

Advertising Pressure on Newspaper Gatekeepers

Lorena BUSTO SALINAS
Universidad de Burgos
lbusto@ubu.es

Recibido: 26/10/2012

Aceptado: 23/01/2013

Abstract

Due to the cost of mounting a global advertising campaign in a crisis environment and the limitation of advertising as a credible source of information, advertising rates -especially in newspapers- have shirked considerably in recent years. Some researchers have open the discussion if gatekeepers benefit advertisers by accepting more press releases and divulgating them with a better position as a way to maintain a reliable source of income. To prove this hypothesis, the press releases, the news stories and the advertisements of nine companies in six different Spanish newspapers during two months have been studied. Results show, among other things, that as newspapers' circulation raises, the number of advertisements increases, and so does the number of advertisers' press releases that are published.

Keywords: advertising, public relations, press releases, media analysis.

El peso de la publicidad en las informaciones periodísticas

Resumen

Debido al alto coste de las campañas publicitarias en la actual crisis económica y la limitación de la publicidad como fuente creíble de información, el gasto publicitario -sobre todo en los periódicos- ha disminuido considerablemente en los últimos años. Por ello, algunos estudiosos han abierto el debate sobre si los diarios benefician a sus anunciantes aceptando más notas de prensa y colocándolas en mejores posiciones dentro de sus páginas. Para comprobar esta hipótesis, se han analizado las notas de prensa, las informaciones y los anuncios de nueve compañías en seis periódicos españoles de diferentes características. Los resultados muestran, entre otras cosas, que a medida que aumenta la tirada del diario, el número de espacios publicitarios se incrementa y, con ello, el porcentaje de notas de prensa publicadas.

Palabras clave: publicidad, relaciones públicas, notas de prensa, análisis de prensa.

Referencia normalizada

BUSTO SALINAS, Lorena (2013): "Advertising pressure on newspaper gatekeepers". *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*. Vol. 19, Núm. especial marzo, págs.: 75-84. Madrid, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad Complutense.

Summary: 1. Introduction; 1.1. Advertising; 1.2. The fall of advertising; 1.3. The raise of public relations; 1.4. The press release as a way to disseminate information; 1.5. Relation between press releases and advertising. 2. Methodology. 3. Development; 3.1. Advertisements in newspapers; 3.2. Press releases sent; 3.3. Press releases published; 3.4. Relation between press releases published and advertising; 3.5. Differences between advertisers and non-advertisers in news stories' characteristics; 4. Conclusions. 5. References.

1. Introduction

1.1. Advertising

Communication departments have several ways to divulgate a message to the public through the mass media. It can make use of press conferences, news releases, pitch letters, press dossiers, media tours, public announcements... However, the most controlled technique is through advertising. It consists on a "paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action now or in the future" (Richards and Curran, 2002). The organization cre-

ates an ad, decides about its composition, and controls where and when it will be published. In other words, advertisements are a space rental in the mass media (Wilcox and Cameron, 2011).

Consumers are exposed daily to a high number of advertisement; in the United States, for example, 2.000 (Bassat, 2009: 36). Thereby, an advertising campaign must stand out from the others and be seductive, as the most appealing ads sell more (Bassat, 2009: 40-43). According to Himpe (2006), the new ways for connecting with consumers have four elements in common: “proximity, exclusivity, invisibility and unpredictability”. It is also important for an ad to have added value (Eguizábal Maza, 2007: 120).

All advertising agencies search for creativeness in their ads, that is to say, they look for the most original and newest ways to divulgate a message (Ries and Ries, 2004). They also seek a way to make art out of the announcement. Actually, Bassat (2009: 33) defines advertising as “the art of convincing consumers”. Doing this, advertisers sometimes force a message that is not what consumers are expecting and forget that, in order to be effective, advertising do not need creativeness, but credibility (Ries and Ries, 2004).

1.2. The fall of advertising

This lack of credibility is contributing to the fall of advertising investments for several years (see, for example, Nielsen Wire data from 2009). Although some countries maintain or even slightly increase their advertising expenditures (Nielsen Wire, 2012), others, like Spain, continue with a falling tendency. The drop in this country from 2011 compared to 2010 is -8.2% according to some sources (Arce Media and Media Hotline, 2012) and -6.0% according to others (InfoAdex, 2012). Newspapers are the outlets that suffer a deeper decrease: -12.9% (Arce Media and Media Hotline, 2012) or -14% (InfoAdex, 2012).

The drop of advertising rates in newspapers is due to several reasons. One of them is the global economic crisis, which has affected the number of advertisements in newspapers and has open the discussion about the balance of their information (de Lara González, 2011).

Wilcox (2006) adds another three main reasons, the first of them being the cost of mounting a global advertising campaign (usually a multi-million dollar investment). Secondly, as said by Wilcox, advertising has suffered a decreasing penetration in recent years, as media around the world have been “fragmented and audiences in any particular medium have been shrinking”. Finally, the limitation of advertising as a credible source of information have contributed to the recently fall of advertising.

