

Evaluation of university advertising in the written press of Ecuador, a longitudinal study

Evaluación de la publicidad de universidades en la prensa escrita de Ecuador, un estudio longitudinal



ARTICLE



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Abstract

The objective of the study is the evaluation of university advertising in the Ecuadorian press. The methodological technique of longitudinal study was applied, analyzing 772 advertisements published in three leading newspapers during every Sunday in 2016 and 2017. This study identified what type of universities, content and visual attributes stood out, and what audiences they were targeting. The conclusions include the predominance of promotional content of private universities that are aimed at potential students and the value that persists in the written press despite the rise of online advertising. The year 2017 exceeds in ads to 2016.

Keywords

Communication, Advertising, Press, University, Ecuador.

Resumen

El objeto de estudio es la evaluación de la publicidad de universidades en la prensa ecuatoriana. Se aplicó la técnica metodológica del estudio longitudinal, analizando 772 anuncios publicados en los tres diarios líderes durante cada domingo de 2016 y 2017. Se identificó qué tipo de universidades sobresalen, qué contenidos, qué atributos visuales y a qué audiencias se dirigen. Entre las conclusiones destacan el predominio de contenidos promocionales de universidades privadas que se dirigen a estudiantes potenciales y el valor que persiste de la prensa, a pesar del auge de la publicidad online. El año 2017 supera en anuncios al 2016.

Palabras clave

Comunicación, Publicidad, Prensa, Universidad, Ecuador.

1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is one of the marketing communication tools paid by sponsors who wish to inform or persuade the audience about their products or services through ads that are disseminated in various media (Arens, Weigold & Arens,

2008). It can influence the increase in income but also impacts on better social recognition or the support of other organizations as it is useful for profit and non-profit institutions. It is not the only thing that influences the decisions of the public because the quality of service, distribution and price are key (Treviño, 2010).

The brand is also influenced, one of the most important intangible assets. Through brands, institutions relate to their stakeholders and transmit values that identify them. It is the most positioned component in the minds of audiences, influencing their preferences, choices or fidelity (Velilla, 2010). That is why organizations seek to build powerful brands to differentiate themselves in a saturated context. They have understood the need to insert them into their institutional communication, since being intangible, they are difficult to imitate and are able to improve credibility, trust and reputation (Fernández & Labarta, 2009).

1.1 UNIVERSITY ADVERTISING

Investment in advertising influences the increase in revenue (Sahni, 2016) but mostly benefits the value of the brand (McAlister, Srinivasan, Jindal & Cannella, 2016). In the case of higher education institutions HEI, advertising is important to project the contribution they make to the community (Veas, 2015), since they are responsible for a society to develop through scientific knowledge (Simancas-González & García-López, 2017). A strategic communication allows them to respond to social needs (Marino & Presti, 2017) and balance them with their economic interests (Vaquero, 2012) that are the livelihood to continue in force. The HEI supported by advertising compete for popularity, resources, students and teachers (Zapata & Tejeda, 2016).

People decide in which university to study through an evaluation of the alternatives they consider best suited to their needs (Scharf & Correia, 2015). Higher education can be a broad field for deceptive advertising, particularly on the quality and economy that universities promote, because it is difficult to contrast this information (Zapata & Tejeda, 2016). The content must be true for ethics and because

it avoids defrauding consumers, since the objective of advertising is that all parties benefit (Beltrán, 2010).

Regarding research on institutional communication of universities, Scharf & Correia (2015) recognize that there is little literature. It is necessary to identify the audiences and the published contents (Rodríguez & Santamaría, 2012). According to De Aguilera & Farías (2010), it is advisable to conduct studies by countries or regions, avoiding treating HEIs as a single set since each context regulates the quality of higher education differently.

1.2 PRESS ADVERTISING

Media coverage is broader when advertising spending is higher (Rinallo & Basuroy, 2009), but traditional media have been threatened by the new media that are available in a myriad of ways, which is why the mission of institutional communication is a challenge (Clow & Baack, 2010).

