The branded content departments of the main Spanish media: organisational and functional structure, professional profiles and work processes

Los departamentos de branded content de los principales medios españoles: estructura orgánica y funcional, perfiles profesionales y procesos de trabajo

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Abstract:

A crucial element in the search for new media business models has emerged in recent years in the shape of branded content departments. A search for renewed sources of funding has become necessary as a result of digitisation and changes in media consumption. The new way of engaging brands through quality content requires professionals who can cope with this hybridisation between the editorial and

Resumen:

En los medios de comunicación ha emergido en los últimos años, un departamento denominado de branded content, clave en la búsqueda de nuevos modelos de negocio. Esta búsqueda de renovadas fuentes de financiación se ha producido como resultado de la digitalización y los cambios en el consumo de medios. Esta novedosa forma de involucrar a las marcas a través de un contenido de calidad requiere de profesionales que

advertising worlds. Through interviews with executives from the main Spanish media, this qualitative research defines the organisational and functional structure of these departments, as well as the working methods they use and their relationship with the newsroom and other departments. The conclusions show the diverse range of profiles and professional skills are involved, as branded content department managers prioritise the search for talent. The contribution of this study is to represent, for the first time, the typical organisational chart and workflows of these departments. The aim is that others should be able to use these models in their own practice, as the interviewees say that they do not know how other media are resolving the dilemmas inherent in the recent formation of these structures.

Keywords:

Media; content generation; branded content department; professional profiles; organisational structure.

respondan a esta hibridación entre el mundo editorial y el publicitario. En esta investigación de corte cualitativo se define, a través de entrevistas a directivos de los principales medios españoles, la estructura orgánica y funcional de estos departamentos, así como la metodología de trabajo empleada y su relación con la redacción y otros departamentos. Las conclusiones retratan la disparidad de perfiles involucrados y sus competencias profesionales, donde se prioriza la búsqueda de talento por parte de los responsables de los departamentos de branded content. La aportación de este trabajo es representar, por primera vez, el organigrama tipo y los flujos de trabajo de estos departamentos con una clara intención de transferencia práctica, puesto que los entrevistados afirman desconocer cómo otros medios están resolviendo dilemas propios de la formación reciente de estas estructuras.

Palabras clave:

Medios de comunicación; generación de contenido; departamento branded content; perfiles profesionales; estructura organizacional.

1. Introduction

In these last two decades, one of the industries with the strongest influence in society, which has suffered a process of transformation and a devaluation has been the media (Villafañe et al., 2020). This process in the media industry has been conditioned by the new digital technologies and the consumption habits of audiences (Casero-Ripollés, Ortells Badenes and Doménech Fabregat, 2013). Also, this process has led to a difficult economic situation for organizations caused by a crisis that exacerbates and shows the obsolescence of business models (Valero-Pastor and González-Alba, 2018). Print newspapers have suffered dramatic drops in readership and revenue, as well as a reduction in staff and resources (Suenzo, Boczkowski, & Mitchelstein, 2020). These mutations not only bring changes in the product, the production of content, the processes and the commercial area of journalistic companies, but they also affect their internal organization. At a higher level, these changes influence the composition of the media industry and its business models (Casero-Ripollés, 2010).

However, like any transformation process, the new digital environment poses a series of risks and opportunities for the development of the journalistic profession, as Casero, Ortells, and Doménech point out (2013). This work focuses on one of these opportunities: the recent creation of branded content departments whose aim is to offer relevant content for brands, thus overcoming traditional advertising formulas and generating new revenue streams. This qualitative research seeks to produce knowledge about the organic and functional structure of the new branded content departments created by the main Spanish media. The objectives that have guided the study are:

1. Describe the structure and main features of the branded content departments of the Spanish media, proposing a standard organization chart.

2. Define the professional profiles and competencies most demanded in attracting talent from these departments.

3. Determine what other departments and profiles of the medium integrate into the process of creating brand content.

4. Analyze the work processes and coordination with other departments, especially those concerning the editorial part.

The result of this research aims to create knowledge with practical implications to generate a transfer to those media entirely developing this process.

1.1. Change in the media business model

The multiplicity of platforms has caused profound changes in the media map, affecting mainstream media without exception. The roles linked to the production and consumption of information are atomized as a result of the mobility and personalization of the content provided by the media and the incorporation of the social networks within their structure (Martínez-Sanz and Arribas-Urrutia, 2021). The intrusion of the internet and social networks has transformed the use and consumption of information. The appearance of new native digital media and networks as alternative information channels coincided with this change in the business model (Villafañe, Ortiz-de-Guinea-Ayala, and Martín-Sáez, 2020, p. 7), thus opening a broad debate on media sustainability. The public chooses to be informed through digital platforms while large media groups are punished by the low advertising investment that has migrated to these spaces (Martínez-Costa, Serrano-Puche, Portilla, and Sánchez-Blanco, 2019).

In this situation, the journalism industry has to reinvent to survive amid a deep financial crisis derived from the digital world providing free content while being a more competitive market. The data are clear: according to Abejón Mendoza (2021, p. 254), the digital report "News Report España 2020" indicates that only 12.2% of the Spanish users paid for digital news in 2019. Therefore, the business model continues without being adapted to the current situation.

As audiences move towards mobile consumption, publishers have had to adapt their business models to the standards set by social media platforms and advertisers. Now they compete with the big tech companies to reach the same audiences. The ad tech ecosystem, created by platforms and advertisers to capitalize on the increasing amount of data withheld on readers, has produced a mess among the major monetization strategies. Journalism has been affected by the redirection of advertising revenue from publisher sites to large-scale platforms, influencer networks, and new native advertising businesses (Watson, Bell, Rashidian & Hartstone, 2018). Native advertising could help sustain a struggling industry by offering informative and entertaining advertising, expanding journalistic practice. The industry should expect an increase in the use of native advertising (Ferrer, 2016, p. 9). According to the Native Advertising Institute, native advertising generated 20% of advertising revenue for media in 2017, and that figure is likely to be 36% in 2021.

