Essential skills in current creative advertising: University *vs.* professional reality

Las competencias imprescindibles en la actualidad de la creatividad publicitaria: Universidad vs. realidad profesional

As competências essenciais da criatividade publicitária actual: Universidade vs. realidade profissional

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Abstract

The wide range of possibilities and content that is offered in new media to the user is a challenge for advertising creatives as they are forced to generate concepts that capture the attention of diverse target audiences. This reality gives rise to the need for professional profiles who can successfully respond to the challenges of high levels of demand and innovation. To be prepared, creatives need to develop new, more complex skills that allow them to understand the characteristics of the current market and leverage the resources they have at their fingertips in order to generate content that will entice their audiences. The objective of this study, therefore, is to understand new trends and professional needs within the creative sector of the advertising market in order to be considered within teaching-learning processes in universities. A qualitative methodology is proposed, which is supported by sixteen semi-structured interviews with creative pairs who work in, what according to professionals are, eight of the top ten creative agencies (Scopen, 2020). The results show that the creative profile in demand responds to that of a person who is willing, up-to-date and who has skills that are reflected in a portfolio and have been acquired through practical training that is not effectively offered by universities.

Keywords: *Creative advertising; Digital society; Creative processes; Creative profiles; Art director; Copywriter*

Resumen

El amplio abanico de posibilidades y contenidos que ofrece el nuevo panorama mediático al usuario supone un reto para los creativos publicitarios, obligados a generar conceptos que capten la diversificada atención de los públicos objetivos. Esta realidad fomenta la necesidad de perfiles profesionales capaces de responder con éxito a retos de un alto nivel de exigencia e innovación. Para estar preparados, los creativos deben desarrollar nuevas competencias, más complejas, que les permitan conocer las características de su mercado actual y aprovechar los recursos que tienen a su alcance para generar contenidos que seduzcan a las audiencias. El objetivo de esta propuesta, por tanto, es conocer las nuevas tendencias y las necesidades profesionales en el sector creativo del mercado publicitario con el fin de que puedan considerarse en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje universitarios. Para alcanzar

este propósito, se plantea una metodología cualitativa apoyada en 16 entrevistas semiestructuradas a duplas creativas que trabajan en ocho de las diez mejores agencias creativas según los profesionales (Scopen, 2020). Los resultados manifiestan que el perfil creativo que se demanda responde al de una persona con ganas, actualizada, con habilidades que se reflejan en una carpeta y que se adquieren mediante una formación práctica que la universidad no ofrece de forma eficaz.

Palabras clave: *Creatividad publicitaria; Sociedad digital; Procesos creativos; Perfiles creativos; Director de arte; Redactor publicitario*

Resumo

O vasto leque de possibilidades e conteúdos oferecidos pelo novo panorama mediático ao utilizador é um desafio para os criativos publicitários, que são forçados a gerar conceitos que captem a atenção diversificada dos públicos-alvo. Esta realidade fomenta a necessidade de perfis profissionais capazes de responder com sucesso a desafios altamente exigentes e inovadores. Para estarem preparados, os criativos devem desenvolver competências novas e mais complexas que lhes permitam compreender as características do seu mercado actual e tirar partido dos recursos que têm à sua disposição para gerar conteúdos que seduzam o público. O objectivo desta proposta, portanto, é compreender as novas tendências e necessidades profissionais no sector criativo do mercado publicitário para que possam ser consideradas nos processos de ensino-aprendizagem universitários, permitindo melhorar a taxa de licenciados em criatividade publicitária. Para tal, é proposta uma metodologia qualitativa, baseada em 16 entrevistas semi-estruturadas com duplicados criativos que trabalham em oito das dez agências criativas mais importantes de acordo com os profissionai (Scopen, 2020). Os resultados mostram que o perfil criativo exigido é o de uma pessoa com desejo, actualizado, com competências que se reflectem numa carteira e que são adquiridas através de formação prática que a universidade não oferece eficazmente.

Palavras chave: *Criatividade publicitária, Sociedade digital; Processos criativos; Perfis criativos; Director artístico; Redactor*

Translation by **Diana Clavería Ibáñez**

1. Introduction

In general, professionals in the communication sector have been forced into constant, profound changes that have caused their profiles to permanently evolve, which has implicitly led to the very metamorphosis of their identity (Salaverria, 2016). This dynamism, characteristic of the communication sector, requires constant progress (Jiménez-Gómez & Mañas-Viniegra, 2018) and forces one to face the challenge of lifelong learning not only for professionals, but for teachers and students as well (Vivar-Zurita, 2011). The challenges posed by today's advertising market are determined by a number of conditions, including digitization and budget constraints. As in all sectors, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a radical change in resources and, as a result, in the daily work of professionals.

