

# What makes a brand cool? How coolness affects the desirability of products and services.

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## **Abstract**

The subject of branding and its management is of increasing importance to marketers. Advertisers value cool brands. They help contribute brand equity, market dominance and sales. Understanding what makes a brand cool can enable marketers with their brand positioning and marketing communications.

The purpose of this study was to examine how consumers consider coolness and individuality in appraising brands. It involved the investigation of customer's perceptions of brands in relation to their perception. The relationship between the perceived coolness of brands and their individuality was measured through a range of characteristics – degree of innovation, originality, authenticity and uniqueness.

Through a quantitative approach via a consumer survey the paper established the factors relating to coolness and individuality among consumers that can enable products and services to become more attractive and desirable to consumers and in so doing provide strategic insights into prospective brand development along with broader implications for marketing and communications strategy.

In light of the findings, this research suggested key actions for marketers to undertake before engaging in branding strategies for their products and services.

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James Byrne, August 2018

# Table of Contents

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
<b>Abstract</b>	
<b>Declaration Form</b>	
<b>Submission of Thesis to the Norma Smurfit Library</b>	
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Concept of Coolness	12
2.2 Dimensions of Coolness	13
2.3 Individuality and Desirability	16
2.4 Authenticity as Cool	18
2.5 Brand Differentiation	20
2.6 Social Strategy	23
2.7 Classifying of Services	26
2.8 Difficulties in Describing Services	30
2.9 Strategies to overcome service communication challenges	33
2.10 Components of Effective Service Advertisements	35
2.11 Conclusions of Literature Review	38
<b>3. Research Questions</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>40</b>
4.1 Introduction	40
4.2 Research Objectives	41
4.3 Research Approach	42
4.4 Brand Selection	43
4.5 Survey Design	44
4.4 Data Analysis	47

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
<b>5 Findings and Analysis</b>	<b>48</b>
5.1 Descriptive Characteristics	48
5.2 Brand Metrics	52
5.3 Products versus Services	56
5.4 Data Testing and Correlation	58
5.5 Findings Summary	65
5.6 Recommendations	66
<b>6 Conclusions</b>	<b>67</b>
6.1 Discussion	67
6.2 Limitations and Further Opportunities	69
<b>7 References</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>10 Appendix</b>	<b>77</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Dimensions of Brand Personality, Aaker (1997)

Figure 2: Water bottles. Warren & Campbell (2014)

Figure 3: Hypothesized Relationship between Perceived Autonomy, Counterculturalism, and perceived perceptions of Coolness. Warren & Campbell (2014)

Figure 4: Most Advanced Yet Acceptable. Thomson (2017)

Figure 5: Meaningfully Different Brands Grow Value. Kantar Millard Brown / BrandZ (2017)

Figure 6: The CRUSH Branding Model. Van den Bergh and Behreras (2016)

Figure 7: FCB Grid. Mortimer (2002)

Figure 8: New Global Brand Simplicity Index Results. Whitler (2017)

Figure 9: Respondent profile by Gender

Figure 10: Respondent profile by Age Group

Figure 11: Respondent profile by location of residence

Figure 12: Brand Awareness

Figure 13: Brand Experience / Usage

Figure 13: Brand ratings for Innovation

Figure 14: Cronbach's Alpha test

Figure 15: Mean Desirability Scores for Apple by Coolness Scale

Figure 16: Mean Desirability Scores for Coca Cola by Coolness Scale

Figure 17: Mean Desirability Scores for McDonald's by Coolness Scale

Figure 18: Coca Cola dependent variable mean scores

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Demarcation of Services. Lovelock (1983)

Table 2: Product and Service Brands for Investigation

Table 3: Brand Metric Mean Scores

Table 4: Array Analysis for Coolness

Table 5: Brand rankings by Variables

Table 6: Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients

Table 7: Coolness ranking across Products and Services

Table 8: Average Correlation Coefficients for Coolness

Table 9: Mann-Whitney U test for uniform distribution of Coolness by Gender

## **1. Introduction**

The subject of branding and its management is of increasing importance to marketers. Advertisers value cool brands whether they be services, products or a combination of the two. They help contribute brand equity, market dominance and sales. According to Forbes, the world's one hundred most valuable brands are worth in excess of \$2.15 trillion (Desjardins, 2018). Understanding what makes a brand cool can enable marketers formalise their brand positioning and marketing communications. Enterprises that possess "the cool factor" have a substantial competitive advantage (Olson et al, 2005). However, despite coolness being a pervasive force in branding it is a difficult concept to find the essence of. It is subjective, dynamic and elusive. Papers on the subject have posited that despite assertions that coolness sells products, there is a lack of understanding about factors influencing perceived coolness. Despite assumptions that coolness increases sales, little is known about what influences consumers to perceive brands as cool (Warren & Campbell, 2014).

Coolness and individuality are also attributes strived for by many brand owners. The elusive nature of both the nature of coolness and the desirability it generates has intrigued marketing practitioners for years. Coolness affords social status and serves as a tool for creating a desired identity. As a result, consumers often crave and choose brands that they perceive to be cool.

This research study tested the relationship between the perceived coolness of brands and their individuality. Individuality will be measured through a range of characteristics – degree of innovation, originality, authenticity and uniqueness.

This paper researched the topics of:

- Coolness as a concept in relation to products and services and the relationship, if any, with brand individuality for consumers.
- Component characteristics of coolness will be explored along with commonalities and differences between brands which are deemed to be cool, across categories and regions.

The rationale for this research is derived from the literature which establishes an extensive body of international work in the area but opens opportunities for exploration of both constructs. The

resulting methodology proposed follows a framework adopted in comparable studies.

The subjective, dynamic characteristics and apparent elusiveness of coolness and individuality to many brand owners make it an attractive subject to study. Cool is mysterious, ineffable. An art, not a science (Haque, 2015). The importance and relevance to the industry is illustrated in that the American Marketing Association Foundation (AMAF) announced ‘How Cool Brands Stay Hot: Branding to Generation Y’ by van den Bergh and Behreras the winner of the 2012 Berry-AMA Book Prize for the best book in marketing.

The research evaluated the degree to which respondents’ perceived degree of coolness which is attributed to brands is dependent on other attributes. The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) states that the variables are independent of each other while the alternate hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) states that they are associated with one another. The independent variables to be examined as part of the research are derived from existing research studies on the topic:

- 1) innovative
- 2) original
- 3) authentic
- 4) unique
- 5) desirable

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Concept of Coolness**

In today's marketplace of disruption and authenticity, many consumers want to 'be cool.' Being cool in how they act, purchase and consume improves and helps define self-image within peer groups and their projection to the outside world. Belk, 2006 described cool as "a person who exhibits a nonchalant control of emotions, a rebellious trickster demeanour, an ironic detachment from the regard of others, and a 'cool' style of talking, walking, gesturing, and grooming". O'Donnell and Wardlow (2000) trace the origins of coolness to adolescence and the desire then for a new individual identity outside of the family unit.

Cool can be considered as a permanent state of private rebellion (Pountain & Robins, 2000). It is subjective and dynamic changing both over time and across segments and markets. There are degrees of coolness leading for it to be measured on a continuum. It is generally seen to be a positive quality though one that is not necessarily linked directly to desirability. For brands owners cool can also be a social differentiation strategy (Elliott et al, 2007).

## 2.2 Dimensions of Coolness

A framework around brand personality devised by Aaker (1997) identified five core dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Each dimension has a number of facets which in turn are measured by a set of traits. Traits related to this research include originality, which is related here to wholesomeness; daring – trendy & exciting; imaginative & unique, and up-to-date – independent and contemporary.

Figure 1: Dimensions of Brand Personality, Aaker (1997)



A quality that differentiates coolness from liking is inferred autonomy (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Autonomy refers to a level of independence and divergence from the norm in contrast to conformity. Factors proposed to affect perceptions of coolness include the perception of contextual appropriateness of the autonomy, the legitimacy of the norm, the level of autonomy and counterculturalism.

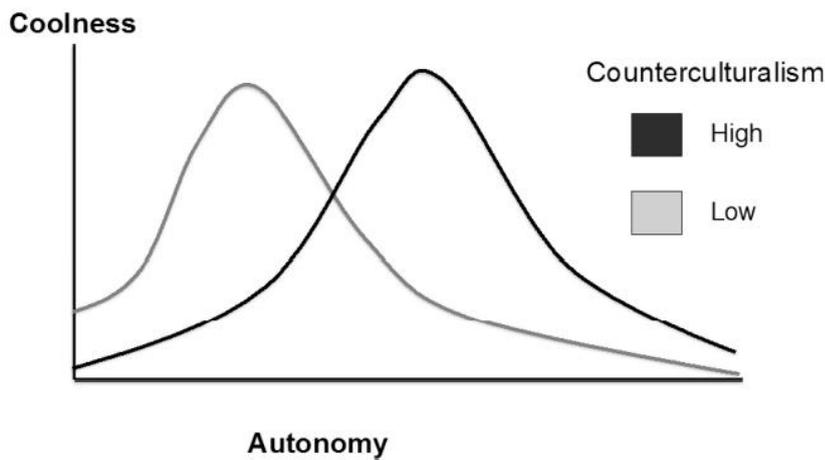
In a study on the impact of product design on perceptions of coolness Warren and Campbell, (2014) found that consumers preferred a product which deviated rather than conformed to the norm. Respondents were asked to rate bottle designs and preferred the more contemporary design (on the right) to the typical example (on the left). It was however found that increased desirability assumes that deviation was appropriate and did not adversely affect the usability of the product.

Figure 2: Water bottles. Warren & Campbell (2014)



Counterculturalism refers to instances where subcultures of consumers consider societal institutions and authority figures unjust and repressive. Suspicion and potential rejection of social norms may follow. Consumers higher in counterculturalism view higher levels of autonomy more favourably than more complicit individuals.

Figure 3: Hypothesized Relationship between Perceived Autonomy, Counterculturalism, and perceived perceptions of Coolness. Warren & Campbell (2014)



Appropriateness of autonomy is dependent on the extent to which a cultural object diverges from the norm. Three levels of divergent behaviour, low, bounded and extreme were measured against coolness and resultant product choice. Study participants were exposed to three bands displaying varying degrees of autonomy in interviews. They then scored each band on coolness and were offered the opportunity to download a song from one of the bands. Both coolness and downloads were highest for the band that displayed bounded autonomy – that is some but not too much. Thus it was concluded that there is a curvilinear relationship between autonomy and perceived coolness. Perceived coolness first increases but then decreases as autonomy increases.

### 2.3 Individuality and Desirability

Brand desirability derived through the optimum level of individuality can be witnessed in other areas. One of America's most famous designers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Raymond Loewy applied his theory of 'Most Advanced Yet Acceptable' (MAYA) to his work (Thomson, 2017).

Figure 4: Most Advanced Yet Acceptable. Thomson (2017)



The core paradox here is that consumers are both attracted to and cautious of newness. They crave the bold but familiar. Thus marketers are encouraged to adapt product positioning and promotion to occupy best place on this continuum of novelty. In assessing points of difference between brands consumers assess three desirability criteria – relevance, distinctiveness and believability (Keller et al, 2012).

Cool has been said to be an attitude or personality type consisting of three core personality traits - narcissism, ironic detachment and hedonism (Pountain & Robins, 2000). Ironic detachment suggests contrived autonomy from the status quo. Further opportunity for exploration presents itself in Rahman's (2012) study into the meaning of coolness among multinational undergraduate students and identified a common set of themes describing the term cool: fashionable, amazing, sophisticated, unique, entertaining, eye-catching and composed. His study identified unique as the third most dominant behind fashionable and amazing. The former with a 32.5% dominance clearly emerged as the overriding characteristic. Associations within unique include different and original which bear the closest comparison with autonomous which was not investigated directly.

Findings raise questions as to the extent to which coolness is dependent on autonomy relative to other more pertinent characteristics.