Advertising raising costs, linked to the fall of products prizes due to competitiveness, do not help either (Ries and Ries, 2004). Neither the large number of advertisements. Years ago, when there was little advertising, the advertisements were intentionally observed and afterwards commented (Ries and Ries, 2004). Now, people sometimes search for ways to avoid it or, at least, select or ignore the ones they want (Bassat, 2009: 36).

1.3. The raise of public relations

As a way to disseminate information with a more credible appearance, public relations has grown considerably in recent years. The expansion has been so significant in number of agencies, practitioners, researchers, body of knowledge, ethics and professionalism, among other things (Wilcox, 2006), that some academics think organizations “cannot survive without effective public relations” (Kirat, 2005).

Although advertising and public relations may complement each other (Fernández Souto, 2006), this last practice is much broader: “Public relations embraces everyone and everything, whereas advertising is limited to selling and buying tasks such as promoting goods and services, buying supplies and recruiting staff” (Jefkins, 1980).

Public relations is the “management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2000), or, more simply, it is the “management of communication between an organization and its publics” (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

1.4. The press release as a way to disseminate information

The tools employed by public relations departments are numerous, for instance, brochures, bulletin boards, suggestion boxes, interviews, press conferences, open days, intranet, social media, blogs, wikis... [see, for example, Wilcox and Cameron (2011), Xifra (2007), Springston and Weaver (2005), Rojas (2008), Palencia-Lefler (2011) and Esparcia (2006)]. However, the press release is one of the most employed and simple methods to disseminate a message to the media. It is a short informative text sent by an organization to the mass media with the aim of being disseminated as unchanged as possible and without monetary compensation.

In order to be published by the media as unchanged as possible, a press release should be elaborated in the same way as a journalist would; that is to say, it has to meet journalism writing guidelines (Busto Salinas, 2012a). In addition, it should be personalized according to the characteristics of each media outlet (Busto Salinas, 2012b).

Press releases have a tremendous and increasing repercussion in the news stories covered by the media, either directly or indirectly. Whereas in 1978 only 30% of the stories covered by newspapers came from this tool, in 1992 the number raised to 52%. Moreover, some researchers think this percentage has been continuously growing, till the point that in the early XXI century it may have reached 80% (Elías, 2003). In Britain, for example, 81% of the stories divulged by the media come from press releases (Entwistle, 1995), whereas in Spain some researchers claim it is 83% (Villafañe, Bustamante and Prado, 1987).

1.5. Relation between press releases and advertising

Some researchers have opened the discussion if newspapers, due to their current economic difficulties, benefit organizations that insert advertising in their pages. In 2009, for example, Rinallo and Basuroy (2009) argued that editors give more consideration to advertisers' products and services than to non-advertiser. Choi and Park (2011), for their part, state that journalists consider advertising when selecting or rejecting press

releases, but only partially. For instance, local newspapers give more consideration to advertisers than national ones. In addition, news articles based on press releases from advertisers that put a high amount of advertisements are longer than those coming from non-advertisers.

2. Methodology

The aim of this research is to prove if Spanish newspapers benefit advertisers rather than non-advertisers. For that, it has been studied if advertising influences the number of press releases published, as well as other important aspects of the divulgation, such as the length of the news story, the inclusion of a photograph, its presence in front page, etc.

In order to achieve these objectives, the press releases sent to the mass media, the news stories published from these documents and the advertisements inserted in six newspapers by nine different companies during the period of February and March 2012 have been analyzed.

The companies belong to different economic sectors. These firms are ING Direct, Línea Directa and Mutua Madrileña (from the finance sector), Telefónica, Vodafone and France Télécom (from telecommunication and the internet sector) and Hewlett Packard, Microsoft and Apple (from office suppliers and commerce). These entities are among the top five advertisers in their sectors (Asociación de Revistas de Información (ARI), 2012).

The six Spanish newspapers selected have different characteristics and are located in different places in Spain. These are two national: *El País* and *ABC*; two regional: *El Periódico* and *El Día*; and two locals: *Deia* and *Córdoba*.

The news releases were obtained from the virtual press sites of the web pages of the companies, whereas the news stories and the advertisements were searched and selected manually from their online libraries. Finally, 151 press releases, 61 news stories and 175 advertisements were examined. The statistics program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used and several tests were driven to check if there is any correlation between the three elements.

3. Development

3.1. Advertisements in newspapers

ING Direct is the firm that inserted more advertisements in the newspapers studied (57), followed by Línea Directa Aseguradora (52). In fact, these two entities accumulate a total of 62.3% of all advertisements. France Télécom is located in third position in number of advertisements (25), followed by Vodafone (20), Telefónica (19) and HP (2). Neither Apple, Microsoft nor Mutua Madrileña have paid for newspapers spaces.

The proportion of advertisers in national newspapers is almost the same than the general data [in this order, ING Direct (54), Línea Directa (44), Vodafone (14), France Télécom (10), Telefónica (7) and HP (1)]. It is not, however, in regional and local publishers. The advertisers in regional are, in this order: Línea Directa (8), Telefónica (8), Vodafone (6), ING Direct (3), France Télécom (2) and HP (1). Local newspapers, on the contrary, have only obtained advertisements from France Télécom (13) and Telefónica (4). In sum, companies inserted 130 advertisements in national newspapers,

28 in regional and 17 in local. In conclusion, the firms analyzed include many more advertisements as newspaper's circulation rises.