The complexity implemented by new media has resulted in a digital *mare nostrum* (García-García & Gértrudix-Barrio, 2009) in which content consumers have simultaneously become co-creators. The Internet and social networks can be defined as tools that allow for the co-creating of narratives thanks to the reciprocity of prosumers (Urbano, Aguaded, & Bernal-Bravo, 2018). However, this technological impact has created multitasking environments that have complicated advertising by reducing the attention of the receiver (Duff & Segijn, 2019).

In Spain, following the signs of recovery shown by the advertising sector, COVID-19 created a complicated situation and, according to Infoadex, investment in advertising fell by 27.9% in the first half of 2020 (Riva, 2020). All media has been affected, including the Internet.

Theories about creative advertising argue that creativity is the lifeblood of an advertising message (Shen *et al.*, 2020). However, the stress faced by the advertising sector, as well as by the dynamics of the profession itself, create blockages that make inventiveness difficult.

Advertising creatives must understand the needs of the advertiser and consider the possible effects on the public (West, Koslow, & Kilgour, 2019). When defined as creative, advertising leaves an impression on the public with the novelty of a

concept and the design of a message (Shen *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, when assessing creative advertising, one must consider both the importance of originality and suitability (Rosengren *et al.*, 2020). In addition, the use of positive emotional language has an impact on consumer decisions (Bhatia, 2019). Currently, there are repetitive campaigns that do not help identify the highlights of a brand (Deng *et al.*, 2020).

Team dynamics for advertising creatives are essential (Ghaffari, Hackley, & Lee, 2019). Today, the creative profiles of advertising agencies must look for new paths within the environment of new media (Mahon, 2010) and big data (Llorente-Barroso, 2020).

Since its inception, the Internet has promoted a massive offering of shared content (Tapscott & Williams, 2006), which provides a space for collaboration or meeting (García-García & Gértrudix-Barrio, 2009) and is characterized by its interactivity. To achieve that level of interactivity, it is essential to adapt the message to target and empathize with it while offer captivating, useful or beneficial content (Landa, 2011). This new context has meant the redefinition of objectives and meanings (Kover, 2016), which involves the modification of profiles and a demand for other skills (Perlado-Lamo-De-Espinosa, Papí-Gálvez, & Bergaz-Portolés, 2019).

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) proposed that student involvement is the cornerstone on which to build their learning experience (Calvo-Bernardino & Mingorance-Arnáiz, 2009). This teaching-learning style proposes a change in teaching methodologies in order to bridge the gap between the university and the reality of businesses (Sierra-Sánchez & Cabezuelo-Lorenzo, 2010). In this scenario, evidence shows how innovative teaching has gained prominence regarding the acquisition of skills in the daily workings of the university (Fidalgo, 2011). This is largely due to the integration of technologies and a necessary rapprochement between the university and businesses (Alonso-Mosquera, Gonzálvez-Vallés, & Bartolomé-Muñoz-De-Luna, 2016; Galindo-Rubio, Suárez-Carballo, & Martín-San-Román, 2015; Sierra-Sánchez & Cabezuelo-Lorenzo, 2010).

The Ministry of Education and Science (MEC, 2006, p. 6) defines competencies as, "a combination of knowledge, skills (intellectual, manual, social, etc.) and attitudes

that enable a graduate to successfully resolve problems or intervene in a matter in any given academic, professional or social context." For Riesco-González (2008), there is confusion and an excessive breakdown of skills that do not help in training. According to the Tuning Project (2006), skills can be transversal or specific. Transversal skills are generic and are shared by all subjects or fields of knowledge, while specific ones are related to particular disciplines. Among the many existing contributions, such as those of Cabero (2005) or Zabalza-Beraza (2005), a classification found in each kind of skill shows that all competencies contain knowledge, execution (skills) and attitude (values, one's relationship with the environment and with oneself in order to solve problems).

