From media planner to media expert: The digital effect in advertising

Del planificador de medios al experto en medios: El efecto digital en la publicidad

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ABSTRACT

The increase in online audience and the development of Big Data in organizations modify the media planning activity and, consequently, the profile of the planner. Following the digital expansion, more information has become available to perform this task, but also, more complexity is observed in the work processes and in their agents' structures. This paper analyzes the changes produced in the management of the media planner within the digital society. Through triangular research, comprising quantitative and qualitative methods, including a questionnaire that was administered to 140 media planners, and 5 interviews conducted with agency experts we examine the variations that have occurred in this professional role in terms of knowledge, the tools used and the skills they have had to maintain or update. It is noted that the adaptation to the digital context has required a substantial change in their work mechanics, the integration of off- and online strategies and digital specialization. Furthermore, with the help of current technology, immediate actions and reviews are implemented. Consequently, the media expert activity requires mastery of digital media planning tools, greater doses of innovation, analysis, business acumen and the ability to work effectively in multidisciplinary teams for multimedia environments.

RESUMEN

El incremento de la audiencia «online» y el desarrollo del «big data» en las organizaciones modifican la actividad de la planificación de medios y, en consecuencia, el perfil del planificador. Tras el avance digital se dispone de mayor información para ejercer esta labor, pero, igualmente, se observa más complejidad en los procesos de trabajo y en las estructuras de sus agentes. Este trabajo analiza los cambios producidos en la gestión del planificador de medios en la sociedad digital. A través de una investigación triangular que incluye métodos cuantitativos y cualitativos, donde se utiliza un cuestionario aplicado a 140 planificadores de medios y la realización de 5 entrevistas a expertos de agencias, se examinan qué variaciones se han producido en este rol profesional respecto a los conocimientos, herramientas utilizadas y competencias que han tenido que mantener o actualizar. Se constata que la adaptación al contexto digital supone un cambio sustancial en las mecánicas de trabajo, la integración de estrategias «off» y «online» y la especialización en digital. Asimismo, con la ayuda de la tecnología vigente, se implementan acciones y revisiones inmediatas. En consecuencia, la actividad del experto en medios exige el dominio de herramientas de planificación de medios digitales, mayores dosis de innovación, análisis, visión comercial y trabajar eficazmente en equipos multidisciplinares para entornos multimedia.

1. Introduction

Most authors agree that, with the deployment of technology, the arrival of the Internet and the consequent digitalization, the media ecosystem has been transformed in such a way that it will never again be the same (Livingstone, 1999; Salaverría & García-Avilés, 2008; Van-der-duff, 2008; Flores-Vivar, 2009; Cabrera, 2011; Cardoso, 2011; Martín-Guart & Fernández-Cavia, 2012; Perlado, 2013). In just over 20 years, the growth of the Internet in terms of audience penetration has gone from 1% (1996) to 75.7% (2017), occupying third place behind Television and Outdoor Advertising (AIMC, 2018) and second place in terms of advertising investment (Infoadex, 2018). At the same time, the arrival of the Internet involves disruptive innovation processes (Christensen, 2014) whereby new markets and values are established.

According to the global forecast, online content consumption will continue to grow. In "The State of Digital" (GroupM, 2018) it was announced that in 2018 the time dedicated to online media would exceed the time devoted to online television for the first time.

Furthermore, Zenith Media (2018) notes that the total investment in mobile advertising will grow annually by 19% until 2020, a figure that will represent over half of the online advertising investment and 29% of the entire advertising revenue. In turn, Advanced Television (US: Smartphone time to overtake TV in 2019, 2018), stresses that the combined advertising investment in desktop computers and mobile phones already exceeds the investment in television; although, some trends point to a decline in the use of smartphones due to the use of other more recent devices, such as smart speakers, portable accessories and augmented/virtual reality (AR/VR) headsets.

