

Research Interview #1: Jorden Smith, Advertising Specialist

Jorden Smith is the first person I chose to interview for my final project. Jorden is currently working as an advertising strategy/copywriting specialist at ARC Worldwide, an agency underneath one of the most well-known advertising/marketing conglomerates in the world, the Publicis Groupe. I chose Jorden to interview for this project as they are very well versed in the behaviors and background knowledge that goes into what makes a consumer want to buy a product that they are trying to sell. During the interview, Jorden's expertise in the advertising industry provided me with insights into how semiotic elements are used both strategically and creatively in developing engaging advertising campaigns.

Throughout the interview, Jorden emphasized the role that semiotics plays in the advertising industry. She explained that "behind every successful campaign, there is a careful selection of symbols and visuals that are designed to evoke specific kinds of emotions and associations to the desired consumer." As someone aspiring to have a career in advertising, I resonated with her explanation, highlighting the intricate balance between creativity and intentionality in advertising campaigns.

When I asked Jorden about some of the campaigns where she believed that she used semiotics, she mentioned how, "In one fun memorable campaign for our P&G client, we strategically used things like color psychology to evoke feelings of trust and reliability in the in-store ads. This was important to us because that is Tide's message that they want to communicate to consumers. So when we incorporate things like warm tones or familiar imagery, we are able to establish a sense of familiarity and comfort with our desired target audience."

One of the key takeaways from my interview with Jorden was Jorden's perspective on how semiotics and consumer psychology work hand in hand. Jorden explained how, "things like semiotic cues can act as what we call in the advertising industry 'triggers', tapping into consumers' subconscious desires and motivations." Her thoughts made me think about the impact of advertising on consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. It also reminded me that just by understanding the nuances of semiotic elements, can help advertisers effectively build

connections with their desired target audience for their select client's ask, further fostering things like brand loyalty and engagement for their select client.

Looking at this interview from an outside perspective, I found Jorden's perspectives very insightful and thought-provoking as they made me consider the common questions surrounding the ethical implications/concerns around advertising, and the responsibility that comes with wielding the power of semiotics. Our interview touched on the importance of authenticity and transparency in advertising practices, further emphasizing the need for brands to uphold/stay true to their values and build long-lasting connections with consumers, to make them brand loyalists.

All in all, my interview with Jorden reaffirmed my beliefs in the profound impact of semiotics in the advertising industry. As I continue to explore the evolving landscape of semiotics in advertising, Jorden's insights from our interview will definitely serve as a great example to call back to throughout my final project research and analysis process.

Research Interview #2: Kelsey Oshea, Consumer Behavior Consultant

The second person I chose to interview was Kelsey Oshea, a consumer behavior and psychology consultant. Kelsey offered a different perspective as she's more of a one-woman show. She consults with advertising and in-house agencies for big pharma companies like Abelson Taylor. She also offers and sells data and insights to other consultants. In exploring the world of signs and symbols in advertising, Kelsey's deep understanding helped illuminate the connection between signs and how consumers react to advertising messages.

Kelsey's expertise was evident throughout our interview. She explained how semiotics influence consumer actions, highlighting the importance of advertisers being able to reach their target audience effectively. During our conversation, Kelsey emphasized that "semiotics serves as the language of advertising." She stressed its role in deciphering the hidden meanings conveyed through symbols and visuals and how things like mirror neurons play a role in our understanding as self-aware beings. Kelsey explained that mirror neurons "can serve as a scientific explanation for how we as humans are able to elaborate on social skills, networks, and the knowledge we call culture through the experiences of ourselves and others around us."

After I asked her about how these mirror neurons are 'activated' or used when a consumer sees an advertisement, she described how our mirror neurons "go under fire when we either see, hear, touch, taste, smell, intuit, or witness something happening in front of us, something that we are doing ourselves, what we see on TV, or hear on the radio." This part of the interview helped me significantly understand the scientific/mental explanations for how using semiotics effectively works in advertising.

Based on her experience, Kelsey shared examples of using semiotics in ads when she worked with advertising agencies as an expert consultant. Kelsey stated, "In a campaign for a household brand, which I can't name at the moment for NDA reasons, we employed cues specific to the target market's psychographic data and beliefs to trigger nostalgia and trust." Her real-life examples and professional explanations help illustrate how semiotics can influence consumer perceptions and behaviors.

During the interview, Kelsey shared her perspectives on how semiotics will shape advertising in the future. She talked about trends she was currently studying in consumer

behavior, mentioning how these trends are predicting a move toward personalized and engaging advertising encounters through sounds. Sharing some of the trends she's finding in real time benefited my research. Understanding the POV of how a researcher/expert in consumer behavior navigates the constantly changing landscape of advertising is crucial to understanding how powerful semiotics are in advertising.

