunters ... cool changes more quickly, and because cool changes more quickly, we need coolhunters (Gladwell, 1997).

In fact, coolhunters should be worried because this cycle will ultimately be bad for business. The reason is simple. The cycle that is being increased is not the cycle of cool itself, but the cycle of cool consumerism. The faster the cycle of cool consumerism, the more expensive it is for brands to chase it and more expensive it is for consumers to keep up. Something will give.

Could it be possible that cool itself would stop being cool? Those of us who cherish the notion of cool in our hearts need not worry that this will happen. However, what will happen is that consumerism will stop being cool. The substantial sales of writers like Naomi Klein, Michael Moore, Thomas Frank, Kalle Lasn and Douglas Rushkoff surely serve as proof that this is in fact happening.

This establishes the third objection; the coolhunt has failed the notion of cool and that we deserve something better. Maybe surprisingly this objection finds its most articulate voice in the words of Douglas Rushkoff, normally one of the most gloves-off critics of contemporary marketing. Rushkoff is persuasively clear both as to what the solution is and the extent to which we are all being let down by not rising to the challenge. As it would be difficult to find a better way of putting these arguments Rushkoff is worth quoting at length:

Instead of dedicating your budgets to exacerbating this problem by drawing ever-tighter circles of teen research, have you considered spending it on designers, instead? Let your own studios and workshops become the locus of discovery, not some photographs on a trend-watching Web site. Dare you lead, instead of follow?

Instead of identifying a trend and then mass-producing it before it has had a chance to mature into something of depth, why don't you develop some trends of your own? Spend your scouting money identifying new designers and then fostering their talents. If you simply must capture the vitality of youth, why not bring in kids as interns or apprentice designers? Let them learn from your best senior people, so that instead of re-inventing teen fashions every season, you build a legacy.

How can teens develop their own culture when each new idea is co-opted and sold back to them before it's had a chance to mature? I know your revenues depend on staying ahead

of the curve, but that curve has come full circle. The very coolest thing in a world where nothing lasts is continuity itself. That's why 1960s, 1970s and 1980s clothing revivals are happening with such disarmingly regularity. Kids are aching for something with more longevity than the current cycle affords them. Don't adults have anything to offer them besides a mirror? (Rushkoff, 2001).

The closing sections of this paper will be an attempt to rise to Rushkoff's challenge; for this is the planner's creative duty.

Cool for cool's sake

First, it is useful to try to define cool apart from the concerns of the coolhunter, i.e. to separate cool from cool consumerism (for more detail see Southgate, 2003a or 2003b).

Second, an analysis of cool will be offered using Aristotelian ethics as its basis.

Finally, some concluding remarks will be made to suggest how we can change what we do so we can make use of what we have learnt about the cool.

Aristotle and the cool: contextual parallels

Before looking at parallels between Aristotelian ethics and the cool attitude, it is worth remarking on the parallels between Aristotle's social context and Post-War America.

Aristotle played a significant role in ancient Greek society. He was involved in the Lyceum in Athens, and also spent time in Macedonia. In this time Macedonia was a military powerhouse, a sort of ancient superpower. Aristotle's connections were impeccable as he was engaged as tutor to Alexander the Great.

The society Aristotle lived in, and had in mind when he composed his ethical writings, was therefore the most wealthy and powerful in the world at that time. This is, of course, the position post-war America has enjoyed.

Aristotle's ethics are intended as practical instruction for the sons of the wealthy and well connected. This is why there is considerable concern with the exercise of wit and the correct attitude to money in contrast to the rather more austere concerns of modern ethical enquiries.

It is true that the converse appears to be true of cool's origins as a code of behaviour for the marginalized in society (MacAdams, 2002). However, like Aristotle, cool is concerned with practical reactions with one's situation, i.e. how to react to the day-to-day indignities of oppression with one's dignity

intact. This practical concern means that cool behaviour affects even the minutiae of behaviour. This is also true of Aristotle's ethics, which are more concerned with practical execution than with providing immutable and overarching rules.

Latterly, as cool has moved from an attitude for the marginalized to an attitude for both literal and lifestyle outsiders, as America became relatively more prosperous and more equitably, the parallel becomes stronger. Aristotle writes for an audience who would have enjoyed the ancient world's equivalents of ubiquitous consumer plenty. Notwithstanding the still vast inequities within American society, it is still the richest in the world and cool its pre-eminent emotional style.

Aristotle and the cool: theoretical parallels

For the purposes of this paper the theoretical parallels have been limited to the four most important.

