A global culture of cool? Generation Y and their perception of coolness

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Abstract

Purpose – *This paper seeks to explore whether the global market segment Generation Y shares a common perception of a specific consumption activity, namely bungy jumping, and how perceptions of cool operate around that.*

Design/methodology/approach – *A qualitative methodology is adopted, appropriate to the exploratory aims of the research, which utilises existing filmed interviews to elicit responses from other members of Generation Y. The research explores shared identification, meaning and knowledge of a specific consumption practice, namely commercial bungy jumping.*

Findings – *The actual form of consumption, bungy jumping was widely accepted as being ''cool'' but a global consensus on a ''cool'' consumer and their story could not be reached. The research concludes by proposing a hierarchy for the attribution of cool from one Generation Y member to another; thus extending theoretical discussion and knowledge by investigating an established concept in a specific context to illustrate the complex and uneven nature of cultural globalisation.*

Research limitations/implications – *This research interprets global Generation Y culture from a small convenience sample from America, Ireland, Scotland and England, thus generating avenues for further research as discussed.*

Originality/value – *These findings have value for businesses that create consumption experiences for Generation Y customers and scholars seeking insight into the plural and complex function of cool.*

Keywords Culture (sociology), International marketing, Popular culture, Generation Y, Cool, Bungy jumping

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Within popular culture, there has been recognition and identification of generational groups, such as Baby Boomers, Generations X and Y and their specific shared culture (Pountain and Robins, 2000). Literature such as Coupland's (1991, p. 20) description of Generation X as deeply suspicious of advertisers, spawning the phrase ''we are not a target market'', and described as ''underemployed, overeducated, intensely private and unpredictable'' has become an icon in popular culture in itself. The current generation of young consumers are often classed as Generation Y, or the millennials, are described as even more sophisticated and media-wise than their Generation X predecessors (Coupland, 1991; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Paul, 2001). There is a large body of literature on Generation Y as a group of consumers, their consumption habits and underpinning values (Bakewell and Mitchell, 2003; Goodman and Dretzin, 2001; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Martin, 2001; Paul, 2001; Tully, 1994). There have been suggestions that this generation share a global culture facilitated by global media vehicles such as MTV who tell them what content is cool and what is not (Goodman and Dretzin, 2001). This paper seeks to explore how members of Generation Y feel about a specific consumption activity, namely bungy jumping. Literature in this area suggests that generational cohorts share some cultural values, this research seeks to

understand how this relates to a specific consumption experience, not only is the consumption activity explored but attitudes towards consumers of this commercial adventure experience and their narratives of the experience are investigated.

Generation Y as a global market segment

Generally agreed to be born between the late 1970s and early 1990s, age is the central characteristic of Generation Y. However, age alone does not make Generation Y a global market segment or dictate shared consumption patterns or culture. Generational theorists suggest that macro environment changes specific to each generation create distinct consumer behaviour patterns (Howe and Strauss, 2000). Consumer attitudes, behaviour and skills are acquired via socialisation agents such as mass media, peers and family (Moschis, 1987) hence Generation Y's common and distinct consumption choices are heavily influenced by the macro environment during their formative socialisation resulting in characteristics such as their high media literacy, high expectations of choice and strong image consciousness (Martin, 2001; Neuborne and Kerwin, 1999; Paul, 2001; Quart, 2003).

Another strong characteristic of Generation Y is their search to acquire ''cool'' through consumption (Goodman and Dretzin, 2001). Macro environment event thought to be influential for this Generation are the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the rise of reality television and the ''cult of the celebrity''. The phenomenon of becoming a celebrity, the performance of that experience and its consumption as relayed through various media channels to members of Generation Y has been called the ''cult of celebrity'' or public performance making where ''fame is the spur'' (Turner, 1999). This behaviour is clearly related to outer directed display and narration of consumption experiences which does differentiate Generation Y from previous generations who considered cool to be a much more understated affair (Pountain and Robins, 2000).

