

The creative competition between the students of the degrees in Advertising and Public Relations in Spain and its adaptation to the demands of the professional sector

La competencia creativa entre el alumnado de los grados en Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas en España y su adecuación a las demandas del sector profesional

A concorrência criativa entre os alunos dos graus Publicidade e Relações Públicas em Espanha e a sua adequação às exigências do sector profissional

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Reception date: 1 September 2020

Review date: 4 February 2021

Accepted date: 13 May 2021

Published: 1 July 2021

To cite this article: Sanz-Marcos, P., González-Oñate, C. & Jiménez-Marín, G.(2021).

The creative competition between the students of the degrees in Advertising and Public Relations in Spain and its adaptation to the demands of the professional sector, *Icono* 14, 19(2), 66-90. doi: 10.7195/ri14.v19i2.1604

Abstract

This paper intends to carry out an investigation about the development of the creative competence during the formation on the university degree of Advertising and Public Relations. Specifically, it seeks to find out if the study and promotion of creativity is adapted to the demands of the professional advertising sector. A triple-approach methodology was carried out based on an analysis of the content of the study plans, a questionnaire for graduate students and a panel of experts made up of academics belonging to the degree of Advertising and Public Relations. The results indicate that, although the training of these graduates seems adequate in general terms, the training received on creativity seems insufficient to respond to the demands of the market. Some of the factors that explain these trends are the excessive integration of digital competences due to the renewal of the degree or the impossibility of the academics to implement creative methodologies in the classroom due to the complicated reconciliation between the professional and academic demands they are subjected to. That is why a transformation of the university study plans of the Degree in Advertising and Public Relations is recommended to meet the labor demands related to the exercise of advertising creativity in Spain.

Keywords: *Creativity; Advertising, Public Relations; Competencies; Degree; Professional Sector*

Resumen

Este trabajo investiga el desarrollo de la competencia creativa por parte del alumnado durante su formación en el Grado en Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas. Concretamente, se persigue conocer si el estudio e impulso de la creatividad se adecua a las demandas del sector profesional publicitario. Se utiliza una metodología de triple enfoque basada en un análisis de contenido de los planes de estudio, un cuestionario dirigido a alumnos egresados y un panel de expertos formado por académicos pertenecientes al Grado en Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas. Los resultados indican que, si bien la formación de estos graduados parece adecuada en términos generales, la formación recibida en torno a la creatividad parece insuficiente para dar respuesta a las demandas del mercado laboral. Algunos de los factores que explican estas tendencias son el exceso de integración de competencias digitales como

consecuencia de la renovación del Grado o la imposibilidad del profesorado para implementar metodologías creativas en el aula debido a la complicada conciliación entre las exigencias académicas y la investigación a las que se ven sometidos. Se recomienda una transformación de los planes de estudio universitarios del Grado en Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas para atender a las demandas laborales vinculadas al ejercicio de la creatividad publicitaria en España.

Palabras clave: *Creatividad; Publicidad; Relaciones Públicas; Competencias; Grado; Sector profesional*

Resumo

Este artigo realiza uma investigação sobre o desenvolvimento da competência criativa dos alunos durante a sua formação no Curso de Licenciatura em Publicidade e Relações Públicas. Especificamente, busca saber se o estudo e o impulso da criatividade estão adaptados às demandas do setor publicitário profissional. Para tal, foi realizada uma metodologia de abordagem tripla baseada na análise de conteúdo dos planos de estudos, um questionário dirigido a alunos de pós-graduação e um painel de especialistas constituído por académicos do Curso de Publicidade e Relações Públicas. que, embora a formação desses egressos pareça adequada em termos gerais, a formação recebida em torno da criatividade parece insuficiente para responder às demandas do mercado de trabalho. Alguns dos fatores que explicam essas tendências são o excesso de integração das competências digitais em consequência da renovação do curso ou a impossibilidade dos professores de implementar metodologias criativas em sala de aula devido a difícil conciliação entre os requisitos profissionais e académicos a que estão sujeitos. É por isso que se recomenda uma transformação dos planos de estudos universitários da Licenciatura em Publicidade e Relações Públicas para responder às demandas laborais relacionadas com o exercício da criatividade publicitária em Espanha.

Palavras chave: *Criatividade; Publicidade; Relações públicas; Competências; Grau; Setor profissional*

Translation by **Morote Traducciones**

1. Introduction

Being a part of our daily lives, creativity is an intellectual process that uses originality and ingenuity to stimulate the creative imagination and so produce valid ideas to resolve a particular problem (Costa, 2015). Companies regard this skill as one of the most valuable personality traits of a potential employees in any profession (McKinsey, 2018).