In television, audiences are declining, especially among young people, some of whom do not even have a traditional television set (Maheshwari & Koblin, 2018). In order to watch audiovisual content, they use an endless number of devices and applications, and everyday mobile SVOD (Subscription Video on Demand) services increase, which competes with traditional television. Indeed, for millennials, social networks have an enormous influence on their buying decisions, and many of them acquire fashion and beauty products, among other things, influenced by Instagram, giving great importance to the recommendations made by friends and influencers in these media (Pérez-Curiel & Luque, 2017).

Thus, the digital environment makes it possible to interact and innovate with new strategies not only to support the brand through advertising but also to prescribe it to other users in the networks (Del-Pino & Galán, 2010). In this sense, the social media audience ranking is published every year, and its growth continues to be remarkable. Four platforms have an audience of more than a billion users (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and LinkedIn) and Instagram will soon become the fifth (We are Social & Hootsuite, 2018).

At the same time, the huge supply of access to information and entertainment diversifies online audiences and leads to small segmentations (López-Vidales, 2005), opening increasingly more communicative options and imposing personalization and hyper-targeting (Ros, 2008), driven by growing information about the audience.

Technology developers and webcasting platforms enable the management of big data in order to get to know the audiences better and to optimize their content and marketing (Kantar Media, 2017; Canada Media Fund, 2018).

Consequently, changing media exposure and the technological drive stimulate reforms in all advertising communications (Schultz, 2016; Kuman & Gupta, 2016) and necessarily in the professional area that relates more closely to the media and their audiences; that of media planning.

This activity consists of a strategic decision-making process in which media formats are evaluated and selected to achieve the objectives of the advertising campaign most profitably and effectively possible (Perlado-Lamo-de-Espinosa, 2006; Papí-Gálvez, 2017), although this discipline has evolved parallel to the common mutations of the field.

The media have been losing their primary characteristics, becoming content containers (Soengas, 2013), which have affected the drafting of the media plan, which has been transformed into a global communication solution integrating traditional and online media.

The focus of campaigns according to attitudinal variables of the target audience is also a usual request among researchers and professionals (Beales, 2010, Benavides, Villagra, Alameda, & Fernández, 2010; Katz, 2017).

Moreover, agencies have had to adapt to the arrival of new actors such as intermediaries between advertisers or agencies and media (Demand Side Platform: DSP), virtual buying/selling platforms for advertising spaces (Ad exchange), advertising networks, technological platforms for result optimization in the sale of advertising space (Supply Side Platform: SSP) and data suppliers, among others (IAB Spain, 2014).

Technology defines the current profiles, and professional roles (López-García, Rodriguez-Vázquez & Pereira-

Fariña, 2017; Sánchez-Sánchez & Fernández-Cavia, 2018; IAB Spain 2018) and media planners also have to con-form to the parameters of the new communication model. This profile, characterized by expertise in communication media, with analytical abilities to interpret marketing and communication problems, creative aptitudes, strategic vision, market research knowledge, as well as certain attributes for presentation, argumentation and staging (González-Lobo & Carrero-López, 1999; Sissors & Baron, 2010), has had to take on the mastery of the broad uni-verse represented by the Internet; a liquid media without barriers or borders, meta-media, as Solana (2010) describes it, that matches consumption and multi-device exposure, adjusted audience measurement systems and new integration, negotiation and buying processes.

The change is such that foreseeably this professional not only has to increase his/her knowledge of digital deployment but also of tools and the acquisition of different skills to adapt to the current strategic planning model, taking on more strategic tasks and incorporating more skills regarding research and web analytics (Papí-Gálvez, 2014).

In light of the communicational and technological challenges described, in general, this study intends to find out whether the digital media have substantially modified the advertising media planning activity as well as the skills linked to the related professional profile. In particular, the study poses the following three objectives:

O1) To identify the main changes that have taken place in recent years (2000-2015) as a result of the digital media, especially regarding media planning in advertising; in the mechanics of work, techniques and roles.

