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What is cool? Operationalizing the construct in an apparel context

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to operationalize the ubiquitously used concept of "cool," specifically considering its meaning to Generation Y consumers of apparel. Using Churchill's rigorous scale generating method, the authors generate items, pre-test, and the test with a sample ($n = 265$) of college students.

Design/methodology/approach – Researchers specify the domain of the cool construct, conduct item generation, collect data through a pre-test to purify the measures and then collect data from a large sample to assess reliability and validity of the measures and construct.

Findings – Results of exploratory factor analysis reveal a six-factor solution; a confirmatory analysis shows that cool is a multi-dimensional construct reflected in two second-order factors that this paper labels hedonic and utilitarian cool. These factors are reflected in five first order factors: singular, personal, aesthetic, quality and functional cool.

Originality/value – The study provides a valuable insight into cool concept as being a multidimensional construct, operationalizing a scale to measure cool.

Keywords Generation Y, Cool, Scale development, Young consumers, Consumer psychology

Paper type Research paper

Now what's cooler than being cool? (Andre' Benjamin)

Introduction

The term "cool" is used often in marketing, especially in marketing to young consumers (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). No less experts on "cool" than MTV Networks see it as a serious part of its business (Saxton, 2005). Target stores, the purveyors of cheap chic, titled its 2011 Fall back-to-school fashion campaign "Cool Never Fades." Sociological researchers continue to utilize the term "cool" in studies of peer group social status (Rodkin *et al.*, 2006). Clearly the term has become so ubiquitous that finding a clear definition among scholars in marketing, psychology, and sociology should be straightforward. Yet such a clear and concise definition is not easy to obtain (Rodkin *et al.*, 2006; Pountain and Robins, 2000). Nor is there a large body of literature addressing the relationship between "cool" and marketing success, even though some claim a strong relationship. "Firms that possess the 'cool' factor have a powerful

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advantage over their competitors" (Olson *et al.*, 2005, p. 14). But what is a "cool" factor? More specifically, what is "cool?"

We address this question in the current study, by offering a conceptualization of the cool construct, developing a scale to measure cool in the context of apparel purchasing, and operationalizing the scale utilizing a sample of young consumers. We define cool as an attitude or belief about a product (in this case, clothing), which is either hedonic or utilitarian in nature. Further, we conceptualize cool as being a latent construct, having several separate sub-dimensions within hedonic cool and utilitarian cool. We use the terms "hedonic" and "utilitarian" to describe the connection between a young consumer's perceptions of a product, and whether that product is "cool" to them based on the conceptualized dimensions. This is different than the concepts of hedonic and utilitarian shopping values (e.g. Babin *et al.*, 1994). That is, shopping values address the actual experience of shopping. We address consumers' emotions about a product in general, but specifically pre-purchase. We do this by identifying cool attributes of apparel, as perceived by these young consumers, and capture feelings about that attribute. Prior to the actual point of purchase (consumption), these consumers formulate an opinion of whether something is "cool," based mostly on emotion. Emotions may have utilitarian or hedonic manifestations (Tamir *et al.*, 2007). The process we follow is Churchill's (1979) methodology for scale development, since used by many scholars (e.g. Lin and Hsieh, 2011). That is, we specify the domain of the cool construct, conduct item generation, collect data through a pre-test to purify the measures, and then collect data from a large sample to assess reliability and validity of the measures and construct. O'Donnell and Wardlow (2000) describe the research on "cool" as "[…] hit or miss" in terms of understanding cool (p. 17). Our study addresses this gap in the literature, to provide a big step toward actually measuring the formation of cool among young consumers.

Conceptual foundations

Understanding "cool"

The term cool (hereafter written without quotation set-offs), originates from black culture, in which black jazz musicians defied racial prejudice through the use of drugs, alcohol, and slang, and as a sense of aloofness from the society where they lived (Shapiro, 1999). Being a Hipster (i.e. Beats or Hippies, and precursor to cool) was a way to resist the conformity of the 1950s through 1970s in the USA. This was a type of counterculture which was resistant to the mainstream (Frank, 1997). Pountain and Robins (2000) depicted early meanings of cool as "intrinsically anti-social, anti-family, pro-drug, anti-caring and most of all anti-authority" (p. 13). Those authors also characterized the concept of cool as having values of ironic detachment, hedonism, and narcissism. Within the last 30 years, the term cool has progressed toward sub-cultural capital representing youth culture. The term cool has become the popular zeitgeist of the new millennium (Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002) and represents the majority attitude adopted by young people in the twenty-first century (Pountain and Robins, 2000).

Today, the concept of cool is most often related to youth or youth culture (Keller and Kalmus, 2009). The cool term has been used by young consumers to identify something as desirable, up-to-date, and suitable. Commercial marketers use the concept of cool to appeal to consumers, in an effort to build brand and image. Cool has seen synonyms develop over the years including, hip, groovy, rad, etc., yet the cool construct is often characterized as "being" stylish, innovative, original, authentic, desirable, and unique

(Tapp and Bird, 2008). The term cool has become ubiquitous, and today is universally seen as positive in nature.