## 2.4 Authenticity as Cool

Southgate (2003), posited that that authenticity is the truest hallmark of cool behaviour. As trust in brands decreases anything that is seen as artificial is a negative (Schultz, 2015). This is particularly relevant for the food industry where transparency is increasingly paramount. Trust is a universal driver of brand love (Manco, 2015). Cool people desire ownership and autonomy over their identities and are drawn towards novelty in their drive for self-expression. This interest manifests itself in the discovery and adopting of new trends. Warren and Campbell, (2014) extrapolated this theory further to hypothesise that consumers who perceive themselves as autonomous seek brands with similar characteristics. A brand speaks to our self-image and encompasses the social aspect of reflection (Kapferer, 2012). Enhanced symmetry between a brand personality and the consumer's self-identity has been shown to increase brand attachment (Malar et al, 2011). Cool is about liberation (Haque, 2015). As with brands, nonconforming behaviours by individuals, can confer increased status and competence (Bellezza et al, 2014). Their study complimented this one in showing that positive inferences derived from signals of nonconformity are dependent on perceived autonomy, the context of the display and intention. Individuals exhibit stronger attachment to celebrities where there is a presence of feelings of autonomy and relatedness (Thomson, 2006). There is the opportunity here to investigate further the effect of the consumption and display of cool brands on self-identity and the associated motivations.

Coolness has also been investigated as a purchase driver in other sectors where it may not have been traditionally deemed a primary factor. Kim et al (2015) found that for technological products specifically smartphones, coolness can be considered as important a trait as usability factors in determining usage attention. Their study found that the originality of curved screens enhanced subcultural appeal and helped distinguish the individual. Their proposed coolness model showed that users are drawn to aesthetic and unique technological products that are, at launch, uncommon in the marketplace. Feelings of enjoyment, identity, and differentness can be seen to be attained through the purchase and use of devices deemed cool. Converging evidence from another study further suggests that coolness in new technological products is derived from attractiveness and originality traits and assists the end user assert their uniqueness or subcultural identity (Sundar et al, 2014). From research a four-factor model of coolness was developed, comprising originality,

utility, attractiveness, and subculture. As the closest trait to autonomy, uniqueness refers to the degree to which the device perceived to be substantively or cosmetically different from similar devices. Perceived coolness of a product can be generated through distinctive packaging, branding and functionality. Sundar et al (2014) give the examples of Grey Goose and Apple as products who derive uniqueness, the former through appearance and the latter through appearance and utility. However design alone cannot in itself generate coolness in technological products. They must be novel, exhibit uniqueness and be useful. These findings have implications for marketers in relation to cementing the selling proposition for new product launches taking into account the emotional and rational factors in driving distinctiveness brand desirability.

## 2.5 Brand Differentiation

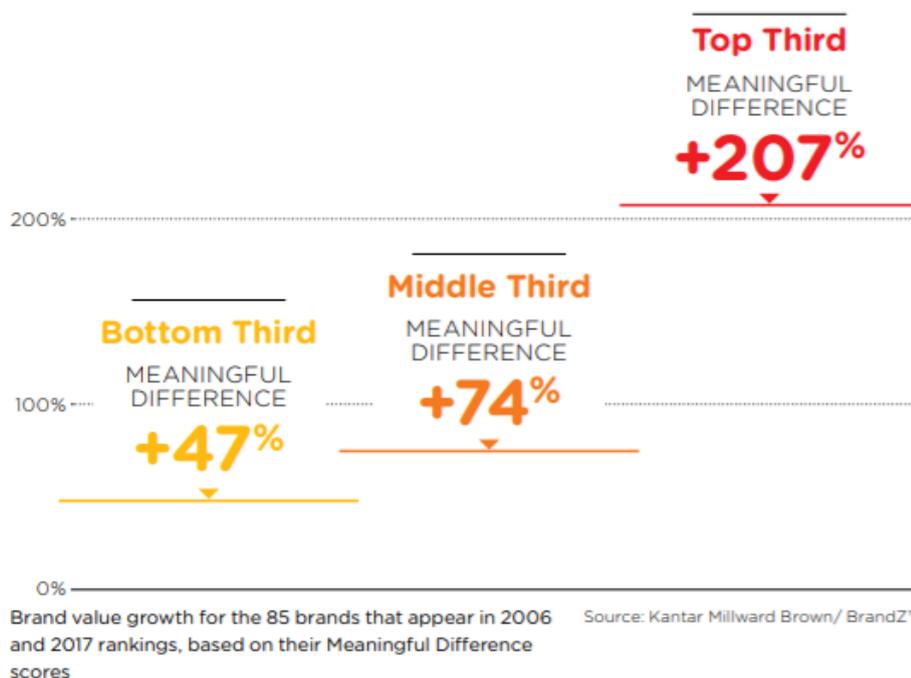
Uniqueness is an enabler of long term brand relationships (Fournier,1998). Through informant brand stories it was found that uniqueness can exist in the relationship that individuals have with the brands the they consume. Although the coolness of a brand can be dependent on the presence of uniqueness, uniqueness in respect of the consumer-brand relationship can exist by itself, or at least apart from autonomy and any notion of cool.

*“It's getting harder to maintain and build the salience of brands. There's too much 'noise' and too many choices, and consumers cope by being highly selective about what they attend to and what they remember.”*

*(Bayne, 2017)*

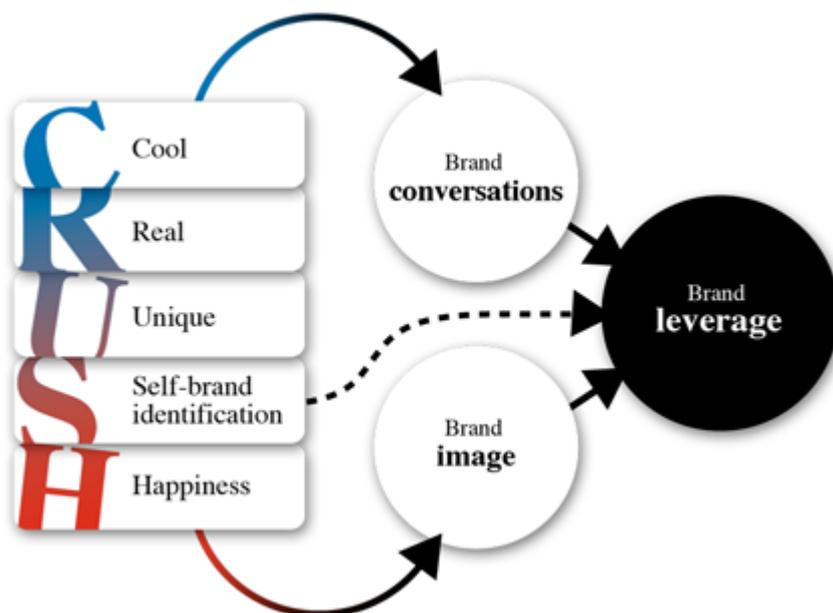
Difference gives the brands their competitive advantage. It is one of three components (along with meaning and salience) that comprise Brand Power, the BrandZ measurement of brand equity.

Figure 5: Meaningfully Different Brands Grow Value. Kantar Millard Brown / BrandZ (2017)



In their seminal book on the subject, Van den Bergh and Behreras (2016) identified five success factors of Gen Y brands – coolness, realness, uniqueness, self-identification and happiness. This learning emerged from a large scale quantitative survey covering over four thousand 15 to 25 years olds in 35 countries. Among the most important brand characteristics reported by them was having its own style and staying up-to-date – both of which relate to coolness. These factors impact both brand image and talkability. The latter is particularly important in this peer influenced group.

Figure 6: The CRUSH Branding Model. Van den Bergh and Behreras (2016)



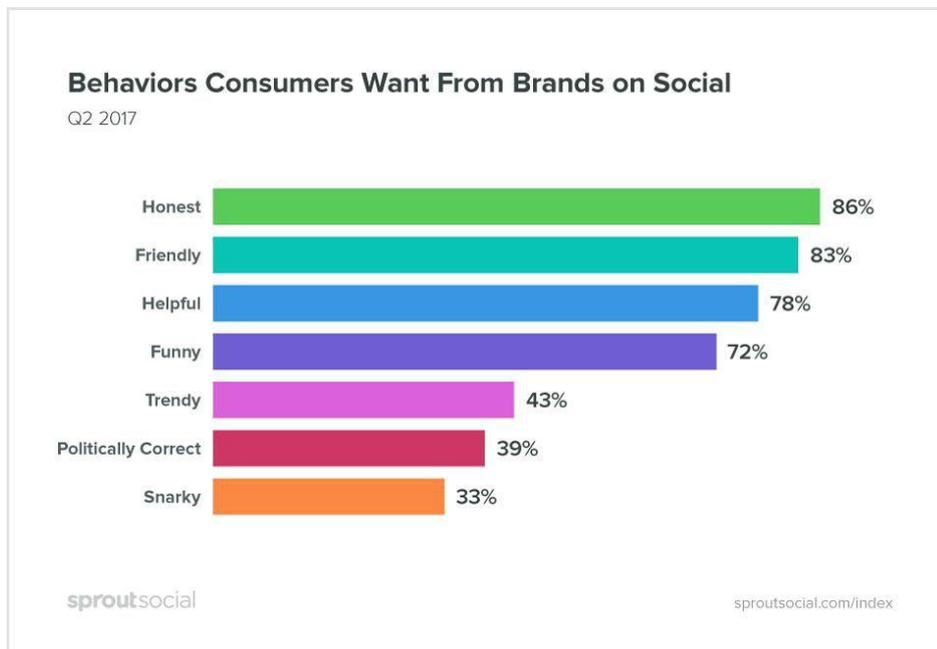
From this research 14 archetypical characteristics predicting the coolness of a brand were generated. In order of importance they were: trendy; high status; clean reputation; successful; creative; fun; cheerful; own style; changes a lot; luxurious; clearly stands for something; contemporary; honest and retro. These core brand associations can help build a focused brand mantra (Keller et al, 2012). The closest aspect to autonomy is ‘own style’ which ranks 8<sup>th</sup> and is in fact, closer to uniqueness (another primary factor). A further study by the same authors discounted edginess, along with buzz value and effort, as key dimensions in cool brands. Rather originality, popularity and appeal emerged as the core components. These findings indicate that autonomy is not a principle source in brands becoming cool. Rebellion has been usurped by

conformity. Strategies for creating coolness include; exclusivity and scarcity, innovation and novelty and advertising media selection. A unique brand identity, along with passion and consistency have been recognised as key components of successful brands (DeMers, 2013). Brand consultancy Interbrand publishes the Best Global Brands report on an annual basis. It identifies the world's 100 most valuable brands. Brand strength is one of the three contributing pillars to brand value (along with financial performance and the influence the brand has in purchase decisions). Ten internal and external dimensions make up brand strength including clarity, commitment, authenticity, consistency, relevance, presence, differentiation and engagement. Social listening has come to play a key role in evaluating brand strength, supporting traditional consumer goods data measures.

## 2.6 Social Strategy

Recent developmental trends in contemporary consumer behaviour present new opportunities for research on autonomy and brand desirability. The emergence of social media and its resultant fostering of co-creation has implications for brand owners (Conejo, 2011). Coolness has evolved into a status system especially among the young (Belk et al, 2010). In western societies, in particular, youth is revered and counterculturists have achieved exposure in media and art forms. Those who seek coolness seek products that diverge from the norm and are more likely to be part of sub and / or countercultures.

Online brands have taken a fresh approach to social strategy by incorporating humour into exchanges with fans. But while this approach gets plenty of attention, it can be counterproductive. While the public appreciate funny brands on social, only a third are attracted by overly snarky brand personalities—and a 88% of people find it annoying when brands tease their social following (Popomaronis, 2017).



There are further opportunities for study into autonomy as a desired trait and coolness as a salient factor in brand desirability among age groups. The origins of cool in teen society imply that that is where its impact is strongest although more recent linkage to wealth and overt consumption may indicate that its very essence is becoming more mainstream and capitalist in nature. Coolness

as a construct has evolved and softened in recent years. From an expression of social deviance and rebellion it has become a display of conspicuous consumption (Pountain & Robbins, 2000). In the ear of the postmodern consumer, desired levels of autonomy may have adjusted to reflect a more nuanced and commercial ethos. An absolute passion and a very clear focus driving quality and consistency has been determined to be an essential component in creating cool brands (Fong, 2013).

Coolness in individuals is derived from attributes including confidence, attitude and rebelliousness (Barker, 2014). But what defines a ‘cool’ brand? Coolbrands UK, which produces a list of Britain’s coolest brands, people and places, identifies six criteria which voters are asked to bear in mind when voting for a cool brand:

- 1) style;
- 2) innovation;
- 3) originality;
- 4) authenticity;
- 5) desirability;
- 6) uniqueness.

