

Chapter 3

Decoding Cool in Indian Context: Meaning, Value, and Brands

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ABSTRACT

The term cool is both nebulous and valuable. It contains some magical property which transforms perceived value of anything to which it is added as prefix. Therefore, marketers want to make their brands cool for superior outcomes. But the challenge lies in apprehending what cool actually stands for and how to use it in brand building. This paper explores meaning of cool by tracing its genesis in theological texts and popular culture. Cool has connections with theological discourses of religions like Hinduism, Stoicism, and Buddhism. Buddhism's fundamental tenet is cultivation of equanimity. Hinduism's sacred text Bhagavat Gita exhorts development of control over senses. Stoicism's core principle is 'Ataraxia' or indifference. Cool in popular culture originated from the sites of slavery by people who cultivated an attitude to calmness as means to survive in punishing conditions. This study assumed cool as a signifying system and sought to uncover the hidden meaning for which it stands. It found that cool stands for four human facets: composure, paradox, good, and cheeky.

INTRODUCTION

A multi-level marketing company has made an entry into premium skin care segment with a new brand. The brand is being aggressively promoted on television. But unlike many cosmetic brands which employ 'ingredient-benefit' strategy this brand exclusively focuses on a particular user personality. One of the ads of the brands goes as follows: the setting is that of a fashion show and models in their high precision choreographed walk on the ramp are appearing one after the other. And then emerges a gorgeous model

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and camera zooms to show her meticulous and confident walk down the stage. She is probably the most admirable of all for the confidence and control of the moment and then there happens the unexpected. Her stilettos go loose and she tumbles. She smiles, collects her stilettos and holds them in her hands, claps, and stands up only to continue her walk up to the end of the ramp unruffled and perfectly at ease. The communication refrains from making elaborate description of product and only introduces the name and who it is meant for. The brand seeks to connect with women, who can laugh at their own self. That is a person who can take imperfection, failures and stress with a characteristic ease.

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

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

RATIONALE

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

'Cool' Adds Value

Notwithstanding the difficulty in understanding cool, being cool matters. It is associated with popularity and attractiveness which can endow a person considered to be cool with a wide range of benefits including personal, social and economic (Hamermesh, 2011; Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004). It is common understanding that some people and products are considered to be cool and being bestowed with this nebulous; hard to define property certainly gives them a position of advantage. For many people a brand like Apple is cool and this gives the brand in question a position of relative superiority in terms of brand desirability, price advantage and brand stickiness. Cool is especially important in children and youth segments. A lot of importance is attached to being cool. But consensus is difficult to reach as to what cool is and what it is comprised of and who personifies it the best (Adler & Adler, 1998; Pountain & Robins, 2000). Cool does not lend itself to easy articulation. It is elusive but sought after and it is

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