> The digital and technological deployment acts, in a broad sense, on the ordinary work processes of the media planner and, in particular, on the new management of audience data, the purchase of spaces and the ability to make decisions in real time.

O2) To delve into the knowledge, tools and transversal skills that are considered necessary for media planners in the digital society.

O3) To explore the adaptation of these professionals for the purpose of digital communication according to their professional careers, distinguishing intervals between 3 to 5 years of experience, 6 to 10, 11 to 20 and more than 20 years working in the sector.

2. Material and methods

Methodological triangulation was used, combining questionnaires, as a quantitative technique, and open interviews with experts, as a qualitative one. The survey showed which basic aspects of media planners' activity and their profiles had been affected by the digital deployment. In the open interviews, questions were asked about the changes produced in commercial communications and in the area of media planning, going into depth on the techniques, processes, and skills of the planner's profile.

The State Collective Bargaining Convention for Advertising Companies defines the media planner as "the person who establishes the media strategy to be used in the campaigns, according to the planned objectives and according to their profitability, coverage and client's budget" (Spanish Ministry of Employment and Social Security, 2016: 10487). Additionally, this convention includes other profiles related to media such as that of the media director/strategic media planner, planning manager, head of media buying or media buyer. In this research, the generic term "media planner" was used as an umbrella term for all the cited profiles.

2.1. Questionnaire

The universe was defined as media planners working in the Autonomous Community of Madrid and who have at least three years of experience in media agencies.

In the absence of an official registration for these professionals, the Economically Active Population Survey (EAPS) of the National Statistics Institute (INE) was used to quantify them[1], as well as the study "Radiografía de la

Industria Publicitaria" (X-ray of the Advertising Industry) (2009) by the General Association of Advertising Companies (AGEP) and the National Federation of Advertising Companies (FNEP)[2], and the report by the Observatorio de la Publicidad (Advertising Observatory) (2016). The analysis "Best Place to Work" by Scopen (2015) was also used, in which it was stated that 44.8% of the 427 interviews conducted with professionals were planners (Scopen, 2015).

The agencies themselves were consulted to learn the percentage of planners in their organizations[3], obtaining an average of 37.8%. It was determined that 41% of media agency workers in Spain could be planners, which represented 6,519 professionals. As 37.9% of the advertising companies were located in the Autonomous Community of Madrid (AGEP, 2009), this yielded a total of 2,471 professionals.

Applying the minimum age filter of 25 and 26 years, the universe was set at 2,372 planners in this Autonomous Community with a minimum of three years of experience in the sector. In order to determine the sample, standard social research criteria were used (Figure 1).

The semi-structured questionnaire was self-administered online. In order to send it, a specialized digital platform was chosen, and email was used for its dissemination, aided by the previous contact by the researchers through snowball sampling. The fieldwork for the questionnaire was carried out between November 2016 and January 2017.

The response rate was 42%, with 167 responses to the questionnaire. From these, 140 were used as valid; a representative sample of the universe assuming a final margin of error of 8%.

The questionnaire began with personal identification questions: sex, age, years of

Figure 1. Questionnaire sheet

| Universe 2,372 | Sample 113-331 | Error margin=7-9% Confidence level=95% Heterogeneity=50% |

experience as a planner, a position held, professional tasks within the organization and the agency where he/she carries out his/her work. The following questions were aimed at the changes in the design and the formulation of the strategy and the media plan resulting from the emergence of digital media. It also deepened the planners' belief about the transformation of his profile after the technological development and expansion of the Internet. The questionnaire also included changes in knowledge, tools and transversal skills.
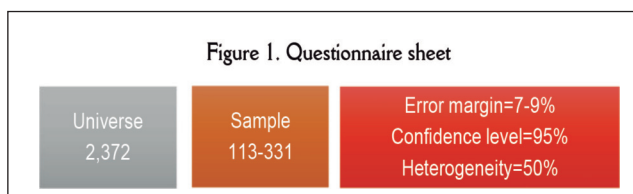
2.2. Interviews with experts

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was applied. Within the profile of the universe defined for the study, professionals with a work environment in both traditional and digital areas were sought in order to observe their approach according to this typology. Furthermore, professionals holding different positions were selected from different agencies, with a minimum experience of ten years and a vision for analyzing the evolution in the processes and skills.