As Herbig *et al.* (1993) note each generation seems to be more materialistic than the previous one, so forms of consumption are becoming increasingly important to each generation in their process of differentiating themselves from the previous generation, Generation Y are the most materialistic generation yet and forms of consumption are central to their sense of identity and the acquisition of status or ''cool'' through this consumption (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Neuborne and Kerwin, 1999; Paul, 2001). Hence Generation Y seeks to differentiate itself from Generation X through its consumption patterns. Some researchers posit that Generation Y is seeking a sense of rebellion in their search for difference (Nancarrow *et al.*, 2002; Pountain and Robins, 2000). Others speculate that as ''never having experienced the tyranny of mass society, they don't feel any great urge to stand against it'' (Hebdige and Potter, 2008, p. 528). This gives a divergent perspective and thus a focus for this research – how does Generation Y understand cool? Is it used to represent rebellion and thus cool consumption is counter cultural or is it more complex as suggested by Hebdige and Potter (2008) that rebellion is not central and the production of culture, the definition of what is cool and what is not is owned by market forces but by culture producers. This concept is developed below.

Generation Y's understanding of ''cool'' is evidenced by the labels that they wear, activities they pursue and music that they like and the meaning that is bound into that consumption (Goodman and Dretzin, 2001; Solomon, 2003). If Generation Y is a global market segment then not only will they share similar consumption patterns but their consumption will have a shared meaning and be specific to them. This requires that Generation Y have developed a shared global culture, a global youth culture or market ideology as discussed by Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) based on marketing communication and consumption patterns. They posit that a global culture for Generation Y is possible but it exists in a co-constituting relationship with market forces, hence contradicting Hebdige and Potter's (2008) claim and they propose that neither market forces nor cultural producers have sole control over the production of ''cool''.

Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) offer two options, the global meaning is adopted in a local setting without significant adaptation (global) or the global meaning is taken and adapted to

become more relevant to a local population (a glocalisation approach). The two approaches provide a framework for understanding the meaning of a bungy jump, there is a global knowledge of what a bungy jump is but is a glocalising affect observable in the meaning conferred onto the consumption experience? Literature suggests that Generation Y's specific empathy towards and integration of modern communication, media and technology into their consumption patterns make the representation and maintenance of a global consumption meaning possible (Goodman and Dretzin, 2001; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Solomon, 2003). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) specifically charge modern marketing, popular culture and mass media as being the means that allow a community to transcend geography. It is these mechanisms that allow communication globally to Generation Y but is there collective agreement on the meaning of consumption activities?

So media specific to Generation Y communicate representations of consumption activities to globally dispersed members creating the means by which a Generation Y consumer culture can create shared meaning if they choose to do so. The almost homogenously global MTV, Web 2.0 application such as YouTube and global magazine titles such as *FHM* are often used as examples of specific vehicles and content creators that promulgate Generation Y consumer culture in a co-constituting loop that both determines and reflects ''cool'' consumption (Goodman and Dretzin, 2001; Pountain and Robins, 2000). To explore how this process might work a globally known, single consumption activity (bungy jumping) is used to give insight.

What is cool?

Before discussing how a global market segment may understand the meaning of a specific consumption activity, an insight into the role ''cool'' plays in such consumption must be clarified. A clear specific and durable definition of cool is problematic. It has been called ''everything thing and nothing at all'' (Connor, 1995, p. 10). Whereas Pountain and Robins (2001, p. 17) in attempting a definition could not decide if it is ''a philosophy, a sensibility, a religion, an ideology, a personality type, a behaviour pattern, an attitude, a zeitgeist or a worldview''. To understand cool it is easier to map it, that is a structural rendering of the phenomena, rather than define it. Cool has most commonly been associated with countercultural stances and in opposition to main strain values. However as a phenomenon, it is essentially dynamic and constantly changing in nature (Goodman and Dretzin, 2001). Cool has a strong influence on our consumption practices, by consuming cool products, services and experiences we seek to transfer the cool status to our identity projects. Thus cool operates within a cultural framework, what is cool in terms of identity projects and consumption is culturally defined and constantly changing. The value of acquiring cool status remains constantly desirable but the resources used to achieve this in an identity project and the meanings conveyed are not static. So the pursuit of cool status via consumption becomes a paperchase and constant culturally approved consumption is required to maintain a cool identity, as approved and acknowledged by an appropriate audience (Thornton, 1995).

