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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**INSIGHT INTO THE MINDS OF
TWEENS: UNLOCKING THE
MYSTERY OF COOL BRANDS**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School

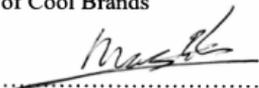
July 2016

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how tweens define cool and why cool brands are important to them. Tweens are essentially the segment between childhood and adolescence or the younger end of the teenagers' age spectrum and this market is deemed important as their consumption power increases with the growing buying power of consumers specifically in Malaysia. Understanding the definition of cool is important to marketers, but a clear definition of the cool concept has been under-theorized in the field of marketing, psychology or even sociology, particularly with a focus on tweens. To close this gap, this study focuses on how tweens perceived the concept of cool, the importance of the cool notion to them and how this is likely to influence their brand choices. Using the qualitative approach based on the interpretive paradigm with an emic focus, a semi structured interview guide was utilised for the face-to-face interview sessions and through in depth narrative analysis, this study theorizes the cool notion from the perspectives of the tweens who were selected specifically from five primary schools and three secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The purposive sampling method used expressed the need to select participants who were deemed able to describe and explain their views on the selection of common goods including apparel, telecommunication gadgets and accessories. Out of the eight participants selected, six were Malays, one Chinese and another Indian, and two of them were boys and the remaining six were girls. The analysis of the study reveals that tweens are well aware of what cool means and are capable of spontaneously defining the concept of cool in their own words. Cool is about popular, trendy, high status, fun, unique, and linked to self-identification. These findings are somewhat dissimilar to previous studies on Generation Y who define cool as functional while tweens in this study define cool as popular. This study also finds clear brand preferences for tweens and their ability to influence directly their parents' spending which offer enduring insights for practitioners and academic researchers alike. Ultimately, this study establishes a framework for the notion of cool that could be of value to both marketers and researchers. This study concludes with an academic and practical discussion of how the cool concept could be theorised and applied whilst staying in touch with the needs and demands of the tweens' consumers.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The assertion that cool brands sell is well established in the marketing literature but no one has specifically explained what leads consumers to label brands as cool (Warren & Campbell, 2014). What makes brand cool is still a subject that is widely debated and across different psychographic markets, the concept of cool may vary distinctively. For the tween market or those consumers aged between eight and fourteen (Lindstrom, 2004) the idea of coolness pervades their consumption behaviour and offer a lucrative potential for marketers. Tweens are so synonymous with cool brands because they desire to be cool, create cool and find cool. Brands such as iPhone, Ferrari and Facebook are what most tweens perceive as cool but what exactly do these brands have that entitle them to be cool brands? As this question become more pervasive, the answer to this may indeed lie in the management of brands especially in marketing to tweens (O'Donnell & Wardlow, 2000; Pountain & Robins, 2000).

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Even though marketers have long understood the importance of cool brands (Bird & Tapp, 2008; Runyan, Noh & Mosier, 2013), they face the challenge of conceptualising and developing their brands into cool brands as they are still in the dark on how the concept of cool essentially evolve. Numerous scholars agree that cool brands have been under-theorized in the field of marketing, psychology or even sociology, particularly with a focus on tweens while at the same time, much is expected from the concept of cool that can benefit those involved in the effort of brand building (Pountain & Robins, 2000; Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl & Van Acker, 2006; Southgate, 2003b). Tweens is a specific consumer segment between childhood and adolescence, the younger end of the teenagers' age spectrum, between the ages of eight to 14 years old (Lindstrom, 2003). As a market potential, tweens are highly relevant and important as their consumption power through their own income from allowances, pocket money or jobs (Mangleburg, 1995), increases