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ASSESSMENT BY THE PROFESSIONAL ADVERTISING INDUSTRY IN SPAIN AS TO THE QUALITIES OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES ENTERING THE WORKFORCE FOR THE FIRST TIME

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Every year, hundreds of university students in Spain graduate with a degree in Advertising. For most, the next step involves securing an internship at an advertising agency, another type of communication-related organization, or with an advertiser. **Methodology:** The aim of this research is to determine —through twenty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews coded with the Atlas.ti software— the perception of established advertising professionals regarding the knowledge and attitude of those beginning their professional careers. **Results and discussion:** The results reveal a critique concerning the need for a better use of the four-year formal training period, which should bring students closer to the current professional reality and lead to more optimized preparation upon entering the advertising industry. **Conclusions:** The interviewees value the work conducted in the classroom for learning concepts and social and personal skills, while simultaneously identifying common deficiencies in recent graduates in areas such as knowledge of key digital tools in the sector (both data management and measurement), oral expression techniques, briefing conceptualization, and greater analytical capacity.

Keywords: Communication, advertising, university degree, advertising agencies, professional skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

The technological (Oosthuizen, 2022), business (Costa-Climent et al., 2024), communication (Bennis & Campos, 2021), and social (Li, 2020) revolution that the world has experienced since the advent of the internet, followed by social media and currently artificial intelligence, has placed universities offering degrees in Advertising and Public Relations (hereafter, PR) before a difficult challenge: to keep pace with this progress, which otherwise risks rendering some trends obsolete before they even reach the classroom (Martín-García et al., 2022). The difficulty of adapting university curricula at the same speed at which changes occur, or the varying pace of updating materials delivered by faculty, are key challenges faced by the university ecosystem linked to advertising in this radically changing environment (Bandrés-Goldáraz et al., 2021).

In Spain, the Advertising degree is offered at 35 universities¹ out of which 19 are public, 16 are private, and 32 offer on-campus programs. Many of these degrees are combined with a second discipline such as Tourism, Marketing, or especially Public Relations. Every year, hundreds of students graduate and make the leap into this aforementioned changing professional sphere. What happens when a student is finishing their studies and signs an internship contract or secures a grant to enter the world of advertising agencies? This article aims to answer that question by giving a

¹ Information taken from the official website of the Ministry of Universities:
<https://www.universidades.gob.es/donde-estudiar/> (Retrieved July 22, 2024)

voice to professionals —with proven careers— who welcome graduates (or near-graduates) and work alongside them during this first professional stage.

1.1. Relationship between the university sector and the business sector. The importance of combining synergies for the benefit of students beginning their qualified working lives

The academic world, public institutions, and companies are aware of the importance of adapting study plans and the competencies transferred to students to the current moment and for the future. This permanent updating must materialize from creativity and innovation as a basis for improving learning outcomes (Schmidt-Wilk, 2011; Mareque Álvarez-Santullano & De Prada Creo, 2017), which derive into a greater possibility of employability.

There are many campuses of excellence that help direct the relationship between entities and universities, developing students personally and professionally and favoring their labor insertion (Fandos-Garrido et al., 2017). This collaboration is also evident when integrating new degree programs into universities, which involve the participation of companies to understand which profiles they demand and cannot find due to a lack of specific formal training. Likewise, training agreements aimed at companies, the signing of chairs with private entities, corporate programs and competitions with university participation, master's agreements between public universities and private entities, scholarship programs, teaching innovation projects that seek to maximize practical learning in the university space (Feixas & Martínez-Usarralde, 2022), or conferences on professional reality given by experts, demonstrate that Spanish universities are genuinely concerned with ensuring their students are prepared to start the work they have studied for (Fernández, 2023), although the question arises as to whether it is sufficient.

However, this training must be directly related to what the faculty must develop. They are primarily responsible for ensuring the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and aptitudes for this labor insertion. They are also primarily responsible for constantly updating and adapting content to the aforementioned changes. Currently, it is observed that the main training teachers receive from courses and seminars offered by universities focuses more on their professional skills (Fernández-Fernández & Madinabeitia-Ezkurra, 2020) than on the updating of novel materials linked to the discipline they teach.

