

Transformation of the advertising art director in the local context *Transformación del director de arte publicitario en el contexto local*

Claudia Vélez Ochoa; claudia.velezochoa@upb.edu.co; Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (Colombia); Omar Muñoz Sánchez; omar.munoz@upb.edu.co; Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (Colombia); Maria Camila Cardona Elorza; camila.cardonae@upb.edu.co; Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (Colombia); Sofía Velásquez Valencia; sofia.velasquez@upb.edu.co; Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (Colombia)

Abstract

This study is intended to make an approach to the background of the director of advertising art in the city of Medellín between 2000 and 2019. This will define the skills of this profile used in the local advertising industry where definitions related to the history of trade and the industry in Medellín are found. In addition, establish advertising behaviour in the city from the mid-twentieth century to the present. The transformation of this professional's practices into multinational, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro agencies, including design studies, will be briefly analyzed.

Keywords

Art direction; progress; city; advertising industry

Resumen

Con este estudio se quiere realizar un acercamiento del trayecto desde el 2000 hasta el 2019 del director de arte publicitario en la ciudad de Medellín. Con lo anterior, se definirán las aptitudes de este perfil aprovechadas en la industria publicitaria local donde se encuentran definiciones relacionada con la historia del comercio y la industria de Medellín. Además, establecer la conducta publicitaria en la ciudad desde mediados del siglo XX hasta la actualidad. Se analizará brevemente la transformación de las prácticas que desempeña este profesional en agencias multinacionales, PYMES y micro; donde se incluyen los estudios de diseño.

Palabras clave

Dirección de arte; progreso; ciudad; industria publicitaria

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INTRODUCTION

The role of an art director has become fundamental in advertising, so it is so important to give it value, not compare it with other profiles, or believe that others can perform the same work. The relevance of this profile is based on the fact that people are becoming more visual and brands must migrate to build their proposals based on the image, being the visual creative the key element to achieve it, Roca, Wilson, Barrios & Muñoz-Sánchez (2017) state that: «The individuals' self-construction influences their behaviour across the different social domains in which they reside». (p.834)

Art direction comprises the existence of a direct relationship between art and other concepts, such as beauty that directly affects the effectiveness of the pieces produced. Tatarkiewicz (1997) indicates that the relationship between art and beauty has changed significantly over the years. In 1750 there was a transformation between the ancient concept of beauty by a modern one where are meant producing beauty. Different authors have tried to define this word, coming as Tatarkiewicz describes, to three different conceptions of this word, but only the one that had the most impact on history will be explained: beauty in a purely aesthetic sense that only understood what an aesthetic experience achieved, including from mental products, to colours and sounds.

What this definition describes is that for a creation to be considered beautiful, it should create through its elements an experience in the viewer that would lead to admire the work. This is important to the advertising art director as he must understand that each element included in a composition can add or subtract to the aesthetic experience that the viewer has once faced the creation.

Understanding in aesthetics and art resides in the sensitivity of the art director; this is an element of possibly infer in what is meant to be communicated. In this manner, aestheticism is expressed in the attractiveness of the advertising piece, this is achieved through visual exploration, a fundamental fact that this creative turns into an experience linked to new sensations where the consumer updates his interpretation. It then occurs, a unique link where aesthetics and art clear through the sensitivity of structured knowledge, giving a wealth of experiences proper to the visual creative. His knowledge of beauty with his expressive competence gives significant new constructions from the information he brings to visual communication (Vélez-Ochoa, Rom, & Muñoz-Sánchez, 2021, p.30).

Each colour, shape or sound that you use must be aligned with a search for harmony in the outcome so that a production that meets this definition of beauty is achieved. Elements such as “the content of thought, expression, degree of seriousness, moral integrity, individuality and non-commercial purpose” come into consideration here (Tatarkiewicz, 1997, p.54). This non-commercial purpose would later evolve to become a work of art to production for monetary purposes.

The demarcation line between fine arts and mass commercial production, although established long ago, has never been perfect. The cabaret posters of a Toulouse Lautrec or the cartoons of a Daumier are not simply borderline cases but works of art of the highest quality (Tatarkiewicz, 1997, p.55).