It can be seen from the literature that although coolness and individuality are pervasive forces in brand identity they are difficult concepts to find the essence of. They are subjective, dynamic and elusive. Apple was voted the UK's coolest brand for the fifth year running on the 2016/2017 CoolBrands list (Benjamin, 2016). The growing dominance of online streaming and social media services is evidenced by the presence Netflix, Instagram and Spotify in the top ten. Stephen Cheliotis, chairman of the CoolBrands Council, said: *"While Apple is still perceived by influencers and the public alike to be the UK's coolest brand, a concerted wave of fast-growing, entrepreneurial businesses are building momentum to seriously challenge its position. Challenger brands are utilising new technologies, new business models and new ways of thinking, while remaining accessible and useful"*.

The top 20 ranked brands in the 2016/17 CoolBrands report were:

1. Apple

2. Glastonbury
3. Netflix
4. Aston Martin
5. Nike
6. Instagram
7. Spotify
8. Adidas
9. PlayStation
10. YouTube
11. Google
12. Airbnb
13. Alexander McQueen
14. Bose
15. MAC
16. Sonos
17. Harley-Davidson
18. GoPro
19. Chanel
20. Ray-Ban

Despite Apple's sustained period of dominance continuing coolness cannot be assumed. It's spearheading of the digital media revolution and reinvention of the smartphone has seen rivals emerge. A survey of American high school students in 2014 found that Apple was losing its cool factor among its technology contemporaries. While 71% those questioned rated Google as "cool," and 72% said the same for Amazon, just 64% held that belief for Apple - while nearly a third thought Apple is "smug" (Chegg, 2014). Price, superfluous functionality and styling were seen as impacting factors.

There is the opportunity to investigate the two constructs in the context of the consumer. The insights into the composition of both brand traits derived from the literature review will provide the foundation for the research questions. A further consideration is the demarcation in the construct and marketing of products and services and the impact on brand strategy.

## 2.7 Classifying of Services

At a base level, services can be categorised as deeds, processes and performances (Wilson et al, 2016). Historically, services have been defined in terms that have differentiated them from goods and services. A service can be described as a ‘deed, act or performance (Berry, 1980). As services are less tangible than products the challenge for marketers is to build a perceptible brand identity.

Christopher H. Lovelock (1983) introduced a classification system which drew parallels between different industries to move beyond standard distinctions between goods and services. Lovelock posited that the diversity of the sector inhibited generalising of marketing practices across different categories. He outlined five distinguishing schemes to enable classification;

1. Nature of the service act
2. Relationship between supplier and customers
3. Levels of customisation and judgement
4. Demand and supply characteristics
5. Delivery of service

### Nature of the service act

Services can be classified in terms of tangible and intangible actions to various subjects as can be seen in the following table adapted from Lovelock’s version.

Table 1: Demarcation of Services. Lovelock (1983)

Recipient	Subject	Action	Example
People	Bodies	Tangible	Haircut
Things	Possessions		Postal service
People	Minds	Intangible	Education
Things	Assets		Insurance

Eventualities of overspill between categories was considered particularly in relation to the usage of buildings and equipment in the provisioning of many people focused services. Levels of

customer presence, both physical and mental, during service delivery should be considered along with the how the target is modified as a consequence of the service.

#### Relationship between supplier and customers

Lovelock differentiated between services where there is a 'membership' relationship with its customers and ones where there is no such formality. The advantages of the former include loyalty, contact insights, greater certainty of demand and pricing strategy, all of which can inform advertising and promotions. Where no formal relationships exist, the marketer must encourage discrete transactions from often first time customers. Wider above the line communications may be required, in preference or in addition to direct marketing to drive new prospect sales.

#### Levels of customisation and judgement

Goods tend to be standardised to a set quality and quantity. Services on the other hand can be highly individual and perhaps intentionally customised to the recipient. In such cases the experience and flexibility of customer contact personnel is paramount and such tailored service is often salient in marketing communications, especially in high level purchases. Even with more standardised services, such as public transportation, variability in delivery can lead to heterogeneity. Outlining the service process and outcomes in marketing communications can lessen associated variability risks. Displaying positive outcomes of difficult situations has been shown to have a positive impact on service brand perceptions in a phenomenon known as the 'recovery paradox' (Wilson, 2016).

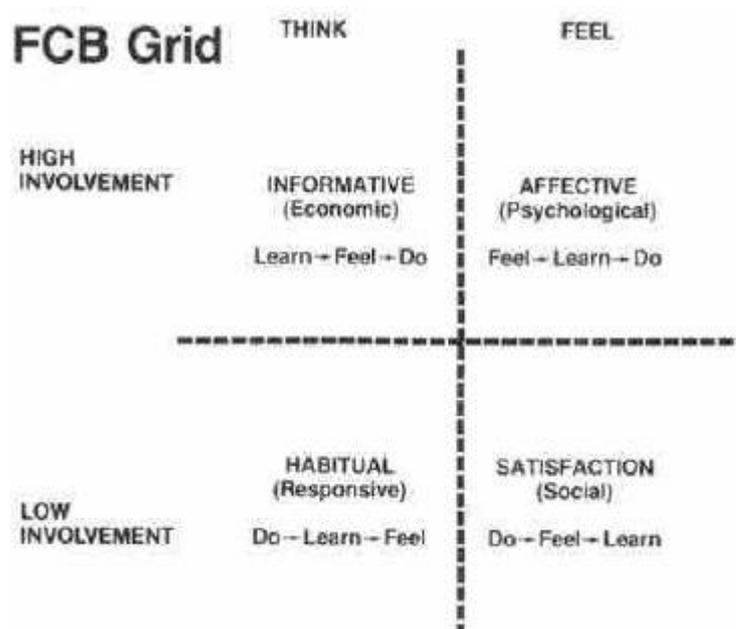
#### Demand and supply characteristics

Manufacturing firms can stockpile in advance of predicted demand. Service businesses do not have this luxury. Services can be differentiated both in terms of how demand spikes can affect supply efficiency and also the degree to which demand fluctuates over time. Marketers can seek to equalise demand patterns through promoting offers at fallow periods and creating new consumption opportunities. Widening the time appeal of services, which are traditionally seasonal, can boost demand and sales across the year

#### Delivery of service

Services can be delivered in-person or off-site, or via electronic means. The internet has transformed the creation, promotion and delivery of services (Zinkhan, 2002). Communication strategies can seek to encourage electronic word of mouth prevalent in many such categories. Integrated marketing communications can effectively bridge the gap between the marketplace which may be online and service delivery in a real world context. Grove et al (2002) utilised Lovelock's earlier typologies of services to assess the degree of intangibility and recipient of the service (people or possessions) to create four categories of service. Their study of magazine advertisements looked at the level of integration between the dual use of image and behaviour tools. The authors discovered a general lack of direct response or follow up mechanisms to drive behaviours and recommended wider use of this communication tool. Plotting services across a sliding scale was further explored by Mortimer (2002) who adapted the FCB grid which classifies in terms of high/low involvement and think/feel influences, to create four types of services, each having a different hierarchy of effects and subsequent advertising approach.

Figure 7: FCB Grid. Mortimer (2002)



Rather than speak in terms of products and services Levitt (1981) preferred to categorise in terms of tangibles and intangibles, degrees of intangibility and their impact on marketing strategies. Intangible products (services) depend on surrogates to communicate benefits to prospective customers. Such surrogates can comprise of physical evidence, current and/or

experienced users and be utilised to tangibilise the intangible. Levitt questioned the degree to which even physical products can be reliably tested prior to purchase. Transparent packing is one tactic to allay risk fears with regards to FMCG products. In such ways both services and products are sold based on 'promises of satisfaction' through which "metaphorical reassurances become the amplified necessity of the marketing effort"

Levitt went on to discuss the problems presented by the delivery of intangible products and the variable impact the human element can have on quality control. He suggested industrialisation of service to substitute people intensive efforts with technologies to reduce heterogeneity. This topic was also covered by George & Berry (1981) who described a service as a performance, be it people-based or equipment-based. In the former service quality is inseparable from that of the provider.

## 2.8 Difficulties in Describing Services

Wilson et al. (2016) examined how the innate intangibility of services leads to them being explained using words alone which presents several risks. The attempts at such descriptions can lead to:

1. Oversimplification - especially in relation to elaborate (complex) brands.
2. Incompleteness – omitting key details.
3. Subjectivity – descriptor bias due to prior experience and knowledge.
4. Biased interpretation – by the message receiver.

Effectively managing external communications between the company and its customers assists in the minimisation of provider gap four as outlined in the gaps model created by Zeithaml et al, (1990). Gap 4 emerges when the delivery of a service does not match the company's service promises. Contributing factors to such a disparity outlined by Grönroos (2007) include;

- (a) Lack of integration in marketing communications
- (b) Ineffective management of customer expectations
- (c) Over-promising
- (d) Inadequate inter-departmental coordination

Wilson et al. (1916) outlined five factors that contribute to communication challenges within the service sector;

- (1) Intangibility
- (2) Management of service promises
- (3) Management of customer expectations
- (4) Customer education
- (5) Internal marketing communications

### Service Intangibility

Because services are performance rather than physical products it is more difficult to communicate their benefits to customers. Five properties associated with intangibility increase the risk of customer uncertainty affecting the effectiveness of service marketing communications;

- (1) *Incorporeal existence*: Services in and of themselves do not occupy an actual physical space so it can be difficult to visualise them in advertising.
- (2) *Abstractness*: Increasing understanding of sometimes vague concepts can be challenging for service companies.
- (3) *Generality*: The challenge is one of differentiation of a service with ephemeral impacts in an often-crowded competitive marketplace.
- (4) *Non-searchability*: Because a service exists in the moment of its delivery it can be more difficult to quantify and evaluate prior to purchase.
- (5) *Mental impalpability*: Customers may lack the prior knowledge and experience to fully understand and appreciate services which can often be high in credence properties.

Strategies to overcome these negating characteristics of intangibility via communication with customers include the use of narratives to storyboard the consumer journey and the presentation of vivid concrete information to reduce generality. Interactive imagery can be incorporated into brand advertising and logos to illustrate the service itself. Tangibility can be further enhanced through personalisation through brand icons or featuring the service provider or recipient in promotional materials. Service companies provide tangible cues to overcome the innate lack of physical presence and reduce perceived risk (Fisk & Grove, 2015). Recurring themes and symbols can generate advertising continuity in the mind of the service customer and enhance ‘coolness’.

Realistic and truthful promotion of services can assist in aligning service promises with customer expectations. Promotion can also work as an educator of the customer base in informing and clarifying key areas including providing mechanisms, the various roles and evaluation. Since services are often consumed as a shared experience, mistargeted communications can often impact negatively on the brand (Hoffman et al, 2009). As employees are often central to the execution of the service it is important that they are considered in the overall communications strategy. Effective marketing communications emphasising quality and reliability can help address customers’ fears regarding variability in service delivery.

Vargo and Lusch (2004) offered a contrasting take on the traditional characteristics used to distinguish goods and services. They opined that the features of intangibility, inseparability,

heterogeneity and perishability do not accurately distinguish between the two and focus more on the manufacturing than the consumption process. They instead focused on the role played by the consumer in the perception, use and adoption of products away from the control of the manufacturer. Furthermore, they suggest that physical products face much the same challenges in their marketing as services do.

## 2.9 Strategies to overcome service communication challenges

There are traditionally four basic forms of promotion available to services – advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and publicity (Baron et al, 2009). A sound communications strategy is based on three primary steps (Hoffman et al, 2009);

- (1) Target market selection
- (2) Establishing a positioning strategy
- (3) Selecting the optimum communications mix.

Many service organisations prioritise brand values in their marketing communications over the benefits of individual service offerings (Palmer, 2014).

George and Berry (1981) presented six general guidelines for the advertising of services that aid in the reduction of risk in the delivery and perceived quality of the service.

### (i) Communicate to Employees

Customer facing personnel act as an important secondary audience for service advertising. Effective communication should not only encourage customers to buy but also inspire employees to perform. Effective advertising can help define for employees what is expected of them and improve morale.

### (ii) Invoke Word-of-Mouth

The inherent variability in service delivery contributes to the risk but also potential of word-of-mouth both in service selection and post-use discourse. Leveraging such potential might involve:

- (a) encourage satisfied customers to share their experiences
- (b) encourage potential customer to solicit information
- (c) target advertising at opinion leaders and early adopters
- (d) featuring satisfied customers in advertising

In such ways the inclination of consumers to seek out personal, word-of-mouth recommendations can be considered and strategised in non-personal communications.