In the relationship between companies and universities, the role of the associate professor is particularly important. They are specialists with recognized expertise in a subject within the degree program in which they teach (Conesa Carpintero & González Ramos, 2018). They have a more complete understanding of the topic at hand because they work in both spaces and have firsthand knowledge of the professional reality that recently graduated students or those in a training period will face. They provide a faithful approximation of what the student will encounter in their job, raising awareness of the functions, competencies, problems, and their resolution (Fernández, 2023). However, this is a role surrounded by controversy, as universities often use it as an entry point into an academic career rather than to establish a real connection between

the academic and professional worlds (Pérez & Montoya, 2018), which can lead to a reduction in the student's practical vision if these teachers are not truly genuine associate professors (Torrado & Duque-Calvache, 2023).

1.2. The need to update the curricular design according to new emerging professions in advertising

Focusing specifically on the field of advertising, the reaffirmation of digital content (35.3%) as the area with the highest investment by advertisers in the last year (IAB Spain, 2023; InfoAdex, 2024), now significantly surpassing television (30.9%), has progressively brought about new formats and, by extension, new professions over the last decade and a half. These include community manager (Agnihotri, 2020; Martín-García et al., 2023), social media manager (Jacobson, 2020), web designer, SEO/SEM manager (Lopezosa et al., 2020), content strategist (Tafesse & Wood, 2021), or influencer management (Haenlein et al., 2020), among others. Often, these roles exist under the umbrella of hybridization, which blurs the lines separating one profile from another and necessitates the enhancement of transversal content (Álvarez-Flores et al., 2021; Martín-García, 2022). These are highly demanded profiles by advertising agencies and advertisers, with an added conditioning factor: the technological tools professionals use to manage their work are continuously updated, just as consumer and viewer behavior also varies (Álvarez-Flores et al., 2021). Therefore, with the same vehemence with which vacancies are generated by advertising entities, the subjects derived from these digital profiles must be updated and become protagonists within the university (Agüero-Pérez et al., 2019; Lee & Cho, 2019) and in the courses offered in the study plans.

However, this process of updating study plans to new profiles is in an incipient phase, leading to question whether the adequate pace is being followed. Regarding the digital sphere, it is possible to find that the new courses implemented in universities relate to content creation (7)², digital marketing director (7), community manager (7), social media strategist (7), web designer (3), and expert in digital advertising and storytelling (1) (Fernández-Gómez & Feijoo-Fernández, 2022), a low number considering there are a total of 35 public and private centers offering the degree in Advertising. Finally, it is worth mentioning other elements that advertising professionals consider when selecting interns for practical work in agencies, advertisers, or institutions. The importance of language, especially English, is emphasized. However, English is only offered as a specific focus in two out of the thirty-five universities that provide the advertising degree. The relevance of conceptualization, content structuring, and attitudinal competencies is also emphasized. In the early stages of a recent graduate's or intern's career, these competencies are valued more than formal training (Agüero-Pérez et al., 2019), are added to the academic obligation for students to learn about the aforementioned new professions, a fact that is only occurring in a small part of the Spanish educational system for advertising.

² In parentheses, there is a number indicating the universities (out of 35 in total) that has adapted these subjects to the new digital professional profiles.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is providing a means for advertising professionals in Spain to share their insights on the job market entry of recent Advertising and PR graduates. In an environment where advertising evolves at great speed and generates new advertising formats (Vicente-Fernández & Vinader-Segura, 2020), new professional profiles, where there are permanent changes in brands' budget investment trends (InfoAdex, 2024) and in consumer behavior (Munsch, 2021), it is fundamental to monitor the first steps of the advertising graduate or those who, while still linked to the university, begin an internship period or are beneficiaries of a grant. Although the teacher's work ends once their students finish their studies, knowing whether the content taught in the classroom has been relevant beyond the final grade can contribute to enhancing positive aspects of teaching and correcting those that can be improved.