Newspapers had consolidated as the mass communication channel in the eighteenth century (Alonso, 2013) and they were the main advertising platform in the nineteenth century (Heras, 2000). In fact, newspapers have been the second largest media after television until 2008, but digital readers increasingly abandon print formats (Arens et al., 2008). Currently, the press is the third media after television and internet (Sánchez, 2018). The latter is the channel of consultation, information and entertainment with more demand and this makes brands feel more attracted to invest in online advertising (Gómez, 2016).

Some world reference newspapers have disappeared due to the decrease in advertising, their main source of income (Treviño, 2010). In general, the decrease in advertising sales and copies is inevitable (Picard, 2014). This does not

mean that advertising revenue in the online version is sufficient, in fact it is not. The written press is threatened by the digital press, mainly due to free access to information and the increase of competitors that are native in the digital media (Casero-Ripollés, 2010).

It should be remembered that the press has been transformed since before the internet existed and that it has adapted to the online environment better than television and radio, adding multimedia content. The new media still depend on the conventional media because they have more years of experience in the generation of informative content, they have specialized professionals and established organizational structures (Cabrera-González, 2001). Although some authors thought that internet would be the end of the written press, it is clear that instead there is a coexistence of offline and online media (Edo, 2000). At least so far.

However, managers of the written press reduce production costs instead of innovating (Casero-Ripollés, 2010). In Ecuador, managers are pressured to optimize paper investment while adapting to a digital environment that brings minimal profits. The printed version predominates because it generates its highest income (Quichimbo & Rivera-Rogel, 2016). If all this is a problem for media companies, it is more critical for advertisers who need to communicate with their audiences through strategic channels. There are obvious disadvantages that the written press means for advertising. The cost is high, young audiences do not use it, it reaches very large audiences, it is not possible to estimate how many people read an ad, it competes with others on the same page (Treviño, 2010) and even with the contents of the newspaper, the quality of the print media is not optimal, it is not common to know on which page exactly the ad will appear (Arens et al., 2008). The written

press does not allow interaction between advertisers and recipients (García-Uceda, 2011).

As the communication process occurs when the information is understood by the recipients (Clow & Baack, 2010), these must be carefully studied during the planning and design of an advertisement since its behavior in the purchase decision process is the result of stimuli they receive from the attractiveness of the advertised offer. In fact, what motivates people to make a purchase after seeing an ad in the press is the level of attraction of the offer and the level of influence that certain newspapers exert for the quality of their news (Benavides & Leiva, 2014). Therefore, what defines which media is the most important for informing and announcing is the attractiveness of its contents and the level of confidence in them (Edo, 2000). Despite the disadvantages, press advertising still exists because newspapers have high credibility and have good prestige (García-Uceda, 2011).

The volatility of the political context is one of the factors that influence the levels of trust that societies have over the media worldwide (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen & Steindl, 2018). In Ecuador, the media lost credibility during the first decade of the 21st century due to strong confrontations between the political, financial and media sectors. This was due to the fact that the new constitution of the year 2008 prohibited financial institutions from owning media (Czech – Godoy, 2012). A little more than a decade has passed since then and although on June 25, 2013, the first Organic Law of Communication in the country entered into force, substantial reforms are currently under way. Therefore, credibility levels will hardly be consolidated in the immediate future. As mentioned by Viveros & Mellado (2018), the law has made journalists in the country more cautious with information.

More rightly, the synergy between advertising and the press is necessary since the first one finances the second one, granting it freedom of expression without political or other pressures. The second one becomes a mass diffusion support for the first one (Heras, 2000). That is, the media need advertising to exist, whether traditional or not (Nitrihual, 2007). The audience is the articulating element between advertising and journalism. In addition, as advertising highlights information about products or services to boost sales, it contributes to good competitiveness among organizations that offer benefits to the community and makes them interested in seeking quality. (Treviño, 2010).

Regardless of the political environment, young Latin Americans prefer to use the internet and distrust the local press (Salzman & Albarran, 2011). They reject the written press more than the digital media (Muñoz, Durán & Thayer, 2014). Those who have grown up using the new media have easier navigation and feel less comfortable reading printed news (Ambrose & Harris, 2008). They have more control over advertising, although they still suffer interruptions in the media, they choose and discard ads. That is why the importance of marketing and creativity has been resumed (Treviño, 2010).