### (iii) Provide Tangible Clues

Due to the difficulty in evaluation and pre-testing services are perceived to be higher risk than products. Such perceived risk can be reduced in the minds of the consumer through the use of tangible clues which provide 'meaningful evidence'. Many products utilise abstract concepts to increase their desirability. However such a strategy with services, which are already abstract, can dilute the reality that the marketer is trying to communicate. So peripheral clues are required which come in the form of celebrity endorsements (personification), physical evidence and numbers.

### (iv) Making the Service Understood

The intangibility of services can make them difficult to define and to be understood completely. Tangibles can be used to address this challenge. Metaphors, both visual (in logos) and verbal (in copy and taglines) can define the service and cement the benefits to the consumer.

### (v) Advertising Continuity

Services are non-visual by nature and differentiation can be a challenge. The long-term incorporation of distinctive symbols, formats and/or themes can help build and reinforce the desired image creating recognisability.

### (vi) Promising What is Possible

Variability in delivery lead George and Berry (1981) to recommend that 'prudence and caution' should prevail when making promises in service advertising. Expectations, they argue, should be managed to realistic levels to decrease the likelihood of post purchase dissonance.

Authenticity and trust are core components of cool brands and this is particularly applicable to services which by their very nature entail some uncertainty.

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## **2.10 Components of Effective Service Advertisements**

Mortimer (2008) examined a sample of six service advertisements (all television) from the UK institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) Effectiveness Database to draw conclusions about successful strategies. She found that emotional appeals and physical representation are more often than not used both for experiential and functional utilitarian services and the level of documentation is low. However, such content characteristics may be due to the choice of media as much as the offering, and the small sample should be noted when drawing broader conclusions.

Mortimer posits that emotional rather than rational appeals tend to be more effective, although both have their uses. She suggested that marketers should consider tangibilising the service in the minds of consumers through use of display of tangible cues or presenting the service encounter. It is not necessary to present lots of facts and figures even for complex services such as banking. Two reasons for this was considered – that supporting data was available from other secondary sources or that purchase decision making was based more on emotional responses than rational comparisons.

These conclusions correlate with Whitler (2017) who found that brands that create simpler consumer experiences are more successful across key performance metrics including loyalty, stock performance, premium pricing and the driving of disruption. She referenced the Global Brand Simplicity Index study produced by global brand strategy and experience firm Siegel+Gate which ranked 857 brands on their perceived simplicity.

Figure 8: New Global Brand Simplicity Index Results. Whitler (2017)



Melymbrose, (2016) recommended that a business define its core brand values in order to best determine look (design), message (voice), and relationships (customer service). She separated a brand into two external aspects;

1. Visual identity which comprises logo, colours, and typography.
2. Voice identity which includes tagline, tone, and communication styles.

Such clarity of thinking and purpose will translate into effective advertising strategies and help shape the service offering in the minds of the consumer.

In their study of 84 MBA students across a range of service category advertisements, Zhang et al (2014) found that emotional advertising was more successful, and that it led to higher

purchase intentions for experiential services, such as the travel industry, while rational messages worked better in credence services, financial services for example. Both strategies were found to increase trustworthiness when applied to the correct service type. Rational advertising tends to provide factual reasons to purchase and decreases consumer uncertainties while emotional advertisements tend to jolt consumers and are less likely to contain defining attributes. The goal of emotional advertising appears to be centred on attention seeking and perception as opposed to rational advertising where competitive positioning is the primary focus.

Décaudin & Lacoste, (2010) examined 4,233 press advertisements to measure the impact of advertising strategy against three variables: type of offer, type of market and industry. They concluded that industry type was the most defining characteristic in terms of strategy ahead of service characteristics. Again it should be noted that, as in Mortimer's study, only one media was examined.

Tripp and Drea (2002) studied Amtrack passengers in Illinois, USA and their perception of and attitude towards the transportation service provider. They found that core service elements are the main affecting factors in perception although factors seen as more peripheral can still encourage service uptake.

Albers-Miller & Stafford (1999) took the debate to an international level with a content analysis of advertising of goods and services across four countries: Brazil, Taiwan, Mexico and USA. Their results showed variance in the use of rational and emotional appeals in advertising both in terms of service type and country and suggest that culture plays a leading role in advertising strategy. Generally though goods feature more content and rational appeals in their ads while services rely more on emotional cues to convey their messages. The challenge for marketers is to address the intangibility of services in creating cool brands.

## **2.10 Conclusions of Literature Review**

The existing literature establishes some relationship between the perception of self and the external world, including products and services. Furthermore, certain brand attributes including autonomy have been found to influence coolness. Moving forward the challenges identified in the marketing of intangible services present new opportunities for research into how they can be positioned as cool and the impact if any on desirability.

From the literature review, there is the opportunity to audit brand perceptions based on coolness across products and services to ascertain the degree to which characteristics of individuality present themselves, and lead to attractiveness in the minds of the consumer. The challenge for services is how to present that uniqueness while at the same time providing reassurance to the consumer prior to delivery.

### **3 Research Questions**

To examine how consumers consider coolness and individuality in appraising a selection of brands. It involved the investigation of customer's perceptions of brands in relation to their perception. The relationship between the perceived coolness of brands and their individuality was measured through a range of characteristics – degree of innovation, originality, authenticity and uniqueness.

What makes a brand cool? How does coolness affect the desirability of products and services.

To ascertain whether individuality and associated brand constructs affect the degree to which brands are perceived as cool

To investigate whether coolness has a measurable effect on the desirability of products and services.

#### **Variables**

Age

Gender

Location

Brand awareness

Brand experience

Brand attributes

1. Innovation
2. Originality
3. Authenticity
4. Uniqueness
5. Coolness

Desirability

## **4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Research methodology demonstrates how the research was conducted and identifies the Process undertaken to complete the study. This study takes a positivist approach to the research and aims to discover the value that consumers place on characteristics of individuality in the context of the coolness of brands on the overall relationship, if any, with desirability. A deductive approach was adopted in order test existing hypotheses based on existing theory identified during the literature and developed into the research objectives. In order to investigate this a rating scale was used to determine the degree to which respondents perceive attributes in certain brands.

## **4.2 Research Objectives**

Data requirements are identified based on a number of research objectives:

### **Overall Research Objective or Topic**

What makes a brand cool? How does coolness affects the desirability of products and services.

### **Research Objective 1**

“To ascertain whether individuality and associated brand constructs affect the degree to which brands are perceived as cool”

The following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>1</sub> – Brands perceived to having greater characteristics of individuality are regarded as being more cool.

### **Research Objective 2**

“To investigate whether coolness has an effect of the desirability of products and services”

The following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>2</sub> – Brands perceived to being more cool are in turned deemed more desirable by consumers.

### **4.3 Research Approach**

Warren & Campbell (2014) in their empirical study found that perceptions of coolness were enhanced when appropriate levels of autonomy were present. This study aimed to extend the construct of autonomy onto other areas of individuality including innovation and originality.

In order to test the hypotheses, the research collected primary data from a convenience online sample. The main advantage of convenience sampling in this instance is that a sizeable robust sample size can be achieved increasing the validity of the results. Primary research encompassed a quantitative survey conducted via MailChimp to explore the deductive theories outlined. A deductive approach involves development of a theory and hypothesis (or hypotheses) and the design of research strategy to test (Saunders et al., 2007). Quantitative research is suitable for this purpose. The use of survey methodology is justified in this research project because the sample size is relatively large at 138 respondents. It has been recommended that brand attribute ratings are most efficiently measured through quantitative research surveys (Fanning, 2006; Bruun et al. 2016). Respondents were asked to grade a range of brands across a range of parameters – see appendix for full questionnaire.

The combination of questions provided robust data, that is reliable and valid, to address the research question. As the research does not depend on a proportional demographic angle a non-Online respondents were gathered via direct links distributed via email and social media posts (primarily Facebook, What's App and LinkedIn).

Data analysis was conducted via Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS software. Microsoft Excel allowed for restructuring of data and presentation via charts and graphs while SPSS enabled the advanced validity and reliability testing necessary in order to establish correlation between variables.

#### **4.4 Brand Selection**

The research involved an investigation of the degree of coolness attributed to a selection of brands correlated with specific characteristics attributed to coolness by previous studies. The brands were selected strategically from two international sources:

1. The 2017 BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands ranking and report published by WPP and Kantar Millward Brown.
2. Interbrand's Best Global Brands 2017

BrandZ reports annually on the top 100 most valuable global brands through worldwide, on-going, in-depth quantitative consumer research. The research covers two million consumers and more than 10,000 different brands in over 30 countries. This intensive, in-market consumer research differentiates the BrandZ methodology from competitors that rely only on a panel of "experts" or purely financial and market desk research.

At the heart of a brand's value is its ability to appeal to relevant customers and potential customers. BrandZ measures brand appeal and validates it against actual sales performance. Brands that succeed in creating the greatest attraction power are those that are meaningful, different and salient. By quantifying and combining financial value, predicted future earnings and brand contribution a rankings table can be created.

With a network of 21 offices in 17 countries, Interbrand is a global brand consultancy. There are three key components in all of Interbrand's valuations: analyses of the financial performance of the branded products or services, of the role the brands play in the purchase decision, and of the competitive strength of the brands. Role of brand evaluates the percentage of the purchase decision that is attributable to the brand, relative to other factors, such as price and convenience. Brand strength is measured across a set of 10 factors, both internal and external. External factors include authenticity and differentiation which are investigated in this paper.

## 4.5 Survey Design

The questionnaire asked respondents to measure their perception of brands' coolness and individuality on a 5 point Likert scale following the brand personality model developed by Aaker (1997). A Likert scale is an orderly scale from which respondents choose the option that best supports their opinion. It is used in this research study to measure respondents' knowledge of and perceptions of brands. The range of real life brands under investigation encompassed a breadth of category, age and region and allow for greater analysis and comparison. A pilot test enabled the questionnaire to be optimised prior to main release. This involved the release of a draft questionnaire to a select group of colleagues in order to receive feedback on content and structure. Understanding and completion time were two key considerations following this process and helped inform the final survey release.

Online survey respondents were informed of the nature of the study and advised on the use of data. Once their willingness to partake in the survey was established via a gateway question, they were asked to confirm their gender, age and if they were resident in the Republic of Ireland or not. Across ten selected brands they were asked if they had experience of them and if they had experience of and/or used them.

For each brand the respondent scored each brand on a five point Likert scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) for six specific criteria.

- 1) Innovation
- 2) Originality
- 3) Authenticity
- 4) Uniqueness
- 5) Coolness
- 6) Desirability

Likert (1932) developed his scaling technique which enables the customers to answer questions from a set number of alternatives. This method was extremely useful for measuring opinions of the respondents and the subsequent data analysis. Betts and Hartley (2012) advocate the

adoption of ordinal scales in questions to gauge attitudes and opinions.

The twelve brands chosen are selected leading entries from both the BRANDZ and Interbrand reports. Listed with category and country of origin they are;

- 1) Apple - consumer electronics, computer software, and online services (USA)
- 2) Tesla - electric vehicle manufacturer (USA)
- 3) Netflix – online media streaming service (USA)
- 4) IKEA – furniture and home accessories retailer (Sweden)
- 5) Amazon -online retailer (USA)
- 6) Samsung- consumer electronics (South Korea)
- 7) Facebook -social media and messaging (USA)
- 8) Coca Cola – soft drinks (USA)
- 9) Adidas – sports and casual wear (Germany)
- 10) Toyota – cars (Japan)
- 11) McDonald's – quick service restaurants (USA)
- 12) Starbucks – coffee chain (USA)

The brand listing was randomised for each response to enhance validity. Two thirds are of American origin. They span a range of industries from telecommunications, motors, quick service restaurants, apparel, soft drinks and retail (both online and offline). Their origins span from Coca Cola which was founded in 1892 and introduced to Ireland sixty years later to 21<sup>st</sup> century brands namely Tesla and Facebook or those which have only expanded to Ireland in the past decade and a half – IKEA, Netflix and Starbucks. They encompass both products and services with primarily product brands being Coca Cola and Adidas while those focused exclusively as services including Facebook and Netflix. The majority of the ten encompass elements of both:

- Toyota and Tesla - cars and after sales service
- Apple and Samsung - smartphones and services including music and social
- Starbucks and McDonald's – meals and restaurant experiences.