Cool can only operate within a cultural context. As identified earlier, cool is often defined in opposition to mainstream culture; whatever holds with the norms and values of mainstream culture inherently cannot be cool. Cool is often found in countercultural communities which actively reject a more standardised, conformist view. However there are contrasting generational theories of cool, Hebdige and Potter (2008, p. 528) criticise the existing model of cool that it ''only makes sense as a foil to something else'' in other words it is the act of rejecting mainstream society and its respective values that is cool. They posit a new understanding of cool that exists under a more quirky aesthetic which is governed by random and unpredictable meshing of different cultural aspects (Hebdige and Potter, 2008) which makes it harder and more unpredictable to plot. Thus the literature gives a mixed and contradictory understanding of cool, hence the need for research to provide insight.

The research problem

This paper seeks to explore whether the global market segment Generation Y shares a common perception of a specific consumption activity namely bungy jumping and how perceptions of cool operate around that activity. Given our understanding of cool as a means of delivering status to individuals, this research will specifically explore Generation Y's perception of the ''coolness'' of this consumption activity and if a global understanding exists around it. The rationale for choosing bungy jumping as a context for this research is based on its appeal to Generation Y. Extreme sports are often attractively depicted in Generation Y media. For example, the Xtreme Games global coverage on Sky Sports (both winter and summer), several articles in *FHM* magazine (Jennings, 2002; Keen, 2002) and films such as *Vertical Limits*, *XXX* and James Bond titles that incorporate activities such as bungy jumping, sky diving and white water body surfing. Bungy jumping (a commercial adventure experience) was chosen as the context for this research due to its global profile and wide spread consumption locations, consumers can undertake bungy jumps in every continent, popular destinations are New Zealand, South Africa, France and China. According to the manager of AJ Hackett in Queenstown, New Zealand, over 90 percent of customers are members of Generation Y.

Thus it can be established that a large proportion of participants of this consumption activity are members of Generation Y and the activity is widely portrayed as desirable exciting and ''cool'' in Generation Y media. However what is not known is how members of Generation Y who have not consumed a bungy feel about the activity and other Generation Y members who have consumed it. Is it the activity itself that is ''cool'' or does some of this status transfer to the consumers? Does Generation Y have a shared understanding of this activity and what are the perceptions of coolness around that understanding? What meaning would a narrative of this experience have to another member of Generation Y who had not consumed the experience?

Methodology

If a global Generation Y culture exists as is posited in the literature, then representation of a consumption experience will have a shared meaning.

The empirical context for the research was limited to bungy jumping in Queenstown (New Zealand), as the activity is very well known (no informant had to describe bungy jumping to his or her friends; family, maybe, but not friends) and the consumers of the experience at AJ Hackett's Nevis bungy jump site provided a sample of Generation Y travellers from around the globe. An earlier research project involved the collection of over 100 filmed interviews of bungy jumpers retelling their consumption experience narratives. These filmed interviews were used as the basis for representation of the consumption experience.

If Generation Y has a shared cultural understanding that regards a bungy jump as ''cool'' or desirable consumption experience then a narrative of that consumption experience will have some level of meaning to all members of Generation Y. The earlier research investigated how consumer of bungy jumps used their narratives to construct ''cool'' identities and as such concluded that Generation Y consumers seek to have themselves and their consumption deemed ''cool'' by their most valued community.

It is too simplistic to presume that other members of Generation Y will consider any Generation Y member ''cool'' merely for doing a bungy jump. Within any social phenomenon, there are degrees of behaviour. It is not the aim of this investigation to predict that there will be preference towards certain types, based on prior analysis, but to build an understanding of how the concepts of this social phenomenon interrelate. Therefore the research question is ''to investigate Generation Y's shared global understanding of bungy jump consumption and their perception of coolness''. Thus the research aims to deconstruct some of the meaning imbued into these stories by the narrators. It was not intended to create a theoretical sample or generalise about all Generation Y behaviour from the chosen sample. Rather, it was intended to explore if the themes identified within the narratives would create a shared meaning about the consumption experience of bungy jumping, hence a

convenience sample of higher education students from USA, Scotland, England and Ireland was used.