To respond to the needs of the job market, universities offer degree courses that include regulated approaches to developing creativity in their curricula. This article analyses the study of creativity in the academic world to establish if they meet the demands of the professional advertising sector. An analysis is carried out of advertising and public relations degrees, which set out to offer a professional profile geared towards developing creativity in a professional setting (ANECA, 2005). Progress has been made with the deficiencies seen in academic degrees (Agüero *et al.*, 2019; Farfán & Corredor, 2010), master's degrees (Matilla, Cuenca-Fontbona and Compte-Pujol, 2018) and PhD studies (Sánchez Pozo, 2018) in response to professional demands. However, there are few studies that focus on the development of specific skills such as creativity and its relation to professional expectations. One exception is the investigation of Castelló-Martínez (2020), who studies in some depth similar profiles such as the planner. While the research mentioned above does in a broad sense analyse the potential inadequacies of curricula in relation to professional realities, it does not consider specific skills such as creative work and its subsequent use in a future profession.

There is a widespread belief that academia is an institution that is disconnected from professional reality and such a perception generates a high level of demoralisation amongst students (Alonso *et al.*, 2009). It has also been a cause of constant concern when higher education courses are updated, where efforts were made to gradually include changes to curricular design (Vázquez Gestal & Fernández Souto, 2012). However, such improvements appear to be geared towards digital transformation and little else. The proliferation of new platforms and the evolution of the Web 2.0, have been identified in the curricula of Spanish advertising and public relations degrees as the main premises for consideration when debating the inclusion of new academic subjects that attempt to respond to this new setting. These proposals appear to neglect

certain qualities that are basic and essential for an advertising professional to develop successfully. Researchers such as Agüero *et al* comment that subjects such as creative thinking (amongst others) continue to be crucial for the development of future professionals in communication (2019). The current demands of the profession may impose a need for this approach, but at the same time it is indicative of the marked concern about renewing the degree courses, which has led to a strategy that focuses purely on the technological aspects of the market. Developing other skills such as creativity are pushed into the background, as are the wishes and desires of many students who are interested in the creative professions (Cuenca, Compte & Matilla, 2017; Peinado & Fernández, 2011). This study therefore seeks to bring together the professional and academic realities, students and working professionals, and sets out to contribute towards advances and improvements in academic performance and competitiveness.

1.2. Teaching creativity in the Spanish lecture halls

The traditional belief that creativity is a magical property that some gifted persons are endowed with has been widely shown to be false by researchers and experts, who agree that it is actually a skill that can be stimulated (Selva Ruíz & Domínguez Liñán, 2018: p. 372). Although creativity is a potentially complex process, since it uses other skills such as the imagination (Villamizar, 2012), it can be guided and worked on until it is fully learnt (Robinson, 2009). One of the purposes of creativity is to seek new solutions to already existing problems. The issue in this particular case is that the process is not an “open, playful, free act of creation”, but rather “subject to a brief or set of technical specifications, which are in turn subject to a series of objectives” (Costa, 2015: p. 18). Challenges like this, along with others such as deadlines, are effectively part an agency’s daily work. Research work by Selva Ruíz & Domínguez Liñán (2018) and others state that advertising agencies routinely use different techniques to boost creativity in the search for high quality ideas for a campaign. According to Vázquez Gestal (2011), creativity is an essential instrument in the world of advertising that helps to solve communication problems between advertisers and their consumers. This makes it one of the core skills to be developed by any future advertising executive during their training.

At university, communication degrees, in particular degrees in advertising and public relations, are presented as the natural option for training future advertis-

ing creatives (Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), 2015). However, previous studies consider that the design of such courses does not directly respond to sector demands (Castelló-Martínez, 2020). Agüero *et al.* (2019) comment that professionals have detected a number of shortcomings that are closely related to how creative thinking is taught, and also state that despite being a process with close links to practical applications in the profession, it has practically been forgotten in the current educational model. Farfán & Corredor have found that such shortcomings may be due to the “lack of professional experience or contact with reality of lecturers who teach creativity” (2012: p. 108), thereby implying that the problem is not only due to curricular design but also to teacher training. Other authors have argued debated on the difficulties lecturers face in balancing teaching demands and research work. Sáenz (1990) comments that the lack of institutional support, specific training and the absence of upgrading courses are factors that limit lecturers’ potential for versatility. The training of university teaching staff is in fact essential in bringing about greater adaptation to the professional setting (Ruíz & Martín, 2005).