Modern consumption itself is rooted in a concept of cool (Tapp and Bird, 2008), as over time the concept has been incorporated into dominant consumer ideology. Nancarrow *et al.* (2002) stress that today cool is best described as an advanced form of intelligence on consumption practices. Marketers have continued to monitor trends and incorporate them into their products and communications, and it is now possible to buy "cool" off the shelf. Cool is valued by the majority but especially teenagers (Frank, 1997). Klein (2000) reports that the concept has become a determinant to influence the success of corporations. Brand marketers use cool to interact with young consumers, when advertising products and services targeted at those groups. In fact, young consumers are the source from which fashion forecasters seek to understand new trends, labeling the latest as cool, and hopefully translating into profits for fashion brands (Southgate, 2003). To put it differently, products, services, or brands consider themselves to be cool, if adopted by young consumers who are seen by peers as themselves being cool (Gladwell, 1997). Think Timberland boots and hip-hop culture in the early 2000s or flannel shirts and the grunge-rock culture of the 1990s.

Thus, cool (and coolness) is a set of common meanings inside a peer cohort, signifying group affiliation. These meanings evoke feelings about objects or ideas. We can use as an example, the previously mentioned Timberland boots, the wearing of which signaled to group members a sense of oneness with hip-hop or urban culture. Marketers seek to understand what is cool to these youth cohorts, so as to gain advantage over competitors. Gladwell (1997) dubbed as "coolhunters," marketers who sought out budding trends from certain small groups of fashion innovators. Spotting a cool trend before anyone else provides marketers the needed insight to beat the competition to market, and glean the higher-margin revenues which can come from a first-mover advantage. Yet the actions, thoughts, and opinions that signal "cool," likely differ across groups and especially over time (Danesi, 1994; Gladwell, 1997; O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). Therefore a first-mover advantage may be fleeting at best, and if mis-read actually detrimental to the marketing making the mistake. As O'Donnell and Wardlow (2000) posit, uncovering how cool as a construct operates as a motivator for young consumers' behavior may offer lasting insights for both practitioners and academics.

Just as cool differs across groups, the type of "things" which can be labeled as cool also seem to differ. Both Timberland boots and flannel shirts were originally designed for outdoor comfort and warmth (i.e. to be useful), rather than for fashion purposes. Yet increased sales of Timberland boots resulted from the "cool" factor gained through cultivating young urban customers' adoption of "Timbs" as a fashion boot, not a work boot (Bloom, 2004). Likewise, the formerly functional flannel shirt gained in popularity due to its position as the unofficial, "official" shirt of the grunge music movement (Miller, 1993). In both cases, consumers were motivated not by the functional aspects of the products, but rather by the desire to look cool. Here, looking cool produces feelings of excitement, or more specifically, hedonic benefits (Higgins, 2001). The concept of cool thus can be related to hedonic notions of consumption (e.g. Aggarwal *et al.*, 2011). What is not clear from the literature is whether the cool construct can be associated with functional, or utilitarian products. Whilst the utilitarian value found in products reflects concepts like excellence and function, hedonic value is tied to esthetics, pleasure, and experience (Choo *et al.*, 2012). But can these values also be associated with "cool," as the concept has become known and is defined here?

Hedonic and utilitarian behavior

Motives, attitudes, and values are predictors of consumer behaviors including those of purchase and consumption. Consistent with prior consumer behavior research (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Babin *et al.*, 1994; Chitturi *et al.*, 2008), we use the terms utilitarian and hedonic to describe the differences in consumption motives and benefits sought by consumers. However, we extend this concept by positing that products may evoke emotions in consumers without actually consuming the product. Further, these emotions can be hedonic or utilitarian in nature (Tamir *et al.*, 2007). The extant literature is saturated with research involving hedonic and utilitarian shopping and consumer behavior (e.g. Aggarwal *et al.*, 2011; Choo *et al.*, 2012). Yet to our knowledge no studies of hedonic or utilitarian emotions in the consumer market exist. Thus we build a framework using prior research in consumer behavior, which focusses mostly on shopping values as opposed to pre-consumption emotions. Utilitarian motives or benefits are attached to products or ideas which are practical, functional, useful, etc., while hedonic consumption is driven by experiential or enjoyment-producing motives.

Extrinsic values stress the functional characteristics of consumption, which is mainly "utilitarian" in nature. Utilitarian values are characterized as task-related, rational, and universal (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Some consumers are motivated by the perceived practicality/functionality of a fashion product when they make purchase decisions (McCormick and Scorpio, 2000). Here, a consumer's perception of product quality connotes utilitarian value, and contributes to their product purchases. Zeithaml (1988, p. 3) defined quality as "superiority or excellence." The product quality is determined by the subjective valuation of the consumer, who considers those certain product attributes valuable. In sum, utilitarian-oriented consumers value product quality when they purchase products (Hanf and von Wersebe, 1994). When consumers are faced with a choice task, they tend to choose a product with superior utilitarian aspects (Chitturi *et al.*, 2007).

Hedonic values are characterized as self-oriented, excitement-inducing, personal, and emotional (Babin *et al.*, 1994). Some consumers are driven mainly by hedonic-oriented values (Bloch *et al.*, 1994), and enjoy the fun and fantasy of the consumption experience (Velitchka and Barton, 2006). The hedonic value perceived by the consumer is a result of esthetic features of a product, which tend to produce arousal, stimulation and/or pleasure (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Veryzer and Hutchinson, 1998). The consumption of unique products provides an opportunity to assert independence, autonomy, and individuality (Simonson and Nowlis, 2000), allowing the pursuit of differentness relative to others. This is often done for the purpose of enhancing one's personal and social identity (Tian *et al.*, 2001).