Creativity has always been considered an essential skill in any professional sector, but universities have failed to address it properly (Cheung *et al.*, 2003; Mareque-Álvarez-Santullano & De-Prada-Creo, 2018). In this sense, initiatives have carried out a combination of learning by doing (Schank, Berman, & Macpherson, 1999) and *Problem-Based Learning* (PBL) (Gargallo-López, Fernández-March, & Jiménez-Rodríguez, 2007) for the development of creative advertising skills (Bartolomé-Muñoz-De-Luna, Llorente-Barroso, & Marugán-Solís, 2018). In addition, these practices have been considered to create a context for the development of talent and creativity that favours learning (Mareque-Álvarez-Santullano, & De-Prada-Creo, 2018). The close relationship that university students maintain with technology should promote a transmedia education enhancing their digital skills (Alonso-López & Terol-Bolinches, 2020), enabling them to improve that ability to produce content using different codes (Aparicio-González, Tucho, & Marfil-Carmona, 2020).

Universities must face the challenge of preparing their students for an uncertain and changing professional future in which technology will be key (Jiménez-Gómez & Mañas-Viniegra, 2018; Llorente-Barroso, 2020), however, these proposals are not standardized in the Spanish university system. There is not even an "institutionalized body of academic competencies" for students who gravitate to the digitized communication sector (Vivar-Zurita, 2011, p. 61). In addition, the relationship between universities and advertising agencies is not fluid enough (Miguélez-Juan, 2018).

In the current advertising sector, the art director has been recognized as being responsible for shaping the message and making it more persuasive by adapt-

ing to the changes of the communicative visual paradigm (Balbuena-Palacios & López-Rodríguez, 2019). In general, new media has prompted creative challenges that have pushed for the redefinition of the traditional functions par excellence of the two creative profiles, art director and advertising editor (Lynch & West, 2017). Both require a high level of multidisciplinary and digital specialisation (López-Berna, Papí-Gálvez, & Martín-Llaguno, 2016).

Given the difficulties that creative advertising must face within the aforementioned context, the general objective of this research is to identify the skills that are required of young professionals in this field. With that in mind, the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- OE1. To list the competencies that advertising agencies require of recent young graduates in creative fields.

- OE2. Explain the needs met by the demands of abilities and skills most valued in these young creatives and how they have achieved them.

- OE3. Identify effective learning strategies for acquiring essential skills in creative advertising.

- OE4. Define the current creative profile and the immediate future in the advertising sector.

2. Material and Method

To achieve the proposed objectives, a qualitative methodology is applied by interviewing sixteen young creatives with diverse work experience who have a fairly recent perspective of their university undergraduate or postgraduate education. This profile responds to their ability to compare what they learned at university, whether in undergraduate or postgraduate studies, with what they have been required to do at an agency. The sample has been selected from the ten creative agencies that make up the ranking published by Scopen (2020). Of these agencies, the study focuses on the nine based in Spain. Using LinkedIn, creatives under the age of thirty-five who work in each of these agencies were contacted for a personal interview. In total, eight creative pairs from all contacted agencies participated with the exception of DDB (Table 1).

AGENCY	POSITION	AGE	SEX	EXPERIENCE	ID[1]
McCann	*Senior* Art Director	31	Female	7 years	1A
McCann	*Senior Copywriter*	33	Male	6 years	1C
Sra. Rushmore	*Senior* Art Director	32	Female	10 years	2A
Sra. Rushmore	*Senior Copywriter*	32	Female	10 years	2C
LOLA Mullenlowe	*Junior* Art Director	27	Male	2 years	3A
LOLA Mullenlowe	*Junior Copywriter*	26	Female	2 years	3C
David	*Junior* Art Director	32	Male	5 years	5A
David	*Junior Copywriter*	26	Male	3 years	5C
El Ruso de Rocky	*Junior* Art Director	27	Female	3 years	6A
El Ruso de Rocky	*Junior Copywriter*	28	Male	3 years	6C
&Rosàs	*Junior* Art Director	25	Male	4 years	7A
&Rosàs	*Junior Copywriter*	24	Female	3 years	7C
Ogilvy	*Junior* Art Director	25	Female	3 years	8A
Ogilvy	*Junior Copywriter*	25	Female	3 years	8C
La Despensa	Art Director trainee	24	Female	1 year	9A
La Despensa	*Copywriter trainee*	23	Female	1 year	9C

Table 1: *Sample of interviews conducted. Source: The authors.*

The interview was chosen because it is a technique that allows one to directly interact with another and explore a topic in a contextualized and holistic way, which allows for the clarification of a series of concepts with the subject interviewed (Benney & Hughes, 1970; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016). A semi-structured style of personal interview has been chosen because it provides a guide while offering the interviewee freedom in responding. The guide, in addition to demographic data, incorporates four major topics:

1. Experience and perception of the advertising sector and creative activity.

2. Incorporation into the labour market.

3. Acquisition of knowledge, abilities, skills and the role of training (university and advertising colleges).

4. Future trends in the creative advertising market.

The interviews will be transcribed for further interpretative and qualitative analysis of their content in order to verify the presence of categories, ideas or concepts (Landry, 1988).