Associated levels of tangibility (physicality) range from low for pure services to high for pure products.

Table 2: Product and Service Brands for Investigation

Brand	Founded	Introduced to Ireland	Product	Service	Tangibility	BRANDZ 2018 Ranking	Interbrand 2017 Ranking
Apple	1976	1984	Y	Y	High	2	1
Tesla	2003	2017	Y	y	High	-	98
Netflix	1997	2012	-	Y	Low	61	78
IKEA	1943	2009	Y	y	High	76	25
Amazon	1994	1998	y	Y	Low	3	5
Samsung	1938	1977	Y	Y	High	33	6
Facebook	2004	2005	-	Y	Low	6	8
Coca Cola	1892	1952	Y	-	High	14	4
Adidas	1949	1950s	Y	-	High	100	55
Toyota	1937	1972	Y	y	High	36	7
McDonald's	1955	1977	y	Y	High	8	12
Starbucks	1971	2005	y	Y	High	23	60

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

The results were examined for reliability and validity through SPSS using a number of tests.

- Cronbach's Alpha test which measured reliability or internal consistency.
- Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient which is a nonparametric measure of the strength and direction of association that exists between variables.
- Mann-Whitney U test used for ordinal dependent variables, to test variances of responses between different groups.

Validity is the extent to which intended measures are accurate in a quantitative study (Heale and Twycross, 2015). Reliability on the other hand relates to the consistency of the results and the extent to which they would be replicated if the study was repeated on another occasion.

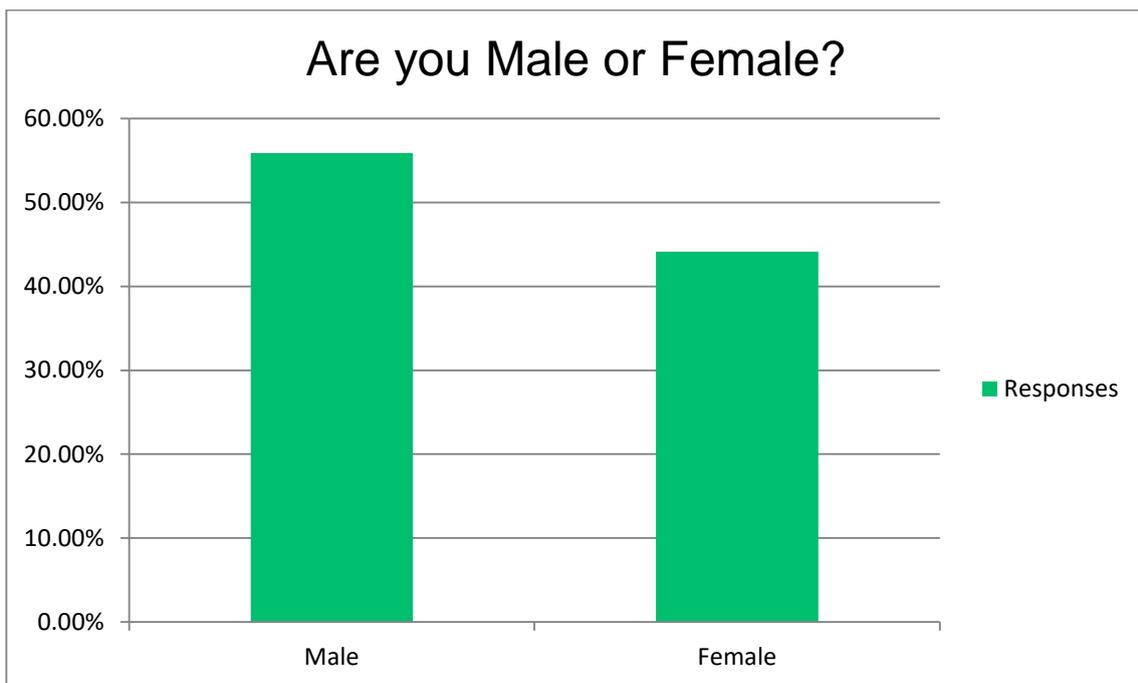
## 5 Findings and Analysis

### 5.1 Descriptive Characteristics

This section of the study examines the demographic characteristics of the respondents, namely age group, gender and location and is presented through bar charts.

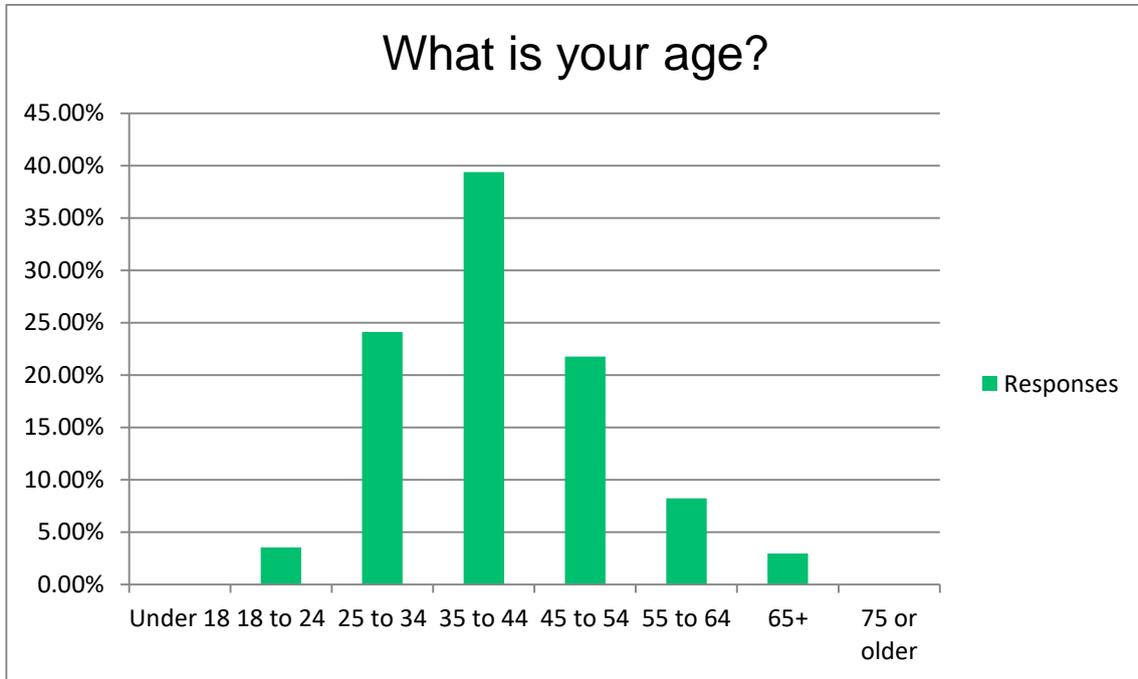
Of 173 respondents, 138 (80%) completed the questionnaire. The gender split was 56% males and 44% female.

Figure 9: Respondent profile by Gender



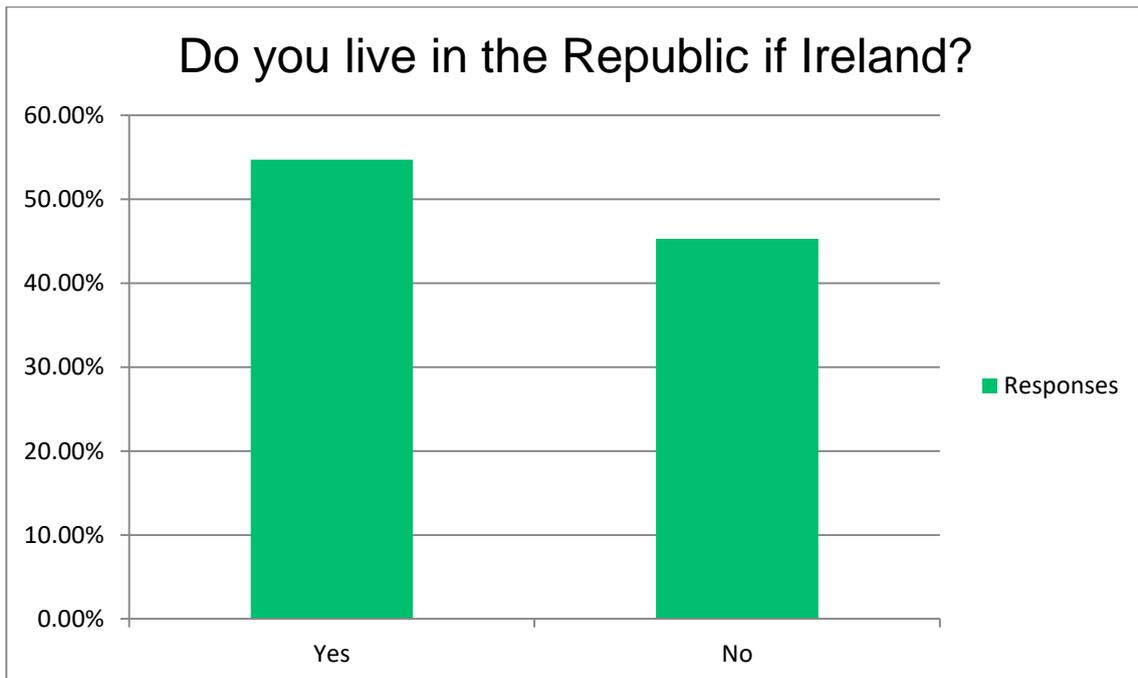
Over 85% of respondents were between 25 and 54 years old with none under 18 or over 75.

Figure 10: Respondent profile by Age Group



55% of the sample were resident in the Republic of Ireland.

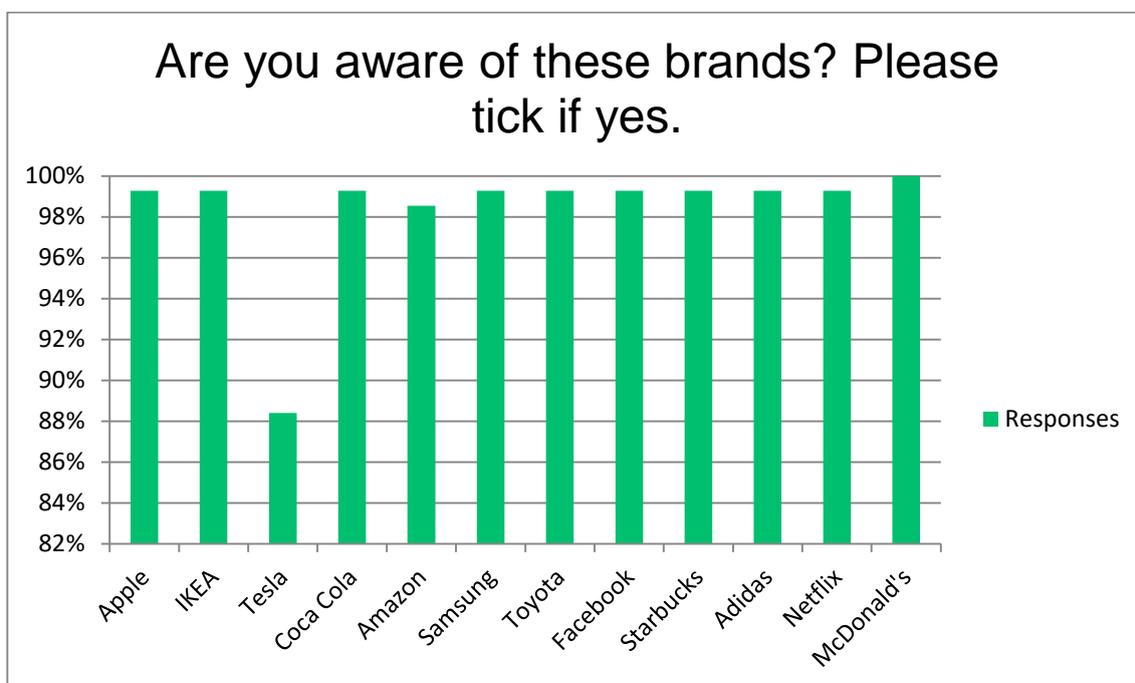
Figure 11: Respondent profile by location of residence



### Awareness

McDonald's was the only brand to achieve 100% awareness. However, all others achieved 99% awareness apart from Tesla at just over 88%. Tesla is the most recent brand to be introduced to Ireland in 2017. To the end of July 2018, 101 cars were sold in Ireland accounting for a market share of just 0.09% (Source: Simi Statistical Service New Registrations July 2018). Bearing in mind the relatively young lifestage and low penetration of the Tesla brand it's level of brand awareness is impressive.