However, the tendency of consumers to engage in hedonic or utilitarian consumption behavior does not depend solely on perceived product characteristics (Addis and Holbrook, 2001). This choice calculus also depends on the consumer's own individual self-perception or characteristics (Guido, 2006). Sirgy (1982, p. 287) states that "self-concept denotes the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object." Thus feelings that something (e.g. an item of apparel) is cool in some way, provides a connection between the young consumer's self-concept and the product, both of which are influenced by the reference group (Hartman and Samra, 2008; Strutton *et al.*, 2011). The value-expressive influence of a reference group is a powerful motivation to young consumers because they have a desire to enhance self-image, associating themselves with a reference group (Bearden *et al.*, 1989).

The youth market (Generation Y (Gen Y))

Gen Y will soon reach 86 million people in the USA in 2015, accounting for about 27 percent of total population (Crmtrends.com, n.d.), and will dwarf the previous Generation X (16 percent of the population). Generation is technology savvy, well educated, has a passion to buy clothes (Morton, 2002), and is thus highly coveted by marketers (Emmons, 2001). This consumer group is considered the first global consumer market segment, as they have been exposed to worldwide internet networks (Walker, 1996) since their formative years. As has always been the case though, understanding the youth market and trends is a big challenge (Saxton, 2005). Perhaps more so than recent generations, Gen Y is influenced most by technology, music, and the "celebrity culture." They have grown up on MTV, Youtube, and reality television, all phenomena which did exist for prior generations.

Young consumers have historically played a significant role as fashion innovators (Beaudoin *et al.*, 1998; Goldsmith and Hofacker, 1991; Gutman and Mills, 1982). They demand the latest trends in most product categories, including apparel (Morton, 2002), and set trends for other consumer groups, including older generations (Male, 2010). Johnson (2006) reports that Gen Y buying behavior can affect the acceptance or failure of new brand name products within a few months after hitting the market. Their lifestyle is more value-oriented and pragmatic, including music, movies, food, and TV consumption (Morton, 2002). Zhang *et al.* (2011) find, however, that Gen Y consumers prefer to buy branded clothing at upscale department stores and/or specialty stores. While quite brand and fashion conscious, they change brand loyalties quickly, which is not unlike previous generations of youth (Morton, 2002). They are highly influenced by brand names in general though, and willing to pay a premium for the right brands, putting a heavy weight on the product being "cool" (Grant and Stephen, 2005). In general, these examples reflect the construct of cool in terms of appearance (Keller and Kalmus, 2009).

Teens develop a sense of cool in adolescence, and later are motivated to associate with certain peer groups in an effort to be cool (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). Many teens are left out of the "right" groups, and tend to aspirational in their pursuit of being cool (Cassidy and van Schijndel, 2011). Individual groups establish was is cool or un-cool within the group, and uncovering commonalities across groups allows for establishing a sort of "[…] metacode of coolness which is amenable to diffusion through the general population" (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000, p. 13).

As is clear from the profusion of scholarly discussion in the literature, the concept of "cool" is not only ubiquitous in everyday language (Rodkin *et al.*, 2006), but is nearly universal in its meaning and usage by youth and marketers to young consumers (e.g. Zhang, 2005; Keller and Kalmus, 2009). What makes something (a product, brand, idea) cool is important to marketers (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). To move the study of young consumers forward it is incumbent upon scholars to move from defining the concept, to measuring it.

The cool construct

The concept of cool is addressed in theory and also in a qualitative manner in the extant literature, but to date no one has attempted an operationalization of the construct. Thus, although cool has been defined in many different contexts (e.g. Danesi, 1994; Gladwell, 1997; Tapp and Bird, 2008), it has yet to be empirically defined. We define cool as an emotion or feeling about a product (in this case, clothing), which is either hedonic or utilitarian in nature. Hedonic dimensions reflect the feelings of fun

and playfulness (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) that come with experiencing something cool. Utilitarian dimensions reflect feelings of rationality and efficiency (Babin *et al.*, 1994), which may be evoked by a piece of clothing.

Hedonic cool dimensions

Singular cool. A consumer's need for uniqueness is defined as "an individual's pursuit of differentness relative to others that is achieved through the acquisition, utilization and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity" (Tian *et al.*, 2001, p. 53). Youth culture members are willing to experiment by purchasing unique (cool) products to distinguish their identities from others. Purchasing unique products allows a consumer to assert his/her independence, autonomy, and individuality (Simonson and Nowlis, 2000). We conceptualize this dimension as "singular cool" because the need to acquire unique products is derived from a social comparison process in which an individual identifies an ideal state of uniqueness and compares that to his/her present state of uniqueness. If a discrepancy between the ideal and present states is perceived, the individual will pursue a remedy (Burns and Warren, 1995). A discrepancy may be ameliorated through consumer activities (Tian *et al.*, 2001) because, as previously mentioned, products convey symbolic meanings about the user. By purchasing unique products, the individual establishes him/herself as unique (Kehret-Ward and Yalch, 1984).

Reference cool. A reference group is a person or group of people that significantly influences an individual's behavior (Bearden and Etzel, 1982, p. 184). The level of reference group influence on an individual's product choice is dependent on whether the product is considered to be a luxury or a necessity and whether the product is consumed publicly or privately (Bearden and Etzel, 1982). Value-expressive influence of a reference group (Bearden *et al.*, 1989) is the compelling motivation in young consumers' cool product purchase decisions because they purchase what they deem to be cool in order to communicate that they are: cool. "Value-expressiveness reflects the individual's desire to enhance self-image by association with a reference group" (Bearden *et al.*, 1989, p. 474). This notion supports a principle of consumer behavior that people are defined by their possessions (Belk, 1988). Because youth purchase products to establish their self-identities (Lippe, 2001), it is reasonable to assume that reference groups help to define what is cool for these consumers.