After analysing the content of the interviews, a template based on the blocks of major topics has been designed. This categorization allows for the classification of the components that make up a set of similar elements and to differentiate them from other groups (Bardin,1996). In this case, the content categories (Sánchez-Aranda, 2005) have been designed from a code book using ATLAS.ti, which is a tool that enables the detection of synergies between the ideas encoded in all interviews according to inferential criteria and objectives. Following Cabero (2005) or Zabalza-Beraza (2005), the first set of categories corresponds to codes related to specific skills that are identified in the discourse of interviews such as knowing (knowledge), know-how (skills) and being (attitude) (Table 2).

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION
Knowledge	What allows a student to acquire information in order to solve problems
Skills	What allows a student to carry out a task using his or her knowledge.
Attitude	Predispositions and ways of acting, both intrapersonal and interpersonal, that allow a student to make decisions and connect in the work environment.

Table 2: *Main categories identified in the interviews conducted. Source: The authors.*

Other sets of codes relating to the method of acquiring these skills has also been incorporated, such as teaching-learning methodologies. The Bologna Plan implied this methodology based on theory and practice.

As well as these principal categories, the analysis of the interviews has identified specific skills that correspond to one or more of these categories and the cooccurrences were analysed using ATLAS.ti.

3. Results

The analysis of the interviews based on the three skills categories defined in the method determines how important skills are (312 references) compared to attitude (134 references) and knowledge (112 references) in current creative profiles (Table 3).

ID	Attitude	Knowledge	Skills
Total A	64	45	146
Total C	70	67	166
Total	134	112	312

Table 3: *Skills counted by category according to each creative profile interviewed. Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.*

In connection with these skills, respondents emphasize that access to creative agencies requires a portfolio (25 references, Table 4): "I had to have a portfolio that demonstrated the worth of my ideas and my creative judgment" (1A). They also highlight the importance of being able to utilize tools, especially in art direction (29 references from art directors (Total A) *versus* 13 copywriters (Total C), Table 4): "To know how to design, create a photo montage, edit, animate. All of that adds up in order to stand out" (3A).

ID	Up-to-date	Portfolio	Digital	Desire	Design	Business Internships	Socio-cultural
Total A	50	11	20	20	29	18	9
Total C	60	14	24	27	13	20	21
Total	110	25	44	47	42	38	30

Table 4: *Skills counted by category according to each creative profile interviewed. Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.*

Table 5 shows the cooccurrences (Coo) and the coefficients of the cooccurrences[2] (CCo) that identify the intensity of the relationship between the main skill categories and the specific skills identified in the interviews. Analysing the coincidences between main skill categories and specific skills, there is a degree of cooccurrence between what interviewees define as "desire" or "hunger" and their attitude (CCo=0.34, Table 5): "But also the attitude, commitment and desire I had to work" (5A); "to want to learn and let yourself be taught" (7A).

	Attitude (TF=134)		Knowledge (TF=112)		Skills (TF=312)	
	Coo	CCo	Coo	CCo	Coo	CCo
Up-to-date (TF=110)	28	0.13	8	0.04	41	0.11
Portfolio (TF=25)	4	0.03	0	0.00	18	0.06
Digital (TF=44)	4	0.02	3	0.02	14	0.04
Entertainment (TF=9)	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	0.01
Desire (TF=47)	46	0.34	1	0.01	13	0.04
Design (TF=42)	9	0.05	2	0.01	39	0.12
Socio-cultural (TF=30)	8	0.05	10	0.08	6	0.02

Table 5: *Cooccurrences between main skill categories and others identified in the analysis of the interviews of the creatives in the sample. Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.*

The role of the university, nevertheless, emphasizes the skills connected to the general knowledge of the profession (CCo=0.48, Table 6): "The university gives you an idea of the world" (2C). Nevertheless, the university's contribution to the creative formation of the people interviewed in terms of attitude and abilities was limited (CCo=0.12 and CCo=0.13 respectively, Table 6), especially from the perspective of an art director: "Unfortunately, the university did not help me at all as far as creativity goes" (3A). While a copywriter recognizes his satisfaction with the university: "I am very happy with what the university has taught me. Knowledge, analytical capacity and then, specialisation in higher education" (7C).