After reflecting on our interview, I found Kelsey's viewpoints enlightening and valuable for my final project research. Her skills in grasping semiotics and consumer behavior challenged many of my previous ideas from my first interview with Jorden. This interview with Kelsey reassured me of my choice of whom to interview for this final project research phase. I knew that the opinions and insights of a copywriter in the advertising industry, compared to a solo consultant for consumer behavior and psychology, would be different. But I'm honestly surprised to say that Kelsey mentioned many things that sounded a lot like what Jorden was saying. She highlighted more of the psychological and scientific explanations for semiotics, like mirror neurons, and how our brains can subconsciously understand what an advertiser is trying to convey through hidden semiotics.

Research Interview #3: Trinity Gaddie, The Average Consumer

The third person I chose to interview was my old semiotics classmate, Trinity Gaddie. Trinity is a music business major with a minor in creative writing. We both took the semiotics in popular media class together last year, and because of this, I consider her a like-minded seeker of my topic. Considering that I wanted to interview someone who's not necessarily related to the advertising industry but is more of a consumer or everyday person, I thought it would be more beneficial for my research to interview someone who is familiar with semiotics. Trinity's personal experiences as a consumer provided invaluable perspectives on how advertising impacts individuals on a day-to-day basis.

As we started the interview, I mentioned my interest in exploring how hidden symbols influence advertising efforts, aiming to comprehend how people interpret and react to cues in ads. Trinity shared her thoughts, recalling her experiences with ad campaigns and the impacts they had on her. She mentioned how she always found it intriguing how advertisers use familiar symbols, visuals, and sounds to communicate messages or actions. She recalled an example from earlier that day before our interview, where she was looking through her TikTok feed, and a random advertisement popped up while she was scrolling.

Trinity explained, "Usually, as soon as I see the 'eligible for commission' or 'paid sponsorship' button underneath a TikTok, I scroll immediately. But there was something about this ad for this facial cream that made me keep watching. It wasn't until later that I realized the girl in the ad was wearing the same outfit and essentially reenacting a scene from one of my favorite episodes of *New Girl*. I didn't even know at the time that that's why I was still interested in it, but I knew that there was something really familiar and weird about that ad." Her observation was a great example of how things like semiotics, or what Kelsey mentioned in my second interview about mirror neurons, can cause a consumer to become more interested or engaged with an advertisement based on familiar things they enjoy.

Trinity loves the TV show *New Girl*. However, she doesn't know every single outfit or scene from the top of her head. But when she saw that advertisement, she knew something was familiar, which made her stay on the ad instead of scrolling immediately like she usually does. Something was activated somewhere deep in her unconscious that told her to keep watching. This shows how the use of semiotics can change a consumer's behavior and actions—further

proving it to be a powerful force in the advertising industry. Trinity's TikTok ad example echoed what experts in the field had expressed in their interviews, emphasizing how semiotics significantly shape consumer engagement and understanding.

Even though she may not have bought that face cream from the TikTok ad, the use of semiotics in the ad made her stay long enough to the point that she now knows the brand and is aware of its products and services. One thing that many often need to remember in advertising is that sometimes advertisers do not always measure the success of an ad based on people who immediately purchase the advertised product/service. We also measure it based on things like increased brand awareness, perception, and word of mouth. Trinity was able to recall this advertisement in detail. She effectively spread the meaning and message of that advertisement to someone who had never actually seen the ad themselves. Her reaction proved that the advertisement was successful.

Aside from analyzing ads, Trinity shared her views on advertising. She voiced concerns about using strategies to sway consumer behavior, stressing the need for truthful marketing approaches. She explained, "I value brands that are honest about their products and avoid unethical practices just to make a sale." Trinity's view on advertising is much like everyone else's in Generation Z. Gen Z is tired of being misled or lied to by advertisers or anyone around them. Especially with influencer marketing and advertising today, it's almost like you always have to question or worry about everything you see or hear, as a hidden message may trick you into buying something.

As our interview came to an end, Trinity answered how she felt about being targeted for ads on platforms like TikTok and Instagram and the overall notion that is circling social media today about how our phones are always listening to us, and that's why a lot of people start to see random advertisements or videos about things that they were talking about earlier that day. Trinity expressed, "There's a line between marketing and intruding on personal privacy." Her observations shed light on the issues confronting advertisers in today's digital landscape. Her statement also made me realize that semiotics is not only a powerful force in advertising, but sometimes it can be so powerful that we should always keep one eye open for everything we see, hear, feel, or experience. This begs the question: Is it that most of the things around you are planted there for a reason, in order for you to react in a specific desired way?