In accordance with the purpose of qualitative techniques, the theoretical significance of the sample was sought through the selection of relevant traits among the professionals, which are guarantors of an adequate formulation of questionnaire items and which facilitated the explanation of the descriptive and quantitative data.

Five experts were interviewed (Table 1). The first four interviews were conducted during the month of October 2016 and the last one was carried out in June 2018, with the aim of verifying that the results were up to date.

3. Analysis and results
3.1. Changes in the processes: the activity

Almost all respondents said their work had changed since the digital deployment (94%). This transformation had been experienced in most stages of the planning process, but mainly in the definition of milestones and target audience, selection and recommendation of media/supports, purchase, monitoring and evaluation of the campaign, the latter aspect being where the greatest variation was perceived.

In relation to the knowledge acquired or updated for their usual work, those derived from new work processes (82%) and web analytics (73%) stood out. Respondents mentioned knowledge about media and audience studies to a lesser extent.

The in-depth interviews revealed the importance of transformations in work mechanics, in addition to data

capture and management; both aspects closely linked to the commitment to a better integration of media in strategies, accompanied by a greater specialization in digital communication: "There has been an important change: first, with the emergence of the technology layer, and second, the data layer. This has altered the processes significantly" (Herrero). "There are indeed specialists in each medium, there are specialists in digital, but that person also sees the whole. There is increasingly more specialization (...). Now there are five or six digital disciplines, but everything is integrated within the same team" (Díaz).

Another important change was the immediacy of the Internet and technological development

Table 1. Experts interviewed				
Experts	**Environment**	**Experience**	**Position**	**Company**
Mr. Juan Antonio Díaz	Offline	16 years	Dir. Customer Services	Universal McCann
Mr. Alejandro Estévez	Offline & online	12 years	Managing Director	Wink
Ms. Leticia Herrero	Online	14 years	Head of Digital	Forward
Ms. Fuensanta Pérez	Offline	13 years	Account Manager	Havas Media
Ms. María Castellanos	Research	12 years	Head of DAN Data Companies Integration	Dentsu Aegis Network

that enables action implementation in real time so that the timing of the processes is reduced, and as soon as information related to results is received, changes can be made:

"You are able to make campaign decisions, I will not say every minute, but indeed every day (…). We are in a business that seems more like a stock market trading business of operating campaigns than buying or intermediating media (…). From the monitoring viewpoint, I believe that we have advanced considerably. Going back to the way a campaign was traditionally done in Excel (and sending it), today there are tools like Datorama, which is a dashboard model in which you are able to integrate that set of things" (Estévez). "Now one learns about what is working and, in real time, changes are made to the same plan" (Díaz).

According to the respondents, with the emergence of a greater number of actors, processes become more complex. Also, the digital boost leads to the development of new techniques used as part of the planning activity, such as programmatic buying, which experts agreed was revolutionizing digital media. In particular, they noted that it affected the online medium in the purely tactical process of purchasing within planning: "Programmatic buying has changed a lot in digital planning, more than in other media (...) because it is a more efficient way to optimize coverage" (Pérez).

In the work process, there is still a need to focus on the effectiveness and efficiency of the actions to be performed. Without losing sight of the results, big data management is presented as one of the critical aspects for econometric models, central to decision-making. This management contributes to more audience-oriented planning: "The top advertisers have their own econometric models; in the end what they do is try to anticipate knowing what works best to generate sales" (Díaz). "The data allows you to obtain a lot of information in order to make models and analyses to elicit business 'learnings'" (Pérez). "What you do in the 'data lake' is structure it, in some way clean it and extract information to create qualified audiences, in order to activate them through the DMP[4] in different legs of communication" (Castellanos).