Such proposals have gradually had an effect on innovations in university teaching. Demands that called for a change in the imbalance caused by teaching based exclusively on content and teaching in the lecture hall (Martínez *et al.*, 2013), have led to innovative proposals that propose a perspective in which the teacher occupies a place that is closer to the figure of the learning facilitator and mediator (Bain, 2004; 2011; Imbernón & Guerrero, 2018; Román-San-Miguel, 2014). However, further analysis of the requests and demands to bring about training that more closely matches professional realities (Torres, 2008) shows that most of the changes in terms of innovation are solely a much-increased use of technological devices in the lecture hall (Fueyo, Rodríguez-Hoyos & Linares (2015). This only serves to highlight that the breach between the academic and professional worlds is still a challenge for universities (Vázquez Gestal & Fernández Souto, 2012).

1.3. Developing creativity in the advertising profession

As part of the economic activities of the service sector, advertising has become an “cross-cutting activity with profound consequences for the political, economic

and social life of Spain” (Alameda-García, Fernández-Blanco & Benavides-Delgado, 2013). This is the conclusion drawn in a study by the Spanish Advertising Observatory (2019), which shows that the total amount invested in advertising was 12,836 million euros, a figure that has increased exponentially since 2014. This figure represents 3.5% of the volume of the entire Spanish service sector, indicating that it is a sector of the economy. These figures are further increased with the budgets that companies set aside for. According to Scopen (2019), they have grown by 5% since 2016.

Such studies show the resistance and capacity for regeneration of a sector that, despite the crisis, has managed to stay afloat in midst of constant changes and demands. Part of this success is undoubtedly due to the work of its professionals. In the case of advertising agencies, their creatives have had to endure a period of forced growth caused by the tremendous pace of change in media (González-Oñate, 2019). These changes have posed major challenges for agencies in both strategic and organisational terms. (López-Font, 2005). Vázquez Gestal & Fernández Souto comment that experts give great value to “the need to know how to tell stories, to seek ideas, produce innovative and original results” in the professionals they work with (2012: pp. 896-897). Creativity is a strategic tool in every part of the advertising process: in the strategic phase itself, when conceiving the message or making the idea a reality (Solanas y Sabaté, 2011).

2. Research objectives and methodology

In line with the research mentioned above, this study considers the following hypothesis: the current demands of work in creative advertising in Spain impose a need for changes to the university curricula for degrees in advertising and public relations. The main objective of this hypothesis is:

1. Identify and analyse the curricula of degrees in advertising and public relations in Spain, with special attention being paid to specific subjects and courses on creativity, to establish if the way the curricula are organised meets the demands and needs of the professional advertising sector.

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The article also considers the following secondary objectives:

- 0.1.1. Examine if the curricula fit the creative profiles currently in demand in the profession.
- 0.1.2. Evaluate the suitability of the creative training received by advertising and public relations graduates in relation to their professional development.

As Table 1 shows, a qualitative and quantitative methodology was used that consisted of several techniques applied over several phases:

	Technique	Researched profile	Correspondence with objectives
PHASE 1	Content analysis (Krippendorf, 2004)	Curricula of Advertising and Public Relations degrees	Objetivo 1
PHASE 2	Questionnaire (Martínez Olmo, 2002)	Graduated students and teaching and research staff	Objetivo 1.2.
PHASE 3	Expert panel (Linstone & Turoff 2002)	Professional creatives	Objetivo 1.1.

Table 1: Phases of the research methodology. Source: personal research.

Phase 1

The first phase commenced with an analysis of the curricula of advertising and public relations degrees. To this end, an exhaustive documentary review of all the curricula of Spanish public and private universities offering degree courses was carried out. The search included all the degree courses found in the University Degree Search Engine in the website of ANECA (Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation). The curricula of 53 Spanish universities were reviewed: 1 in Alicante, 6 in Barcelona, 1 in Cadiz, 1 in Cantabria, 1 in Castellon de la Plana, 1 in Girona, 1 in the Balearic Islands, 6 in Madrid, 1 in Malaga, 2 in Murcia, 1 in Navarra, 1 in Pontevedra, 1 in Seville, 2 in Valencia, 1 in Valladolid, and 1 in Vizcaya. The documentary review was carried out in March 2020 and covered the curricula for the 2019/2020 academic year.

A more specific analysis of the contents was carried out (Krippendorf, 2004) by applying a template based on prior analysis of the communication courses in

Spanish MBAs carried out by Matilla, Cuenca-FontBona & Compte-Pujol (2018). The template was applied to the study programmes available on the university websites and consisted of the following variables: province where each centre is located; name and type (public or private) of university; name of the subjects related to creativity; number and percentage of ECTS credits assigned to each subject; subject type (mandatory or optional); and academic year when they are taught.