Understanding the relationship that has existed between art and commercial production allows us to understand a little more thoroughly how close the work of the advertising art director is to art. This is because the creations it makes will, for the most part, have lucrative purposes that benefit a brand or the agency to which it belongs. It can then be understood that the work of this professional has always been linked to economic and business achievement.

LOCAL ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

It is almost impossible to define a precise moment in history where it can be accurately said what is the beginning of advertising in Antioquia. “Publicists who have written or intended to write a “history of advertising” ..., are hasty, seen where any economic communication is automatically referred to as advertising” (García, 2012, p.105). Therefore, advertising will not be

specifically discussed, but some terms will be used to define the context of communication in Antioquia, and it will begin since advertising practices became evident.

One of the authors who better describes and interprets the beginnings of this work was used as a guide, according to García (2012), the 1920s in Antioquia, from the perspective of the economy and companies, can be considered a time of foundations and small businesses' mergers, thus, the 1920s being the emergence of advertising, where what was offered was a market that relied on what we today we call the family basket of goods, the agricultural products of the *Aburrá* Valley, and the department of Antioquia. In this sense, this decade marks the need for this profession or the most similar to it in the economic field.

It is preferred to be named as economic communications, in the form of commercial advertisements (ads) instead of advertising, since social life, economy, politics and culture revolve around the agricultural and livestock society, therefore, advertisements were used in which consumers were not specified, nor was consumption and purchase encouraged, but simply informed where they could be purchased. It is then at this time that the appearance of the suspected advertising begins, without being able to call it directly so because it lacked several factors to endow it with this name; that is why García (2012) mentions, there was talk of commercial advertisement, where which respect to the design, bullets, heraldries, figurative and caricature prevailed but the consumer or those to whom they were addressed did not matter enough yet.

Between that decade and today, many differences can be found from what we currently name as advertising and previously as commercial ads. This is not intended to detract from the work previously done by advertisers, but according to García (2012) what we want to demonstrate are the shortcomings of the commercial ads concerning modern advertising, since the consumer's ignorance was notorious if we compare it with today's educated consumer, who has as its disposal the necessary information for any doubt that arises regarding products and ads.

Another difference between current and past advertising is that good prior research is now considered necessary and essential to creating an advert, a commercial or a campaign, while in the last century, this was not crucial, since it only mattered to inform the price and to mention where a certain product or service could be purchased.

Good advertising texts come only from effective and genuine research (from consumers); "inconsistent brilliance" (...) must be avoided. But product research is not enough. Consumers also need to be investigated. (García, 2012, p.57)

As the years go on, advertisements begin to be more complete, there was more concern about consumers and aesthetics; the advertiser began to take their advertising to another level and was backed up by science and research. By the 1930s, industrial warning begins to be discussed, justification becomes more necessary and consumers need to believe more, they no longer care about aesthetics and from this point onwards texts are graphically backed up by scientists with their respective instruments. The advertisements start having the clearest information in their messages, the "scientific" gave support of a knowledge to ensure consumption (García, 2012). This was to achieve more credibility by the consumer and the advertisers who found means to start making more reliable products or services through the research that was carried out a priori to start with graphic production.

Over the years, advertisers realized they had to evolve. García (2012) rescues that for the 1940s product advertisement arises, since, in commercial and industrial ads, communication tended to be economic and not so advertising regarding product's characteristics and brand relevance. In this decade where the National Association of Industrialists (ANDI for its Spanish acronyms) and the National Federation of Merchants (FENALCO for its Spanish acronyms) are created; industrial production in Medellín is also consolidated. In the post-war period of World War II, Colombia was linked to international capitalism and the mid-1940s is considered the golden age for Antioquia's industry and entrepreneurs.

In the commercial sense, the radio was the ideal media in the second phase and for the consolidation of industrialization and urbanism in the 1940s to broadcast its

messages for the main Colombian urban centres; Medellín was not detached from this phenomenon (García, 2012, p.169).