3.2. Skills and specific abilities: the professionals

With regard to skills related to the mastery of tools, respondents stressed the need for better management of programs specific to digital media planning (77%). In addition, nearly half stated that data exploitation software for market studies have greater importance in the digital environment. They emphasized the use of tools to improve data analysis, visualize results or as support in the presentation of campaigns. Some examples are the Data Management Platforms that allow classification or segmentation (creation of clusters) and can facilitate the application of allocation models.

Regarding the generic skills, respondents stressed innovation capacity and the need to adapt media function to a more multidisciplinary and multimedia framework, typical of the global and digital environment (Figure 2). Within client service teams there are specialists from different disciplines of digital communication (SEO, SEM, mobile...), as well as more statistical or mathematical profiles, responsible for the data sector. Multidisciplinarity is a relevant aspect that the experts also explained during the interviews:

"We all have to become multidisciplinary, with respect to understanding and knowing how to manage different disciplines (...). The specialists in each medium are necessary, but from the brand viewpoint, it does not make sense to parcel out the recommendations, the vision, or the approach" (Herrero).

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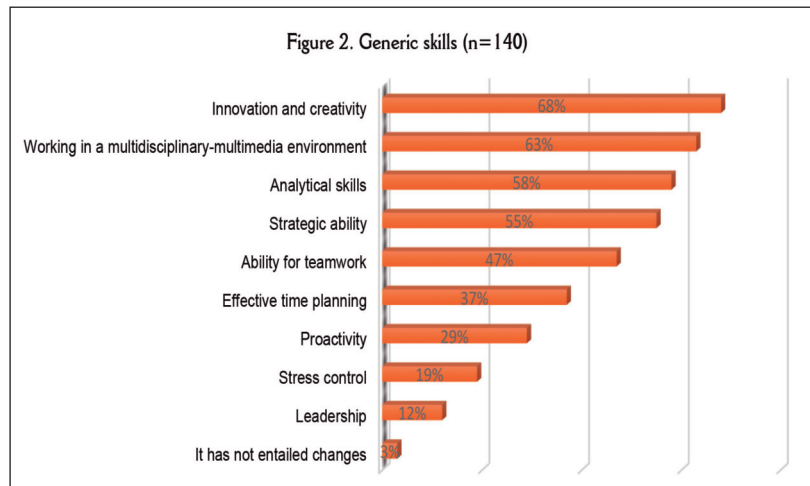"Being multidisciplinary takes on much more relevance now, in the sense of understanding that there are people with very different training when producing a global strategy that has (...) different cases: special actions in television, special activation that unites television, radio and digital... The greater the multidisciplinary training of people, the richer the strategies and the activations that are produced (...)" (Díaz).

In addition, both survey respondents and experts insisted on the indispensable inclusion of analytical and strategic profiles, in addition to the ability to provide solutions tailored to the client's objectives: "An analytical or technology profile, that has that customer service part" (Herrero). "People who have good analytical skills (...). In addition to mathematics, I would like to find those analytical profiles with the capacity to understand the business and the customers, and who are able to transform all that knowledge into something understandable, by agency teams and by customers" (Castellanos).

Pursuant to this last statement, other experts highlighted the lack of experience of the more technical professionals in dealing with the client; although they grow rapidly in their area and professional career, they do not seem to develop a strategic approach linked to commercial objectives at the same pace. However, it would be possible to provide these professionals with specialized business training.