Phase 2

Advertising and public relations graduates completed a multiple-choice questionnaire (Martín González, 2010) to evaluate the suitability of the creative training that they received. The questionnaire was made available on the Google Forms platform and SPSS software was used to process the data. A total of 245 questionnaires were completed between 15 November 2019 and 15 January 2020, 196 of which were valid. The questionnaire consisted of eight close-ended multiple-choice questions that were structured according to five thematic blocks: graduate's current employment situation, skills developed in their current professional activity, estimation of lack of prior training when starting work, appraisal of the methodologies used during courses on creativity and an assessment of how creativity is developed at university.

The sample was selected under the following criteria:

- Graduates in the job market as active employees in the advertising sector.
- Graduates with different profiles in advertising.

Given that teaching staff play a fundamental role both in students' perceptions and in their learning, we felt that it was important to include the opinions of 36 full-time lecturers in advertising and public relations degree courses. The process for the questionnaire was the same as the one used for the graduates (Google Forms, subsequent processing with SPSS). In this case, the field work was carried between 20 January and 20 March 2020. The survey participants were selected according to the following criterion: full-time advertising and public relations degree teaching and research staff who at some stage had participated in a course whose subject matter was to develop advertising creativity.

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The questionnaire was made up of 10 close-ended multiple-choice questions divided into four thematic blocks based on the premises highlighted in the studies mentioned above:

- Block 1: to find out more about the participant's profile.
- Block 2: to establish the appraisals of the teaching methodology used in the classroom (Ruíz & Martín, 2005).
- Block 3: the aim in this case was to gain appraisals of advertising and public relations degree curricula and their relevance to the needs of the current job market.
- Block 4: Appraisal of institutional support in terms of resources for the subject (Sáenz, 1990) and for training teaching staff (Farfán & Corredor, 2012).

Phase 3

Once the first phases were completed, a meeting of a panel of experts was organised (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). This set out to analyse the complexities and specific features of creative work and discuss whether the curricula meet the demands imposed by professional realities (objective 1.1). The experts were from the following advertising agencies: E1 (Family Different), E2 (Officer & Gentelman), E3 (Singular One), E4 (Dakota & Durango), E5 (Miwerta), E6 (La caseta de Juan León), E7 (Grupo Mundo), E8 (McCann Erickson). The selection criteria for the experts were based on three essential concepts. Firstly, experts with a strong rapport for the subject (advertising creativity) were sought; secondly, national prestige and/or recognition in the members' professional sector and in relation to the purpose of this study were positively valued. Finally, the aim was to form a group that, while united under previously established guiding principles, would also consist of a range of different profiles so as to further enrich discourse and the final outcome.

The panel was held in virtual format. The experts were sent an invitation by e-mail that presented the research project, along with a report and a form with open-ended questions. The questions were designed to reinforce and justify the results of the previous analysis of the content and questionnaires, and the invitees were asked if they would be willing to directly participate. A report was prepared

with the outcome of the results obtained in order to transfer the results from the previous phases to enable the experts to discuss them and the questions. The answers obtained were codified by dimensions into verbal categories and the data from the interviews were transcribed according to thematic areas. The results were presented as thematic categories to consider the issues under discussion here. The experts' contributions appear between quotation marks along with a previously assigned individual code in parentheses, in which E refers to expert, followed by a number in the sequence for each expert.

This three-phase methodology sets out to respond to the objectives by the participation of the stakeholders directly involved in the profession of teaching advertising, thereby providing a more global perspective.

3. Results

We present the results in the order of the phases mentioned above and then analyse and extract the data that enabled us to draw our conclusions.

Results of Phase 1

Analysis of the curricula for the advertising and public relations degrees of 38 universities showed that there was a total of 53 courses on creativity.

Province	University	Character	Denomination	ECTS	%ECTS	Typology	Course	
Alicante	U. of Alicante	Public	Fundamentals of Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	2°	
Alicante	U. of Alicante	Public	Creative Strategy and Conceptualization	6	2,50%	OB	3°	
Barcelona	Autonomous of Barcelona	Public	Advertising Creativity	12	5,00%	OB	2°	
Barcelona	Autonomous of Barcelona	Public	Creative Processes and Techniques	6	2,50%	OB	3°	