This new advertising modality represents a necessary bet to make journalistic activity sustainable. Therefore, they believe that the media branded content studies are in a suitable position to offer these services to brands. The study by Carvajal and Barinagarrementeria (2019) has confirmed the growing supply of specialized teams in branded content to compete for digital advertising investment.

The main concerns of the media focus on increasing revenues, improving the quality of journalism, rejuvenating and retaining the audience, and organizing work in the newsroom (Palomo and Palau-Sampio, 2016). This situation generates a media environment full of challenges while being very competitive. At the same time, it offers encouraging signs about the future of the news business in the face of the decline of traditional business (Newman, 2020). According to Newman's report, it is not easy as the key lies in combining editorial values and harsh commercial realism that enable the successful development of one's digital journalism and the business that supports it.

1.2. Change of the advertising model

This new reality also produces a contraction in the advertising market severely affecting the media sector and, like a transmission belt, the entire advertising chain: advertising agencies, media agencies and in general, all companies operating in this sector. The situation can be summarized as the evolution from mass to interactive communication and is leading to relevant structural changes in the agency sector (Corredor and Farfán, 2010). Adaptation is necessary since advertising can be invasive if the fact that audiences are active and social is not considered (Quintas-Froufe and González-Neira, 2014).

Consumers, advertisers, agencies and the media are immersed in a revolution that demands a rethinking of their communication channels, in particular the codes used (Del Pino and Galán, 2010). The concept of the economy of attention evolves from referring to the necessary selection of attention, accomplished in a scenario of information overabundance, to a different concept linked to the sophisticated control mechanisms that delegate this selection to algorithms that operate under the user's unconsciousness (Giraldo-Luque and Fernández-Rovira, 2020). The change in consumer behaviour is such that the study of Giraldo-Luque and Fernández-Rovira shows how emotional impulses are ahead of rationality. Likewise, the extensive use of the mobile phone in social networks allocates and centralizes the informative intention of the users to the same channels, the social media, exempt from verification and contrast.

The user chooses the way he consumes information and leisure, and the entertainment culture has illuminated terms such as "advertainment", "branded entertainment", or "brand on-demand" (Del Pino and Galán, 2010). In all of them, the common denominator is to create communication products to provoke an active response from the consumer, who demands or requests content where the advertising intention is not to be interpreted as an interruption. And also where the advertiser should lose the fear of the risk of innovation. According to Jaramillo (2021), the brands' growing interest in the content and digital media is currently detected.

The key, and the difficulty, lies in shaping it properly so that the advertising is relevant. Thus, engagement, branded content, or native advertising stand out insofar as concepts related to the user's involvement with the brand (Papí-Gálvez, 2015). The most evident digital alternative to display advertising is native advertising, which can be presented in different formats, such as product placement, interactive ads and sponsored content (Valero Pastor, 2015, p. 190). However, we must pay special attention to branded content, which is the creation of content associated with commercial brands by the media. In this regard, while native advertising is more punctual and temporary, branded content is more durable and needs more time to establish emotional ties (Jaramillo, 2021, p. 375).

Given this new reality, a close collaboration between the media and the brands has emerged in branded content as a new bet to connect with the audience (Miotto-Payne, 2019, pp. 27-28). A high presence of brand content is detected in digital newspapers due to the importance acquired for their business model (Jaramillo, 2021, p. 376). The thing to note is that advertisers no longer need publishers or ad agencies like they used to. In fact, platforms are so efficient at reaching audiences that it is becoming less clear what is the added value for advertisers to work with publishers (Watson, Bell, Rashidian, & Hartstone, 2018).

1.3. Branded content departments

These departments appeared for the first time in the digital native media. They mix news and entertainment, such as BuzzFeed or The Huffington Post and adopted native advertising, thus becoming an economic success (Chittum, 2014, cited by Ferrer, 2016, pp. 3- 9). Important newspapers such as The New York Times, which created the T-Brand Studio or The Guardian with Guardian Labs, soon joined in, through specialized departments or business units, taking this phenomenon to a higher level of professionalization. Over the past decade, numerous news publishers have created branded content departments. The native ad sales business model is so lucrative that many respected news publishers have invested in it. This way, new jobs have been created: creative director, strategist and video producer, jobs that had never existed before in news publishing, and yes, in advertising agencies (Sirrah, 2019).

The challenges are to adapt the media to the new times and to assume that innovation is continuous. To achieve these goals, factors such as recruitment, the change of collaborators or even management have influence. Innovation in the media requires autonomy, alternative work cultures, constant technological adaptation and a desire for real proximity with the audience. The viability of the media depends on professionals capable of assuming changing demands (Palomo and Palau-Sampio, 2016) with multidisciplinary teams (Valero Pastor and Carvajal Prieto, 2017). Research has detected in digital media, such as PlayGround, a work with different methodological approaches where teams prepared to activate innovation at the service of brands are configured (Blay, Balado and Zomeño, 2018). Creativity is an appreciated quality because it avoids the homogenization of agendas, and multidisciplinary teams favour creativity.

This drives investment in talent to be a priority since the launch of new products or services will depend on the staff. In the research by Palomo and Palau-Sampio (2016), their recommendations include a commitment to adaptive journalists open to the culture of experimentation and journalists who collaborate with technical profiles. There is also talk of hybrid advertising profiles (Álvarez-Flores, Núñez, and Mañas, 2021), with a technological dimension (Rodríguez-Vázquez, Direito-Rebollal and Silva-Rodríguez, 2018) as audience analyst or engagement editor and different specializations and competences (Valero-Pastor and González-Alba, 2018). In fact, the professional profiles most in demand today by the media are, in addition to multimedia journalists, social media managers. They manage communities, social networks and those who dominate data journalism. Programmers, developer journalists, and audience analytics experts are other new hires (Palomo and Palau-Sampio, 2016).