It is understood that industrial companies began to be clear about the purpose of the radio for commercial, propaganda and ideological purposes, which was achieved because of socio-cultural changes, the scope and the impact it had, which over time made this media to be linked to consumption. As mentioned by García (2012), in the 1940's the printed media became relevant, they were already called product ads and were some of the most outstanding brands of the time such as: *Coltejer, Fabricato, Nacional de Chocolates, Gaseosas Postobón, Galletas Noel, Imusa, Cervecería Unión, La Suramericana de Seguros, Esso, Chocolate Luker and Pilsen*.

The 1950s corresponds to the producers' ads, which can be understood as the economic propaganda of the political economy; is at this time that publicists, advertisers and the public begin to separate advertising from propaganda as two economic communications with different purposes and ideologies.

By the 1960s, the search for foreign markets began, but it is only at the end of the time when you could talk about advertising. One of the most significant changes is that is no longer known as producers' ads but as ads. Is at that time that low-cost communications no longer advertise with the sole intention of selling, but begin to consider demand as their focus. By the end of this century and the beginning of the 1970s, it began to be tentatively talked about consumer's market research and thus, about modern advertising.

What used to be called propaganda offices and advertising offices began to be transformed into advertising agencies as they are currently known, each with its respective departments, with clear functions for each employee and with professionals in each subject. These modern advertising agencies began to grow as the supply of goods and services expanded (García, 2012). Nowadays, we find countless agencies and design studios that have been born thanks to the advances that have been made regarding the relationship between advertiser and consumer.

It can be said that the role of a creative in an advertising agency can vary and be understood and implemented in various manners. As explained by Ochoa (2017), the size and of the agency can determine the director of arts' skills and workflow, it is not the same to work in a large agency such as in a group like WPP which groups companies such as Leo Burnett, Ogilvy, Young & Rubicam, etc., where processes are more structured, departments more established as well as each professional's functions, to what it is working for an independent agency such as Mr Freeman, 3 AWWW, M&C, among others, where profiles must be multipurpose, since they do not have a great capacity for hiring, so the fields of influence of each professional must be more flexible, making them fulfil and cover tasks specific to another department. The art directors of independent agencies, small or micro, are the ones who must have the greatest ability to adapt because they have to fill tasks of other profiles taking over greater responsibility and commitments within and outside the company.

METHODOLOGY

Taking up the aims of the research, the exercise is approached from the qualitative perspective, developed from a phenomenological interpretative approach; since "(...) qualitative research provides depth to the data, dispersion, interpretative richness, contextualization of the environment or environment, details and unique experiences. It also provides a "fresh, natural and holistic" view of phenomena as well as flexibility" (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2014, p. 16). For this reason, it is qualitative research, as it seeks to analyse, deepen and examine the phenomenon of study from its daily life.

Emphasizing the study units, this research includes art directors from the city of Medellín, taking DDB and Havas (Multinationals), Conker (SMEs) and Invade (Micro), among others, as reference. To classify the business size of the companies mentioned above, reference was made to the second article of Law 905 of 2004, mentioned in previous paragraphs. According to this, micro has no more than 10 workers, SME has no more than 100 workers, and multinational belongs to another country. The approach was achieved through structured interviews

with descriptive scope, a tool that “aims to measure and collect information independently or jointly about the concepts or variables to which they refer; that is its objective is not to indicate how these relate” (s.n., 2010, para. 26), that is, it is not intended to indicate the relationship of the variables, but only to describe them to obtain information that allows responding to the research. This information allowed the characterization of the profile of the art director in Medellín’s advertising agencies or design studios from 2000 to 2019.

To carry out this qualitative research there are various techniques such as interviews, focus groups, observation, ethnography, among others. The instrument chosen to complete this research was the interview, which

(...) it is an unstructured way through which collect extensive information and record unexpected variables. From the interaction provided by the interview, a great deal of data can be obtained on subjects, on which the interviewees have direct knowledge. (Chicharro, 2003, p. 5)

Regarding the size of the sample in qualitative research, the theory explains that it should not be random and that a significant proportion should be kept against the population of interest, as long as it is some cases that allows reaching clear conclusions. The systematization of the information was achieved through categories of analysis that included their knowledge of art and aesthetics, working methodologies, work experience, size of the workplace, among other variables. These results were collected and analysed by the Atlas Ti software.