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Province	University	Character	Denomination	ECTS	%ECTS	Typology	Course	
Barcelona	Autonomous of Barcelona	Public	Audiovisual Creativity	6	2,50%	OT	4º	Mention in Creative Direction in Advertising and Public Relations
Barcelona	Autonomous of Barcelona	Public	Graphic Creativity	3	1,25%	OT	4º	Mention in Creative Direction in Advertising and Public Relations
Barcelona	Autonomous of Barcelona	Public	Creative Book	6	2,50%	OT	4º	Mention in Creative Direction in Advertising and Public Relations
Barcelona	Pompeu Fabra	Public	Theories and Techniques of Advertising Ideation	6	2,50%	B	2º	
Barcelona	Pompeu Fabra	Public	Strategy and Creativity	4	1,67%	OP	4º	Advertising Creativity Itinerary
Barcelona	Pompeu Fabra	Public	Creativity in Communicative Forms of Interactive Media	4	1,67%	OP	4º	Advertising Creativity Itinerary
Barcelona	Pompeu Fabra	Public	Creativity in Advertising Media and Supports	4	1,67%	OP	4º	Advertising Creativity Itinerary
Barcelona	Abat Oliba CEU	Private	Creative Direction	4,5	1,88%	OB	3º	
Barcelona	International of Catalunya	Private	Advertising Creativity	5	2,08%	OP	3º	
Barcelona	Vic-University Central of Catalunya	Private	Bases of Creative Thinking and Innovation	6	2,50%	OB	1º	
Barcelona	Vic-University Central of Catalunya	Private	Creativity applied	6	2,50%	OB	2º	
Barcelona	Vic-University Central of Catalunya	Private	Creativity on the Internet	3	1,25%	OB	3º	
Barcelona	Vic-University Central of Catalunya	Private	Advertising Creativity	3	1,25%	OP	4º	

Province	University	Character	Denomination	ECTS	%ECTS	Typology	Course	
Barcelona	U. of Barcelona	Private*	Advertising Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	2º	
Cádiz	U. of Cádiz	Public	Advertising Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Cantabria	Europea of Atlantic	Private	Advertising Creation	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Castellón de la Plana	Jaume I of Castellón	Public	Advertising Creativity I	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Castellón de la Plana	Jaume I of Castellón	Public	Advertising Creativity II	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Girona	U. of Girona	Public	Advertising Creative Processes and Techniques	4	1,67%	OB	2º	
Girona	U. of Girona	Public	Advertising Creativity	4	1,67%	OB	4º	
Girona	U. of Girona	Public	Creation of a Book	3	1,25%	OP	4º	
Islas Baleares	Pontificia of Comillas	Private	Advertising Creativity II	6	2,50%	OB	4º	
Islas Baleares	Pontificia of Comillas	Private	Advertising Creativity I	6	2,50%	OB	4º	
Madrid	San Pablo CEU	Private	Creative thinking	6	2,50%	OB	2º	
Madrid	San Pablo CEU	Private	Advertising Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Madrid	Rey Juan Carlos I	Private	Creativity in the Elaboration of the Advertising Message	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Madrid	Complutense of Madrid	Public	Creativity in Unconventional Media	6	2,50%	OP	3º	
Madrid	Complutense of Madrid	Public	The Advertising Creation process	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Madrid	Camilo José Cela	Private	Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Madrid	Camilo José Cela	Private	Advertising Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Madrid	Antonio of Nebrija	Private	Advertising Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	3º	
Madrid	Francisco of Vitoria	Private	Workshop of Creativity I	4,5	1,88%	OB	1º	
Madrid	Francisco of Vitoria	Private	Workshop of Creativity II	4,5	1,88%	OB	2º	

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Province	University	Character	Denomination	ECTS	%ECTS	Typology	Course	
Madrid	Francisco of Vitoria	Private	Creative narra-tion	6	2,50%	OB	2°	
Madrid	Francisco of Vitoria	Private	Creative Image Expression	6	2,50%	OB	2°	
Madrid	Francisco of Vitoria	Private	Creative Expres-sion of Video	6	2,50%	OB	2°	
Málaga	U. of Málaga	Public	Advertising Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	2°	
Murcia	Católica San Antonio	Private	Creativity in Communication	6	2,50%	FB	1°	
Murcia	U. of Murcia	Public	Advertising Creativity	12	5,00%	OB	3°	
Navarra	U. of Navarra	Private	Creation and Elaboration of Messages	18	7,50%	OB	4°	
Pontevedra	U. of Vigo	Public	Advertising Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	2°	
Sevilla	U. of Sevilla	Public	Advertising Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	2°	
Valencia	Cardenal Herrera-CEU	Private	Creativity for Advertising Crea-tion and PR	9	3,75%	OB	3°	
Valencia	Europea Miguel of Cervantes	Private	Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	3°	
Valladolid	U. of Valladolid	Public	Creative Ideas, Methods and Strategies: The Creative Plan or Project	6	2,50%	OB	3°	
Valladolid	U. of Valladolid	Public	Online Creativity	3	1,25%	OP	4°	Management of Creativity and Avertising Communication and PR
Vizcaya	U. of País Vasco	Public	Creativity	6	2,50%	OB	2°	
Vizcaya	U. of País Vasco	Public	Creativity II	6	2,50%	OP	3°	Multimedia Realization in Advertising Mention

Table 2¹: Courses focusing on creativity in Spanish advertising and public relations degrees. Source: personal research.