Consequently, the following initial research questions have been established:

- a) Do advertising agencies and advertisers perceive that recent university graduates are prepared to start working in the sector?
- b) What are the main aptitudes and deficiencies with which graduates from Spanish university Advertising degrees enter the workforce?
- c) What do these professionals believe should be enhanced in the university sphere to align classroom knowledge with the professional profiles required by agencies and advertisers?
- d) Do the interviewees identify an alignment or a gap between the university and the professional sphere?

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology based on grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Gibson & Brown, 2009) was used, which aims to find explanations for a social phenomenon within its natural context, relying on informants who participate directly in that phenomenon. The medium used was the semi-structured in-depth interview as a data collection method. This is an effective technique when gathering information from the main subjects of the study (Folgueiras-Bertomeu, 2016; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). A total of twenty-five interviews were conducted with active professionals from advertising agencies and advertisers, covering the criteria specified later in the sample. Seventeen were conducted in person and eight via telephone. The data were uploaded to the qualitative analysis tool Atlas.ti version 8.4.3, focusing on three of the units it offers: category, codes, and quotations.

The interviews were conducted during the months of July, August, and September 2024. Initial contact with participants was established via email to explain our research in detail. After acceptance, a day was set for its completion, specifying to the advertisers that they were free to elaborate on their answers as much as they considered appropriate and offering them the opportunity to anonymize their first and last names in Table 1 if they so wished, as anonymity can lead to more complex or

even more critical responses (Cisneros-Caicedo et al., 2022), and it is believed that it should be offered as an option. Only one participant chose to do so.

3.1. Participant selection criteria

For the selection of professionals participating in this study, criteria were pre-established to ensure the results were supported by stable work experience in the advertising sector, offering a more complete vision. These criteria were:

- a) Professionals graduated/qualified in Advertising or other degrees directly linked to communication from any public or private university in Spain.
- b) Work experience in the advertising sector exceeding five years. It is considered that this is an adequate amount of time for professionals to be established. It is considered that this is an adequate amount of time for professionals to be established, to have experienced corporate rotation (Martín-Llaguno et al., 2007) that gives them perspective, and to have interacted with recent graduates accessing an advertising agency or an advertiser for the first time in internship positions or with grants.
- c) Representation of the main general disciplines within advertising agencies and advertisers, in both analog and digital spheres (Álvarez-Flores et al., 2018): creativity (Trachuk et al., 2021), account management, social networks (Martín-García, 2022), SEO/SEM (Lopezosa et al., 2020), digital content (Sabich & Steinberg, 2017), and media planning (Perlado-Lamo-de-Espinosa et al., 2019).
- d) Ensuring that the advertising agencies and brands to which the interviewees belong include multinational, national, and regional/provincial representation, minimizing a hypothetical bias in the results motivated by their size or number of employees.
- e) The number of interviewees working in the same entity was limited to three, so that the results are based on experiences accumulated in the maximum number of brands and agencies possible.

The final professionals list is the following:

Table 1.

List of professionals participating in the study

Name	Agency/Advertiser	Years in the profession	Current position
María Gil	Arena Media	+10	Account Director
Jonathan Fernández	iProspect (Dentsu)	+10	Account Director
Alba Esteban	Repsol	+10	Marketing partner
Sara Díez	Arnold fullsix	+10	Account supervisor
Gema González	Arena Media	+10 years	Account director
Marisa Álvarez	ZenithOptimedia	+10 years	Planning and optimizer controller
Anonymous	Hogarth	8-10 years	Account executive
Belén García	MC&Saatchi	+10 years	Account director
Amanda Barrios	Accenture song	8-10 years	Account supervisor
Macarena Chozas	MC&Saatchi	+10 years	Account director