Data collection

With over 100 filmed bungy jump narratives collected from prior research, not all of them could be shown to an audience, so a rationale for selecting narratives that could be edited into a short story that represented the essence of the bungy jump, was developed. Several elements had to be considered: the storyteller, the story, selection of audience and presentation to audience (see Table I).

Table I	Methodological considerations
Methodological issue	*How these issues were addressed*
Storyteller	An initial pilot video was put together of ten stories. These were selected on the basis of gender (50/50 split), nationality (Ireland, England, Scotland and America were all represented) and a representation of different facets of their bungy stories
	It is recognised that the inclusion of a visual story may introduce a cultural bias; for example, Americans may identify more with fellow Americans telling their stories. However, there is a compelling argument for the encompassing nature of a visual story, as the most complete representation of a consumption experience narrative and it would compromise the research to have a more limited representation such as a textual recounting of the story
Story	Each short vignette started with a response to the question, ''So how will you describe this experience to your friends and family back home?''
	It also included responses to questioning on how the consumer would use any merchandise associated with the jump and how they anticipated their friends would respond to their story
	Care was taken to include clearly articulated stories, despite colloquial language and accents
	The overall duration of initial pilot video was 26 minutes and included ten vignettes, as a result of a pilot study, the video was split into two videos of five vignettes totalling 13 minutes in length, as respondents found it hard to recall and respond to ten stories
	Each was sent to an equal number of participating institutions
Selection of audience	As the principle language of these narratives was English, it was appropriate to show the stories to a native English-speaking audience
	It was decided that the audiences for these stories should reflect the nationalities represented in the data gathering. Academic contacts were used to display these stories in a lecture setting and gather responses immediately from the audience. Contacts were made and agreements were reached with academics in America, Ireland, Scotland and England to have access to a student group that predominantly fitted within the Generation Y age frame
	The use of student groups was considered as a potential source of bias. However, a significant proportion of undergraduate students are members of Generation Y and the thrust of the investigation was to establish the nature and strength of any alienation or identification experienced by the audience
Presentation to audience	It was intended that the video would be shown at the end of a lecture and (consenting) informants requested to complete a short response sheet detailing which stories they felt had the most meaning for them and those that they did not relate to. The audience were asked open ended questions prompting them to articulate perceptions of the informants and their narrative about their bungy jump, specifically asking which they associated with most and which least
	This presentation method was piloted with two groups of international postgraduate students at the researcher's institution. The first group saw all ten stories and the second only five. Feedback from the pilot groups indicated that ten stories were too many to comprehend meaningfully and detail was lost in the process
	The response sheet was designed to encourage respondents to comment as fully as possible on their response to the presented bungy narratives. Thus matching the interpretive stance of the research and the researcher. Given that the research was to be conducted remotely, consideration was given to ensure that brevity is not the easiest option for respondents
	The pilot study indicated that an appropriate range and depth of responses were gathered from the respondents. The pilot study also demonstrated a strong response from the audience, suggesting that these stories were meaningful to the audience
	The facilitator was requested to ensure confidentiality to all students and encourage them to provide genuine and accurate personal responses to the stories. The responses were collected and immediately couriered back to New Zealand

The process of analysis

This process of analysis and interpretation of qualitative data is linked to understanding Generation Y's shared global culture of a specific consumption experience and its inherent meanings. Therefore, inference gained from the analysis process must address how insight and understanding are generated from raw data. This research seeks to understand and interpret the meanings and experience of its informants through their responses to these bungy narratives. As Wallendorf and Brucks (1993) note, it relies on understanding the informants' point of view (emic) to portray broader cultural meanings (etic point of view). The end product of this process is a conceptual framework or theory, the most complete representation of the informants' reality described by the data and framed by the researcher. Specifically, the analysis process attempts to understand and represent meanings by studying the meanings that others attach to their experiences, how these meanings coalesce and form patterns and how symbolic forms, rituals, traditions and cultural codes affirm and reproduce cultural themes and culture (Spiggle, 1994).