* Indicates that although the Universitat de Barcelona is a public university, the qualification it offers is catalogued as private because it is provided at an attached school.

As Table 2 shows, the institutions that give more weight to creativity with respect to the subjects as a whole in their curricula are the Autonomous University of Barcelona with 10.70% of subjects given over to creativity and the University Francisco de Vitoria with 8.75%. We would point out that there is little or no difference between these centres since the percentage of credits for creativity courses in comparison to the entire curriculum between public and private centres differs by 0.62%.

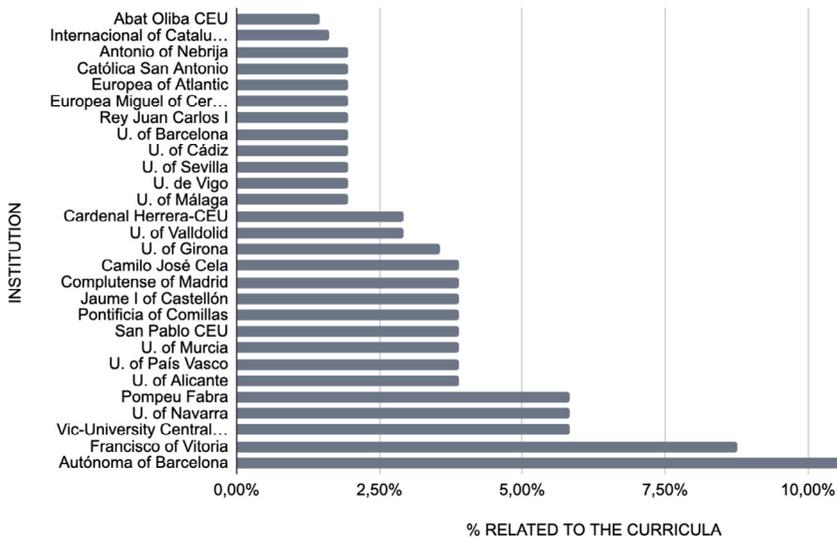


Table 3: List of the number of credits of courses on creativity in Spanish universities. Source: personal research

The results for the number of credits for subjects that specialise in creativity showed that most gave an average of 6 ECTS (66.7%). However, there are centres that give them a higher number of credits. 9.8% gave courses with 4 ECTS and 3 ECTS respectively, and 5.9% offered courses with 4.5 ECTS. The least common trends are subjects with 12 ECTS, representing a total of 3.9% and 18 ECTS and 5 ECTS with 2% respectively.

Results for the subject type showed that most (73.08%) of them are mandatory. This indicates that the subjects are obligatory for obtaining a degree. However, 23.08% of the subjects on creativity appear as optional, followed by 3.84% as

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“foundation courses”. The level at which most students study this type of subject is usually in the third year (40.4%), second year (28.8%) and fourth year (25%). The least common period for courses on creativity is the first year (5.8%).

Finally, a number of curricular programmes or mentions were identified within the curricula of some universities that enable students to obtain a specialist qualification with creative skills. Examples include the Autonomous University of Barcelona with “Creative Management in Advertising and Public Relations”, the University of Pompeu Fabra with a programme for “Advertising Creativity” and the University of Valladolid with a programme called “Creativity and Management of Advertising Communications and Public Relations”.

Results of Phase 2

The results show that the 196 participants of the survey come from a wide range of universities, including: University of Seville (34 graduates), University of Jaume I (27 graduates), University of Pompeu Fabra (19), University of Malaga (18), University of Alicante (18), University of Cadiz (12), Camilo José Cela University (11), Complutense University of Madrid (11), King Juan Carlos I University (10), Cardenal Herrera-CEU (9), University of Alicante (8), Vic-Universidad Central de Catalunya (7), Catholic University of San Antonio de Murcia (5), University of Girona (4), and the University of Valladolid (3).

The data shows that 54.6% of the interviewees were employed in the advertising sector. In particular, 44.9% were company employees while 9.7% were freelancers. The other 45.4% were working in other sectors (23.5%) and 21.9% were unemployed.

Three basic skills were identified from the abilities developed while working: digital skills (34.8%), creative thinking (22.6%) and strategic decision making (17.4%). Sales activities (11.6%), economic management (8.4%) and documentary management and/or research (4.7%) make up the other skills most effectively developed in the workplace. Other skills such as creating and drafting web content, product design, graphic design, event organisation, teaching, etc., make up 0.5% of the results, showing that digital and strategic/creative skills are the most practical ones.

Paradoxically, this data shows that the skills identified above match the ones that are believed to be least developed while learning. 38.6% stated that digital skills were not studied much during the degree course, while 27.4% and 19.8% felt the same about strategic decision making and creative thinking skills, respectively. However, there were other skills that were highlighted, such as organising events (12.3%), human resources management (1.7%) and others (0.2%).