María Gueimonde	Aelca	+10 years	Marketing and communication manager
Vanessa Sanmartín	MC&Saatchi	+10 years	Account director
Natalia Llorente	Media Diamond	+10 years	Digital director
Rodrigo Bravo	Groupm	8-10 years	Social media
Beatriz Moreno	Cinco Sentidos Diseño y Comunicación	+10 years	Creative director
Sandra Cebada	Socialmood	8-10 years	Project manager
Rebeca Adán	Ineco	8-10 years	Communication responsible
Laura Tarradas	Está pasando	8-10 years	Creative director
Marina Hernanz	Hellofun	+10 years	Marketing director
Laura Troya	Está pasando	8-10 years	Account supervisor
Julia Araújo	Está pasando	5-7 years	Account manager
Ana Sanz	Publicis Groupe	5-7 years	CRO <i>manager</i>
Daniel Hernando	The summer agency	5-7 years	Creative director
Martín Manso	The summer agency	5-7 years	Creative director
Marcos Palomares	iProspect	+10 years	Content director

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

3.2. Interview Script

To fulfill the objectives outlined in section 2 and answer the research questions, the present study puts forth two primary lines of inquiry.: one focused on the interviewees' perception of students undertaking their work placement after finishing or being about to finish their studies in Advertising, and secondary line of inquiry that will be devoted to ascertaining the participants' perspectives regarding the positive or negative responsibility of the university in relation to the first aforementioned line.

Prior to conducting the interview, a request was made for the provision of fundamental data from the professionals (name, current advertising agency, job title, and years of experience). All of them meet the criteria set out in section 3.1.

Regarding advertising interns:

Q1. When selecting candidates for job interviews with recent graduates, do you prioritize them being graduates of a specific degree? **Q2.** Why? **Q3.** Do you believe that upon beginning their internship period, they are prepared for the functions assigned to them by the agency? **Q4.** And upon finishing that period? **Q5.** What aptitudes and competencies for working in advertising do you consider they have acquired from their time at university? **Q6.** Do you perceive an interest in advertising and communication from the advertising interns?

Regarding the work done by universities:

Q7. What knowledge should they have acquired prior to starting their internship? **Q8.** Regarding the previous question, which of those possible mentioned shortcomings do you believe should be addressed at the university? **Q9.** Creativity, account management, media, social media, buying, SEO/SEM... do you consider that advertising interns leave university better prepared in these areas? **Q10.** Do you

consider there is a direct link between the contents and practices planned in the classroom and what the advertising profession demands?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the interviews, having transcribed and coded them using Atlas.ti, the following step was to proceed to highlight the obtained results with the aim of determining if they have been valid for answering the four research questions in section 2, concerning the assessment that advertising professionals make of recent Advertising graduates upon entering the professional market. In order to identify the fragments of responses that are offered verbatim and which represent trends in the interviewees' opinions, a coding system is established based on the following conditions:

Table 2.

Codification to identify the answers precedence

Years of experience	Working place	Type of work
5 to 7 years=+5 8 to 10 years= +8 More than 10 years= +10	Agency=AGE/Advertiser= ANU	Counts=CUE Creativity=CRE Media=Med Contents and social media /RED Marketing=MK

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

4.1. The vindication of advertising degree studies for accessing the profession despite the evident shortcomings in student knowledge

The advertising profession prioritizes graduates in the same field in which the profession is to be practiced during a selection process for an aspirant to gain an internship. This statement, which a priori might seem obvious, deserves to be highlighted, given the multidisciplinary nature of the present context (Álvarez-Flores et al., 2021) where it is common to find workers from very diverse academic backgrounds and where there is also occupational intrusion (González-Oñate et al., 2019) in competencies that many believe they know without the need for prior certified training.

+10/AGE/CUE. Advertising and PR because, although it is true that trainees join agencies mostly to continue learning, I consider it necessary that they already have a clear understanding of the basic concepts acquired in degrees related to our sector. In my opinion, for a person to progress and develop professionally in an agency, we must try to expand knowledge and put it into practice, but without having to start from scratch. The pace of an agency would not allow for that work, which is perhaps more pedagogical than practical.