Figure 2. Generic skills (n=140)

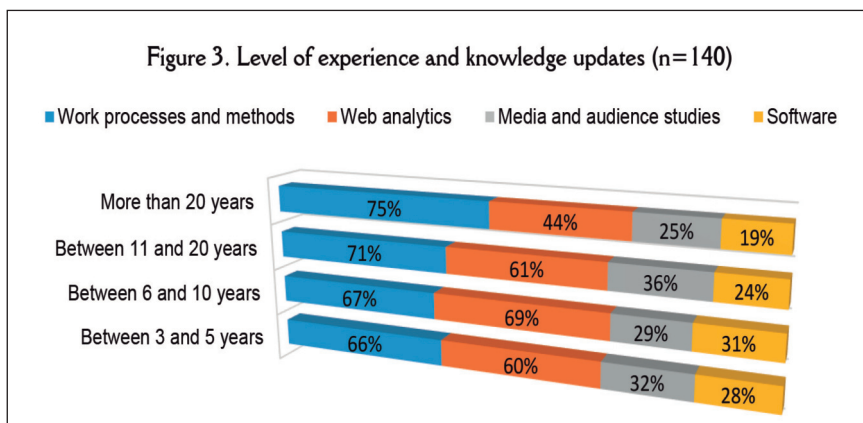|	
Innovation and creativity	68%
Working in a multidisciplinary-multimedia environment	63%
Analytical skills	58%
Strategic ability	55%
Ability for teamwork	47%
Effective time planning	37%
Proactivity	29%
Stress control	19%
Leadership	12%
It has not entailed changes	3%

3.3. Disruption and professional experience

The analysis of changes produced in the planners' profile in relation to their experience showed that the longer the career in the sector, the higher the need for broadening or updating knowledge on new processes and work methodologies.

A priority need for all the ranks studied is the need to increase web analytics knowledge, with little difference when compared to concerns about processes and working methods.

In particular, the experts also stressed the areas of analytics and programmatic advertising as specific knowledge that they must broaden as a result of the digital media: "Although I began in digital, I have changed; the entire subject of programmatic advertising and analytics reached me when I had some years of experience, when you believe you have already learned" (Herrero). "I always talk about performance and programmatic buying, which are quite technical areas, because nowadays there is a great tendency to look for this type of strategy and it seems that it has a technical part that you have to know. I have a lot to learn there". (Perez)

Mastery of media planning tools is the most relevant specific area at all

Figure 3. Level of experience and knowledge updates (n=140)

■ Work processes and methods   ■ Web analytics   ■ Media and audience studies   ■ Software

	Work processes and methods	Web analytics	Media and audience studies	Software
More than 20 years	75%	44%	25%	19%
Between 11 and 20 years	71%	61%	36%	24%
Between 6 and 10 years	67%	69%	29%	31%
Between 3 and 5 years	66%	60%	32%	28%

levels of practice. The greater the experience, the greater the need to manage new software related to marketing intelligence technologies (Figure 4): "for them to know other types of technologies which is what we have today, all the Salesforce environments, Adobe..". (Castellanos).

Market study exploitation programs concerned the more junior planners, with a maximum of five years of experience, since this is when they learn to manage them.

In relation to personal skills, those professionals with a longer career track display a higher level of concern regarding the adaptation to new work processes and methodologies of the digital environment (Figure 5), while the innovative capacity and creativity, followed by strategy, are considered more necessary for those with six to ten years of experience: "this changes a lot, I consider those abilities or skills of adaptability and restlessness to be up

Figure 4. Level of experience and tool updates (n=140)

to date more important" (Castellanos).

In junior planners, organization and time planning skills become more relevant, followed by analytical skills and adaptation to new multimedia and multidisciplinary environments.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This research delves into the identification of the main changes produced in media planning by the impact of digital media. Therefore, it deals with the competence review of one of the most prominent and interesting communicational profiles in the advertising sector of digital societies. Its results contribute to the understanding of the disruptive processes of digital transformation and can help update and guide university programs.

