

Payphones do make you look cooler: precisely 35% cooler.



Sex in the City's Carrie Bradshaw prefers payphones

Throughout the last century, the term "cool" has come to mean in-style, avant-garde and an overall calm and collected demure. Because of the varied and changing connotations of cool, as well its subjective nature, the word has no single meaning.¹ It has associations of composure and self-control (cf. the OED definition) and often is used as an expression of admiration or approval.²

Foresighters have spent their careers making or breaking something's coolness, and it will come as no surprise that using a payphone actually

makes someone be perceived to be cooler than perhaps they really are. The question is: how much cooler?

Payphones may occasionally have a bad reputation as they are expensive to maintain due to damage caused by vandalism, bodily fluids, or attempted theft of the cash-box. However it is clear they harness a strong cult following, like any cool phenomenon.

"Secretly I pretend my cell phone is out of batteries or I forgot it, just so I have an excuse to use a payphone," Simon Jasper reveals, one of the studies participants. "...I mean, they're everywhere so why not just use them? It's totally cheaper than a cell phone."

This simple statement from Mr. Jasper is essentially way the payphone is cool. An important part of the aspect of being cool, according to the "Cool as a social distinction" theory.

Historically speaking, Cool was once an attitude fostered by rebels and underdogs. Often this open rebellion invited punishment, so it hid its defiance behind a wall of ironic detachment, distancing itself from the source of authority rather than directly confronting it.

This theory is very historically rooted, most recently with artist collectives such as Dada, the modus operandi of such groups was often self-consciously revolutionary, a determination to scandalize the bourgeoisie by mocking their culture, sexuality and political moderation.



Happy Days' rebel Fonzie is the epitome of coolness

1 Wikipedia.org entry for "cool"

2 Wikipedia.org entry for "cool"

A recent survey took a sample of 25-35 year olds from various major cities and they voluntarily wore the experimental Bio-Variable Response (BVR) device, a unique new tool that compares your perception of yourself with the perception of those around you by measuring environmental conditions and your pulse, and communicating via bluetooth and telephony.

On the occasions where participants used payphones during their daily routines, because they remained calm in demeanour and also because their behaviour was non-invasive, people perceiving them appreciated their overall courtesy and efficiency. During these interactions the BVR readers measured high amounts of perceived coolness.

Using a payphone may seem less convenient than using a cell phone, but as Mr. Jaspers noted, not only is it more economical, it's also less invasive than cell phone communication.

We discovered some unique findings with our participants as well: When cell phone users talked loudly in crowded areas (such as public transit) or played games with the sound up too high, the cell phone user's coolness dropped 25% immediately.

The payphone revival and it's sudden reappearance as a cool technology can be linked to the overall higher efficiency of payphone use and it's overall fewer health risks.

Ultimately you also risk being hit by a bus. That is measurably very uncool: 78% uncool to be precise. A recent study done in Texas determined that children who talk on cell phones while crossing streets increase their chance for injuries or death in pedestrian accidents.³ The survey defines children as youths between the ages of 8 to 12, and while not in the demographic we specifically surveyed, they are still a group that is very conscious of being cool.

Closer in age to our surveyed demographic are individuals who drive while using their cell phones. Many of our researchers (and other internationally recognized safety groups) have warned that driving while on a cell phone is incredibly dangerous. Data has also proven that talking to a cell phone and driving at the same time have a negative effect on the first level of performance, by lowering the lateral control, often leading to drifting on the side of the road. On the second level of performance, cell phone use led to changes in speed, acceleration, and delayed reaction times.

While these are all the cognitive and physical reflexes that get diminished, our labs sought to measure how much coolness is diminished by.

If the risks and personal safety factors were previously dismissed, it is hard to ignore that driving while on your cell phone makes you appear 50% less cool. These measurements are difficult to ascertain because the driver generally perceives themselves as 100% cool, while

³ http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/fea/healthyliving2/stories/DN-life--cellrisk_30brf.ART.State.Edition1.1e2a8bf.html

pedestrians and observers perceive said drivers as 15% cool. Thus, the over overall conclusive median for the coolness factor perceived is 50%.

This particular study into coolness has helped to reinforce what many health practitioners and consumers have been observing and promoting for years. While all technologies can be abused, payphones are very difficult to misuse (though easy to neglect) and when someone attends to their communication needs privately, not in large crowded areas sharing their conversations and feelings with everyone, they are perceived as courteous, understanding and ultimately cooler.

Payphones continue to be the noble steward of communication and the steadfast promoter and preserver of what it means to be cool. While we have quantitatively measured this data and presented it here, we know there are many other users who have had cool payphone experiences. Whether it's finding money in the coin return slot or seamlessly connecting with loved ones, we invite your stories not only to possibly map payphone user trends but also to further connect the payphone user community.

This particular payphone tale of cool was taken from the Bell Payphone Labs stories archive:

"I was being bothered by this guy on the streetcar last summer; he was being obscene and gave me his card thinking I would be his lover." Jennifer describes this with a look of disgust on her face. I actually had to push him away from me and take a cab the rest of the way home.

"When I got home I was still a bit shaken from the incident. I left the card on the table and explained to my boyfriend what happened. We were both irritated but still had a nice enough evening. I didn't know this until two days later, but on his way home from the gym my partner called the perp from a payphone and started giving him a hard time. Not in a macho 'stay away from my girlfriend' kind of way but in a more 'you shouldn't harass people like that' sort of way. I wish he told me sooner that he had done it but he probably thought it might make him look a bit intense."

If you have a story to share with us about a cool payphone experience, please write to one of our operators@bellpayphonelabs.com or call 1-866-275-3663.