The decision to prioritize the Advertising degree hints at a value placed on the content the student learns within the classroom, which should serve as an engine so that their first work experience is not based on ignorance, but on the application of learnings obtained over four or five years (if it's a double degree) at university, giving meaning to the institution as a space for personal growth, but above all as a generator of future qualified professionals.

+5/AGE/CUE. We consider any degree related to communication: Advertising and PR, Journalism, or Audiovisual Communication. I believe that, with this foundation, their performance within the agency will be faster. **+8/AGE/MK.** The reason is that, as they usually lack experience, their training in Advertising and PR or something related to internships, such as courses, vocational training, or a master's degree, allows them to perhaps have some useful knowledge for the internship.

Both in this section and in the following ones, it will be possible to find predominant positions, like those being reproduced above, but also different ways of making decisions. There is a part of the profession that claims that work is learned on the daily job, and that at the beginning, what makes the difference, more than specific knowledge, are other factors like attitude, desire, and the willingness to perform well the functions entrusted to them, as cited by Agüero-Pérez et al. (2019) in their research.

+10/ANU/MK. I believe personal value and knowledge are transferable to any marketing-related position and that day-to-day life is learned by working. **+8/ANU/MK.** I don't care what they studied; what I prioritize above all are attitude and a willingness to learn.

However, the fact of having a degree in Advertising or being close to it with some ECTS credits left to complete does not guarantee, in the opinion of the interviewees, that the student's internship period is based on a command of the knowledge that should be presumed for undertaking the tasks assigned to them in the agency or at the advertiser. It is common to consider that one could access internships with greater knowledge after the university experience.

+8/ANU/MK. Generally, they are not prepared, no. They don't understand agency dynamics, workflow, nor do they have basic knowledge. Furthermore, most don't know what they would like to do within an agency, which makes it difficult for them to apply for internships correctly. **+8/AGE/CUE.** Some things sound familiar to them, but they have a very vague idea of what happens in an agency, as is logical. They need a lot of training.

From the responses obtained, the importance of the selection process for an internship offer being rigorous is clear, as affirmed by Mendoza-Armijos (2021), and it should find the ideal candidates who possess suitable personal characteristics and learnings, just as if it were for a more experienced position, beyond the requirements being lower because it is a period of training and professional adaptation. These are decisive elements so that, upon finishing that stage, which usually lasts around six months, the intern can make the leap to a more stable employment contract with better salary conditions.

+10/AGE/MED. At the end of the internship period, it depends on each person, how they have used their time, their willingness to learn, the people they have around them, if enough time is dedicated to giving them help, teaching them, their aptitudes... **+10/AGE/CUE.** After the internship, they have already had learning and an experience that obviously allows them to start developing

professionally. When the internship period is over, the team already perceives whether that person has the willingness and good attitude to continue growing within the agency itself, depending on the positions available at that time.

4.2. The gap between the academic and professional worlds as the basis of the problem for students doing internships in agencies or at advertisers

The interviewees are aware that, in any profession, day-to-day work is what leads to gaining experience (Pacheco-Barrio, 2020); a process that requires time, trying, making mistakes, and correcting errors. When affirming that there is an evident gap between what is taught in Advertising degree classrooms and the work developed in the sector, different reasons are alluded to, ranging from the speed at which the digital environment evolves, the lack of technical updating, or the assertion that many teachers in this degree have not previously held positions related to the areas they teach or have never worked in brands or agencies. From this stance arises a question formulated in studies like that of Álvarez-Arregui and Arreguit (2019), which is not anecdotal: whether part of the problem addressed in this section would be reduced with the inclusion of more sector professionals in universities, meaning more associate professors with the capacity to also choose subjects to teach directly related to their work. The feeling that theory is not accompanied by faithful practical application is notable, as it is perceived that students access internships having notions of many contents but without having delved deeply into most of them.

+8/AGE/CUE. I don't believe one leaves university knowing how to work in an agency. The difference between university and the real world in our case is abysmal. **+8/AGE/CRE.** When I studied, I detected that the syllabi were repeated year after year. And in subjects like media planning, what was learned was completely disconnected from reality. I believe university education is too rigid and slow to update. In the end, most teachers have never worked in an agency. They have studied a lot, but they haven't been in the trenches.