	Attitude (TF=134)		Knowledge (TF=112)		Skills (TF=312)	
	Coo	CCo	Coo	CCo	Coo	CCo
Practical (TF=293)	51	0.14	32	0.09	271	0.81
Theoretical (TF=94)	8	0.04	83	0.67	26	0.07
Self-taught (TF=69)	26	0.15	9	0.05	29	0.08
Connection with Company (TF=114)	20	0.09	6	0.03	72	0.20
College yes (TF=125)	20	0.08	9	0.04	95	0.28
University no (TF=231)	19	0.05	16	0.05	179	0.49
University yes (TF=126)	27	0.12	77	0.48	51	0.13

Table 6: *Cooccurrences between main skill categories and others identified in the analysis of the interviews of the creatives in the sample. Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.*

Most of the participants in the study who recognize some contribution from the university in their training refer to general knowledge (CCo-0.48, Table 6) that, to some extent, helped them define their initial interests: "The university, for me, has been a starting point for discovering my concerns" (1A).

Specific advertising colleges where the interviewee completed a master's degree have a better reputation among those interviewed, especially the colleges that focus on learning practical skills (CCo-0.28, Table 6) specifically linked to creative advertising: "At [X, advertising college], I was taught […] to be creative in four months" (2A).

According to the interviewees, the type of training offered by the university is not sufficient to achieve the skills, especially specific skills, required in the creative advertising sector (CCo-0.49, Table 6): "In my opinion, an advertising degree from the university was not relevant in my training, however, creative colleges marked a before and after in my creative growth" (9A). Some recognize that the university has another function and that it cannot and does not have to teach like creative colleges do: "They have to train professionals who will engage in very different tasks" (6A).

However, most of the respondents believe that when they entered the market they were perfectly qualified after studying at an advertising college: "Yes, having spent a year in a creative college with teachers who are professionals in the sector, I have received good training to work" (9C). In these colleges, some consider the preparation to be so demanding that it makes it much easier to adapt to the dynamics of an agency: "Later, at [X, advertising college], I acquired the knowledge and I knew what it is really like to work in an advertising agency" (8C). On the other hand, there are things that can only be learned through working: "Until you get to work, you do not know how to do it" (7A).

The connection to the company emerges as a key point in acquiring skills (CCo-0.20, Table 6): "Without a doubt, the best way to gain knowledge is by having an internship in a real agency" (5A). Internships must be approached as a real job: "If you have the initiative to take the briefs and do them, solve them and so on, you will do well" (5C).

As for the most appropriate method for acquiring knowledge, the interviewees agree that they should target learning by doing. There were 293 references concerning the need to do acquire practical skills *versus* theoretical with 94 references (Table 7).

ID	Practical	Theoretical	Self-taught	Connection with Company
Total A	144	41	28	54
Total C	149	53	41	60
Total	293	94	69	114

Table 7: *Counting learning methods according to each creative profile interviewed. Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.*

In studying the cooccurrences between references to the source of learning and the necessary methods shown in Table 8, the university's limited contribution to practical learning is perceived (CCo=0.55, Table 8) with criticization of its excessive focus on theory (CCo=0.58, Table 8). In fact, some consider the university to be useless because it focuses excessively on theoretical aspects: "At university, knowledge was too theoretical and, unfortunately, it was a waste of time" (3A). Something that some of the interviewees came to understand due to the variety of interests that are concentrated in undergraduate studies: "I consider it normal, we are thirty students and each of us is interested in pursuing different activities." (1A). However, they admit that, in creative subjects, an effort must be made to offer more practical methodologies: "I am very much in favour of laying the foundation with theory, but in the advertising sector, the important thing is to have a good practical base" (5A). Although very few are satisfied with their time at the university, this person's perception is remarkable: "The university offered me a theoretical framework that, for me, was very enriching and useful in my work, but it was not a space to learn or develop creative skills" (3C).