The process of analysis comprises several different operations, such as categorisation, abstract construction, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration and refutation. These provide a basis for exploring the theoretical significance of a piece of research (Spiggle, 1994). Through these operations, the researcher organises data, extracts meaning, arrives at conclusions and generates a conceptual scheme that describes the data. The data gathered were in written form and particular care was taken to consider that it is the audience's perception and reaction that is being investigated, not the actual stories. This adds another level of complexity to the actual nature of the reality being investigated. Any analysis is, at best, the researcher's interpretation of the collected data that best fits the data and the researcher's view of reality. These data have an added perceptual layer, the reaction of audience.

Findings emergent themes

Three major themes emerged from these data with several sub components. Each key point detailed below is supported by informants' comments.

1. How do these informants feel about the activity of bungy jumping?

Every informant appeared to be familiar with bungy jumping as an activity. The responses indicated not only knowledge of the experience of a bungy jump but informants appeared to have imagined how they would feel about the consumption experience and what their expectations and responses would be. With the exception of one respondent, everyone found something that had meaning in some aspect of these bungy jump experiences. One respondent did not relate to any of the experiences, as he/she could not imagine wanting to consume such an experience and hence could not find meaning in the stories. ''This is not something that I would particularly want to do so I don't really relate to any of these stories.''

However the other 78 informants all indicated that they had either already done a bungy jump (five) or wanted to do one. Their responses regarding the experience of bungy jumping included the themes of emotional response and ''cool''.

The most common theme regarding the actual activity of bungy jumping included the informant's imagined emotional responses during the experience, first being very scared almost over whelmed but overcoming those fears. This would be a major achievement of which the jumper could rightfully be very proud. One informant specifically compared activities such as theme park roller coasters with bungy jumps and stated how much he loved them. Another summed up their expectations of the experience as this ''exciting, adrenaline filled, nervous, very fun, out there, tell *everyone* afterwards''. Many informants commented on the importance of sharing these emotional responses and that being one of the motivations for wanting to consume such an experience. A typical comment was, ''[I would want to do this] so I can tell everyone about it later and make sure they all knew how scared I was and how hard it was for me to do it''. Several informants referred to the activity

as something they would like to do so they could tell stories about it, ''I would only ever do this so I could tell everyone I have done it'' was a typical comment that indicated the outwards social consumption meaning of bungy jumping for these informants.

''Cool'' was a recurrent comment in much of the data. Just fewer than half the informants used the term. It was used to describe both the activity (usually in a positive way) and the informant's view of the narrator (both positive ''I liked the way she didn't tell her folks – just surprise them later! She was way cool'' or ''Cool dude, funny attitude'' and negative ''the way he talked was uncool, he sounded really up himself''). The general attitude towards the actual activity of bungy jumping from this sample of Generation Y could be summarised by this participant, ''Cool, way cool in fact!''

2. How do these informants feel about the consumers who are telling their stories about their bungy jump experience?

It was significantly more difficult to establish any pattern when considering bonds between Generation Y members, specifically, members who have consumed a bungy jump and other members who are responding to their narratives about the consumption. The interpretation appeared to become fixated on personal aspects such as sharing motivations (covered by theme 3) rather than shared understanding and meaning of the consumption experience. However, one element was very clear from analysis. The need to differentiate from their parent's generation was key, this was succinctly summarised by the respondent, ''I identify most with the bungy jumper no. 3 in the sense that I would have two different speeches about the jump (one for my parents and then a real one for my friends)''. This would seem to indicate that friends could understand the ''real'' meaning of the consumption narrative when family would miss it. Hence suggesting that there is a shared understanding between friends who are likely to be members of Generation Y.

3. Motivations

There seemed to be a divide between informants whether the consumption motivation was externally or internally focused. In this sample, a smaller number appeared to be motivated by internal feelings than external, approximately a 30:70 split. Those who valued internal motivations made these types of comments; ''[I would want to do this because] I think that this kind of activity is more about your personal feelings and I suppose I would react like him and I will not put the certificate in a frame or anything showy like that'', ''I like the way he did it for himself and doesn't need to show it to everyone to impress them'', ''I have done two jumps and I did it for the experience rather than the image it may portray. Although I am 'crazy' my motives were personal in terms of achievement and not to tell everyone''.