Parallel 1: Cool and the life of reason

The aim of human life is to pursue happiness. Happiness will be achieved by pursuing what is good for human life. According to Aristotle, the good of something is best served when it acts in its most characteristic way. For example, a good wheel is perfectly round, a good athlete runs well.

The defining characteristic of humans is having and exercising reasoning. Happiness, therefore, is to be achieved by correct exercise of the reason in accordance with the virtues.

This finds its parallel with cool because cool responses are always appropriate. Considering the context the action is made in arrives at appropriate action. Consideration is the correct exercise of reason.

One should remember that consideration of context does not have to imply deep, reflective thought on each and every occasion. One can know the right thing to do because one is well attuned to what is necessary in a situation. This is why doctors can train to work under pressure, or karate experts can learn to anticipate an adversary's moves. Prior consideration produces later correct action.

This parallel is also reflected in our use of language. We talk about people "keeping their cool" when they act appropriately. Conversely, when people react badly, we talk of "losing one's cool". People who act well are cool people. This sense of acting well can be extended beyond moral actions. This is why

we feel it is cool when people know exactly what to wear, or admire the cool wit of someone who has just the right words when they need them.

Parallel 2: Holistic approach to life

Although concerned with practical guidance, Aristotle is also concerned to weigh and balance individual virtues. He is not, therefore, overly concerned with the worth or otherwise of individual actions. He is interested in how these actions add up to a life well lived.

Likewise, the cool is concerned with an overall approach to life. This has the apparently paradoxical affect of forcing concerns of the cool into every possible aspect of life. However, when the overall picture is one's concern, anything can make a difference, so this is to be expected.

Again this fits in with our notions of cool people. To be truly cool is to be cool all of the time. Part-time cool makes no sense at all.

Parallel 3: Importance of friendship

Aristotle discusses friendship at some length. This is notably different to modern ethical writing which is almost silent on the subject, much preferring abstract rules and generalities.

Likewise, cool is deeply concerned with personal relationships. Cool people can only be cool by defining their relationships with other people in a cool manner. Usually this means choosing cordial and respectful relationships with those around. However, cool people will always engage in appropriate resistance. Cool people stand-up to the bully. Mohammed Ali increased his cool by resisting the draft. Hermits can be still be cool if the terms of their withdrawal are also suitably cool (withdrawing through anger would be uncool, withdrawing for contemplation can be cool, hence the high cool factor Zen Buddhist monks enjoy, see (MacAdams, 2002)).

Parallel 4: Emphasis on the practical wisdom

As already noted both Aristotle and the cool are interested in practical pursuits. This emphasis on the practical is constantly evident when we talk about cool people because we nearly always talk of cool people "knowing what to do". Cool is a body of practised knowledge.

Cool and the virtues

As already explained the judgement of correct behaviour is made in Aristotelian

ethics by judgement against the virtues. The virtues discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are listed in Table I.

The only virtue that would have to be added to round out a modern notion of cool would be one of aesthetic response. One of cool's concerns is the elegant expression of good actions, which demands an aesthetic sense. Equally, being able to discern the beautiful is also an important part of being cool (particularly given the large number of artists we regard as cool).

Nonetheless, allowing for this one absence, Aristotle's list of virtues is remarkably complete and flexible (it should also be noted that Aristotle's texts are not complete, and he discussed aesthetics extensively in other writings).

Using the virtues to harness the cool

As should have become clear, cool is a quality of people, not of objects. Objects can only be said to be cool in as much as cool people use them (and this should include products and services, although service brands are rarely mentioned by coolhunters). We do not, therefore, have to worry about how a training shoe could be said to exhibit the virtue of courage. This is fortunate as that would be absurd.

Instead we have to consider how our target audience feel about the exercise of each of the virtues. Aristotle urged that each virtue needed to be exercised in moderation. However, what changes from person-to-person and group-to-group is where this point of moderation sits.

It is easy to understand how courage finds a different mean expression for young men in their twenties who follow football teams, than it might for teenage girls interested in high street fashion. What brand owners need to consider is how their brands can reflect the way their targets express a virtue. The more it helps them do so, the cooler the brand.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Stone Island is a cool cult brand amongst hardcore football fans. The label's distinctive logo is attached like a military insignia, suggesting a martial expression of courage. On the other hand confidence for teenage girls is frequently concerned with finding a comfortable point of sexual poise. So one finds that Miss Sixty, with its apolitical updating and blending of summer of love motifs, strikes the right tone of cool confidence for many 16-year old girls.