The empirical position is presented as one of its main strengths, by approaching the study of this reality through the experience of active professionals. The limitations that arise from the quantitative methodology applied, an online survey, are reduced with the application of quality criteria aimed at optimizing data collection, such as the delimitation of the observation to one of the communities that gathers a large number of media agencies. Likewise, the profile

Figure 5. Level of experience and skill updates (n=140)

of the respondent confers guarantees in the completion of the questionnaire, since it constitutes a qualified group, acquainted with digital communication. Triangulation also adds value to quantitative analysis, facilitating the achievement of the three objectives pursued and offering, as a whole, conclusive results.
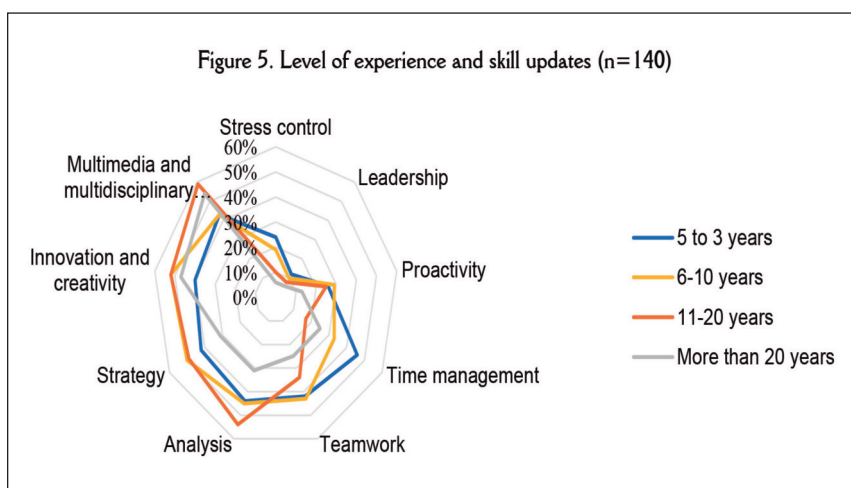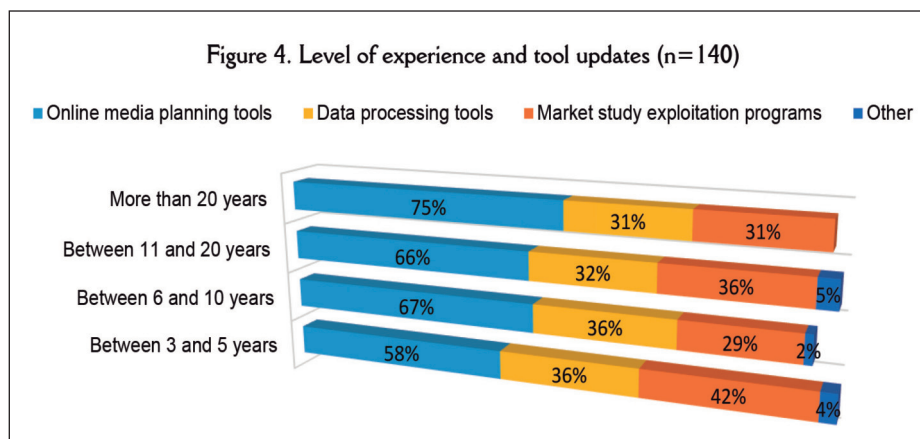
In light of professionals' responses, the Internet and technological progress does indeed entail substantial changes both in media planning work processes and in the update of knowledge and skills.

The digital media affect the entire known work dynamics, accelerating processes, but the essential changes are produced by the technological innovations applied to the capture and management of digital data and to the automation of space purchase; aspects that modify work team profiles and generate a corresponding demand for knowledge and skills.

On the one hand, with respect to big data, this would represent the technological component of the activity, which contributes to better audience knowledge, thereby to the design of the strategies. Companies then have their own tools, and working groups focused on research and modeling, in line with the findings of studies on digital communication of innovation in media agencies (Papí-Gálvez, 2015). Today's planners stress the importance of specialized knowledge of marketing intelligence and media management programs. The analysis and report of campaign monitoring and results also become more complex because of the availability of data, often unstructured, that needs to be processed. Everything must be measured, so current planners must master, among other aspects, the metric fundamentals of the digital environment, among which those related to web analytics stand out.