This perceived gap between university and the advertising sector is asymmetrical. The interviewees identify differences in preparation depending on the position the young people access, noting greater shortcomings in technical aspects generally associated with web positioning and in those professions with diverse functions, such as account executives or media planners. On the opposite side, the skills they bring from university associated with creativity and social media are valued, an area in which young people move particularly well as they are already digital natives.

+10/AGE/CUE. Regarding the media part, I would dare to say I have never found students with a deep knowledge. In social media and online, I believe that as they are generations generally much more digital than previous ones, they do have greater knowledge. The accounts area is where I have seen that students have the most confusion. They don't really know if we only do budgets, manage, or are planners. **+8/ANU/MK.** I think they are well prepared for basic advertising things, perhaps more in creativity, for example, but not for the digital marketing sphere, especially everything related to data, SEO, and SEM. **+10/AGE/MED.** In some of them more than the others. For example, for

accounts or media, they usually start with more knowledge than with SEO, which is much more technical, and if you don't take a specific course outside of university, it's complex.

The lack of language skills is a fact reflected in all universities, which, although they offer courses or even agreements with official language schools, they do not have the possibility of choosing a language in the curricula linked to advertising, as explained in the work of Fernández-Gómez and Feijoo-Fernández (2022), who conclude that only in two Spanish universities is English among the subjects students can choose.

+8/AGE/CUE. Generally, we don't look so much for them to have certain knowledge, but rather a willingness to learn, work, a good attitude, and knowing how to handle themselves by resolving new situations. But it depends on which department they enter. For example, if they want to enter design or audiovisual production departments, they must master programs that they haven't learned to use at university. If they enter account departments, languages are usually required, which are also not taught at university. **+10/AGE/MED.** Teaching should also be focused on language training; it is something in which any social sciences professional is better trained than someone in advertising.

4.3. Contrast between some positive aspects that reaffirm the work in the classroom and the lack of a predominant interest in advertising during the internship period

When evaluating the student based on their university experience, the predominant view among interviewees is that, before prioritizing more technical knowledge, they highlight the importance of recent graduates having acquired aptitudes more related to personality, good attitude, and social skills, considering that these are elements that are positively taken into account in the classrooms, in line with research like that of Seivane and Brenlla (2021), which praise the work of those teachers who correctly address aspects that go beyond the rigid application of the syllabus.

+10/AGE/CUE. The teaching environment and the work environment are completely different; we must start from that basis. The time at university will undoubtedly mark that person on a vital level and, in addition to certain knowledge and curiosity, I believe they should acquire certain capacities such as social skills themselves, teamwork, and certain communication skills. **+10/AGE/CUE.** In my opinion, a minimum of creative sensitivity and communication capacity is needed, whether you are in accounts, creative, planner... We always look for organized people with an eye for detail. They are aptitudes that I believe are innate and are reinforced during their time at university.

Knowledge of the media, experience in public speaking, assuming responsibility, prioritizing tasks, or organizational capacity are some of the strong traits that the interviewees repeat and associate with the interns. However, the wide variety of career paths associated with advertising means that the interviewees' responses vary depending on the department they belong to, as they consider that especially in those related to design and creativity, attitude is not enough; they must arrive at the

profession with minimum knowledge, both of work processes and tools to manage their tasks.

+8/AGE/CUE. They know basic concepts like the functions of some departments, work tools like a briefing, design programs, or making presentations. They are capable of developing creative ideas that provide solutions to real problems, with varying degrees of success; they do it in a fresher and more novel way than the team is accustomed to. **+8/ANU/MK.** They know the workflow of an agency, everything related to the client-brief-creativity-project performance relationship. They have broad theoretical knowledge of what they are going to encounter, they know why they are going to do a specific task, and they handle themselves well with the new software they come across.

