



## The Neurocentric View on Consumers of Cotton: An Application of Consumer Neuroscience

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The purpose of this project was to provide students opportunities to recognize and identify the new knowledge of consumer neuroscience, which offers a different perspective that could contribute to a deeper understanding of consumers of cotton. Consumer neuroscience refers to the study of the neural conditions and processes underlying consumption, their psychological meaning, and their behavioral consequences. The online certificate workshop was developed on the topic of the “Neurocentric View on Consumers of Cotton: An Application of Consumer Neuroscience.” The thirteen interactive learning modules included various aspects of consumer neuroscience related to cotton consumption, such as neuroaesthetics (neural aspects of perception of beauty), neuroeconomics (neural aspects of consumer decision making), and neuromarketing (neural aspects of consumer responses to marketing stimuli). Due to the inherent complexity of neuroscience knowledge, the focus of content development was on explaining the various aspects of consumer neuroscience in layman’s terms and applying those terms to a cotton-consumption context in anecdotal form. Each learning module also included a multiple-choice quiz to assess student comprehension of the content.

Students who participated in the online workshop were given a chance to win two competitions in which awards were given to students who provided creative marketing strategies for cotton products based on consumer neuroscience findings. The first competition was based off the quiz grades that followed each online learning module, as well as participation in the discussion boards. The second competition, the NeuroDisplay Student Competition, gave students the opportunity to apply the neuromarketing principles that they had learned throughout the online workshop to a visual display. Students had the option to create either a shadow box or large window display, or an in-store wall or table display. Participating students worked in groups of two to four people. The main goal for each of the groups was to influence young consumers to purchase trendy and “must-have” cotton products. Each group submitted written summaries and photographs of their display to highlight the details of the design. The winners were selected based on the creativity of their concept, the use of materials to support the goals, and the use of brain-friendly design elements, including color, light, texture, scale, proportion, and line.

A total of 92 students in three different fashion-merchandising courses participated in the online workshop as a part of their course requirements. After completion of the workshop, students were invited to participate in the online evaluation survey. There were 83 complete responses, resulting in a 90% response rate. The majority of the participants was female (95%) and had taken an online course before this workshop (71%). When the participants were asked

how much of the content from the workshop they already knew, a majority (72.3%) responded that they only knew a little about the covered topics. Based on their experience and knowledge level, 91.6% of the participants found the neuromarketing workshop to be just right for them, with only 8.4% feeling it was too advanced. Using a 5-point rating scale (1 is “poor” and 5 is “excellent”), respondents were asked to rate the content, organization, and pace of the workshop, the ability of the workshop to create interest in topic, and the overall workshop. Mean ratings for all five evaluation items ranged from 3.75 ( $SD = .81$ ) and to 4.29 ( $SD = .64$ ).

The majority of the participants were satisfied with their learning experiences from the online workshop. About 90% of the participants believed that the workshop was a good learning experience, which enhanced their understanding of fashion consumers and provided them with new knowledge and ideas that they believe they will be able to use in the future. Nearly 80% of the participants found that as a result of this workshop, their attitudes about fashion branding and marketing have changed. About 84% of the participants agreed that they think differently about fashion consumers and marketing as a result of this workshop and would recommend it to others. Of the thirteen neuromarketing units offered in the online workshop, the participants found the “What is Beauty?” (49.4%), “What are Emotions?” (44.6%) “Brain Friendly Retail Strategies” (31.3%) “Sensory Marketing” (27.7%), and “Who Needs Attention?” (22.9%) as the most interesting units. Participants also found “System 1 vs. System 2” (27.7%), “What is the Brain?” (26.5%), “Tools for Neuromarketing” (13.3%), and “Mirror Neurons” (12%) to be the least interesting units. The participants were also asked to indicate their degree of understanding of specific topics before and after the workshop. Using a 5-point rating scale (1 is “very little understanding” and 5 is “a lot of understanding”), topics for which participants had the least understanding before the workshop were what neuromarketing is ( $M = 1.30$ ,  $SD = .59$ ) and brain friendly retail and marketing principles ( $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = .64$ ). However, after the workshop, participants had quite of a bit of understanding for what neuromarketing is ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = .60$ ) and for brain friendly retail and marketing principles ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .71$ ). The topic for which participants had the highest understanding after completion of the workshop was the importance of emotion in fashion marketing ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = .65$ ).

The competitiveness of the apparel industry will be driven by creativity and creative thinking processes. It is important for educators to introduce an alternative perspective to stimulate students’ curiosity and creativity. The findings of this project show that through exposure to the new perspective of consumer neuroscience, students not only gained an insight into the neurological processes of cotton consumers but also had an opportunity to rethink their understanding of existing cotton-consumption issues. The implications of this project address a broad range of consumer neuroscience topics that can be applied to fashion design, marketing and merchandising courses.

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