Graphic design helps the ad to positively impact the reader with the good use of visual attributes such as images, typography, color and composition (García-Uceda, 2011). The audience index of a media outlet changes depending on the quality of the ads. The more readers feel identified with the product, the more they will appropriate it (Beltrán, 2010). Advertising should attract attention in a pleasant way. When the visual characteristics are complex, the attention towards the brand and the attitude towards the advertisement are negatively affected. But when design is complex, people

pay more attention to both the design aspect and the content (Pieters, Wedel & Batra, 2010).

Before the 1950s it was common for ads to occupy a page full of text in newspapers to mention the benefits of a product, in that decade Paul Rand proposed a more visual style (Sorrentino, 2014). In communicative design today, more complete visual codes need to be used to understand complex information in a simple way (Arrojo, 2015). The work must be interdisciplinary (González-Díez & Puebla-Martínez, 2018), not only because of quality, but because advertising creativity is demanded more than before in the offline environment due to the proliferation of online media (Perlado Lamo de Espinosa & Rubio Romero, 2017). Creativity must balance aesthetics, that is, beauty in a graphic composition and the quality of the message (Beltrán, 2010).

Since there is a high exposure of advertisements, it is necessary to educate people in advertising since their childhood to have the ability to make decisions with freedom and responsibility when a brand seeks to persuade them (Pellicer Jordá, 2015). Scientific content that includes some advertisements must also be discerned and critically analyzed by readers before making a decision (Ezquerria & Fernández-Sánchez, 2014). The social values that are included in the copywriting should also be identified because the agencies base their creative strategies on the needs and on what the target audiences value (Gutiérrez-Guerrero, Méndiz-Noguero & Repiso-Caballero, 2018).

With the above, it is worth questioning what presence universities have in the traditional press and how their advertisements are developed to determine if the written press is still valued and used in the higher education sector, given the media convergence. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to evalua-

te the presence of university advertising in the national press of Ecuador. For this purpose, the following specific objectives were established: to detect what type of universities publish the most, to identify what content they publish, to determine which audiences they are targeting and to analyze what visual attributes characterize the advertisements. The fulfillment of the objectives allows to answer the following research question: Have universities reduced the publication of advertisements in the written press of Ecuador?

2. METHODOLOGY

A longitudinal study was developed to achieve the objectives and answer the research question. A descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were performed based on the direct observation of 772 advertisements that universities published every Sunday from January 2016 to December 2017 in the three most important newspapers in Ecuador: El Comercio, El Universo and La Hora. They are considered to be the most important newspapers because their reach is national and because it has been found that they had the greatest circulation during the two years of study.

In Ecuador, the press is the second largest media after the radio (Consejo de Regulación y Desarrollo de la Información y Comunicación, 2017). Of the conventional media, the written press is the only one that has permanent archives of the printed version on their websites.

The analysis of the results was carried out from a database built for this study. A series of variables that other authors included in their research were considered. The variables for this research were: contents, recipients (Ortega-Gaucin & Peña-García, 2016), date of publication, section (Fernández Trigueros & Fer-

nández Castaño, 2014), location on the page, size (Zapata & Tejeda, 2016), issuer, color and informative value (Guallar, Rovira & Ruiz, 2010).

Gutiérrez-Guerrero, Méndiz-Noguero & Repiso-Caballero (2018) pointed out that social values in advertising must also be identified. Based on the contribution of Segura-Mariño (2018), the contents were classified as informative, promotional and social. The informative contents communicate about past events, the promotional contents boost the action of the recipients regarding offers and the social contents promote scientific knowledge or actions on topics of social interest.

In addition to the name of the university, it was identified if it is public or private and if it is present in a world ranking, particularly in Scimago Institutions Rankings SIR of the year 2018. Regarding the newspaper, it was observed in which newspaper and on which page each advertisement appeared.