Finally, returning to the importance of attitude already cited on several occasions, in this study, it is considered imperative to know whether the profession perceives a clear interest in advertising in those who are starting to work in it. A unifying perspective among all interviewees was not identified, although the predominant one is that in which, without being dissatisfied with the work done by the intern, no passion for the profession or a special interest reflecting a vocation is identified.

+10/AGE/CUE. There is less and less interest, truthfully. I think that passion as an almost vocational thing has been lost, and now it is understood as just another job. This is reflected both in their way of facing the day-to-day work and in their own knowledge of the sector, other agencies, or specific campaigns. In recent years, I see much less ambitious profiles than those I used to find 5 or 10 years ago. **+8/ANU/MK.** Generally, their interest is in the most striking or viral brands, in the ad that everyone is talking about, but not so much in the world of communication. **+5/AGE/CRE.** No. They are bluntly instruments to be used and discarded that might get you four things. Unfortunately, it's a period where you have a bad time, and you have to put up with a heavy workload and even without sometimes knowing what you are doing or why.

Without disregarding that interest, the profession questions whether the reason it is not so palpable has to do with the fact that the graduate has doubts upon graduation about what they are going to face, which leads them to not have a defined professional profile or to hesitate between different career paths.

+8/AGE/CUE. We students left with the feeling of having had a bunch of subjects about the same thing, like Sociology, ICT, etc., and as soon as you enter an agency, you feel like you know nothing because you don't know the programs, you don't know the dynamics, you don't understand what they are talking about, and you don't know how to work with a briefing.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the most important elements conveyed by publicists from agencies and advertisers have been broken down. There are many and varied interpretations of the same fact—the arrival of university graduates to the profession— explained here, with some positive aspects and others that reaffirm the need to undertake improvements

in the Advertising degree programs in Spanish universities to bring students closer to the professional reality they will encounter upon graduation (Pérez & Montoya, 2018).

As for the research questions posed after the theoretical framework, they have been answered in full. From the Advertising profession —on the agency and advertiser side— it is perceived that student preparation in universities should be more related to the current moment in advertising, meaning it should have an update that tries to get as close as possible to the constant changes experienced in this sector. Among the detected shortcomings, it is observed that they are related to those more technical professions, which also require technology, such as web positioning or media planning, while on the opposite side, creativity and social media are areas where new graduates show better preparation. Among the positive aptitudes, teamwork and organization are highlighted as pillars that help them begin their professional stage. An excess of theory or an absence of more professional experience in advertising on the part of many teachers is interpreted as a hindrance on the rapid adaptation of the content being taught at university to the trends prevailing in the business sphere.

In light of the results, and complementing previous studies like those of Fandos-Garrido et al. (2017), Fernández-Fernández and Madinabeitia-Ezkurra (2020), or Fernández-Gómez and Feijoo-Fernández (2022), it can be concluded that, from the university, and especially from the teaching staff, one must not fall into complacency and all means must be put in place to reduce, in degrees linked to advertising, the gap with agencies and advertisers that emerges from this research. For this, it is vital to know and periodically update what the leap of students into the profession of advertising and communication is like, with what virtues, aptitudes, and shortcomings they access it, and which of them can be better worked on from the universities themselves.

Relevant to this discussion is the fact that the aforementioned shortcomings are perceived by advertising agencies and advertisers as natural, despite the fact that those who access the profession have undergone four years of theoretical-practical training, as well as a decline in the interest in advertising with which recent graduates arrive at their first work period. Understanding where this lack of motivation comes from in for some students is key to ensuring they leave the classroom eager to demonstrate their talent.

A limitation of the study is the exclusive focus on one segment of the professional sector: advertising agencies and advertisers. Expanding the research to other areas such as events, public relations, or communication agencies, and checking if there are notable variants in the results, is imperative to further adjust the current perception of the work done in Spanish universities to train communicators. Likewise, it is important to recognize the true protagonists of the relationship between universities and the labor market: graduates and interns who, after years of training, transition into the workforce. Giving them a voice in the near future through new research will enable a more complete perspective and first-hand knowledge about whether their impressions —on the topics analyzed in this publication— coincide with those of the interviewed subjects.

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