Jaramillo (2021) detects that journalists and media collaborators assume a large part of the work involved in the production and publication of these pieces. In this context, the study affirms that newsroom journalists are taking part in preparing these contents in an ethically dubious way. Therefore, professional deontology enters the debate since these departments alter the historical relationship between publishers and advertisers. Watson, Bell, Rashidian and Hartstone (2018), on the one hand,

and Ferrer (2016), on the other, detect the divisions of "church and state" between advertising and publishing, that they are under intense pressure. While editorial teams must not be involved with ad content, we are in a new situation where best practices need to be shared and hot topics discussed with the advertising side of the business. Sirrah's (2019) research shows a cordial relationship between product teams working closely with editors and reporters to try to find ways to align advertisers with newsroom content.

For example, in the case of the T-Brand Studio, The New York Times' editorial talent is harnessed in storytelling to create brand narratives. Brands go straight to the medium because of the trust it has already cultivated with the audience (Watson, Bell, Rashidian, & Hartstone, 2018). Regarding the size of these departments, we have as a reference the study by Rodríguez-Vázquez, Direito-Rebollal and Silva-Rodríguez (2018) on Spanish media. In this study, we see that the Editorial Unit team comprises 25 people while "El País" has 20 professionals in this area, a third having technical profiles.

The objective of this research is to transfer the generated knowledge to the journalistic industry, giving an account of the structures and profiles currently developing their work. The professionals interviewed affirm that they ignore how the other media are working since they are departments with no more than five years of experience and in the process of configuration. This article addresses the job opportunities opened by information technologies for communicators that according to Salaverría (2016), are still far from disappearing.

2. Methodology

To obtain this holistic knowledge, qualitative research is proposed (Soler, 2011, p. 191), where the conclusions are based on expert opinions (Lafuente and Marín, 2008, p. 16). For this, the professional routine of those directing the departments that are the object of this study has been approached, through in-depth interviews conducted in situ in the media.

The selection of the sample of directors of branded content departments from the main national newspapers is part of the universe of study of the ComScore News Ranking in its different categories. This ranking is a source of reference among professionals in the sector as it measures the audiences of the media on varied digital platforms.

Figure 1. Ranking News ComScore Top 30 News June 2019

	Media	🏷...	Total Unique Visitors/Viewers (000)			% Reach		
			Total Digital Population	Desktop	Mobile	Total Digital Population	Desktop	Mobile
	Total Internet : Total Audience		33,777	22,236	30,641	100.0	100.0	100.0
	News/Information		33,243	21,784	30,396	98.4	98.0	99.2
1	Vocento	●	25,809	6,671	23,922	76.4	30.0	78.1
2	Prisa	●	25,768	7,733	23,500	76.3	34.8	76.7
3	RCS MediaGroup - Unidad Editorial	●	25,360	7,072	22,953	75.1	31.8	74.9
4	Prensa Ibérica	●	24,922	5,612	23,127	73.8	25.2	75.5
5	Grupo Godo	●	23,719	4,440	22,096	70.2	20.0	72.1
6	Henneo	●	20,732	3,298	19,044	61.4	14.8	62.2
7	ELCONFIDENCIAL.COM	●	15,611	2,852	13,839	46.2	12.8	45.2
8	ElEspañol Sites	●	15,133	2,430	13,592	44.8	10.9	44.4
9	OKDIARIO.COM	●	10,775	1,151	9,936	31.9	5.2	32.4
10	Grupo Planeta Sites	●	10,681	1,921	9,319	31.6	8.6	30.4
11	Eldiario.es Sites	●	10,045	1,674	8,834	29.7	7.5	28.8
12	Microsoft News	●	9,591	8,863	2,202	28.4	39.9	7.2
13	ElEconomista	●	9,477	2,519	7,679	28.1	11.3	25.1
14	Yahoo-HuffPost News Network	●	9,380	1,510	8,308	27.8	6.8	27.1
15	La Voz De Galicia	●	7,940	909	7,217	23.5	4.1	23.6
16	Xataka	●	7,627	2,263	5,948	22.6	10.2	19.4
17	PUBLICO.ES Sites	●	7,349	993	6,572	21.8	4.5	21.4
18	Periodista Digital Sites	●	7,298	373	6,982	21.6	1.7	22.8
19	Agencia Europa Press	●	6,706	1,291	5,714	19.9	5.8	18.6
20	Pelmorex Corp.	●	6,372	1,557	5,184	18.9	7.0	16.9
21	Grupo ADSLZone	●	6,370	2,120	4,750	18.9	9.5	15.5
22	Libertad Digital	●	6,272	743	5,676	18.6	3.3	18.5
23	ESdiario Sites	●	5,539	142	5,397	16.4	0.6	17.6
24	AccuWeather Sites	●	5,370	230	5,165	15.9	1.0	16.9
25	Upday (Mobile App)	●	4,570	N/A	4,570	13.5	N/A	14.9
26	Vozpopuli.com Sites	●	4,423	416	4,065	13.1	1.9	13.3
27	Weather Company, The		4,420	42	4,379	13.1	0.2	14.3
28	Grupo El Comercio	●	4,310	603	3,809	12.8	2.7	12.4
29	Elnacional.cat Sites	●	4,121	374	3,798	12.2	1.7	12.4
30	BBC Sites	●	4,035	895	3,313	11.9	4.0	10.8

Source: Ranking News ComScore of reference to establish the study universe

The need to interview experts from four types of communication media is determined to obtain knowledge of different business models since each one has a different experience and technological development. To make a complete observation of the phenomenon, we must add the experience of the different media according to their category:

– Category News / Information. Selection of communication groups with the main traditional media outlets.