	Self-taught (TF=69)		Connection with Company (TF=114)		College yes (TF=125)		University no (TF=231)		University yes (TF=126)	
	Coo	CCo	Coo	CCo	Coo	CCo	Coo	CCo	Co	CCo
Up-to-date (TF=110)	26	0.17	33	0.17	13	0.06	38	0.13	6	0.03
Practical (TF=293)	28	0.08	75	0.23	92	0.28	185	0.55	46	0.12
Theoretical (TF=94)	0	0.00	1	0.00	4	0.02	13	0.04	81	0.58
Portfolio (TF=25)	1	0.01	9	0.07	16	0.12	13	0.05	0	0.00
Connection with Company (TF=114)	26	0.17	0	0.00	48	0.25	80	0.30	8	0.03
Digital (TF=44)	6	0.06	6	0.04	2	0.01	12	0.05	4	0.02
Entertainment (TF=9)	0	0.00	2	0.02	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Desire (TF=47)	14	0.14	8	0.05	4	0.02	4	0.01	1	0.01
Design (TF=42)	7	0.07	4	0.03	4	0.02	17	0.07	4	0.02
Business Internship (TF=38)	5	0.05	24	0.19	15	0.10	15	0.06	4	0.03
Socio-cultural (TF=30)	5	0.05	4	0.03	1	0.01	2	0.01	5	0.03

Table 8: *Cooccurrences between main skill categories and learning methodologies identified in the analysis of the interviews of the creatives in the sample. Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.*

Although it is not a point of major coincidence, it is interesting that some of the participants emphasize the importance of being up-to-date and self-learning (CCo=0.17, Table 8) by stating it is the student's responsibility to gain his or her own formation: "I understand that, in studying for this degree, they are going to teach the basics, but if you really want to be good at advertising you have to look at campaigns and make it happen" (5C).

From the perspective of a large part of the participants, the overly theoretical methods of teaching used at the university make a postgraduate degree necessary, since the training "tbrings out and tests the theory and knowledge through practical work" (5A). In practical training, there is some coincidence between the importance of colleges and the connection with the market (CCo=0.28 and CCo=0.23 respectively, Table 8). It is also noteworthy that this connection to the company is more viable with colleges (CCo=0.25, Table 8) than with universities (CCo=0.03, Table 8). The interviewees believe that universities could help develop more applied methods by incorporating professors who have professional experience or are in agencies and "not a university professor who has never worked in an agency" (2A).

To ensure comprehensive and successful training of an advertising creative, improvements in the connection between universities and businesses is noted as being paramount. Currently, this relationship exists with advertising colleges (CCo=0.25, Table 8) but not with the faculties (CCo=0.03, Table 8) and it is essential to get into creative agencies as a trainee: "Colleges serve as a springboard and there are colleges that are very clear about this and have a lot of contacts in the agencies" (1A). Colleges work because, "creativity is not taught, it is developed" (9C). Another proposal for universities to optimize their study programmes is to have schedules in the later courses that specialise in profiling: "Perhaps separating students according to what they want to specialise in and be more specific regarding their studies" (6C).

Given their preparation and the strong connection with the sector, almost all of the young creatives interviewed consider it mandatory to take a postgraduate course if they want to work in creative advertising: "I consider it the equivalent to the military service of advertising" (1A). In fact, they consider it completely unnecessary to pursue a degree offered by the university: "We do not need a degree to work in advertising" (2C).

4. Conclusions and Discussion

4.1. Research Conclusions

The results obtained allow us to draw some conclusions in relation to the specific objectives defined at the end of the introduction:

1. Currently, the creative sector requires young graduates to have a hybrid profile that stands out and shows skills that are specifically related to creativity, attitudes linked to desire ("hunger" or ambition) and continually updated knowledge.

2. The methodologies that are considered to be the most appropriate for acquiring these skills are those that promote practical learning or learning by doing. In this respect, these methodologies highlight the importance of an agency´s contact with the reality of the profession and also the student´s ability to develop some of these skills in a self-taught way.

3. The perception that young creatives have of the university as a source of specific training in this area is not positive. They feel that the courses are far from the reality of the sector and do not use a methodology that encourages practical application. To this end, they propose to encourage access to faculties for working professionals and specialised plans to optimise training and facilitate portfolio development.

4. Creatives of today and the immediate future are defined as being professionals with attitude and "hunger" who are permanently updated and equipped with skills that can only be acquired through practice and are expressed in a good portfolio.