Personal cool. Self-concept theory comprises constructs that are believed to be related to cool for youth culture. "Self-concept denotes the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Sirgy, 1982, p. 287). To solidify an individual's self-concept and to communicate his/her self-concept to others, individuals acquire, and display products that are congruent with their self-concepts, or with who they are as people. Products are essential to the communication of an individual's self-concept because products have recognizable symbolic meanings that are transferred to the user (Mehta, 1999). As a person, we identify who we are by our possessions (Belk, 1988).

Esthetic cool. Seven innate values are common to all people, but vary in degree of importance. These are not learned, but rather part of our personal makeup (Cathcart, 1999). One of these values is esthetics, which we believe is a dimension contributing to making a product cool among youth. The creation of products inherently involves esthetics, and is a potential source of pleasure for consumer (Veryzer and Hutchinson, 1998). Esthetics influence a consumer's product choice because design allows for

recognition and discernment among competitors' products (Bloch *et al.*, 2003). Esthetes perceive design to benefit their lives, prefer well-designed products, expend greater resources to obtain esthetically pleasing.

Utilitarian cool dimensions

Functional cool. This cool dimension addresses the design conundrum, should form follow function? "Fashion without function will no longer suffice for a core group of consumers who have proven their buying power […] Consumers want products that work for them" (McCormick and Scorpio, 2000, p. 16). Some consumers are concerned with the pragmatic aspects of a product. Practicality has been found to be a consideration in parent-child purchase decisions (Darian, 1998) and clothing importance for university students in England (Cox and Dittmar, 1995). However, the importance of product practicality and functionality differs among individuals (Cox and Dittmar, 1995). A woman who primarily desires quality and utility in clothes is less likely to perceive a frequent need for new and/or better clothing, than a man who sees clothes as an important way to continually improve his social prestige among his peers (Cox and Dittmar, 1995). Thus, some consumers' purchase decisions are more influenced by the perceived practicality of a product rather than the newness.

Quality cool. Quality can be defined broadly as superiority or excellence (Zeithaml, 1988), and we believe as a dimension it contributes to young consumers' concept of cool. Quality can be further segmented into perceived quality and objective quality. Perceived quality is derived from both intrinsic and extrinsic cues, allowing for an overall abstract value judgment of the benefits received, while objective quality refers to an unbiased assessment of the product based on measurable product attributes (Lichtenstein and Burton, 1989). Evaluations of quality are often based on imperfect information and relative to the consumer's evoked reference set (Hanf and von Wersebe, 1994). The quality of something depends on the subjective valuation of those who may recognize some attributes as valuable, even if those attributes are not easily measured (Hanf and von Wersebe, 1994). This implies that an assessment of product quality, to a large extent, requires experience on the part of the consumer. Therefore, since assessment of quality requires assessment or experience, it will take on more utilitarian, or task-oriented nature (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982).

Method

Scale development and validation

Once a construct has been defined within its empirical domain, the next step is to propose an operational definition of the construct. In that way, scholars are able to assess the validity of the proposed measures of the newly defined construct. Having defined the construct of cool, and described its underlying dimensions of hedonic cool and utilitarian cool, we apply a systematic scale development procedure as proposed by Churchill (1979) and subsequently utilized in many validation studies (cf. Lin and Hsieh, 2011). This procedure includes three phases: item generation, scale refinement, and scale validation.

Item generation

Potential items were generated using two sources: the extant literature and data gathered in conjunction with a market research firm. The extant literature searched included research from marketing (e.g. Babin *et al.*, 1994), psychology (e.g. Guido *et al.*, 2007; Tamir *et al.*, 2007), management (e.g. Goldsmith *et al.*, 1999), and sociology

(e.g. Rodkin *et al.*, 2006) domains. We also sought to enrich our pool of items by accessing respondents from a market research firm's existing panel(s). While asking respondents to consider items of clothing, we included two open-ended questions asking: "How do you decide that something is cool?" and "What makes something cool? Please give an example." The panel members were young consumers, ages 14-30. No demographic data were available. A total of 310 useable responses were received, helping us to generate a total of 42 distinct characteristics of cool. We then reviewed the items for content and face validity, based on aspects and definitions of cool within the literature. As our next step was pre-testing the items in a survey, we decided to retain all 42 items for the second phase.

Scale refinement

Using the 42 items generated in phase one, we created a questionnaire to administer in a pre-test. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, utilizing a convenience sample of 114 college students at a large Midwestern university in the USA. The use of college students is appropriate in this case, as the population of interest is youth from 14 to 28. The results of the pre-test were analyzed using principle component factor analysis with varimax rotation. First, we examined factor loadings, and eliminated all items with loadings below 0.60. This cutoff criterion eliminates all but those factors considered practically significant (Hair *et al.*, 1998), and is a more robust assessment of factor significance. We also eliminated those factors with cross-loadings above 0.40 based on the sample size (Hair *et al.*, 1998). This left 32 items which comprised the cool dimensions in the next phase of the study.

Main study

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from college students enrolled in 11 different courses at a major Midwestern university. To ensure maximum diversity of the sample (in terms of race, gender, etc.), the convenience sample was obtained from a broad range of disciplines. The questionnaire included the 32 pre-tested items regarding the "cool" construct, measured on the same five-point Likert scale. We included demographic questions regarding characteristics of the respondents. As in the pre-test, the use of college-aged students is appropriate given the context and purpose of the study.