– Category News / Information. Selection of native digital media.

– Niche content category. Selection of vertical media from specific consumption areas.

– Millennial Media Category. Selection of media aimed at the millennial public and with RRSS as the main channel.

The resulting sample is a convenience (Gaitán and Piñuel, 1998, p. 90), based on the difficulty involved in personally interviewing the directors of these organizations. The media represented are in the top positions of ComScore 2019. The interviewed were 16 executives representing 15 groups or media. All informed subjects with knowledge about the researched referent (Gaitán and Piñuel, 1998, p. 90) since they have active participation in the studied process.

Figure 2. Sample of managers and groups / media interviewed

News/Information Communication Teams

HENNEO	Fedra Valderrey Aldonza – Branded Content Product Manager
grupoGodo	Alejando Teodoro – Brandslab Director
PRENSA IBÉRICA	Atala Martín – Branded Content Director
PRISA	Leyre Rodríguez – Branded Content Specialist
vocento	Marta Gesto – Content Factory Director
Unidad Editorial	Silvia González y Aurora Yánez – Heads of the departement of contents and Branded Content

News/Information Digital Natives

EL ESPAÑOL
Julián Povedano
Head of Branded Content

El Confidencial
EL DIARIO DE LOS LECTORES INFLUYENTES
Alberto Guzmán Luna
Director of CBrand - Content Agency

Niche Content

CONDÉ NAST
Jorge Madrid
Director of the creative agency CNX

HEARST
Ana Multigner
Digital Content Director

¡HOLA!
Gema Jiménez Peral
Branded Content Director

webedia.
Alex Ferrero
Branded Content Director

Millenial Media witth Social Media as main channel

JOT DOWN
contemporary culture mag.
Ángel Fernández
Director

PlayGround
Davit Miró
Chief Revenue Officer

YOROKOBU
Marcus Hurst
Head of Branded Content

Source: prepared by the authors

These interviews were conducted between November 20, 2019, and July 10, 2020. Twelve of these interviews were face-to-face, having the opportunity to visit the departments. Only three were online since the pandemic and confinement occurred. The in-depth interview has followed a structured script with specific guidelines for formulating questions (Vilches, 2011, pp. 216-219) linked to the objectives set by the research.

The questions raised in the interview have been divided into four thematic blocks, such as the characteristics of the branded content departments, to more specific questions about profiles and work processes to finalize future forecasts. The interviewing in the real place, in the work environment where the activity takes place, enabled to operate previously prepared checklists.

The results have been analyzed using horizontal analysis since the interest resides in the set of responses to each of the questions (Gaitán and Piñuel, 1998, pp. 109). Only when the differences have been substantial, the media category where a phenomenon occurs or not has been established. In the presentation of results, some *verbatim* are presented for their ability to illustrate ideas.

It is a methodological approach that meets the three fundamental requirements (Álvarez-Gayou, 2003, pp. 32-33): validity, for being able to explain that reality; reliability, for the sum of the different perspectives; and sample, for the criterion of qualitative representativeness, not defined by size or statistical representativeness (Wimmer; Dominick, 1996, p. 67).

Finally, a discussion unlocks contrasting the results that will help raise critical reflection with practical implications and its evolution for the future.

3. Results

3.1. Portrait of the branded content departments of the Spanish media

The creation of these departments is in the midst of a growth phase since several managers interviewed acknowledge the exponentially increasing number of professionals that make it up. Alejandro Teodoro explains that:

> "In Godó Strategies the branded content team was born four and a half years ago with two people, today despite being a small team compared to other media, we have a multidisciplinary team of fifteen people" (Verbatim interview, 07/10/2020).

Even when talking about newly created departments, several of them are the result of restructuring and the exploration of different formulas where traditional structures combine with new teams, according to Leyre Rodríguez:

> "Prisa Content was born from the union between the marketer that is Prisa Brand Solution and a new editorial team, to which we add the La Factoría agency, which is in charge of design issues" (Verbatim interview, 12/10/2019).

It is common for these new structures to be born closely linked to the business units in charge of marketing the different products of the medium. In some cases, as Gema Jiménez from ¡Hola! Comments:

> "We are a 100% commercial department since the umbilical cord connects with this department, and nothing moves without it. Everything depends on the commercial director of the headline, who at the same time relies on the commercial manager of the magazine and the web" (Verbatim 12/18/2019).

On the other hand, other departments operate under the coverage of the content department and their dialogue is direct with the general director of content, as in Prensa Ibérica, or with the strategy and product department, as in the case of Vocento and Spanish.

It should be noted that in some native digital media such as Yorokobu or Playground, the trend is to explore new business opportunities beyond the medium. This has led the branded content department to become an agency with its own and differentiated identity, as Davit Miró explains:

> "Apart from the editorial products marketed through native advertising, we have a content agency specialized in branded content services that range from the creation and distribution of campaigns to the creation of digital strategies for brands or the management of their social networks. All this encompasses the world of branded content, but we work as an agency as the medium does not have any intervention. It is simply teams for clients that work with their marketing or communication departments" (Verbatim interview, 10/13/2019).

Although we can refer to the creation of branded content departments as a phenomenon extended to all the main Spanish media, it is relevant to note that this has not materialized homogeneously since the research shows a disparity of structures and quite remarkable dimensions. According to the conducted research, we estimate that the average structure is usually composed of around 15 professionals. Of the analyzed sample, those structures such as Prisa or Webedia stand out. They incorporate more than fifty and represent the most extensive departments. In another sense, we find much smaller structures usually formed by over five professionals. The size of these departments relates to the magnitude of the media group to which they belong.