The appraisal of the methodologies taught in courses on creativity showed that 9.2% considered the methods applied to be “totally inadequate” for overcoming professional challenges, while 25.5% regarded as them “not very adequate”, 42.9% felt they were “more or less adequate”, 20.4% considered them to be “very adequate” and only 2% regarded them as “sufficient”. This indicates that most participants tended towards a positive assessment of the methods used in the courses.

The block that appraised development of creativity during the degree by the participants showed that 5.2% considered that the subject matter on creativity development was “insufficient”, 20.4% felt it was “sufficient”, 59.1% thought it was “acceptable” and 15.3% regarded it as “excellent”.

This data matches participants’ perceptions of how suitable their studies are for developing creative skills. In this case, 10.7% stated that the degree had contributed “very little” to the development of their creative skills, 17.3% considered that it had contributed “little”, 32.1% felt that there had been “some”, contribution, while 27% and 12.8% regarded it had made a “considerable” or “sufficient” contribution, respectively.

The results obtained in the first block from the 36 members of the teaching staff, which was designed to establish the profile of the interviewees showed that the universities where the academics worked were as follows:

University of Seville (7 participants), University of Jaume I (5), University of Pompeu Fabra (5), King Juan Carlos I University (4), Complutense University of Madrid (2), University of Malaga (3), University of Cadiz (2), University of Alicante (2), Camilo José Cela University (2), Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya (1),

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Catholic University of San Antonio de Murcia (1), Cardenal Herrera-CEU (1) and the University of Valladolid (1).

The second block, designed to determine the value given to teaching methodologies, was mostly favourable. 25% of academics stated that the methods are “excellent” ways to boost students’ creativity, 54% felt they were “very good” and 16.7% considered that they were “good”. Only one participant (4.2%) considered them to be “inadequate”.

As regards innovation in the methodologies, teaching staff did not appear to be very willing to make changes to the teaching methods. 67.3% stated that they never or hardly ever changed their teaching/learning methods, while 24% declared that they changed their methodologies every year. The remaining 8.7% stated that they infrequently made changes.

The third block, which set out to assess the curricula with respect to the needs of the job market, occupied an intermediate position, although it showed a positive trend. No interviewee affirmed that the response of curricula to job market needs was excellent, and only 4.2% felt that they did not provide any response at all. Most lecturers chose an intermediate answer (54.2%) and 41.7% considered that the response to such needs was good. However, when considering the importance of creativity as a factor to be developed in the curricula, 20.8% felt that creativity played a role that was “not very important”, 29.2% considered it to be of intermediate value, 45.8% felt it was “important” and 4.2% regarded it as “very important”. This block ended with the lecturers’ evaluation of how important it was to develop creative skills to enable inclusion in the labour market. In this case, most teaching staff (83.3%) considered it to be “very important”, 12.5% felt it was “important” and only one gave it an intermediate value.

A clear response was obtained when the lecturers were asked about which academic year should be used to develop creative skills: 87.5% of the interviewees felt that they should be developed in every year, thus showing that it needs to be a subject present throughout the curriculum. The other positions stated that it should be developed over one particular year. There was just one vote for each academic year.

There was a positive trend in the lecturers' response to the question about the level of support they receive from their institutions in terms of tools to enable creativity to be developed. 12.5% considered that they felt "not very" supported by their university, 33.3% regarded the support as "adequate", 41.7% found it to be "very adequate" and 25% felt it was "excellent". The answers also shed light on the importance they gave to training to enable them to adapt their teaching to the demands imposed by professional profiles: 100% of the interviewees stated that high quality, specialist training is essential to be able to properly develop their work.

Phase 3

The interviews with the experts were fluid and collaborative. Generally speaking, their perceptions of higher education showed a belief that there was a certain shortage in creativity training. According to the experts; "levels aren't high enough to meet market needs, they haven't worked on creativity" (E4) and, according to expert, 3 (E3), such training is detected "on very few occasions". Indeed, although "they do know about advertising, they don't give free rein to opinions that advertising creativity and all it has to offer can give them" (E7). In particular, E6 felt that if training in creativity is provided, "it would be a very positive thing to teach it continuously in every academic year" (E6) since, according to expert 8, who backs up this belief: "It's the most practical thing when it comes to the crunch" (E8).