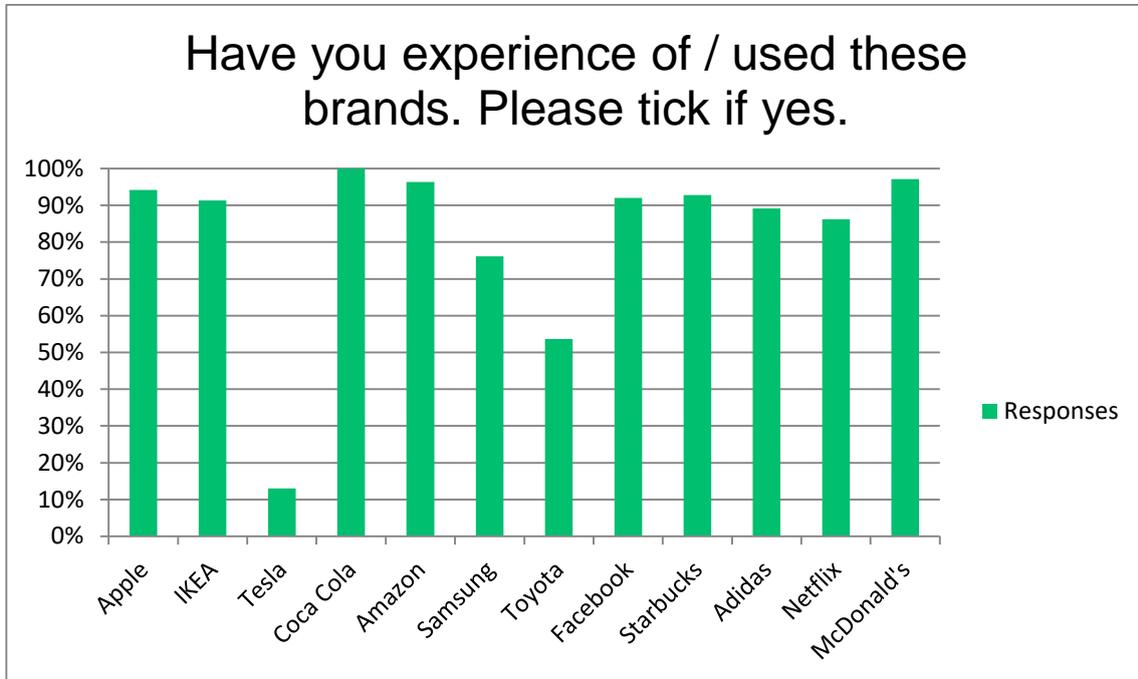
Figure 12: Brand Awareness



### Experience / Usage

In terms of experience and /or usage Coca Cola was the only brand to achieve 100%. All other brands achieved over 80% apart from the relatively high cost automotive products Toyota (54%) and Tesla (13%), along with Samsung (76%).

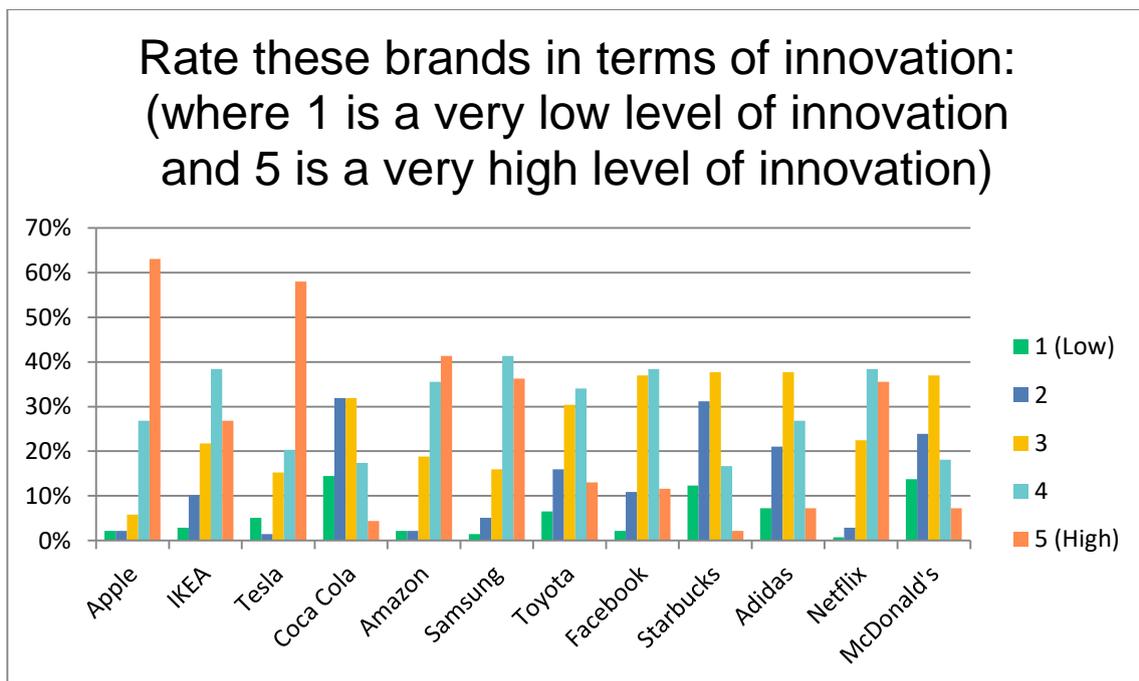
Figure 13: Brand Experience / Usage



## 5.2 Brand Metrics

For each of the brand metrics respondents rated in terms of a Likert scale from 1 (very low level) to 5 (very high level).

Figure 13: Brand ratings for Innovation



A score can be generated via the Likert scale by multiplying the frequency of responses for each scale by the value attributed to that scale (1-5), adding those together and dividing by the total number of responses. The table below outlines the averages for each brand in each metric measured.

Table 3: Brand Metric Mean Scores

Brand	Innovation	Originality	Authenticity	Uniqueness	Coolness	Desirability	Average
Apple	4.46	4.30	3.88	3.92	4.11	4.31	<b>4.16</b>
IKEA	3.76	3.99	3.91	3.81	3.20	3.02	<b>3.61</b>
Tesla	4.25	4.17	3.74	4.09	3.90	3.96	<b>4.02</b>
Coca Cola	2.65	3.01	3.54	2.89	2.77	2.60	<b>2.91</b>
Amazon	4.12	3.93	3.44	3.63	3.13	3.06	<b>3.55</b>
Samsung	4.06	3.54	3.49	3.06	3.34	3.41	<b>3.48</b>
Toyota	3.31	3.04	3.43	2.56	2.25	2.50	<b>2.85</b>
Facebook	3.46	3.54	2.99	3.50	2.40	2.39	<b>3.05</b>
Starbucks	2.65	2.62	2.91	2.24	2.50	2.40	<b>2.56</b>
Adidas	3.06	3.05	3.47	2.70	3.34	3.15	<b>3.13</b>
Netflix	4.05	4.13	3.80	3.77	3.78	3.62	<b>3.86</b>
McDonald's	2.81	2.83	3.12	2.47	2.12	2.23	<b>2.60</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>3.22</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>3.31</b>

In addition to the average or mean the standard deviation (SD) of an array is used to measure how spread out the responses are. The higher the SD the more spread out the data is. For coolness the standard deviation is highest for Adidas and Tesla brands at > 1.2 indicating that opinion less uniform for them. Conversely SD is lowest for Toyota and Samsung at < 1 which indicating a narrower spread of opinion.

Table 4: Array Analysis for Coolness.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Coolness - Apple	131	1	5	4.11	1.035
Coolness - IKEA	131	1	5	3.20	1.153
Coolness - Tesla	131	1	5	3.90	1.214
Coolness - Coca Cola	131	1	5	2.77	1.180
Coolness - Amazon	131	1	5	3.13	1.084
Coolness - Samsung	131	1	5	3.34	.981
Coolness - Toyota	131	1	5	2.25	.987
Coolness - Facebook	131	1	5	2.40	1.093
Coolness - Starbucks	131	1	5	2.50	1.119
Coolness - Adidas	131	1	5	3.34	1.220
Coolness - Netflix	131	1	5	3.78	1.083
Coolness - McDonald's	131	1	5	2.12	1.045

From these scores the brands can be ranked 1-12 for each metric and overall based on an unweighted average as outline in the table below:

Table 5: Brand rankings by Variables

Brand	Innovation	Originality	Authenticity	Uniqueness	Coolness	Desirability	Average
Apple	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
Tesla	2	2	4	1	2	2	2
Netflix	5	3	3	4	3	3	3
IKEA	6	4	1	3	6	7	4
Amazon	3	5	8	5	7	6	5
Samsung	4	6	6	7	5	4	6
Adidas	9	8	7	9	4	5	7
Facebook	7	6	11	6	10	11	8
Coca Cola	11	10	5	8	8	8	9
Toyota	8	9	9	10	11	9	10
McDonald's	10	11	10	11	12	12	11
Starbucks	11	12	12	12	9	10	12

Ranks shaded in green indicate metric ranks above the brand's overall average while those in red are below the average. Apple was the overall top ranked brand achieving top scores in four areas; innovation, originality, coolness and desirability, and second in authenticity and uniqueness, to IKEA and Tesla respectively. Apple became the world's first trillion-dollar company in August 2018 (Gurman et al, 2018). It is ranked first in the Interbrand report and second in the BRANDZ study, below Google. Tesla, the least recognised and experienced brand was nonetheless ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> on average. It was weakest in authenticity where it was placed forth.

The top three brands overall; Apple, Tesla and Netflix ranked in that order for originality, coolness and desirability indicating some relationship between those characteristics. The greatest discrepancy between the coolness ranking and the others is exhibited by Adidas which is ranked 4<sup>th</sup> overall for coolness but only ninth for innovation and uniqueness. All brand metrics scored lower than coolness for Adidas, indicating some other attributes other than those investigated in this study may be at play. Another brand to show deviation in its coolness ranking against other measures include Facebook which only ranked 10<sup>th</sup> for coolness but 6<sup>th</sup> both for originality and uniqueness. It also ranked second lowest for desirability. In the past year Facebook has received widespread criticism of its role in influencing elections and referenda internationally through so-called fake news. The lowest ranked brands overall are both American quick service restaurants - McDonald's and Starbucks. Comparing individual brand rankings is not the primary objective of the research study. However they help to illuminate the examination of performance across the measures and provide indications of correlation.

### 5.3 Products versus Services

Result findings show that brands score independently of their characteristic, whether they be products, services or a mix of the two. Apple, the brand which ranks top for coolness encompasses both products (iPhone, iPad, Watch) and services (TV, Music and support). Exclusively service brands Netflix and Facebook, which also incorporate a high degree of intangibility, rank 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> respectively. Notably two brands which could be considered primarily service and operate in a similar sector McDonald's and Starbucks are among the lowest coolness scores. However, similarities between categories is not uniform as is illustrated two car manufacturers Tesla and Toyota which come in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> respectively.

Table 7: Coolness ranking across Products and Services

Brand	Product	Service	Tangibility	Coolness Ranking
Apple	Y	Y	High	1
Tesla	Y	y	High	2
Netflix	-	Y	Low	3
IKEA	Y	y	High	6
Amazon	y	Y	Low	7
Samsung	Y	Y	High	5
Facebook	-	Y	Low	10
Coca Cola	Y	-	High	8
Adidas	Y	-	High	4
Toyota	Y	y	High	10
McDonald's	y	Y	High	12
Starbucks	y	Y	High	9

There are a number of potential reasons for the mixed performances between the two segments:

- I. Consumers do not discriminate between products and services when evaluating brands.
- II. The service brands examined have overcome the communications challenges presented to them (outlined in the literature review).

III. The brands selected for study may have different identity goals. Coolness although an attractive attribute in many instances may not be a desired attribute for some brands and within some categories.

As previously stated the primary objective of this study is to examine links between coolness, individuality and desirability which is addressed in the next section.

## 5.4 Data Testing and Correlation

Cronbach's Alpha test is a measure of reliability or internal consistency. The result is a number between 0 and 1. This study achieves a figure of 0.87 indicating a good level of internal consistency. A value above .70 is deemed acceptable (DeVellis, 2003).