Another important factor determining the size has to do with the relationship established with the newsroom since it is generally employed to create content. Therefore, it is common for smaller structures to mobilize plenty of resources from the editorial side. In addition, it must be considered that in most of the analyzed structures, profiles of other departments and external collaborators are employed, resulting in a phenomenon of larger dimensions than the size of the department itself.

Regarding its composition, it seems that the most standardized division is the one formed by strategic and account management area, and a content creation area including teams linked to the creative part, as well as product development and production. All these divisions are usually under the creative direction coordinated with those most responsible for the direction of the medium.

3.2. Common profiles in these departments

The appearance of branded content departments has brought the incorporation of a series of professional profiles historically linked to the advertising industry rather than the journalistic one. It could be said that the media, in its quest to reformulate the relationship with brands, have had to replicate agency structures within the company. The majority have chosen to seek an intermediate formula, combining the recruitment of specialized talent in the advertising field and the reorientation of profiles typical of journalism, progressively acquiring knowledge related to branding.

Despite the different dimensions of these departments, it has been possible to establish a series of areas and profiles present regularly. We will always find the figure of the maximum person in charge known as the content director. This role is in charge of the direction of the entire department, being the link between account management and the creative part. From what has been observed, this function is performed by journalists with a notable career within the newsroom. In the case of the analyzed sample and from a gender perspective, there are 53% men and 47% women.

3.2.1. Commercial and account management

These are one of the most relevant profiles due to the specific weight they usually have within the structure, as Marcus Hurst tells us:

> "The commercial team is quite large for a small institution, I would say half of our team, we are in our early twenties, and half are commercial" (Verbatim interview, 11/12/2019).

The analysis of these profiles is interesting since the evolution of their functions and competencies relate to the transformation experienced in recent years within the media. They have incorporated knowledge related to marketing strategies since their function is not limited to selling advertising space but to selling something much more sophisticated and complex such as content and stories. Jorge Madrid confirms this reality:

> "We no longer have traditional advertising commercials, but we have figures that tend to be something more like a consultant. Brands have a series of needs, and they have to provide a solution that involves many tools" (Verbatim interview, 07/09/2020).

3.2.2. Content creation

The area where the ideation and creation materialises is supervised by the content director who delivers the day-to-day management in intermediate profiles responsible for ensuring that the orders are duly resolved. They are known as a content coordinator or project director, as in the case of Unión Editorial, where Silvia Gonzalez and Aurora Yañez tell us that:

> "Everything revolves around the project manager, he is the one who decides what the design is like, the one who decides with production what the videos are like, the one who manages with the commercials, the one who will see the client for any task" (Verbatim interview, 12/17/2019).

As with the content director, this profile is usually an editor with years of experience and trained to deal with the report. However, due to the high volume of assignments, it tends to focus on the tasks of coordinating and supervising the texts that arrive from the journalists.

In the case of Playground Studio, where it is required to know how to function within networks and new narratives, journalistic training is not essential as Davit Miró tells us:

"They lead multidisciplinary teams and have, to a greater extent, all the skills needed to develop a content project from start to finish. That means that they may come from the editing or script world, but they have adopted skills of audience strategy, social media, production and content distribution" (Verbatim interview, 10/13/2019).

Beyond these figures, the content creation falls to the figure of the writer or storyteller. This role is usually familiar with the values and rigour of the reporter when looking for a story and can integrate content into the medium. It is common for him to come from the in-house newsroom and be trained in his new task, which means incorporating some knowledge on how to work with brands.

That is why those responsible for creating the work teams like Fedra Valderrey tell us that, to create branded content, a creative or a journalist is not enough, it has to be a hybrid. Someone who can understand that the medium is just as important as the advertiser and its objectives.

In the content creation process, the role played by those responsible for design and art direction also stands out. The latter intervenes from a more creative sphere, with the responsibility of visually conceptualizing the proposals of the editors while those responsible for design have a role aimed at the final execution, both digitally and on paper since they are still being elaborated specially for brands and require layout designers.

These profiles are responsible for strategy, account management and content creation in most of the analyzed media. From here there are a series of profiles in some cases that we can find integrated into the structure itself. They usually belong to other departments of the environment that offer services across the entire company.

3.3. Collaboration with other profiles and departments

As a result of the digitization of the Spanish media, a series of departments of a technological nature linked to innovation emerged, which assist the editorial part and have put all their knowledge at the service of the groups, giving support to the branded content business area. This reality is exposed by Marta Gesto when she explains:

"The audience analysis department of this house is not only editorial since it is a transversal department that works and analyzes both for the editorial and for the rest of the units of the house. When we do a branded content project, it helps us understand where we have the right audience for the project and what they like. We ask for the analysis, and we do the interpretation" (Verbatim interview, 11/21/2019).

The data analysis and management departments have been immensely demanded by those responsible for creating content for brands. Also, they do not hesitate to classify their contribution as fundamental. As Jorge Madrid tells us:

"Searching for insights is very important for our campaigns since what we sell is editorial intelligence. For this, we need to know what happens inside our headers, and this is an allied department to understand our audiences very well and create better creativity for our clients" (Verbatim interview, 07/09/2020).

La colaboración tan estrecha con los equipos de *big data* está especialmente relacionado con la búsqueda y desarrollo de nuevos productos y servicios, ya que se han empezado a vender proyectos de *branded content* que incluyen la comercialización de los datos recogidos y la creación de paneles de navegación, como nos comenta Leyre Rodríguez:

> "The SEO department has also established as one of the most important and it is used daily by branded content teams. It is even common for training courses to take place" (Verbatim interview, 12/10/2019).