Almost all the experts agreed that graduates leave university with insufficient preparation for a creative environment. Expert 1 acknowledged that "the person who graduates with an acceptable degree of preparation is the one who took the time to supplement their university training with some parallel learning in their own time" (E1). Expert 5 stated that "I don't think they leave university with enough training, although they are halfway there" (E5). In fact, the general trend in the contributions was that there was little in the way of adaptation to reality: "I think they need they need to go deeper into this area. They have resources and tools, but that's a long way away from what agencies are looking for" (E4). Even when the posture is clearly in favour of higher education, we find a negative response: "I'm a fervent defender of higher education and public universities, but if

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I hadn't studied at a creativity school, I would never have been able to work in a high-end agency" (E8).

When discussing employment of young interns, the experts agreed on the importance of being able to see and evaluate the students' previous work: "I really appreciate the ideas they have in their folders to solve specific problems, even if the campaigns are fictional" (E3). Experts E1 and E6 emphasised the importance of the creative portfolio when they say that "practically 100% of students who apply to work in the creative department attach a portfolio. In fact, a candidate without a portfolio is rejected" (E6).

The participants discussed the main qualities that students and new graduates need to improve to form part of the advertising sector, and pointed out that graduates need to work on "their own personal brand and give shape to the creative skills to achieve a style that makes them stand out" (E3). "Having a global vision of how to transform a brilliant idea into different processes" (E7). All the above comments were summarised in the contribution made by E8: "Conceptualisation and references. Learn to think".

As regards the professional roles with the most importance and potential for employability in the sector, some experts opted for profiles linked to innovation (E1). According to others, "traditional creative profiles go further than strategic or accounts profiles" (E2). There are also a wide range of opinions between these two positions: such as "digital creatives stand out above the others" (E3), and those who opt for a very specific role such as "art direction" (E4). Hybrid roles are mentioned by E5 and E6.

Finally, when we asked about the main skills that an advertising graduate should have, the experts agreed on a number of characteristics: patience, motivation, curiosity, the ability to express oneself, a proactive approach, not having prejudices and, above all, being brave enough to propose ideas and make them real (E1-E8).

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of the phases offer an interesting starting point for analysis and dissemination of current labour needs with respect to advertising creativity in Spain and the curricula for advertising and public relations degrees. When we consider the first objective, what we find is that although the analysis makes plain that the mandatory nature of creative courses shows the inevitable need to study this type of subject in order to obtain the degree, the number of total credits in relation to the degree as a whole reveals that there is a certain lack of creative material in comparison to other course content. The experts agreed that graduates are not sufficiently trained to respond to market requirements. This belief is shared by graduates when they likewise comment that their creative skills are not sufficiently developed during the degree course. For their part, academics appear to be further away from professional realities given that their answers show differences in recognising a consensus on the importance of creativity in curricula.

Some of the factors that could explain these trends include excessive integration of digital course material into renewed degrees. The response to the current trends towards digitalisation of work has been a fundamental concern when updating curricula, while traditional skills such as creativity have been neglected. If we follow the graduates' arguments, although digital skills are in high demand in the professional sector, creative skills are also widely considered to be basic abilities in their daily work.

On the other hand, the professional demands imposed on lecturers may provide the answer to this lack of work on developing creative skills. The academics acknowledged that a certain degree of comfort was sought when designing their teaching models. At the same time, they recognised that any change in methodologies is a slow process. It should be stated that university lecturers are now feeling the effects of the tremendous increase in demands on teaching and research work, which can even sometimes lead to professional collapse. However, most graduates give a positive appraisal of the methodologies used in the lecture hall.

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As regards the objectives that considered the match between the curricula and the creative profiles required in the profession (0.1.1) and the subsequent evaluation of professional performance (0.1.2), the experts commented on what they called a lack of preparation of students. The trend observed amongst professionals is that the training looked adequate and in fact some skills amongst young professionals were identified. But a need for additional training was also mentioned. Other studies such as those by Farfán & Corredor (2010) and Castell-Martínez (2020) on communication degrees in general show that the training received is not sufficient to respond to such demands. Professional realities require more dedication to creative work and this does not appear to be recognised as such in curricula. In fact, deeper examination of the curricula shows that there are few specialised programmes, and an imbalance of creative skills in course distribution. What is needed therefore is the opportunity to provide training that responds to professional creative needs in advertising and public relations degrees.

However, it should be pointed out that the results of the graduates' surveys show a certain degree of effectiveness in terms of inclusion into the workplace given that there are very few people without work in the sector. In view of all the above, we could therefore pose the hypothesis that there is a need to respond to current professional demands in advertising creativity in Spain. This could be done by transforming the university curricula of advertising and public relations degrees. While our objectives did not include how such changes should be made, at least they offer a useful starting point for recognising some of the weaknesses that exist and need to be improved to respond to professional realities. Issues such as boosting practical creativity through strategies such as designing creative portfolios, more creative courses throughout the degree and more attention to lecturers' needs by facilitating methods that more closely match the profession, are just some of the points that could be considered in future research on the subject.

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