Informants who appeared motivated by the external element of the consumption made comments relating to the importance of retelling their story after the consumption. Such as ''I think I would be like the first bungy jumper because he was very excited about his achievements and wanted to tell everyone about it which is something I would definitely do. He bought all of the accessories and was proudly going to show them off'', ''I would only do this so I could tell everyone I have done it'', ''I associated with him because he talked about almost backing out and feeling he had to do it because he had told friends, I would be like that.'' Interestingly, it often seemed that the two views were incompatible if an informant felt they would consume this experience for internal and personal motivations then they were often negative about bungy jumpers who consumed for social display reasons. For example, ''he seemed to do it for a personal achievement by not showing his certificate just like I would do . . . .she really pissed me off cos she seemed to be doing it to impress others rather than for herself.''

Conclusions and discussion

In conclusion, the actual activity of bungy jumping was perceived ''cool'' by this sample of Generation Y consumers but there was no agreement on a ''cool'' consumer and or ''cool'' story. Views expressed were often diametrically opposed on the same story. However,

respondents who expressed an empathy with internally motivated consumption appeared to have a negative reaction to socially focussed consumption and visa versa. Hence, this exploratory work would suggest that Generation Y accept bungy jumping as a ''cool'' and attractive commercial consumption activity in agreement with Generation Y media. Thus suggesting that culture creators rather than market forces have been successful at securing the consumption activity in Generation Y members' global consciousness as a cool activity, as market forces relevant to this activity (at least those controlled by the companies operating the bungy sites) do not have a large budget for promotion but other culturally based means of communication have taken the experience and spread it globally to receptive consumers.

At a personal level the shared understanding appears to be only partial and the informant's personal views on motivations to consume this activity becomes more dominant than any shared personal meaning. So it seem there is agreement about the consumption activity but the consumer does not become ''cool'' through the act of consuming. Nor is there agreement on the components that would make a ''cool'' story about the activity of bungy jumping, similarly there is not a recipe or formula that will appeal to all Generation Y members.

In this research, it is not the brand (although A.J. Hackett is globally recognised) that is particularly meaningful, rather the consumption experience (bungy jumping) that is important to Generation Y. The creation of a global market segment for Generation Y is facilitated by mass media that communicate representations of aspirational consumption practices globally, easily and cheaply, hence the knowledge of what a bungy jump is and what it means to this sample of Generation Y members. This research does suggest that Generation Y has formed a relationship with the consumption practice of bungy jumping through media representations and bungy jumping as a consumption activity has taken on totemic qualities. However, this research does suggest that the bonds between Generation Y members are weak, despite their shared understanding of bungy jumping as a consumption practice. In summary, this research emphasises the complex, plural and uneven nature of global segments. However, it adds clarity to two earlier theories, firstly Hebdige and Potter (2008) suggested that cultural producers create cool. This research reinforces that but only in so far as the consumption activity not the person consuming. Whereas it does not show a level of glocalisation of cool, these informants showed no preference for similar nationalities or any localising effect. Bungy jumping was seen as a globally know consumption activity.

This interpretation is based on an understanding of the totemic qualities of bungy jumping for Generation Y; it is a consumption activity that symbolically represents their values. It assists Generation Y to feel ''different'' from other generations who would not understand the value they derive from the experience. For example, telling one narrative to your friends (members of your generation) and a different narrative to your parents who not ''understand'' the narrative designed for friends. This could be labelled as ''symbolic generational cool'' or totemic cool.

There is anecdotal evidence that there can be a transference of ''cool'' from a branded good to an individual (Quart, 2002) and this has some parallels with McCracken's (1989) model of meaning transfer in that, meaning transfers from the celebrity to the good and then on to the consumer (McCracken, 1989). Anecdotal research suggests that a ''cool'' branded good can transfer ''cool'' to its user (Quart, 2002). However, this research suggests a development on that concept, the duality or split consciousness of ''cool'' that is observable in these consumers between inner and outer directed motivations displayed in the narratives is the dominant effect. In other words cool can only be transferred from the branded good to the consumer in the eyes of an audience if they both demonstrate self same attitudes towards inner or outer directed motivations. Informants responded positively to self same narratives that displayed behaviour that they would emulate in the same situation, the term ''cool'' emerged without prompting or elicitation as a description of the narrative and/or the narrator. The literature suggests that ''cool'' has traditionally been associated with understated and restrained behaviour (Pountain and Robins, 2000) not outer directed displays or narratives.