Figure 14: Cronbach's Alpha test

### Scale: ALL VARIABLES

#### Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	131	75.7
	Excluded <sup>a</sup>	42	24.3
	Total	173	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

#### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.870	.871	6

The Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient is the suggested nonparametric measure of the strength and direction of association that exists between two variables measured via ordinal scale such as the Likert scale used in this paper. The postulation of a Spearman correlation test is that there is a monotonic relationship evidenced in the data. This may be a positive association in that as one variable increases another one also increases, or negative, in that as one variable increases another decreases (Laerd, 2013).

Results indicate a significant positive correlation between coolness and all the other brand attributes being investigated as illustrated by the coefficients in the table below.



Table 6: Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients

		Correlations						
		Coolness - Apple	Innovation - Apple	Originality - Apple	Authenticity - Apple	Uniqueness - Apple	Desirability - Apple	
Spearman's rho	Coolness - Apple	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.404**	.524**	.457**	.509**	.591**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	131	131	131	131	131	131
	Innovation - Apple	Correlation Coefficient	.404**	1.000	.512**	.396**	.295**	.451**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	131	138	138	138	131	131
	Originality - Apple	Correlation Coefficient	.524**	.512**	1.000	.528**	.461**	.648**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	131	138	138	138	131	131
	Authenticity - Apple	Correlation Coefficient	.457**	.396**	.528**	1.000	.480**	.441**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	131	138	138	138	131	131
	Uniqueness - Apple	Correlation Coefficient	.509**	.295**	.461**	.480**	1.000	.391**
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	131	131	131	131	131	131
	Desirability - Apple	Correlation Coefficient	.591**	.451**	.648**	.441**	.391**	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	131	131	131	131	131	131

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

An analysis of the average coefficients across all brands indicate that coolness has the strongest positive relationship with desirability. Convergent validity is indicated in the highly correlated independent variable and dependent variables. In effect, the cooler a brand is perceived to be the more desirable it becomes. Of the inherent brand attributes being investigated for association with coolness uniqueness has, on average, the strongest positive correlation for the twelve brands chosen in this paper. Originality follows with an average correlation coefficient of 0.53. Authenticity and innovation both have average correlation coefficients of 0.41 indicating that, although not as strong as influence as the other variables they still exhibit a significant level of correlation. Since p value is significant at  $p < 0.05$  the null hypotheses are rejected and a relationship is established between the independent variable (coolness) and the dependent variables (individuality metrics and desirability).

Table 10: Average Correlation Coefficients for Coolness

Brand Attribute	Correlation Coefficient
Desirability	0.70
Uniqueness	0.53
Originality	0.48
Authenticity	0.41
Innovation	0.41

Graphically the relationship between coolness and desirability can be illustrated by plotting the mean desirability for each rank of coolness for same brand. As illustrated in charts below for Apple, Coca Cola and McDonald’s the higher the rank of coolness the higher the predicated mean score for desirability will be. This is found to be the case for all brands in the study, whether they be products or services, whatever their degree of coolness indicating a strong correlation between the two variables.

Figure 15: Mean Desirability Scores for Apple by Coolness Scale

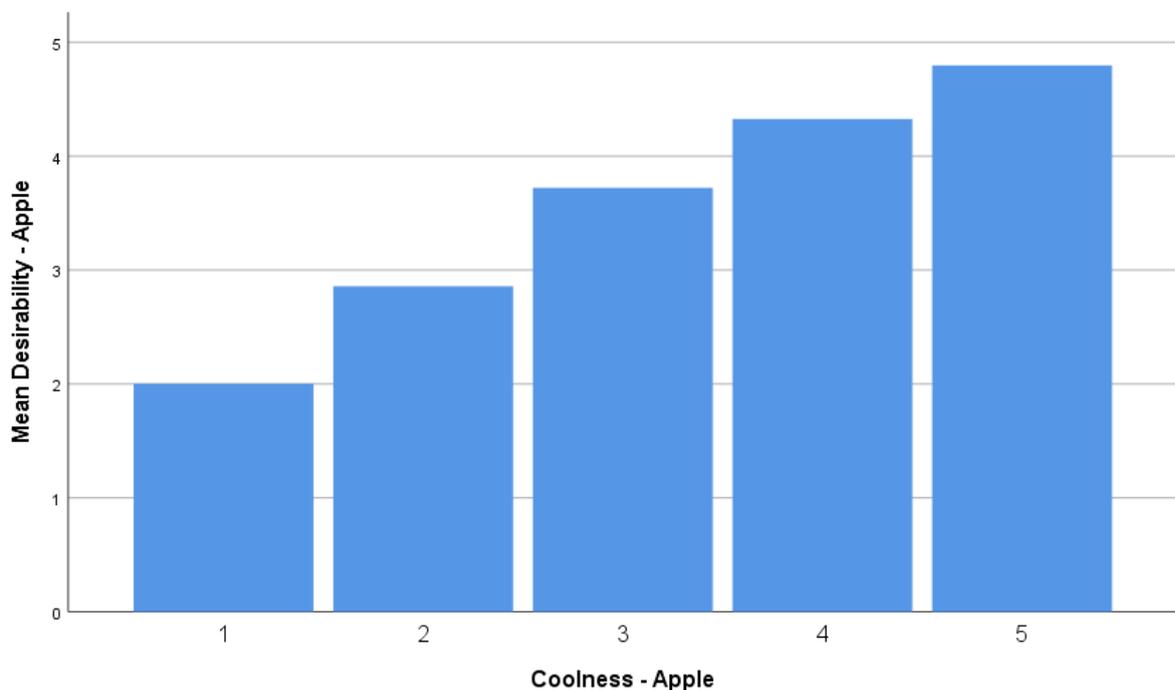


Figure 16: Mean Desirability Scores for Coca Cola by Coolness Scale

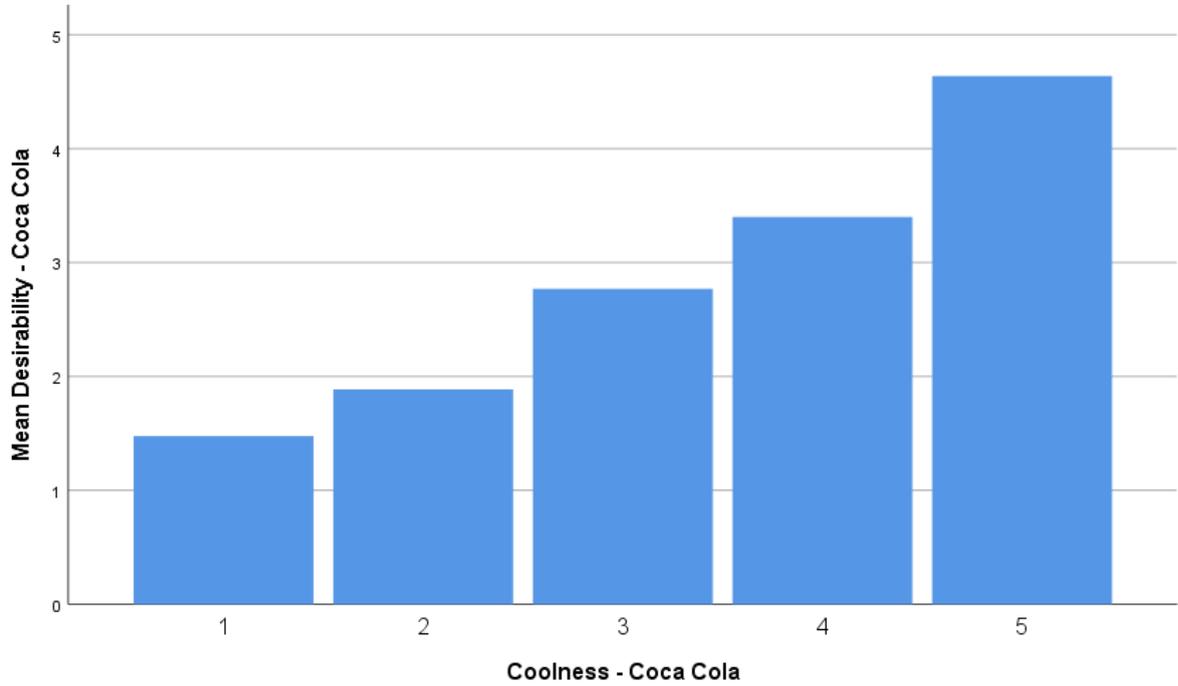
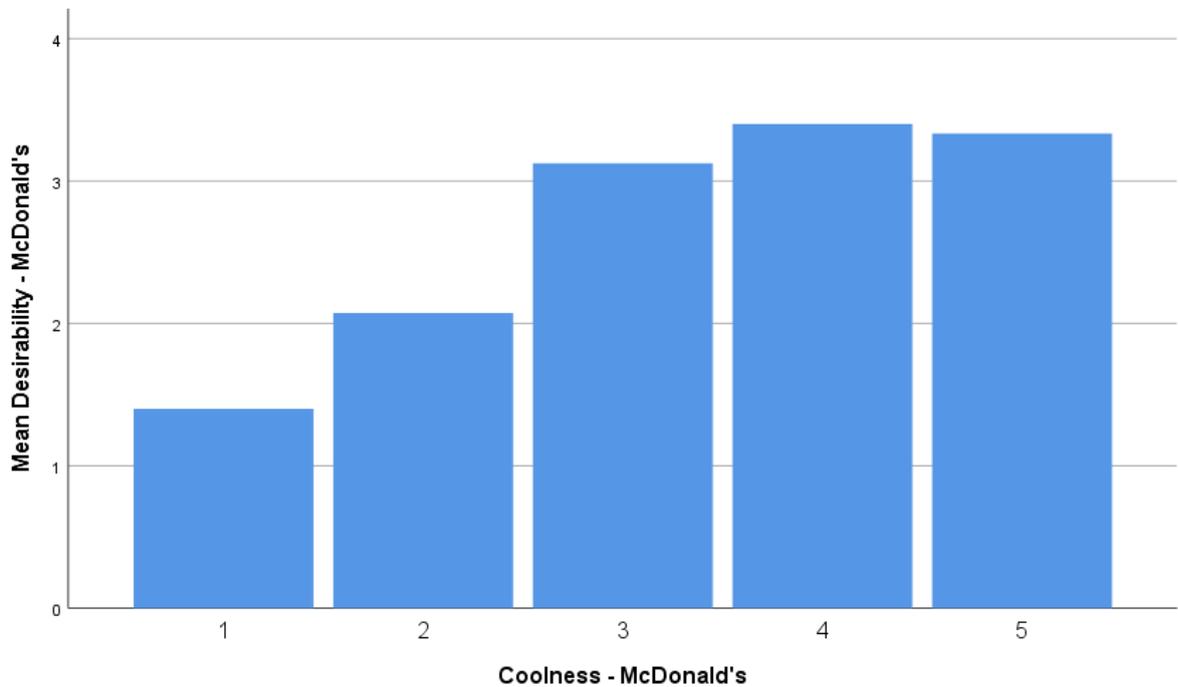


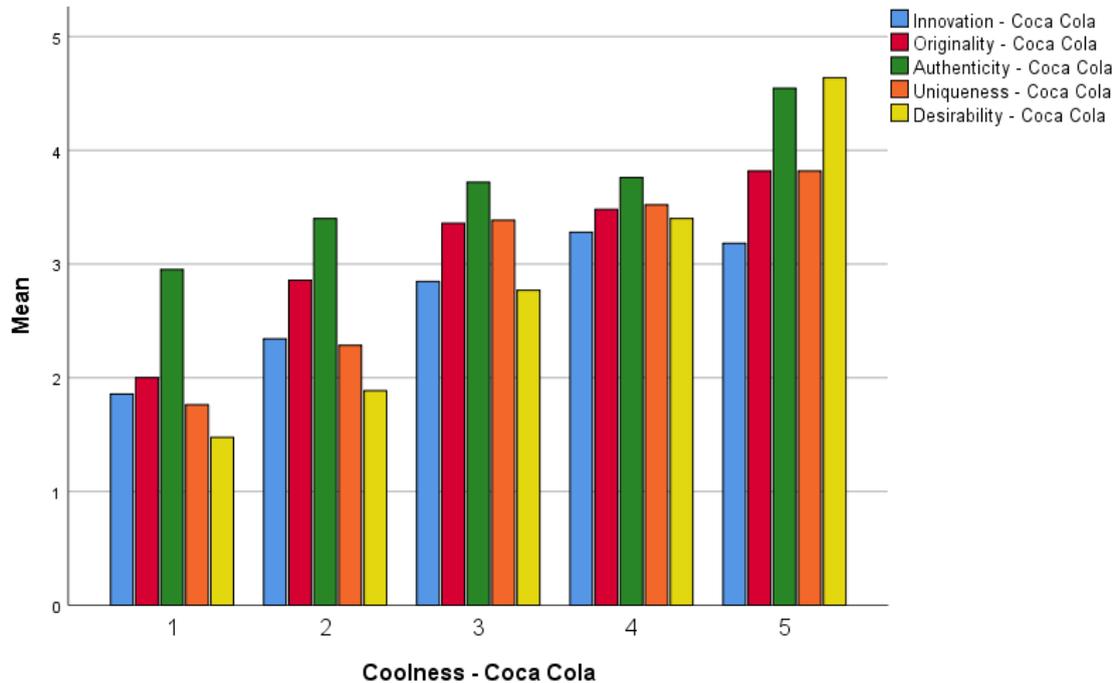
Figure 17: Mean Desirability Scores for McDonald's by Coolness Scale



Taking Coca Cola as an example, it can be understood that brand attributes around individuality are related positively to increasing perceptions. The upward trajectory in the

mean scores is evident when moving from left to right across the grades of coolness.