On the other hand, the emergence of new intermediaries in the digital activity, as in programmatic purchasing, requires greater conciliation of the professionals involved in the planning and purchasing processes; although it is not the most outstanding implication. The automation of these processes usually includes the possibility of displaying advertising in sync with content that is being consumed by a user. This function, which normally extends to the whole medium given its peculiarities, offers the opportunity to direct the planning towards audiences definitively and to capture them in real time, eliminating the previous selection of supports, which occupies a large part of the work of offline planning.

Thus, due to their technological profile, part of the competencies known as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) occupy workplace positions in coexistence with the communicational ones, inherent to the activity of the advertising media planner.

Technology stimulates the creation of multidisciplinary and multimedia work teams, where planners must integrate different disciplines with a wide range of actions and formats, such as "online" media, search engines, social media, "digital signage" and "mobile", among others, coordinated with professionals from different disciplines. Studies on digital profiles in Advertising and Public Relations also highlight this hybrid nature of the sector, through the analysis of job offers in specialized portals (Álvarez-Flores, Núñez-Gómez & Olivares-Santamaría, 2018).

A global view of the whole process is necessary. The strategic component remains a priority and defines the activity's performance, as an important part of advertising communication. The effect of digital media on the strategic phase of the media function does not, in fact, change the approach itself, but takes place in the proposals, i.e., in the design of concrete strategies, which know how to exploit the potential of the digital environment. In addition, the results of this study indicate that, in the face of this new ecosystem, it is possibly more necessary to activate the capacity for innovation that was already present in the proposal for creative media plans (Sissors & Baron, 2010), with the intention of generating value or some competitive advantage.

Consequently, while professionals in this field of specialization must now acquire knowledge of data exploration tools and techniques that optimize actions and facilitate the visualization of post-campaign results, they must also be able to provide communication solutions based on effectiveness and efficiency, adapted to the new model. The specificities of digital environments demand, in short, specialized but also connected knowledge.

According to this study, there is no doubt that the advent of the digital society substantially modifies the conditions under which traditional media planning operates; but this transformation does not entail a loss of the importance of the media function in advertising, quite the contrary. The responses of the professionals in this study support the reflections reflected in other texts (Perlado- Lamo de Espinosa & Rubio-Romero, 2009; Papí-Gálvez, 2014). The media planner profile, whose definition seemed to be anchored in the most operational part of the activity, is broadened by integrating research and analysis skills. In addition, audience orientation decreases the tactical stage in favor of the strategic phase.

However, despite the transformations that the planner's profile has already undergone, it is evident that the planner remains immersed in the process of change. The analytical capacity and the overall vision, enhanced by the ability to create and innovate, are competencies identified as priorities in current planning, which is fed by hybrid profiles, technological and communicational, to provide effective solutions.

In short, the media planner gives way to the media expert, who, while including the operational approach of the former, also highlights the knowledge and skills needed to perform this activity in today's societies.

Notes

[1] The EAPS recorded 103,500 persons in the advertising sector according to the National Classification of Economic Activities of Spain CNAE 09-73 (CNAE, 2016).

[2] A leading company. It carries out market analyses in communication, marketing and advertising (www.scopen.com).

[3] Twenty percent of the companies registered in the National Classification of Economic Activities in Spain (CNAE) belonged to media agencies, so this percentage was applied to obtain the approximate number of employees that these companies had (Scopen 2015). In order to estimate the number of planners within them, Carat, Equmedia, Forward, Havas Media, Initiative and Maxus were consulted.

[4] Data Management Platform (DMP) is a tool that allows aggregating and centralizing different types of data that are obtained from the actions in different communication vehicles.

Funding Agency

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