Especially relevant has been the impact of social networks on the media, which means that they must master complex and sophisticated content distribution strategies, especially when they want to connect with young audiences. Therefore, the social media department tends to participate actively in the projects, since the community manager, apart from stimulating the conversation with the audience, knows what the editorial red lines are, as Silvia Gonzalez and Aurora Yañez tell us:

> "The head of networks in our headends is the one who can best tell us if this is going to work or not. We rely heavily on them to determine which approach to take and thus create the best strategy for the brand" (Verbatim interview, 12/17/2019).

Davit Miró indicates that within social media we find other profiles that also participate, such as the audience strategist who helps the content manager to make the most out of the content on all platforms. This role consists of distributing the content while making sure that it is adapted to the rules of each platform, in addition to working on a traffic strategy towards the pieces. The audience strategist knows the audiences and the platforms, so he intervenes at the beginning and end.

It is rather common to have development and innovation departments regarding product development. In many cases, the digital innovation applied within the company contributes to the clients' projects. Julián Povedano tells us that when working in a format that requires special development, the design and technology team are in charge of carrying it out.

Other recently incorporated departments, such as those for audiovisual production or events management, also tend to collaborate and give support. Although the research carried out certifies that most of the media have relevant audiovisual production departments, it is also true that many projects are often assigned to external filmmakers and producers.

3.4. External collaborators

The structures of the branded content departments have not stopped growing since their creation. In this accelerated process of incorporating professionals, most of the media have opted for sustained growth, outsourcing part of their needs in the figure of freelancers, as Alex Ferrero tells us:

> "Even if you have stable projects, many clients are fluctuating, and you cannot maintain a structure full of specialists" (Verbatim interview, 11/20/2019).

Marta Gesto finds herself in the same situation, who confesses to us:

> "Here we do very specialized content, so we have a pool of more or less permanent collaborators. Inside the house, we think about approaches, we adapt languages to our audience and edit, but 80% of the content is created externally, we manage a large number of collaborators" (Verbatim interview, 11/21/2019).

The Godó group works similarly since it is impossible to cope internally with the large number of small projects that are the main source of income. The department develops a coordination function, but these are prepared externally. Alejandro Teodoro highlights the importance of having a wide network of collaborators, also specialized to provide clients with the profile that best suits their needs. These collaborators are usually trusted. Therefore, despite being external, they are considered part of the team.
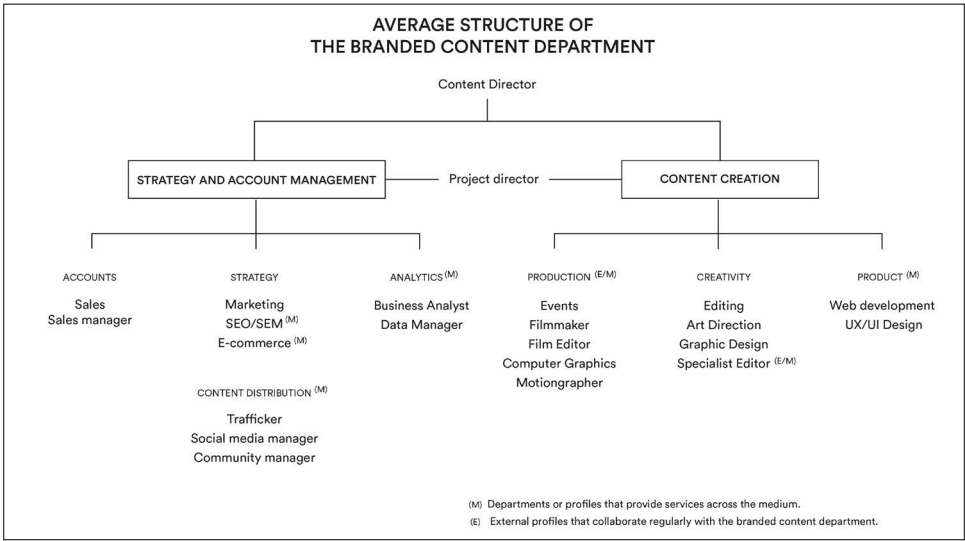
Several of the professionals interviewed point out that by starting from structures traditionally focused on the creation of written content, sometimes developing the necessary knowledge to be able to face quality audiovisual projects has been one of the greatest challenges, as Marta Gesto explains:

> "One of the things that is costing us the most and that we are tackling is audiovisual transformation. At first, we tried to do simple things, and we were capable. But as the demand for audiovisual content from brands grew, we were forced to outsource key pieces such as scriptwriters, filmmakers and video producers" (Verbatim interview, 11/21/2019).

When the demand for the audiovisual piece is high, external professionals are usually used, beyond the fact that an audiovisual department is available internally. In particular, certain media like Hola! and the Condé Nast or Hearts group usually develop projects with brands linked to fashion or lifestyle and require ambitious and complex productions.

The same happens with other profiles related to the field of creation, where it is common to commission the development of graphic materials such as infographics or illustrations from external professionals. Other external professionals increasingly in demand are those technical profiles that enable technological innovation, such as those in the field of online event production.

Figure 3. Typical organization chart of the branded content department of the main Spanish media

AVERAGE STRUCTURE OF
THE BRANDED CONTENT DEPARTMENT

Content Director

STRATEGY AND ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT — Project director — CONTENT CREATION

ACCOUNTS
Sales
Sales manager

STRATEGY
Marketing
SEO/SEM (M)
E-commerce (M)

ANALYTICS (M)
Business Analyst
Data Manager

PRODUCTION (E/M)
Events
Filmmaker
Film Editor
Computer Graphics
Motiongrapher

CREATIVITY
Editing
Art Direction
Graphic Design
Specialist Editor (E/M)

PRODUCT (M)
Web development
UX/UI Design

CONTENT DISTRIBUTION (M)
Trafficker
Social media manager
Community manager

(M) Departments or profiles that provide services across the medium.
(E) External profiles that collaborate regularly with the branded content department.

