

# Don't believe the hype-ster...

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I recently had to explain to my father (aged 74) what a hipster was.

You probably started to build a picture in your mind when I said 'hipster' there. Checked shirt/ironic t-shirt. Tattoos. Too tight jeans. Baseball shoes. Hangs out in an artisan coffee shop. Let's throw in a beard for the blokes. Yup. That's them. But then I wondered: what was the actual definition of a hipster, and was I just generalising when describing them? Dictionary.com describes them as 'a usually young person who is trendy, stylish, or progressive in an unconventional way'. So it's about unconventionality.

Recently, a man threatened to sue a magazine for using his picture in an article about hipsters looking alike. He was furious to recognise himself – sporting a beard and beanie hat – in an image illustrating the article, and emailed the publication accusing them of

“slander” and breach of copyright. However, the magazine informed him that the photo was of someone else who closely resembled him. The article, from MIT Technology Review, was about a mathematical study which purports to explain “why anti-conformists always end up looking the same”. If there was ever a time for irony, it was at that moment.

The study was conducted at Brandels University in Massachusetts, by Jonathan Touboul, a mathematics and neuroscience professor. He created a computer model which simulated the behaviour of conformists and non-conformists in society, in a bid to explain why people who reject mainstream styles often end up looking similar to each other. He found that, in rejecting trends, non-conformists tend to “consistently make the same choice”, meaning “they will switch all together to another state where they remain alike”. Therefore, the very thing a hipster purports to be, unconventional, then becomes the new convention, as they assimilate into one mainstream identity.

As someone who spends a considerable part of their time developing target audiences, I found this fascinating. Will the definition ‘hipster’ now become as commonplace as ‘millennials’? And of course, we know how millennials (anyone aged 22-37 years old) are all the same – a 22 year old behaves exactly the same way as a 37 year old don’t they? I can categorically say they don’t. Their beliefs, behaviours, social media engagement, and media consumption, amongst many things, are poles apart, and yet they are consistently lumped together as one audience.

So, whilst hipsters now all look the same, and apologies to those who believe they are ‘trendy, and unconventional’, perhaps this is an opportunity to remind ourselves that people are still individuals, even if they are labelled as one thing or another, behaving and thinking differently from the person sitting next to them. Even if they are sitting in a coffee shop having a flat white.

*(Photo: iiii iiii)*

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