Findings

Sample characteristics

A total of 265 questionnaires were used to analyze data. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 28 years, with a mean of 21 years. Most of the respondents were female (62 percent) and Caucasian (63 percent). The respondents' average family income was $67,500 and their average discretionary spending was $70.97 per week. Sample characteristics are shown in Table I.

Cool measurement scale development

A principal component factor analysis, with varimax rotation was used to extract first-order factors from 32 items that measured "cool" characteristics. Two items were dropped due to low factor loadings (i.e. <0.50). We then submitted the remaining 30 items to a second factor analysis, extracting six distinct factors. We label these: reference cool, singular cool, personal cool, esthetic cool, functional cool, and quality cool. The factor "reference cool" contains eight measures representing cool as

	% ($n = 265$)
Gender	
Male	36.2
Female	62.3
Ethnic group	
White, non-Hispanic	63.0
African American	16.6
Asian	11.3
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish	2.6
American Indian	1.5
Other	1.1
Age	
18-19	12.1
20-21	52.5
22-23	25.3
24-25	4.5
26-27	2.3
28	1.1
Total annual family income	
Under $25,000	13.6
$25,000 to $34,999	6.8
$35,000 to $49,999	10.2
$50,000 to $74,999	17.0
$75,000 to $99,999	15.5
$100,000 and over	30.2

Table I.
Sample characteristics

ubiquitous. The "singular cool" factor contained six items related to unique cool. "Personal cool" is also a six-item factor, reflecting cool as it pertains to the person or self. The fourth factor extracted was "esthetic cool," assessing design esthetics, with three measures. "Functional cool" consisted of four items which reflect usefulness as cool. Finally, three items related to quality as cool were extracted to form the "quality cool" factor. All factor loadings were relatively high with the value $\geqslant 0.5$ as shown in Table II. This table also contains the scale reliabilities, factor loadings and percent of variance extracted for each factor, and the final 30 items in the cool scale.

A first-order confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the overall model fit of the cool product measurement scale, using the six proposed cool dimensions and the remaining 30 measurement items. The fit of the initial model was less than acceptable ($\chi^2 = 1{,}285.08$; df $= 390$; $p = 0.000$), indicating that the model did fit the data well. Fit indices were also below acceptable cut-off levels (CFI $= 0.824$; RMSEA $= 0.093$). We examined the Lisrel output for the largest standardized residuals, and determined that several items were contributing the most to mis-fit. We thus eliminated from further examination, one item each from singular and functional and two items from personal cool factor scales. We then re-fit the measurement model using the remaining 26 items. This time the model fit was much improved ($\chi^2 = 613.18$; df $= 282$; $p = 0.000$), as were the fit indices (CFI $= 0.96$; RMSEA $= 0.067$). However, in examining the phi matrix, we observed that the reference cool factor was negatively correlated with four of the other five factors, and with the fifth factor in only a slightly positive way ($\beta = 0.02$). Thus it seems that although reference cool was proposed to measure cool as it pertained to young consumers' reference groups (e.g. a "cool article

Constructs	Scale items	Cronbach's α	Factor loading	Variance explained (%)
Reference cool	1. A "cool" article of clothing is well known	0.90	0.84	16.09
	2. A "cool" article of clothing is presented in favorable advertisements		0.82	
	3. A "cool" article of clothing is heavily advertised		0.80	
	4. A "cool" article of clothing is owned/worn by my friends/peers		0.79	
	5. A "cool" article of clothing is popular		0.75	
	6. A "cool" article of clothing is mainstream		0.75	
	7. A "cool" article of clothing is owned/worn by favorable celebrities		0.69	
	8. A "cool" article of clothing is easy to find		0.55	
Singular cool	9. A "cool" article of clothing is one of a kind	0.88	0.85	13.58
	10. A "cool" article of clothing is unique		0.83	
	11. A "cool" article of clothing is exclusive		0.76	
	12. A "cool" article of clothing is original		0.76	
	13. A "cool" article of clothing is innovative		0.73	
	14. A "cool" article of clothing is novel		0.67	
Personal cool	15. A "cool" article of clothing fits my personality	0.88	0.78	12.74
	16. A "cool" article of clothing boosts my confidence		0.75	
	17. A "cool" article of clothing fits my self-identity		0.75	
	18. A "cool" article of clothing boosts my self esteem		0.72	
	19. A "cool" article of clothing fits my style		0.67	
	20. A "cool" article of clothing contributes to my individuality		0.63	
Esthetic cool	21. A "cool" article of clothing is a flattering cut	0.94	0.90	9.13
	22. A "cool" article of clothing is a flattering color		0.87	
	23. A "cool" article of clothing is a flattering style		0.85	
Functional cool	24. A "cool" article of clothing is functional	0.80	0.78	9.05
	25. A "cool" article of clothing is practical		0.75	
	26. A "cool" article of clothing is affordable		0.66	
	27. A "cool" article of clothing is comfortable		0.63	
Quality cool	28. A "cool" article of clothing is known for quality construction	0.80	0.86	7.97
	29. A "cool" article of clothing is well constructed		0.78	
	30. A "cool" article of clothing has longevity		0.63	

Table II.
Exploratory factor analysis: loadings and reliability measures of cool scale items

of clothing is [...] worn by my friends; [...] popular; [...] worn by favorite celebrities; etc.), the measures and factor itself are not really related to the other cool factors.