Source: own elaboration based on the conclusions of the investigation

3.5. Separation of the business units and the publisher

In recent years, an issue in debate has been the complex relationship between the business units and the editorial part. This is known within the media as the church/state separation (Ferrer, 2016). It has given rise to different views on the suitability of establishing a link between the day-to-day running of the editorial team and the content creation for brands. Alex Ferrero explains that from the beginning in Webedia, the bet was to opt for separation, although done progressively.

> "Now I have a team with tech journalists, but they can't be a newsroom staff. When the writer has a reputation and recognition on a specific topic, it is tricky for the audience to put it in native advertising. When the department was created, we sat down with all the editorial boards of the newspapers and magazines to establish a way of working, define red lines and preserve certain spaces" (Verbatim interview, 11/20/2019).

The professionals interviewed emphasize that the birth of *branded content* departments has helped structure and organize certain processes, putting a brake on a series of actions by commercials that used to be a source of tension and conflicts with the newsroom. Periodically, they took initiatives later not implemented because they were not in line with the editorial lines of the headlines.

Although the trend is marking a certain predilection for creating more autonomous branded content departments with the capacity to deal with editorial projects without the participation of the editorial team, managers are aware of the importance of maintaining a solid relationship with the editorial part since a transfer of editorial intelligence establishes and is essential to serve as an effective product. As Silvia Gonzalez and Aurora Yañez explain:

> "We count on absolutely everything with the newsroom, we see with them if the content is consistent with the editorial line because we have to take care of our headlines since it is the platform where we give visibility to our content and it should be perfectly integrated. The balance is very well achieved, because we have managed to have separate departments but with a very good relationship, where we are always connected" (Verbatim interview, 12/17/2019).

In the case of large publishing groups, this relationship must occur with each of the newsrooms that comprise it, as the branded content departments are transversal and the proposals are often channelled through the different headlines of the group. In some cases, such as the Prisa group, the department has an interlocutor who works as a liaison. Although integrated into the newsroom, he responds to the business needs, taking charge of the elaboration of the branded content.

Beyond the validation of the content proposed by the branded content departments, so that they are inherent to the newsroom' content, several reasons justify the convenience of maintaining a fluid relationship between both parties.

1. The transfer of editorial know-how is important since the day-to-day writing with all the data analysis makes them know the audience. This is essential to determine the appropriate approach when creating content that intends to embrace certain territories.

2. The exploration of new narratives and formats by the publisher is also crucial. As most of those responsible for branded content acknowledge, it is usually in the newsroom where new editorial products are designed, and later offered to brands.

3. They must be up-to-date with the content produced in the newsroom to avoid duplication and align the brands with the content of the newsroom, since in some cases there may be conflicts of interest. In those more niche media, such as those dedicated to the world of fashion or lifestyle, it is common to report on the actions developed to avoid overlaps, especially at certain times of the year when it is conventional to produce content subject to temporality.

In general, those responsible for the departments must stay informed about what is being worked on in the editorial, trying to interfere as little as possible but remaining aware of their planning to anticipate and avoid possible conflicts. Over the years, the media have found the right formula to establish a balance between departments, which favours the creation of increasingly attractive products for brands, since as Jorge Madrid explains:

> "The proposal has the best of the strategy that our CNX agency can contribute, and it has the best of the editorial creativity that our headers can contribute. When joining both teams, what you have is the ideal answer for the client. He needs something relevant to the audience. But it must be also presented in a briefing and needs to meet the objectives of the brand. For this reason, from the concept and content creation to the distribution, there is an absolute connection with each one of the newsrooms" (Verbatim interview, 07/09/2020).

The relationships between the branded content department and the newsroom seem to have entered a phase of maturity and understanding. However, some professionals such as Alejandro Teodoro warn that although the relations occur daily, it is complex as interests often differ. The editorial side focuses on the audience while the business concentrates on revenue. They cannot math their objectives every time. Therefore, these counterweights are often difficult to manage, and it is a great challenge.

In some cases such as CBrands, where there is a structure that enables it to function independently, a dissociated work methodology has been chosen, as Alberto Guzmán explains:

> "I know that in other media they still converge, but our work methodology has enabled us to grow. If you have good journalists and good approaches, there is no need to turn to the newsroom reporter. We have sponsored news, in many days are among the most widely read in the newspaper" (Verbatim 12/10/2019).

3.6. Professional skills and talent recruitment.

In general terms, the majority of professionals comprising the content departments have profiles with a significant background in the media. It is common for those responsible for configuring work teams to use people from the house with a strong bond with the editorial part. Beyond the great value that having a deep knowledge of the editorial line of the medium contributes, it is sought that the profiles in charge of creating content also have a great knowledge of the digital field, since it is essential to understand the new channels, formats and narratives, as Ana Multigner tells us.

> "The fact that the projects marketed within the large groups are on many occasions transversal and multi-channel makes it necessary to have a global knowledge of what the media are, from the radio part to the paper or digital press, since it is about making an impact wherever the audience is" (Verbatim interview, 12/18/2019).

Since they are profiles responsible for developing projects for brands, it is foreseeable that they should incorporate into their competencies those capacities of the world of creativity and advertising agencies, as Jorge Madrid confirms:

> "There is wisdom that has to do with strategy and that applied to the content is very necessary to understand the value of branded content. Another reason we have looked at the world of the creative agency when incorporating talent is to fully understand the communication needs of clients, as it is a legacy of the agency world that we need to incorporate" (Verbatim interview, 07/09/2020).

Alejandro Teodoro goes further when he proclaims a figure that understands its role very well within the business structure. He also remarks that the person who joins the branded content team must have a very clear look at the commercial, being aware of the importance of responding to a briefing that enables closing projects and obtaining investment. In addition, not all content creators, no matter how good they are, can deal with a branded content commission, managing to transform an idea of a brand into quality editorial content, as Ángel Fernández explains.