It is necessary to point out that the classification of universities by financing in Ecuador includes four types: national public universities, public universities operating in Ecuador under international agreements and conventions, private universities receiving allocations and income from the State, and self-financed private universities. However, it has been decided to reduce research to the types of public and private so that the results can be compared to other countries in future studies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Until August 2, 2018, the day the Organic Reform Law to the Organic Law of Higher Education came into effect, the Ecuadorian entity that accredited and categorized universities according to their quality was the Consejo de Evaluación, Acreditación y Aseguramiento de la Cali-

dad de la Educación Superior CEAACES. From that date, the categorization was eliminated but the evaluation and accreditation is maintained by a new entity, the Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior CACES. This has generated controversy since the perception on the quality of each university differs according to the international ranking that is consulted after the national categorization disappeared. It is also an opportunity for those HEIs that were not in the highest category to improve or recover their positioning through different media.

The HEIs were classified as public and private in order to meet the objectives, answer the research question and detect what type of universities publish the most, it was also determined whether or not they were present in the SIR. Although there are Ecuadorian universities in several rankings, the SIR has the only objective classification system worldwide in which there are universities from Ecuador, although there are only 8 of a total of 60 HEIs until the end of this research (Table 1).

		Presence in Scimago Institutions Rankings		Total
		Sí	No	
Type of university	Public	4	29	33
	Private	4	23	27
Total		8	52	60

Table 1. Universities in Ecuador. Source: Consejo de Educación Superior de Ecuador.

3.1 TYPES OF UNIVERSITIES THAT PUBLISH THE MOST

Of the 60 universities, 35 published and 25 did not publish. Most of them are private. All 8 universities that were in Scimago Institutions Rankings published. The chi-square and Fisher statistics show that there is a relationship between advertising in the press with the type of university and the presence in the ranking (Table 2 and Table 3).

The number of ads is also associated with it. Of the 772 ads, 570 were from private HEIs and 202 from public HEIs. The average is 12.87, the range is 0 to 128, the median is 1 and the mode 0. It was observed that the variances between the groups were different when comparing the average of advertisements between public and private HEIs, as well as between HEIs that were in SIR. The levels of significance were less than 0.05 in both cases and were determined through the Student's t-test (Table 4 and Table 5).

3.2 CONTENTS OF ADVERTISEMENTS

The contents were classified as informative, promotional and social. The informative contents communicate about past events, the promotional contents boost the action of the recipients regarding offers and the social contents promote scientific knowledge or actions on topics of social interest (Segura-Mariño, 2018). Of the 772 ads, 550 (71.2%) had promotional purposes, especially about the academic offer. 146 ads (18.9%) addressed social interest (research results) and 76 (9.8%) were informative about events held in previous days. The chi-square analysis determined that the content is not defined according to the type of HEI or depending on whether they were present in SIR. Significance values are greater than 0.05. Segura-Mariño (2018) found slight differences in the online en-

Have they advertised in newspapers?				Total	
			Yes	No	
What type of university is it?	Public	Count	13	20	33
		Expected frequency	19,3	13,8	33,0
	Private	Count	22	5	27
		Expected frequency	15,8	11,3	27,0
Total		Count	35	25	60
Frecuencia esperada		35,0	25,0	60,0	
		Value		gI	Asymptotic significance (bilateral)
Pearson's Chi-square		10,823 ^a		1	,001
a. 0 boxes (0.0%) have an expected frequency of less than 5. The minimum expected frequency is 11.25.					

Table 2. Type of university and presence in newspapers.

Have they advertised in newspapers?				Total	
			Yes	No	
Presence in Scimago Institutions Rankings	Yes	Count	8	0	8
		Expected frequency	4,7	3,3	8,0
	No	Count	27	25	52
		Expected frequency	30,3	21,7	52,0
Total		Count	35	25	60
Frecuencia esperada		35,0	25,0	60,0	
		Value	gI	Asymptotic significance (bilateral)	Exact significance (bilateral)
Pearson's Chi-square		6,593 ^a	1	,010	
Fisher's exact statistic					,016
a. 2 boxes (50.0%) have an expected frequency of less than 5. The minimum expected frequency is 3.33.					

Table 3. Presence in Scimago Institutions Rankings and in newspapers.