Generosity and magnificence are clearly virtues of interest to the financial services sector. American Express found that younger consumers rejected the brand values of the

classic green card. They found it stuffy and pompous and loaded with suggestions of an entirely anachronistic approach to money. For young people the Green Card failed to meet their moderate expression of generosity and magnificence. Amex's response was the Blue Card. The Blue Card captured an entirely different tone and approach to money. It caught the way a less openly status-driven generation wanted to express their generosity and magnificence. Consequently it became Amex's cool card.

Go is (or was) arguably the coolest low-cost airline. It allowed an upmarket audience to mark the mean point of several virtues in a new way. Air travel had been caught up with expense, and was therefore an expression of magnificence. Indeed, business travel advertising is full of imagery appealing to our desire for magnificence. By taking wealth out of the equation the transaction was relocated to one of generosity – the everyday management of money. Air travel is related to a completely different virtue. Go was also witty and with its retro birth of the jet age imagery, evoked a sense of the democratic hopes and possibilities of air travel. Go therefore also tickled its audience's sense of justice and helped them feel good about that weekend trip to Nice.

These examples all show how brands reflected their audiences. However, it is hopefully self-evident how brand owners can use their brand to provoke and suggest responses in people's virtues they might not anticipate. In this way one can respond to Rushkoff's challenge.

If one thinks that sport should be democratic, then develop a sports brand that is about justice (arguably where Nike started, but not where they have ended up). If you think fashion is too magnificent, rediscover its generosity. If fashion is too witty, use it to tug at justice. If fashion dealing with justice is too rich for you, reassert its friendliness or

truthfulness. Each will create new ways of being cool and maybe find an audience.

To make these judgements one needs to contemplate one's target audience's judgements about the virtues. This can be done with traditional research techniques.

Unlike the coolhunt it is not important to ask the trendsetters. The challenge is not to discover which virtues will be fashionable in the future. This is absurd because the virtues are always relevant at all times. They are neither in fashion nor out of fashion. Nor is the challenge to spot how the fashionable mean point will move. The challenge is not to reflect what people are expressing. The challenge is to give people new ways to express that virtue.

With the coolhunt, difficulties occur because, although the hunt can tell you what cool people are doing today, it can't tell you what they will do tomorrow. This is because no analysis of the cool is offered. Cool people's next moves seem arbitrary.

Virtues, however, do offer an analysis of cool. If expressing friendliness is important to your target it is surely more inspiring to think of new ways of expressing that virtue than it is to try and guess what will replace Cajun-Tex-Mex fusion cocktail bars as the *trend de jour*.

One may discover that what is important to the target audience simply isn't well addressed by your brand. Maybe your ketchup just can't instil a sense of justice; maybe your soap-powder will never deliver a sense of even temper. The answer here is not to try. Make your brand respond to the virtue appropriate to it and make people respond to that virtue. It could just be possible that people would like a brand that knows its limits and doesn't aspire to brand and intrude on every aspect of their existence.

Conclusions

Account planning is most valuable to agencies when it provides a bridge between analytic and creative thought. Good research and careful observation will always provide raw material for this analysis. However, they cannot replace the contribution of good planning and the inevitable paucity of information provided through coolhunting demonstrates this point.

The challenge for account planning is to help create ideas for communication and for brands that allow people to have new experiences. Making the effort to ground our thinking in a subtle and inventive understanding of the human condition will help achieve this. Despite its current

Table I

The virtues as discussed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)*

Virtue	Sphere of exercise	Discussion in NE
Courage	Fear and confidence	III.6-9
Temperance	Bodily pleasure and pain	III.10-12
Generosity	Giving and retaining money	IV.1
Magnificence	Giving and retaining money on a large scale	IV.2
Greatness of soul	Honour on a large scale	IV.3
(Nameless)	Honour on a small scale	IV.4
Even temper	Anger	IV.5
Friendliness	Social relations	IV.6
Truthfulness	Honesty about oneself	IV.7
Wit	Conversation	IV.8
Justice	Distribution	V
Friendship	Personal relations	VIII-IX

popularity, coolhunting fails to provide an understanding of the underlying dimensions of cool consumerism preferring to perpetuate the shrouding myth that it defies analysis. This paper has taken a peek beneath that shroud to reveal that an appreciation of the virtues derived from Aristotelian ethics can be used as the basis to assess cool consumerism and if applied appropriately can appease consumer's need for "cool".

Account planning must come to terms with the need to acquire, develop and maintain its own expertise – and in doing so, define itself as a discipline. Without this effort, planners will either revert to being in-house agency research managers or will be supplanted by the coolhunters and their next incarnations.

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