Young creatives, like all professionals in the sector, are required to undergo continuous learning (Jiménez-Gómez & Mañas-Viniegra, 2018; Vivar-Zurita, 2011) that allows for their constant recycling and adaptation to accelerated and modified processes (Llorente-Barroso, 2020).

4.2. Main Contribution of the Research: Definition of the Ideal Profile of Present and Future Creatives

In the definition of the current creative profile, being up-to-date, having skills and qualities related to attitude and values stand out (Figure 1).
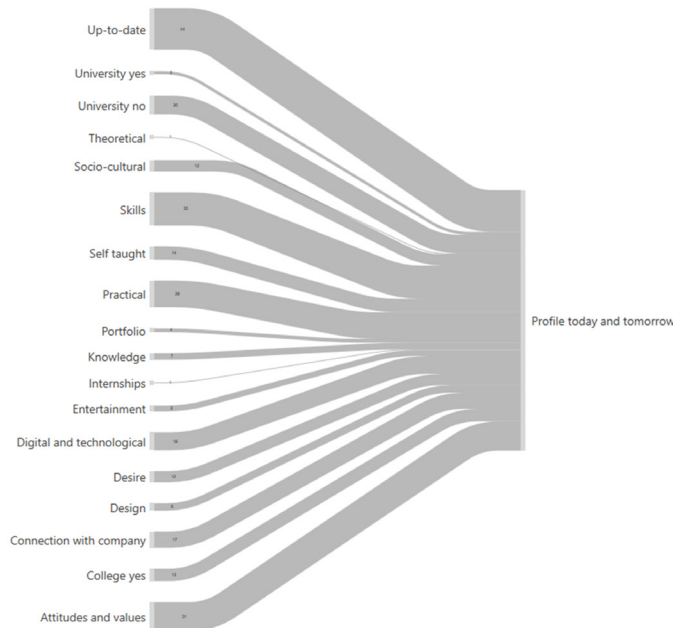

Figure 1: *Sankey diagram of the creative profile that is in demand today and in the near future. Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.*

The Sankey diagram (Figure 1) visualizes the relative magnitudes and / or areas that contribute to the variable or coded idea being analysed. The width of each magnitude is proportional to its represented contribution (Friese, 2020, pp. 192-193). As shown in the diagram, hybrid profiles are sought out in creativity. A "versatile professional, decisive and capable of learning quickly" (1A); "Productive, observant and curious people" (9C) who are capable of producing "award-winning ideas" (6C).

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In creativity, it is also necessary to show skills and abilities in one's portfolio: "The postgraduate programme has taught me how to work in the creative department. I have met professors who are working creatives, which has helped me create my portfolio" (8A). They insist that, for the specialty of art direction, it is necessary to have knowledge of the visual culture and the ability to use design tools: "For an art director [...] it is very good to come from [...] fine arts, graphic design, [...] because, in the end, the person will be able to execute, which can help him or her a lot. On a day-to-day basis, handling tools well makes it easier" (5C).

In addition, there is a demand for updated profiles of those who know the trends. Agencies, "look for a profile that is up-to-date in the digital field. Society uses social networks on a daily basis, so native, digital creatives are needed" (2C). Among the technological trends, video games also stand out: "A super big trend that is becoming more and more popular, so to speak, is the world of video games" (5C).

Regarding attitude and values: "More than knowledge, it is a matter of willingness and attitude, right?" (5C) and a profile that shows a person who is "mainly curious, hard-working, proactive, a good person and very cool, as they say in advertising slang. If the person has talent, he or she is perfect" (5A). The most important thing is a desire to be creative: "If you are curious and willing and have plenty of skills to be creative" (2C).