RESULTS

We then start with the analysis of the results. The interviews had questions related to the art director’s knowledge and skills. His knowledge of the history of the Medellín industry and the transformation of this profile into this century was also investigated.

For the vast majority, the art directors interviewed indicate that there are visual elements of composition that allow them the successful development of the pieces, but for each one, it varies because they ensure that they always depend on the ultimate purpose of communication. They work constantly hand in hand with elements such as colour, texture, typography, diagramming, hierarchies, resting spaces, format, among others; which are necessary tools to achieve proportion and movement in the different advertising pieces.

For visual creatives, inspiration has been an argued topic and it is clear that it is still today. For many, inspiration simply comes at the perfect timing, when you talk about the inspiration you also talk about references; that is, of creative habits, those daily activities carried out to feed and expand their knowledge in visual aesthetics. The interviewees consider that you should nourish yourself from art daily so as not to end up doing the same thing and especially to give an impact. Thanks to the accelerated change in trends, these creatives adapt themselves, reflecting the importance of coping with frustration and mistakes, recognising art direction as an extremely complex and rigorous work where, fortunately, rewards are eminent.

Concerning knowledge about the history of the Medellín industry and the transformation of this profile today, it was found that most of the interviewees agree that advertising in the city has grown thanks to the advances of the industry. It concurred that Medellín is in its best time and has a creative and promising industry where small enterprises are having a considerable boom and recognised companies are beginning to reach this city. This has caused large agencies to migrate to Medellín and new design studios or small agencies to start emerging.

On the other hand, concerning the current situation, the importance of this profile in the agency is assumed, because it is the one in charge of the designers, understanding their skills and abilities for greater and better productivity. They agree that you need a head, a leader who knows how to guide, direct and get the best results and who achieves it is the art director, in other words, the aesthetic creative must stop doing so much and direct more. The evolution of this creative responds to social and technological changes bringing an evolution in its knowledge to new resources embodied in other media making a big difference in the tasks addressed in multinationals or SMEs, associating workload with the size of the company.

CONCLUSIONS

The local advertising art director moves forward according to the industrial activation of this new century. This is partly the result of technology, but above all by the birth of the local industry, which is quite powerful, thriving with precise provisions that multinational agencies failed to meet in the requested times.

It could be said that, at the end of the twentieth century, the advertising agencies recognised in Colombia were mostly located in its capital; Bogotá, being headquarters to the large national companies, producing the largest economy in the country. Equivalent to the above, the economy in the city of Medellín started great improvements, with it the emergence of small companies of different sectors, characterizing a more entrepreneurial city and with these new needs were generated, and different consumer profiles responding to new forms and formats in communication were recognised. Therefore, the economic development in the city of Medellín is closely linked to the growth of the creative and advertising industry, causing the emergence of small companies called: design studios that, in turn, are available to local companies in different sectors that seek quality advertising services but are not at the level of a multinational agency because they do not have the capital to invest large sums of money. This opened the path for advertising activity to be decentralized and for clients to be allowed to have agencies that understood the context of the city's market and its niches.

As for the local advertising industry, different agents that make up the sector such as advertising companies can be found, whether they are small, medium and large advertising companies or multinationals, or design studios that are mostly small or medium-sized. Within these two protagonists is the profile of the art director, who has been called in different manners, in some cases, named as creative director or graphic creative. Although it could be understood that it is the same profile regardless of the size of the agencies or design studios, they do not always perform the same tasks and this is possible due to variables such as the production capacities, work team size, or budget. This is why when the art director has a small team or even when is the only one in the team, or has a very low budget, he cannot devote himself mainly to directing, but to carry out the works related to visual communication. In contrast, when this professional has a great work team, projects covering more needs or has a large budget, becomes a project leader who must delegate tasks, since he has the possibility of having expert professionals for every need.

Finally, the behaviour of advertising in the city from the mid-twentieth century to the present day has had noticeable changes in all its areas, especially in the importance that the consumer and the aesthetics within the industry begins to have; that is, advertisers now demand high-quality visual pieces and consumers are attracted to them. It is at this point that the art director begins to be supported by academia and research.

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