Figure 18: Coca Cola dependent variable mean scores



The Mann-Whitney U test is used for ordinal dependent variables, to test variances of responses between different groups (DeWintter & Dodou, 2010). Examining the results for coolness across males and females it indicates that certain brands show significant statistical differences in coolness ratings for males and females – Apple, IKEA, Coca Cola, Amazon, Samsung, Facebook, Starbucks and Netflix while four brands display greater similarity in the distribution profile between genders – Tesla, Toyota, Adidas and McDonald’s. Differences in the perceptions of coolness for certain brands can be expected among consumers based on target market, experience and attitudes. The null hypothesis in this test relates to the uniformity of response by gender and not to the overall questions posed in this research paper.

Table 8: Mann-Whitney U test for uniform distribution of Coolness by Gender

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Coolness - Apple is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of Coolness - IKEA is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.011	Reject the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Coolness - Tesla is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.203	Retain the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of Coolness - Coca Cola is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.018	Reject the null hypothesis.
5	The distribution of Coolness - Amazon is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.024	Reject the null hypothesis.
6	The distribution of Coolness - Samsung is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.047	Reject the null hypothesis.
7	The distribution of Coolness - Toyota is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.407	Retain the null hypothesis.
8	The distribution of Coolness - Facebook is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.006	Reject the null hypothesis.
9	The distribution of Coolness - Starbucks is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.018	Reject the null hypothesis.
10	The distribution of Coolness - Adidas is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.349	Retain the null hypothesis.
11	The distribution of Coolness - Netflix is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.015	Reject the null hypothesis.
12	The distribution of Coolness - McDonald's is the same across categories of Gender.	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.184	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

## 5.5 Findings Summary

The levels of correlation established between variables in the study is sufficient to establish a positive relationship between the dependent and independent variables concluding that the null hypotheses (no relationship) can be rejected and the alternative hypotheses which proposed a relationship between brand coolness, individuality and desirability accepted.

Thus, the following conclusions can be drawn from the research:

- Brands perceived to having greater characteristics of individuality are regarded as being more cool.
- Brands perceived to being more cool are in turn deemed more desirable by consumers.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

The study provides insight to marketers striving to build or refresh their brand portfolio. The challenge of differentiation in today's crowded marketplace places a premium on stand out products and services. A unique brand identity, along with passion and consistency have been recognised as key components of successful brands (DeMers, 2013). A brand audit, conducted either internally or by a consultancy, can illuminate the strengths and weaknesses in existing, brand perceptions and positioning and enable strategy formulation to address issues and maximise opportunities in brand strategy, based on exiting core values.

The analysis of leading global brands confirms that coolness is derived from a number of factors including innovation, uniqueness, individuality and authenticity. Brand owners who focus on enhancing these characteristics in their products and services can expect enhanced perceptions among consumers which in turn positively drives desirability, usage and loyalty. The study builds on previous research which posits that enterprises that possess "the cool factor" have a substantial competitive advantage (Olson et al, 2005) while coolness has also been identified as a purchase driver (Kim et al , 2015)

Brand insights derived from research can help inform marketing communications including advertising, sponsorship and PR. The challenge in building brands of substance in today's service led economy which provide meaning and identity to consumers can be addressed through such understandings.

# 6 Conclusions

## 6.1 Discussion

The fundamental aim of this dissertation goes beyond a narrow account of what brands are cool and what aren't. Following an extensive literature review, this research's foundation is built upon the fact that inferences of individuality lead to enhanced inferences of coolness (e.g., Belk et al., 2010; Warren & Campbell, 2014), while also impacting positively on desirability.

This research study established a correlation relationship between the perceived coolness and desirability of brands. It also found that characteristics concerning individuality were more likely to be found in brands perceived as cooler. Increased degrees of individuality itself along with uniqueness, and to a lesser degree, authenticity and innovation were found in brands that are perceived to be cool such as Apple. Brands which are deemed to be less cool, Starbucks for example, tend to display these characteristics less.

As a result of the study the null hypotheses have been rejected and the alternative hypotheses accepted in respect of positive effects for:

1. Individuality and other constructs of autonomy have positive effects on a brand's perceived degree of coolness.
2. The more a brand is perceived as cool the more likely it is to be desired.

Of all the brand metrics measured coolness shows closest positive correlation to desirability indicating that cool brands are desired more. This is of import to marketers intent on pursuing a strategy of creating cool brands, be they products or services, or enhancing the perceived coolness of existing brands. The implied positive effect on desirability, and with proper planning distribution sales can be used as justification for this course of action. Furthermore, the correlation established between components of individuality and coolness has the potential to inform brand development and communications whether they be products or

services and their associated degree of tangibility. Individuality and uniqueness, both in the brand itself and in the marketing channels and messages used to promote it, can increase a brand's salience, coolness and desirability. Conversely a low score for any of the brand metrics measured (uniqueness, innovation, individuality and authenticity) has been found to impact adversely on brand coolness, particularly within certain categories.

The findings of the research study have implications as regards brand theory and for marketing practitioners, particularly brand managers and advertising executives who like to understand what makes brands desirable to consumers. The establishing of the degree of relationship between various brand attributes associated with individuality and coolness has, to the knowledge of the author, not been conducted in this way before.

## **6.2 Limitations and Further Opportunities**

There is opportunity for researchers to expand the brands under investigation into other categories or to focus on a specific category such as groceries or clothing. In addition to autonomy there are other contributing factors that could be considered to impact on coolness including rebelliousness, availability and price that are open for investigation. Although positive correlation has been established between components of individuality and coolness their weighting is more difficult to compare across products and services, acknowledging the converging of these constructs across many categories in recent years including telecommunications and media. In this respect the growth of licencing or subscription services could be examined for attractiveness versus the more traditional product classifications they challenge.

Due to sample size the study was largely examined as a single group but a wider representative survey would present the opportunity to interrogate results to a greater degree by geodemographic or attitudinal characteristics. Additionally, the degree to which the individual considers themselves to be cool may have either an enticing or inhibiting factor on their attraction towards certain brands and categories.

One potential weakness that could be considered in future studies is the potential of variability in the understanding of relatively abstract fluid concepts amongst individuals especially when the sample is a heterogeneous international one. Similar, often overlapping constructs such as uniqueness and originality, for example, may need to be teased out in another more qualitative forum or examined through experimentation and case study rather than scale measured.

Further to the establishment of a link between coolness and desirability there is the opportunity to explore the concept of a price premium in relation to how much extra consumers are prepared to pay for products and services they perceive as cool. In addition, the role of influencers in brand promotion via social media is a topical and controversial trend. Finally, further studies are recommended into the impact of coolness on other important positive brand discriminators including trust and loyalty.

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# Appendix

## Brands

### 1. Welcome to My Survey

This survey will inform my primary research for a dissertation on Brands. It takes approximately 7 minutes to complete and will not be used for any other purpose. Thanks for your cooperation.

James Byrne, NCI

1. Please indicate if you are happy to take part.

Yes

No

## Brands

### 2.

2. Are you Male or Female?

Male

Female

3. What is your age?

Under 18

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

65+

4. Do you live in the Republic of Ireland?

Yes

No

## Brands

3.

5. Are you aware of these brands? Please tick if yes.

- Coca Cola
- McDonald's
- Samsung
- Adidas
- Netflix
- Apple
- IKEA
- Facebook
- Amazon
- Toyota
- Starbucks
- Tesla

6. Have you experience of / used there brands. Please tick if yes.

- Starbucks
- Tesla
- Coca Cola
- Toyota
- McDonald's
- Facebook
- Apple
- Amazon
- Samsung
- Netflix
- IKEA
- Adidas

7. Rate these brands in terms of **innovation**: (where 1 is a very low level of innovation and 5 is a very high level of innovation)

	1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>				
Coca Cola	<input type="radio"/>				
Samsung	<input type="radio"/>				
IKEA	<input type="radio"/>				
Adidas	<input type="radio"/>				
Tesla	<input type="radio"/>				
McDonald's	<input type="radio"/>				
Starbucks	<input type="radio"/>				
Netflix	<input type="radio"/>				
Apple	<input type="radio"/>				
Amazon	<input type="radio"/>				
Toyota	<input type="radio"/>				

8. Rate these brands in terms of **originality**: (where 1 is a very low level of originality and 5 is a very high level of originality)

	1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)
Tesla	<input type="radio"/>				
IKEA	<input type="radio"/>				
Netflix	<input type="radio"/>				
Apple	<input type="radio"/>				
Coca Cola	<input type="radio"/>				
Starbucks	<input type="radio"/>				
Amazon	<input type="radio"/>				
Samsung	<input type="radio"/>				
McDonald's	<input type="radio"/>				
Adidas	<input type="radio"/>				
Toyota	<input type="radio"/>				
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>				

9. Rate these brands in terms of **authenticity**: (where 1 is a very low level of authenticity and 5 is a very high level of authenticity)

	1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)
IKEA	<input type="radio"/>				
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>				
Toyota	<input type="radio"/>				
Tesla	<input type="radio"/>				
Starbucks	<input type="radio"/>				
Adidas	<input type="radio"/>				
Samsung	<input type="radio"/>				
Amazon	<input type="radio"/>				
Coca Cola	<input type="radio"/>				
Netflix	<input type="radio"/>				
McDonald's	<input type="radio"/>				
Apple	<input type="radio"/>				

Prev

Next

## Brands

### 4.

10. Rate these brands in terms of **uniqueness**: (where 1 is a very low level of uniqueness and 5 is a very high level of uniqueness)

	1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)
Starbucks	<input type="radio"/>				
Amazon	<input type="radio"/>				
Coca Cola	<input type="radio"/>				
McDonald's	<input type="radio"/>				
Netflix	<input type="radio"/>				
Apple	<input type="radio"/>				
IKEA	<input type="radio"/>				
Toyota	<input type="radio"/>				
Samsung	<input type="radio"/>				
Adidas	<input type="radio"/>				
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>				
Tesla	<input type="radio"/>				

11. Rate these brands in terms of **coolness**: (where 1 is a very low level of coolness and 5 is a very high level of coolness)

	1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)
IKEA	<input type="radio"/>				
Amazon	<input type="radio"/>				
Starbucks	<input type="radio"/>				
Apple	<input type="radio"/>				
Adidas	<input type="radio"/>				
Netflix	<input type="radio"/>				
Coca Cola	<input type="radio"/>				
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>				
Samsung	<input type="radio"/>				
Tesla	<input type="radio"/>				
Toyota	<input type="radio"/>				
McDonald's	<input type="radio"/>				

12. Rate these brands in terms of **desirability**: (where 1 is a very low level of desirability and 5 is a very high level of desirability)

	1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)
Apple	<input type="radio"/>				
IKEA	<input type="radio"/>				
Tesla	<input type="radio"/>				
Coca Cola	<input type="radio"/>				
Amazon	<input type="radio"/>				
Samsung	<input type="radio"/>				
Toyota	<input type="radio"/>				
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>				
Starbucks	<input type="radio"/>				
Adidas	<input type="radio"/>				
Netflix	<input type="radio"/>				
McDonald's	<input type="radio"/>				

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