These considerations make it possible to define the creative profile that is in demand at present and in the immediate future (Figure 2). It is important to be a person with attitude and desire, who is constantly staying up-to-date, who possesses skills that are shown in a portfolio which have been acquired through practice, self-training or from college.
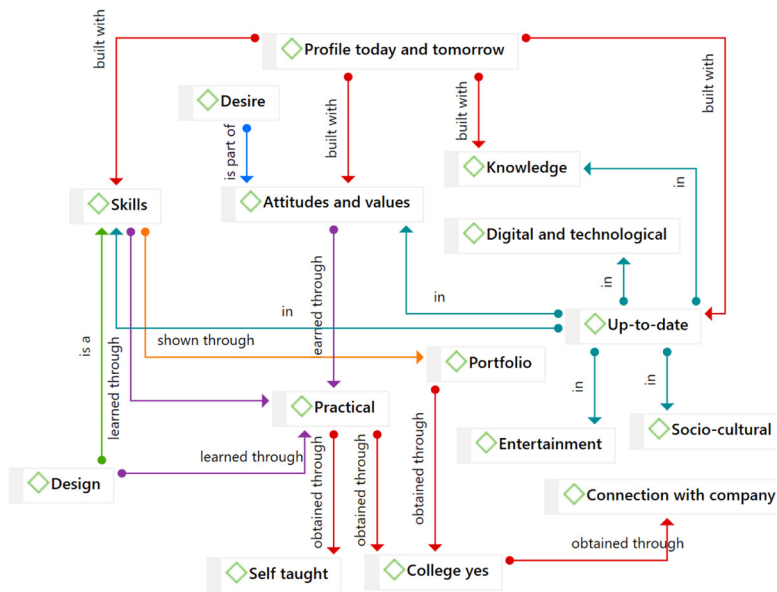
Figure 2: *Definition of the creative profile that is in demand today as well as in the near future based on the links between skills, methodologies and sources of learning. Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.*

4.3. Discussion

The results corroborate that, although creativity is a key aptitude for any professional (Cheung *et al.*, 2003), the university has not managed to develop this adequately (Mareque-Álvarez-Santullano & De-Prada-Creo, 2018). New media has revalued creativity, which is in demand in all current advertising profiles (Álvarez-Flores, Núñez-Gómez, & Olivares-Santamarina, 2018). Specifically, the current digital world has reformulated the traditional functions of creatives (Lynch & West, 2017) by encouraging more hybrid and transversal profiles (Álvarez-Flores, Núñez-Gómez, & Olivares-Santamarina, 2018).

Given the complexity of these profiles, university programmes must strive to train professionals in line with market demand. However, the reality of the Spanish university system is far from attaining the objectives set by the EHEA and only some isolated initiatives use new methodologies to motivate learning in creative advertising (Bartolomé-Muñoz-De-Luna, Llorente-Barroso, & Marugán Solís, 2018; Gargallo-López, Fernández-March, & Jiménez-Rodríguez, 2007; Schank, Berman, &

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Macpherson, 1999). One of the biggest problems is that there is not a set of institutionalized digital communication skills (Vivar-Zurita, 2011). Another stumbling block is the lack of resources at the university to successfully train future professionals while another drawback is the lack of a more fluid and strong relationship between the academic world and the advertising business sector.

The results of this study also indicate the need to address lines of research and actions that improve the market situation of creative advertising in connection with a university education and guaranteeing the transfer of knowledge into the productive sector. In this sense, it is important to further develop the creative skills required in digital society, which, from a psychological and neuroscience standpoint, allows one to delve into the changes and needs posed by the use of technology in creative advertising. Likewise, within the investigation of the skills that a creative must develop today, it is essential to look into the importance of the student's attitude to learn and to effectively face and solve problems in his or her professional future. The joint work of academics and professionals to guarantee the acquisition of skills demanded by the creative market forms a second line of research, the results of which could provide much needed help in updating advertising curricula in universities. Lastly, it would be interesting to open a path of analysis and evaluation of the resources (material and human) that universities need so students could successfully enter the professional world following the training received in their undergraduate studies without having to enter a postgraduate programme. The collaboration of teachers, university managers, creative professionals and students would be essential in these investigations and actions since all of them are part of the process for the acquisition of valuable skills in the advertising creative sector.

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1] Each interviewee has been identified with a code that responds to the position held at his or her employment agency in the Scopen ranking (2020), which is used to define the sample and the position. "A" is used for art director and "C" is used for copywriter. Since we did not receive a reply from DDB, the fourth position and its pair are missing.

[2] The coefficient of cooccurrence (CCo) is a number between 0 and 1, which measures the strength or intensity with which two codes cooccur according to their frequency of coincidence. It is understood that the higher this coefficient, the stronger or more intense the relationship between these two codes (Friese, 2020, pp. 205-206). Although the value of this coefficient is not mathematically significant for small samples, it does allow us to understand the strength of the connection between some key ideas. An inherent problem in the calculation of this coefficient is that it appears distorted when cooccurrences between codes with a very different total frequency (TF) are analysed. In such cases, the CCo tends to be much less than the potential importance of the cooccurrence (Friese, 2020, p. 206), which is why the cooccurrences (Coo) are also included in the tables.

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