In order to test whether the cool measurement scale should include the reference cool factor, we fit a model with only the five factors (and 18 remaining measures), and compared it to the six-factor model. Although the fit indices for the five-factor model were not much different (CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.076), overall it exhibited much better fit ($\chi^2 = 358.03$; df = 141; $p = 0.000$). With a difference in χ^2 of 255.15 and 141 df, the five

factor model fit significantly better ($p < 0.001$). We thus retain this model as our baseline for further model fitting and validation. All measures loaded significantly on their respective constructs, confirming the convergent validity of the scales. Additionally, the first-order constructs were significantly, but moderately correlated providing evidence of discriminant validity for the measurement model. Correlations between first-order constructs and average variance extracted for each construct are provided in Table III.

Dimensionality

In this study we have conceptualized cool as being a two-dimensional factor, comprised of one factor we call "hedonic cool" and a second we call "utilitarian cool." To test if this proposed factor structure actually exists, we fit the previously assessed five-factor model, as a second-order factor model, and examine any difference in χ^2. The model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 310.54$; df = 128; $p = 0.000$), with fit indices also within the acceptable cut-off ranges (CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.073). Using the five-factor measurement model as the baseline, we find a difference in χ^2 units of 47.49, and 13 df. This (second-order factor) is a significantly better fitting model than the first-order model ($p < 0.001$). Thus we retain this model for further validation and testing of psychometric properties.

Establishing the psychometric properties and dimensionality of constructs are important in general, but especially so with previously un-operationalized constructs (Zahra *et al.*, 1999). The dimensionality of the cool construct is important for allowing researchers to test its usefulness in both descriptive and causal studies, as it provides a baseline from which scholars may compare data gathered in different contexts (Runyan *et al.*, 2011). Since we already established a good fitting second-order factor model, we next tested whether the cool construct might be better conceptualized as a single dimension. We modeled the data with one higher order factor (cool), as being reflected in the five first-order factors. Even though the fit was acceptable ($\chi^2 = 331.80$; df = 129; $p = 0.000$), the χ^2 difference test showed a significant difference between the single factor and the two factor models (χ^2diff = 21.26; df = 1), at the $p < 0.001$ level. Thus the second-order factor model is retained. Finally, to check whether the cool construct might be unidimensional in nature (i.e. one single factor), we fit the data as a single factor model. The fit was unacceptable ($\chi^2 = 2{,}250.46$; df = 152; $p = 0.000$), with no reason to compare further. In sum, we retain the second-order factor model depicted in Figure 1.

Discussion and implications

Despite the ubiquitous use of "cool" in social discourse (Rodkin *et al.*, 2006) as well as business (e.g. O-Donnell and Wardlow, 2000; Olson *et al.*, 2005), little is known about

Table III. Correlation matrix of measurement model

Factor	Singular	Functional	Esthetic	Personal	Quality
Singular	*0.53*				
Functional	0.04	*0.51*			
Esthetic	0.34	0.28	*0.85*		
Personal	0.34	0.48	0.50	*0.69*	
Quality	0.16	0.62	0.42	0.55	*0.61*

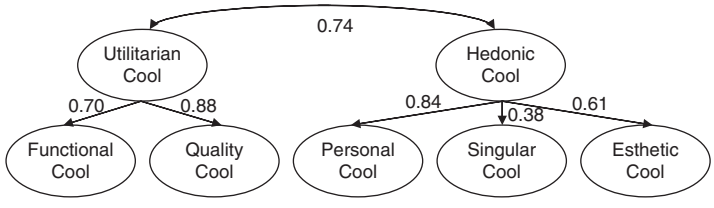
Note: Average variance extracted on diagonal

how marketers or researchers can measure what is "cool." Considering the importance assigned to discovering what young consumers think is cool (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000; Saxton, 2005), operationalizing a scale to measure cool is long overdue in the literature. Marketers have employed so-called "coolhunting" experts in the field to observe and discover early fashion trends, ostensibly predictable through identifying the "cool" groups or individuals (Gladwell, 1997), and finding what they are wearing. Observation (like ethnographic research), however, is quite time consuming, and lacks the ability to generalize findings. This is certainly the case with coolhunting, as agencies hire experts to engage in quasi-ethnographic research in clubs, malls, and on the street (Southgate, 2003). The need to generate generalizable data is obvious from an economic standpoint. If marketers of products dependent upon being "in fashion," can determine a priori, the likelihood of a new product being deemed "cool," the need for costly fieldwork (e.g. coolhunting) may be reduced overall. Thus as O'Donnell and Wardlow (2000) imply, research on cool has been less than successful or robust.

The term cool has been discussed often in both the academic and trade literature. It is universally understood today to be positive in nature (Tapp and Bird, 2008). As a research construct, however, it has yet to be conceptually defined or operationalized, although many claim to do so. For example, Southgate (2003, p. 181) devotes a section with the heading "defining cool," and then spends six paragraphs without defining the term. This seems to be a prevailing issue in the extant literature (cf. O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000). We go beyond discussing the term here, by defining cool as an attitude or belief about a product (in this case, clothing), which is either hedonic or utilitarian in nature, and which if purchased or worn by an individual, sets that individual apart from an average person. Further, we conceptualize cool as having five separate dimensions: esthetic, singular, and personal cool, all part of hedonic cool; and quality and functional cool, both part of utilitarian cool. Following Churchill (1979) we then operationalized each of the five dimensions by developing and testing reliable and valid measurement scales. We discuss the meaning of each of these dimensions as follows, including our interpretations of what each dimension means, and how it may impact marketers in the field.

