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CREATING  
COOL

TECHNOLOGIES

Edited by Janet C Read,  
Matthew Horton, Daniel Fitton,  
Gavin Sim, Linda Little





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# PSYCHOLOGY JOURNAL

## The Other Side of Technology

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## Editorial Preface

In collating together the papers for this special edition on cool, the underlying question is one of motivation. How does, and in what ways does an understanding cool contribute to the research agendas of psychologists and technologists? Why should interaction designers worry about, or even think about, cool? To what extent does cool matter to designers of interactive products. Is it just a cool thing to be doing or is there something deeper and more meaningful hidden below its glossy surface?

Cool has been previously studied in literature, especially within psychology and sociology with commentators highlighting that cool is something across axes, aligned, if you like to the roots of its existence - to the quite negative almost aggressive aspects associated with the black roots of the term and to the more commercially driven aspects about a shared understanding of a community ideal. For the HCI and Interaction Design community, it matters primarily because it is our business to understand people, to understand their cultures and to understand their situations. We believe, through the user-centred design paradigm, that the more we understand a user group, the more able we are to design for them.

For our community, focussed as we are on design, coolness is rather enticing as it, and the study of it, transcends as well as belongs within, user groups. Significantly socially constructed, what is cool for one group may not be cool for another. Studying coolness as an informant to design is akin to studying delightfulness or to studying loveliness - it will never be complete nor will it ever be possible to be complete as the very meaning of the term is so much in flux. That, however, should not be a cause for us not to bother as the more we unpick the notion, the more we are able

to begin to understand the emotional and social connections that people make with the artefacts around them; a better understanding of cool products and cool behaviours, of cool people and cool activities - will all shed insights for technology design.

The papers presented in this special issue build upon previous work, in understanding and designing for cool specifically within the context of teenagers including publications from CHI 2011, but more specifically from a workshop and the discussions that followed from CHI 2012 which had as its theme the notion of cool as it crosses the boundaries of continents, cultures and communities. The diverse range of papers adds meaning and understanding of the different facets and contexts of cool whilst also documenting a selection of methods that can be useful in this endeavour. Through this special edition the foundations are set for understanding cool as it applies to the design of technologies.

The impact of the perception of a device being cool and trendy whilst using location based services with young and elderly users is investigated by Thomas in the paper Who wants to use the killer app? Perceptions of location based services in young and old. This study used interviews to gauge the perceptions of the two distinct user groups. The work highlights clear generational differences and the importance of the perception of cool to the younger generation. Moving from the technology towards the activity of cool, the concept of being cool is explored in the paper "Too Cool at School - Understanding Cool Teenagers through the use of personas" by Matthew Horton, Janet C. Read, Daniel Fitton, Nicola Toth and Linda Little. This paper contributes a method for exploring cool that could be

used with multiple user groups and provides insights on cool in the context of UK teenage behaviours. The way young people view the notion of cool is explored by McCrickard, Barksdale and Doswell in "Understanding Cool: An Analytic Exploration of Contributing Factors for Teens". In this study 38 participants from the US were asked to reflect on aspects of cool for young teens and tweens, highlighting the importance of innovation a driving factor attributed to cool. This paper highlights the edges of cool, also shown by Horton et al. that extreme rebellious anti-social technology is not cool.

The paper by Gerber and Geiman entitled "Measuring the existence of cool using an extended social relations model" uses self evaluation of cool across a peer group. Here 47 undergraduate students from US rated the personal and group level coolness of others in order to understand the real and elusive factors associated with cool. In the paper "Situating Techno-Cools: factors that contribute to making technology cool in a given context of use" by Cullen and Gasparini a model for cool is proposed which is derived from a study of the use of iPads in an educational context. Within Norway iPads were used in four studies in two elementary schools, a high school and a university, with the results showing that the age of the participants is a determining factor for what subset of proposed constructs makes the iPad cool at school. Gaining an understanding of what factors influence UK teenage perceptions of cool is explored in the paper "Constructing the Cool Wall: A tool to explore teen meanings of cool" by Dan Fitton, Janet C Read, Matthew Horton, Linda Little, Nicola Toth and Yukang Guo. This paper again proposes a method for exploration, the cool wall, and the findings from this study are aligned to seven core categories derived from the literature.

In the future, the study of cool, as it aligns to the design of interactive technology, is likely to be concerned with similarities and differences. It is important to realise the factors that change the understanding whether these be cultural, age related, or situational. The impact of time is also important, the tools and methods and ideas presented in this special edition can serve as springboards for future studies in this space. There is much to be discovered, challenges include the understanding of uncool; designs might be around products that remain cool just long enough for adoption and then that might change shape to become something else; methods might need to be tested across multiple groups. This is a lively space for further work. This special edition delivers a platform for future work.

**Janet C. Read, Matthew Horton,  
Daniel Fitton, Gavin Sim, Linda Little**  
*Guest Editors*