	What kind of university is it?	N	Mean	Typical deviation.	Typical error of the mean
¿Cuántos anuncios publicó?	Public	33	6,12	17,217	2,997
	Private	27	21,11	33,250	6,399
Bilateral Significance					
T-test for equality of means	Equal variances have been assumed				,028
	Equal variances have not been assumed				,041

Table 4. Number of ads by type of university.

	Presence in Scimago Institutions Rankings	N	Mean	Typical deviation	Typical error of the mean
How many ads did it publish?	Yes	8	58,88	47,601	16,829
	No	52	5,79	10,996	1,525
Bilateral Significance					
T-test for equality of means	Equal variances have been assumed				,000
	Equal variances have not been assumed				,016

Table 5. Number of ads based on presence in Scimago Institutions Rankings.

vironment, the HEIs of Ecuador publish more promotional content on Facebook (54.4%), the followed by informative content (41.6%) and only 4% were social.

3.3 ADVERTISING AUDIENCE

Three classifications were made about the audience: internal, external and both. A variable was also created to classify them in detail as they were detected in the content analysis: university students, alumni, high school graduates, future graduates, professionals, organizations, parents and citizens in general.

Public HEI advertisements were primarily aimed at both audiences, private advertisements were aimed at external audiences. 1.7% were directed only to the internal public. On the other hand, the HEIs present in SIR were directed more to both audiences. HEIs that were not in SIR were directed to external audiences. The chi-square indicated that the types of audiences and the types of universities were associated (0.001 and 0.024 respectively). Generally, the promotional ads were aimed at students of HEIs, citizens in general, future high school graduates, graduates and professionals. The advertisements of social interest and information were aimed at the general public. It is convenient to know the ads each audience re-

ceives most. 44.7% was directed to the general public with promotional and social interest content, 21% was directed to university students with promotional content, 17% was directed to professionals with promotional content, 15.5% was directed to future high school graduates and high school graduates with promotional content, 0.9% corresponded to organizations with content of social and promotional interest, 0.5% was directed to parents with promotional content and 0.4% was directed to alumni with promotional content.

3.4 VISUAL ATTRIBUTES OF ADVERTISEMENTS

The three newspapers with the highest circulation are El Comercio, El Universo and La Hora. The universities preferred to publish in that order. 58.9% of ads were published in El Comercio, 34.2% in El Universo and 6.9% in La Hora. The majority were from private universities, the same was found when observing the type of HEI that publishes more in each newspaper. It was observed that there were representative differences when analyzing whether the newspaper's decision is associated with HEIs that are in the ranking or not. Those in the ranking prefer El Comercio and those that do not, El Universo (Table 6).

For an advertisement to be effective in the written press, Trevino (2010) argues that it must be located on odd pages because they are more visible. In this study it was found that universities in Ecuador seek to apply this strategy. Of the 772 ads, 688 (89.12%) were published on the right side of the pages, especially at the bottom.

On the other hand, it was detected that being in the ranking or not is related to the size of the ad. The biggest ad occupied two pages. There were eight two-page ads, seven were from HEIs that were in the SIR. There was no major difference in terms of those that occupied a page or half a page. Those that occupied a quarter and an eighth of page were mostly of the HEIs that were in the SIR. The smallest ads (1/16 page) were from HEIs that were not in the SIR. It was observed in which part of the newspa-

pers were located the ads. The majority (98.4%) were on internal pages, none were on the cover and only 1.6% were on the back cover. 7 of them were in El Universo, 5 in El Comercio and none in La Hora. 2 were from the public university Escuela Politécnica Nacional, the number one Ecuadorian university in the SIR. 10 were from private universities, six from Universidad Casa Grande, two from Universidad San Francisco de Quito, one from Universidad Católica Santiago de Guayaquil and one from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador. These were in the group of the most published, but the Universidad Casa Grande and the Universidad Católica Santiago de Guayaquil were not in SIR.