Hedonic cool dimensions

The three dimensions of hedonic cool are personal, singular, and esthetic. Each of these operationalizes a distinct, but interrelated dimension of cool. These dimensions deal with both the intrinsic (e.g. personality, self-identity in personal cool) as well as extrinsic (e.g. flattering color or style in esthetic cool; novelty, uniqueness, exclusivity in singular cool). Personal cool addresses the need for young consumers to make connections between a product or brand, and self (Chaplin and John, 2005). Marketers are then able to promote the idea of being cool through a "cool fulfilling product"



Notes: $x^2 = 310.54$, df = 128, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.07

Figure 1.
Hierarchical model of cool measurement scale with parameter estimates

(Cassidy and van Schijndel, 2011, p. 163). Esthetic cool reflects the need to purchase or wear, clothing which enhances one's person, and projects the image of being "in style." This sort of cool is similar to Keller and Kalmus' (2009, p. 329) description of "cool as appearance." In other words, if a product does not make the wearer look better (through color, style, cut, etc.), then the product itself is not cool. One might argue that this concept follows the old adage of "beauty being in the eye of the beholder" though, as there are myriad examples over the decades of starkly un-flattering products which were considered "cool" at the time. We invoke two examples and rest our case: men's leisure suits (1970s) and women's padded-shoulder polo shirts (1980s).

Singular cool is the dimension of cool which we were most surprised at in terms of its relationship to the hedonic second-order factor. Measures for the factor reflected uniqueness, originality, and exclusivity. For those consumers who are cool, singular cool says "I am not ordinary; I do things differently than most; I don't run with the crowd; etc." This is what Thornton (1995) refers to as authenticity as a key criterion for cool; it expressed not only finer tastes, but also contempt for the mass-produced. Thus we were puzzled by the weaker β (0.38), expressing the factor loading for singular cool, on the hedonic second-order factor. Innovativeness, uniqueness, and exclusivity are all measures which should evoke feelings of arousal or excitement, which are by definition hedonic emotions (Veryzer and Hutchinson, 1998). However, this type of cool does help to explain why the dimension of reference cool had a negative relationship with most all of the other dimensions of cool. Reference cool was operationalized with statements such as: "well known, mainstream, heavily advertised." Each of these seem the opposite of authentic, related to mass-produced, and certainly not unique.

It is clear then from the perspective of hedonic cool, that although esthetics play a strong role, they are not exclusive to cool products. That is, flattering styles and colors are equally as important in clothing that may not be considered "cool" (e.g. misses sportswear; popular-priced junior tops; etc.). Likewise the construct of personal cool: here measures designed to operationalize this dimension included: "fits my personality; boosts my confidence; fits my style; etc." Undoubtedly, these criteria are applied by consumers to non-cool products (think Spanx, for example). However, the other dimensions of hedonic cool apply more clearly to cool products in general, if not particularly to clothing. Thus marketers are advised to think about esthetic and personal cool as dimensions of cool which, while important to the consumer, will be important no matter to whom they (marketer) are trying to sell their products. However, singular cool is the dimension which appears to be the factor which can control when a product is deemed cool, and how long it remains cool. As seen by the negative relationship between reference cool (i.e. ubiquitousness) and singular cool, the more something is perceived as being popular, mainstream or well known, the less cool it becomes.

Utilitarian cool dimensions

It is easy to see the connection between cool and hedonic dimensions. In the extant literature on cool, we find that the foundations of the term "cool" lie in feelings of anti-authority, uniqueness, and pleasure seeking (Pountain and Robins, 2000), and we often find cool framed in terms of emotion (exciting, desirable, etc.). Yet emotions may be hedonic or utilitarian in nature (Tamir *et al.*, 2007), meaning that the emotions which can be evoked from a piece of clothing may be the consequence of either emotion.

What is unique about our study's results is that we find evidence that apparel can be deemed as cool and utilitarian at the same time. We find two sub-dimensions of utilitarian cool: quality and functional cool. Although utilitarian shopping motives are usually characterized as rational in nature (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), and not often combined with the term cool, research has shown that there are consumers who are motivated by perceived practicality when seeking fashion products (McCormick and Scorpio, 2000). The quality cool dimension was measured by items which included: "longevity; quality construction." These are surely utilitarian motives and evoke thoughts of practicality, but may also signal a type of cool. Zeithaml's (1988) definition of quality included the words superiority and excellence. These are similar to terms used by Thornton (1995) to describe cool, including the idea of superior taste (in something). Therefore, one might see the pairing of quality and cool, as exuding a sort of superior taste for fine products. An inexpensive car might be perceived as cool by some, especially if it is unique (e.g. the Mazda Miata in the mid 1980s). But a consumer whose concept of cool was based on quality would eschew such products, since they are made for style, more than for quality.

McCormick and Scorpio (2000) also attach the term functionality to some consumer motivations. Functional cool was indicated by items such as: "affordable; comfortable; practical." Similar to quality cool, we introduce this combination to describe a counter-intuitive term. That is, utilitarian shopping motives like rational, functional, and task-oriented have not been used historically to describe cool in any way. In fact, these types of things would be most certainly uncool as described in most research (e.g. Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002). Yet, since utilitarian-oriented consumers value utilitarian aspects of products, including functionality when they purchase products (Hanf and von Wersebe, 1994), it follows that those persons might define cool in terms of quality or functionality.