This research contradicts that finding, suggesting that cool is indeed dynamic and ever changing.

In conclusion, the contribution of this research is not that certain consumption activities can be perceived as cool by a global sample of Generation Y. Rather the contribution is that within this generational segment the transfer of cool from a branded good to an individual is governed not by shared or collective values and motivation but by personal values and motivation. This sample of Generation Y consumers relate and attribute cool to people most like themselves. As an audience to an unknown person's consumption narrative, these informants are able to ameliorate the global understanding of the cool consumption activity in favour of a more personal understanding of the individual's narrative. Consequently they are more likely to attribute cool and status to someone who shares the same personal motivations and values as themselves. Hence reinforcing their own self-concept in the process, if they were to do a bungy jump and narrate the experience, they would perceive that they themselves were cool.

However the obvious exception to attributing cool to other unknown members of the Generation Y cohort is the status afforded to celebrities. This research does not investigate how cool is attributed to celebrities but I speculate that the ''cult of celebrity'' or the idolatry of media personalities, would contravene this observable behaviour pattern within this sample. Particularly as intense media speculation allows individuals to feel they have a personal connection and insight into a celebrity's life, through the growth of reality television and talent shows where ordinary members of the general public become celebrities and their lives are widely reported in increasingly popular media such as gossip magazines and entertainment or ''showbiz'' television shows.

Hence the last finding of this research is the proposal that within the global cohort of Generation Y, there is a hierarchy of attribution of cool. As a global community where bonds between members are weak but relationships with the vehicles that create their culture are strong, there seems to be a set of interactional rules. First, consumption activities can be decreed as cool with very little disagreement, the acceptance of the cultural meaning created by media vehicles seems to be accepted wholesale. Whereas the meaning transference to a member of the global community is governed by personal knowledge, if we know someone personally then the rules governing how we attribute cool to them is dependent on that relationship primarily (Ferguson and Todd, 2005). This similarly applies to the attribution of cool to celebrities, as detailed by Turner (1999). However this research clearly shows that in this global generation cohort, personal motivations and values trump many other aspects.

Limitations and future directions

As addressed above, a future direction would be to further explore this split understanding that this research found and investigating how the co constituting relationship with media influences values and aspirational behaviour. This could provide insight into the relationship between these concepts and whether the term ''cool'' emerged naturalistically from the data. There is an issue of ''self-same''; informants are drawn towards participants that mirror their values and perceived behaviour if they were in a similar situation. As addressed above, this ''self-same'' identification meant that informants displayed a stronger connection to some members of their global community than others and this could possibly be considered a form of social contamination. However, as the contribution of the paper is interpreting that diametric difference of reaction between narratives, what could be considered a limitation actually moved the research to another level of interpretation.

Despite the objective of this research being tied to rich and thick understanding, the sample frame for this phase of research addressed the range of geographical and hence, cultural origins of the bungy jump consumers and informants rather than a purposive sample frame. This decision is an attempt not to create a more representative sample for generalisable purposes, but to reduce possible bias with regard to audience response. Since it was

strongly argued that video representation of stories was the most complete representation possible, then shortcomings associated with this method should also be recognised. Any insights that these narratives give into the phenomenon of ''cool'' must be tempered with the knowledge that the identification with the storytellers may bias identification with the story. However, it should be recognised that judgements are made on a range of aspects and impressions are multidimensional.

Given the limitations identified above and the research aim of understanding Generation Y as a global market segment, there are many future directions that this research could take. This research addresses responses to one consumption practice, there are many others that are deemed ''cool'' by Generation Y, do they conform to a similar pattern or are there discernable differences? There are also issues with regard to the sample of Generation Y; this research specifically used a small sample to create insight and understanding. This was in part governed by limited resources and respondents from four countries (Ireland, America, Scotland and England) could not be considered extensive as a sample, hence there is an opportunity for wider replication of this study to build on the themes established.

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