Another key element is color. Alonso (2013) argues that it can be the most active visual communication component since it impresses im-

It is in Scimago Institutions Rankings			Total		
			Sí	No	
Newspapers	El Comercio	Count	328	127	455
		Expected frequency	277,6	177,4	455,0
	El Universo	Count	113	151	264
		Expected frequency	161,1	102,9	264,0
	La Hora	Count	30	23	53
		Expected frequency	32,3	20,7	53,0
Total		Count	471	301	772
		Expected frequency	471,0	301,0	772,0
			Value	gl	Asymptotic significance (bilateral)
Pearson's Chi-square			60,696 ^a	2	,000
Likelihood ratio			60,606	2	,000
a. 0 boxes (0.0%) have an expected frequency of less than 5. The minimum expected frequency is 20.66.					

Table 6. Newspapers according to presence in ranking.

mediately. For Ambrose & Harris (2008) it is the most instantaneous way to highlight, differentiate and rank information. This investigation identified that 72.9% of ads were in color and 27.1% were in black and white. HEIs preferred color advertisements, especially in El Universo (84.5%), then in El Comercio (66.6%) and in La Hora there were no significant differences in preference. The type of HEI and whether or not they were in the SIR is associated with color preference; the significance value is 0.000 in the chi-square test.

On the informative value, Alonso (2013) distinguishes image formats such as photos, infographics, illustrations, graphic brands, among others. Of the 772 studied ads, most used photos, only 5 had illustrations and 5 had infographics.

3.5 HAVE UNIVERSITIES DECREASED THE PUBLICATION OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE WRITTEN PRESS OF ECUADOR?

No, universities have not decreased the publication of advertisements. On the contrary, the advertisements of every Sunday of the year 2017 (470) increased in 55.63% compared to the year 2016 (302). Figure 1 shows that there is no pattern in the number of ads throughout each year. It would be assumed that there is more publicity in the registration months, but they coincided on high values only in July. This is understandable, because HEIs not only promote graduate degrees, but also postgraduate programs, continuing education, events, and so on.

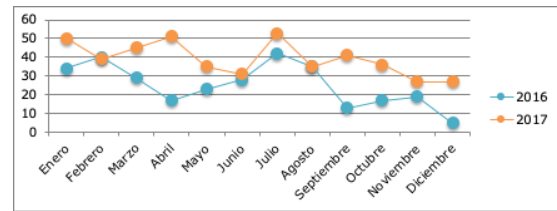


Figure 1. Number of ads per year. Source: Direct observation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Evaluating the presence of university advertising in the written press of Ecuador allowed to determine that this type of media is still valued by higher education despite the rise of online media mentioned by Clow & Baack (2010). Brands are more attracted to investing in online advertising but prefer traditional media as mentioned by Gomez (2016), although the media lost credibility in the country, as noted Checa-Godoy (2012).

There was a 55.63% increase in advertisements by Ecuadorian HEIs in 2017 compared to 2016. In the future, it is of special interest to investigate: the causes of such increase, the participation of other sectors in the written press, the comparisons with the online framework and the analysis of the transmedia narrative with emphasis in this last aspect. In addition, it would be necessary to study how audiences perceive advertisements based on the theory of Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion.

In total, 35 universities (58.4%) published advertisements in national newspapers during the two years of study and 25 did not (41.7%). The institutions that most valued the press as an advertising medium were private and those included in Scimago Institutions Rankings.

Universities have improved their visual communication strategies. Institutions seek to publish on odd pages (which are the most visible), in color and use images. They use photos rather

than illustrations and infographics. All this despite the fact that most ads were published on internal pages, 1.6% on back covers and none on covers.

Advertising that targets potential students predominates. In this sense, universities do not strategically advertise in the written press because they aim at people who prefer to use the internet. They do not take advantage of the fact that the written press has the potential to reach other audiences such as parents, professionals who wish to get a postgraduate degree, adults interested in continuing education or to inform about the activities they carry out.

Advertising with promotional content that demonstrates the interest in increasing the number of students also predominates. They

should highlight their mission regarding the development of scientific and social knowledge that they are called to do as institutions of higher education. This would improve their positioning and the positive results would be sustainable in the long term.

It can be concluded with certainty that universities have to improve their offline communication strategies and respond with agility to the needs of the audience on the Internet, specifically on emerging websites and social media that have not yet been studied through a longitudinal analysis.

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