In today's market place, segmentation is more sophisticated and refined. This results in diverse and specific target markets that require deep understanding and thorough analysis. It is imperative that as market segmentation evolves, so too must the strategies to reach the targeted segment (Neal, 2002). As found in this study, there are different types of cool, meaning that marketers must appeal to different consumers in different ways. To position products to reflect self-concept or, "personal cool," marketers could feature the ability for youthful consumers to personalize their products and, thereby, profess their identities. In relation to this, it would be sensible for marketers to play up youth's ability to realize desired self-concepts with products. Youth are working to cultivate who they are through their consumption practices, and companies that enable this will likely capture that market. It is a common practice that "marketers develop advertising messages that employ product scarcity appeals, uniqueness appeals and appeals to breaking the rules of one's reference group" (Tian *et al.*, 2001, p. 51). However, infusing product uniqueness is difficult for marketers when appealing to youth, as those with a high need for uniqueness are aware that following traditional marketing ploys will result in the demise of their distinctiveness (Tian *et al.*, 2001). And, according to Simonson and Nowlis (2000), individuals who seek uniqueness are less persuaded by promotions, advertising, or loss aversion to purchase products. This is not to declare that engaging the youthful consumer on the basis of product uniqueness is impossible, but in order to be effective with this strategy, the product had better be unique. The Swedish apparel retailer H&M exemplifies this practice with their limited runs, frequent turnover, and replenishment of merchandise (Curan, 2001).

Intriguing youth with the cool components of product practicality and functionality, as well as product quality will most likely be achieved through information and advertisements that focus on intrinsic product characteristics. The youth market is pessimistic and skeptical in regards to the marketing mix. Years of repetitive marketing messages aimed at Gen Y have taught them to presume the worst about companies trying to persuade them into a purchase (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski, 2001). An effective tactic to overcome this hurdle is to encourage these consumers to evaluate product practicality, functionality, and quality for themselves. Information concerning the benefits of the product should be abundant, accessible, and comprehensible. By allowing the youth market to independently draw the conclusion that the product is advantageous, they are more likely to believe it is a beneficial and essential purchase. Nissan North America is an example of a company that uses practical and functional appeals to entice the youth target market (Kiley, 1999). A recent television commercial features a kayaker lost, off shore, in the mist. To emphasize the practicality and functionality of the vehicle, the kayaker uses his versatile SUV as a foghorn followed by the tagline "a million uses and counting."

Finally, companies can seek to influence this market through the product esthetics component of cool. This study revealed that esthetics are a significant component of an overall factor of cool; thus, marketers need to have an in-depth understanding of what products appeal to youth culture's esthetic standards. Seed informants (i.e. coolhunters) can relay these trends to marketers allowing them to know what youth are buying as well as where and why they are buying it. Esthetic research can completely revitalize a company by rejuvenating consumer interest (Nussbaum, 1999).

Marketers should consider that being "cool," does not necessarily mean only one thing, nor does the concept of cool apply to only certain types of consumers. When a customer says "that (product) is cool," it may be more likely that the customer will buy the thing which she is describing as cool. Since we know from the extant literature that many consumers are utilitarian in their shopping motives, and that often shoppers are driven by different motives in different contexts, it is advisable to marketers to understand that cool means different things to different folks. So while teens tend to engage in hedonic type use of the internet much more than utilitarian use (Hartman and Samra, 2008), they may well find functional sites like Wikipedia to be cool too.

We believe the key insight gained in this study is that combining utilitarian and hedonic cool may be the type of marketing tactic which provides the greatest amount of potential growth in market share. That is, if an apparel marketer can position a product as having "quality cool," and then simultaneously begin repositioning it as having "singular cool," a different segment of the market may be reached, without losing the original. An example of this in the US market is Carharrt work clothes for men. This clothing brand was utilitarian in nature for over 100 years. But it became fashionable with blue-collar workers and country music stars in the USA, in the late 2000s, helping the company to achieve increased sales by evoking feelings of both utilitarian and hedonic cool.

Future research

We suggest the use of these scales in studies of consumers within different shopping contexts, including online, non-branded goods, single-brand retailers, etc. It is possible that hedonic dimensions of cool will be more important that utilitarian in some settings, while the reverse will be true in others. Researchers should examine the cool dimensions in terms of their effects on loyalty, patronage, and buying behaviors.

The concept of cool is utilized by marketers (coolhunters) to help predict trends and innovations. Yet absent a working definition of cool, these coolhunters leave the decision of what is and is not cool open to interpretation, with millions (or billions) of dollars in merchandising decisions resting on a subjective judgment. Cool may be a driver of brand loyalty, a component of brand experience, or a mediating construct in the consumption process. These questions have not been addressed, as to date there has been no operationalized scale with which to test hypotheses about cool and its place in consumer behavior models.

Our data were gathered from college-aged respondents, and there are several weaknesses therein. The sample was purposive, but convenient in nature. That is, it was not random, and thus subject to the weaknesses inherent in non-probabilistic samples. We chose college-aged respondents due to the nature of our study: we tested a scale to measure cool. This study should be replicated using a younger sample of respondents. Although nearly 90 percent of our sample were under 23, none were under 18. Thus we were unable to assess how youth in their teens view the concept of cool. Research supported the inclusion of the reference cool dimension, and its measures. This dimension included items regarding celebrity, popularity, friends/peers, and advertisement. These things have been shown to influence teens, and have a particular influence on their concept of what is cool (O'Donnell and Wardlow, 2000; Grant and Stephen, 2005; Cassidy and van Schijndel, 2011). Yet our study found that this type of cool was if anything, the opposite of cool for our respondents. Future research may uncover if college students move beyond peer groups influences to the point that, when too many of their peers adopt a product, it is no longer cool.

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