

With a little help from science and consumer behavior, GAP students look into why people purchase the products they do.

MARISA PATWA

WHY WE

BUY

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CHEETLE. It's that orange, powdery residue left on your fingers after eating Cheetos, those cheese-flavored, puffed cornmeal snacks most people have tried at least once in their lives.

The cheetle doesn't bother a lot of people — they see it as a part of eating the beloved snack. Most simply rub their fingers together to make it disappear. But in 2008, Frito-Lay discovered that there were consumers who strongly disliked the leftover dust.

The snack food company proceeded to release an ad campaign called "The Orange Underground," based on data it received from neuromarketing. The ads included several TV commercials with Chester Cheetah, the Cheetos mascot, being mischievous and encouraging people to pull cheese-tastic pranks. The campaign was wildly successful and made

Chester a pseudo-celebrity in his own right.

Through the research, Frito-Lay learned that adults consumed about 60 percent of all Cheetos. And it was Goodby Silverstein, the firm Frito-Lay had previously hired to learn how consumers viewed Doritos, that used neuromarketing techniques to find out what consumers thought about Cheetos.

Since Goodby Silverstein had been successful with its "got milk" campaign in the mid 1990s and more recently with Twitter, Shutterfly and eBay all directed toward adults, Frito-Lay knew its marketing for Cheetos needed to influence and relate to adults too.

Ultimately, the message to consumers was that "Cheetos feeds your inner child and your desire to be a tad bit naughty." It worked, and Frito-Lay attributed the success partially to neuromarketing.

Simply put, neuromarketing is the study of how the brain responds to marketing stimuli. This helps marketers understand the underlying reasons as to why consumers make the purchasing decisions they do.

Neuromarketing has been around for years, but it took a while for those in the academic world to acknowledge and begin researching the various neuroscience-based techniques used to evaluate consumer behavior utilized for more than a decade by marketers.

Roger Dooley, a well-known neuromarketing author and proponent of combining neuroscience and marketing, wrote in *Forbes* earlier this year that after some recent studies evaluating the correlation between neuroscience data

and ad performance, it was found that consumer neuroscience actually works — and marketers and those in academia are now accepting how the two relate.

Atefeh Yazdanparast, assistant professor of marketing, said consumers often may not know what they want or how to articulate it, and neuromarketing works to help solve that problem.

"So we ask them to answer questions about which products they like and why, and then use techniques to read their biological responses," she said. "For instance, if a consumer gets excited, there is a psychological response. With the techniques, we can detect those responses and link them to reasons why."

With UE's newly opened Neuromarketing Research Center, Global Assistance Program students now have the opportunity to study this field of science using state-of-the-art technology. The program allows students in various majors to work together to consult with businesses.

And although the course was offered last spring, it was a \$22,000 Ball Brothers Foundation Venture Grant that allowed those involved with the program to open the center and purchase various types of equipment — including one that tracks eye movement — to begin researching consumer behavior this semester.

"The beauty of it is how portable it is," said sophomore Annie Stenftenagel, a neuroscience major who is enrolled in the GAP course. "People used to be nervous when they had to wear an EEG with all the wires on their head, with gel in their hair, hooked up to a scary machine, especially kids. But now the technology is nothing more than a headband and a little Band-Aid."

She said the idea for this GAP course came from Erica Loesche, a 2015 graduate who majored in psychology, because she was worried about what job she was going to be qualified for after graduation.

"She said she was interested in business and something with neuroscience," said Lora Becker, associate professor of psychology. "I had just learned about neuromarketing from Don Jones, [vice president for marketing and communications], and here I had a student saying she wanted to do just that. She just didn't know it."

Juniors Kay Sheets and Alyssa Murphy did research during the summer for Project Escalade, a sports marketing company, about which designs would look best on tennis rackets.

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Sheets, a psychology major with a neuroscience minor, said she hopes they can test the paddles — some are flashy while others are not — on the tennis team.

“It’s beneficial to both of us,” she said. “We are working to help market [Project Escalade] better and it is also [a way for us] to figure out the science behind how to market better.”

Becker and Yazdanparast had the chance this summer to conduct neuromarketing research for two weeks in Shanghai. While they have not completed analyzing their data, their goal is to find out why Chinese citizens choose to have plastic surgery. Yazdanparast had conducted a similar study as part of her doctoral dissertation that focused on Americans.

“We wanted to see how different cultures might influence the reasons behind why people chose to get elective cosmetic surgery,” Yazdanparast said.

She said the decision to undergo plastic surgery is one of the fastest growing medical procedures in the United States, while eyelid surgery is popular in China.

The pair used eye trackers on about 50 men and women to detect their movements and tell whether they were happy or sad when they looked at attractive fashion photos in relation to their respective genders.

“The eye tracker tests where the consumer is looking, they are calibrated to follow the eye movement of each person,” Yazdanparast said.

Those in the course will also be brainstorming ideas this semester about how UE can work to solve its marketing woes.

The group is also hoping to work with students from the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corp. to see what kind of materials 16-18 year olds respond to.

“Neuromarketing has been growing in popularity for the past 10 years but not in the Midwest,” Becker said. “But it is a buzzword here now because we are bringing some innovation to UE.”

Stenftenagel said she never thought she would study neuromarketing because she thought business was boring. She now understands and likes how it brings science and humanities together.

“I’ve worked with people I never thought I would work with,” she said. “And by the end of the semester, we will have finished a [course], but also have had what feels like three years of experience, work and connections.”

Becker said she hopes more students will become interested in neuromarketing and the GAP program in general.

“GAP is magic,” she said. “It teaches you to solve problems on a global nature, work with people and address things you don’t think you know the answers too.”