Due to the media convergence and the profound transformation of the journalistic industry, versatility is another of the most demanded characteristics and emerges in most of the professionals interviewed. Profiles with knowledge in the audiovisual field, able to apply aesthetic criteria in creating pieces, and even stand in front of a camera or work on a voiceover, in addition to having broad skills in communication and journalism, are in demand. The proliferation of tools that enable, from the editing of a video to the elaboration of infographics, and the need to reduce production costs has forced the figure of the journalist to incorporate multidisciplinary knowledge.

Marcus Hurst tells us that we are facing the birth of a new profile since, in a way, the creation of branded content is a niche that requires specialists. According to him, many of the major media do not have these profiles, so they barely know how to do it.

Figure 4. Professional skills sought by the management of the branded content departments of the main Spanish media

In relation to the media.	1. Have a track record within the media, with the ability to address the report. Know how to write, communicate and do editing tasks.
	2. Be familiar with the values and rigour of the reporter when searching for a story.
	3. Deep knowledge of the editorial line to be able to integrate the content to the medium.
	4. Cross-sectional and multi-channel vision, having global knowledge of what the media is.

In relation to brands.	1. Knowledge related to marketing strategies. 2. Capabilities of the world of creativity and advertising agencies to develop lateral thinking and give content a different look. 3. A vision of corporate communication to develop messages and arguments. 4. Well understanding of the communication needs of customers, giving the same importance to the medium as to the advertiser and their objectives. 5. Commercial vision to respond to a briefing that enables closing projects and obtaining investment.
In relation to the new digital channels.	1. Know how to function within networks, understanding new formats and new narratives. 2. Ability to create an audience and social media strategies. 3. Mastery of content production and distribution. 4. Knowledge in the audiovisual field to create pieces following aesthetic criteria, and to even stand in front of a camera or work on a voiceover.

Source: own elaboration based on the conclusions of the investigation

4. Discussion

The importance of this research lies in its approach to an emerging phenomenon that has a significant impact on the media. The changes in recent years have led the media to a new scenario where they must rethink business models, strategies, structures, profiles and work methodologies. The results register a series of consolidated facts that help us understand the main characteristics of the observed phenomenon, yielding a series of fairly precise patterns, which extend to most of the branded content departments analyzed.

On the other hand, a disparity is observed concerning some actions. This compels us to affirm that we face a heterogeneous and constantly evolving phenomenon. We find it hard to establish defining lines applicable to all the departments observed since these are configured according to the particularities of each communication group. This also determines the different formulas employed to improve the processes that enable to obtain results and be more competitive.

Concerning the most common patterns, the fact that most of these departments contain profiles from journalism stands out. It is expected for these professionals to have belonged to the newspaper's newsroom. The consolidated trend is to start from editorial profiles, which are internalizing and understanding the needs of the brands. On rare occasions, the profiles in charge of creating content come from advertising. Knowledge related to the generation of editorial content is a priority, and the ability to understand the dynamics of a communication medium, well above the codes and languages of brand communication. The incorporation of advertising profiles is usually linked to the most strategic and consulting part. Several interviewed proclaim the hybrid formula of brand consultant and copywriter.

The evolution of publishing products has brought about much more complex creation processes that have forced the articulation of multidisciplinary work teams made up of specialized profiles of great value. The most widespread solution to face this demand is to have profiles that offer their services in a transversal way, both to the newsroom and to the business units. These highly technological profiles and connected to new trends are essential for the success of content creation and distribution strategies, whether editorial or for brands.

Despite the fact that the demand for branded content is growing dramatically, most of the media have opted for structural sustained growth, resorting to trusted external collaborators who are in charge of preparing a large part of the content, always under the supervision of those responsible for the project. About audiovisual creation, it is also common to outsource services, especially when looking for higher quality in the execution of the pieces.

If we consider that native advertising relies on the ability of a newspaper to transfer the credibility and reputation of the newsroom to the branded content department, we can affirm that the relationship established between the editorial and the business part is essential. And in this area, we can find the greatest discrepancy in criteria on the level of integration and collaboration that must exist between the different departments. In some media, the involvement of editorial staff in the development of content for brands is still a common practice, while in others, an absolute separation has been preferred, leaving the newsroom on the sidelines of branded content projects. This link has probably been a critical issue regarding the design of the work processes for the development of content for brands since the tensions and conflicts originating between both departments have been persistent.

The professionals interviewed convey the feeling that the present is a moment of balance. The branded content departments achieved work processes that help preserve the space and independence of the newsroom. Likewise, the newsroom knows how important is to contribute to the correct development of new business models. Therefore, collaboration in the supervision of content is regular.

It should also be mentioned that the disparity of the analyzed media in terms of dimensions or trajectory has provided a varied representation of models. Even sharing important features about structure, the profiles included, and their work methodologies, draw a scenario full of variables and combinations. From totally autonomous structures that reclaim agency entity and seek to extend their scope of action beyond the medium, to others much more dependent on it, described as one more department.

5. Conclusions

The research shows an emerging phenomenon in consolidation, where those responsible for leading the different processes are immersed in a phase of constant search based in many cases on trial/error. Some interviewees speak about the need to hybridize professional profiles to find a new figure specialized in creating branded content. This gives us an idea of the moment of exploration where they are.

Both because of the novelty of the question analyzed and its enormous growth potential within a highly changeable environment, we can affirm that we are facing a line of research that will require constant study. To know how the media

confront challenges in the search for the viability of publishing projects, we must pay attention to both the redefinition of structures and the probable appearance of new profiles crucial in implementing new strategies. This implies the obligation to incorporate skills, methodologies and work processes never seen before.

6. Acknowledgments

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