3.2. Press releases sent

Advertising does not seem to be related to publicity, as all nine companies analyzed in this research have dispatched press releases to the mass media, whereas only six have introduced advertisements. Indeed, the number of advertisements of each company do not relate to the number of press releases sent. The firm with more press releases dispatched is Microsoft (48). Telefónica is positioned in second place (25), followed by Vodafone (18), HP (16) and France Télécom (14). On the last positions of the list are Apple and Mutua Madrileña (9 each) and Línea Directa and ING Direct (6 each).

3.3. Press releases published

As proved in previous researches, a high number of press releases do not relate to a high number of them being published. For example, Microsoft, which sent 48 press releases, only seen 4 published (8.3%). On the contrary, Apple, which only dispatched 9, had 8 published (88.9%), becoming the company with a higher percentage of press releases accepted. Mutua Madrileña stands in second place, with 5 out of the 9 press releases published (55.6%). On the contrary, ING Direct (with 6 documents sent), Línea Directa (6) and HP (16) have no stories published in the newspapers analyzed.

3.4. Relation between press releases published and advertising

Taking into consideration all the newspapers as a whole, there is no relation between the press releases accepted and advertising. In other words, in general, putting a high number of advertisements in Spanish newspapers do not mean that their journalists would publicize more news releases. For example, ING Direct and Línea Directa, which are the companies with more advertisements, have no press releases published. Quite the opposite happens with Apple and Mutua Madrileña, for example. Neither of them inserted advertisements in the period studied, but their percentage of news releases divulgated, as seen earlier, are 88.9% and 55.6%, respectively. Microsoft, although did not either pay for newspaper space, only saw 8.3% of their news published. The rest of the entities are on average, as can be seen in table 1:

Company	Number of advertisements	Percentage of press releases published %
ING Direct	57	0
Línea Directa	52	0
France Télécom	25	14.3
Vodafone	20	16.7
Telefónica	19	28.0
HP	2	0
Apple	0	88.9
Microsoft	0	8.3
Mutua Madrileña	0	55.6

Table 1. Press releases published by company compared to its advertising rate.
Source: own preparation.

Although it seems like advertising do not have an influence on the number of press releases published taking into consideration all the newspapers as a whole, results do not show the same situation dividing the newspapers by geographic circulation. In this case, it seems like as circulation grows, the number of advertisements rises and, with them, the number of news stories covered. Local newspapers, with only 17 advertisements, have a 5.25% rate of press releases published. Regional gatekeepers, who had 28 ads, divulgated 6.95% of the news releases received. The group with a higher rate of documents published (9.6%) is also the group with a higher number of advertisements: national newspapers. These results can be seen in table 2.

Geographic distribution	Number of advertisements	Percentage of press releases published %
Local	17	5.25
Regional	28	6.95
National	130	9.60

Table 2. Press releases published compared to advertising rates depending on newspapers' circulation. Source: own preparation.

3.5. Differences between advertisers and non-advertisers in news stories' characteristics

Apart from the mere publication of news stories, we have also studied if advertising rates have an influence on other important aspects of the divulgation, like, for example, its presence in front page. However, as none of the press releases analyzed have been published in front page, this idea has been rejected.

Another aspect considered is the presence of the story in odd or even page. Results show no continuous trend. For example, France Télécom (the third company in number of advertisements, with 25) has its 3 news releases divulgated in odd page, but Telefónica, with only four advertisements less, has more stories in even page (52.4%) than odd (47.6%), whereas Microsoft (with no advertisements) have 60% of its stories in odd page.

There are no relation either between advertising rates and the extension of the press release published. Telefónica, for example, has the largest news stories, but it is the penultimate in number of advertisements. On the contrary, Apple did not insert any advertisement and obtained the second most extensive stories, whereas France Télécom, the first company in number of advertisements with at least one press release published has the shortest stories in newspapers. There are no significant differences either between advertising and extension of the press release dividing the newspapers by geographic circulation.

The inclusion of photographs and their extension does not change considerably between advertisers and non advertisers. Telefónica, for example, which accounts 10.86% of all advertisements, obtained 71.43% of its stories with an image, although other companies with no advertisements, such as Mutua Madrileña or Apple, have a percentage of 80% and 87.5%, respectively.

The inclusion of the company's name in a story headline can be a possible way for

newspapers to please its advertisers. However, results show no relation between advertisers and non advertisers in this case. For example, France Télécom and Telefónica (both advertisers) have a mention rate of 100% and 85.7%, which are very high, but Vodafone (also advertiser) only have a percentage of 33.3%. On the other hand, Mutua Madrileña and Apple (non advertisers) obtain 80% and 50% of their stories with their names in the headline. There are no significant differences either separating newspapers by geographic circulation. Nonetheless, it seems like, in general, the smaller the newspaper's diffusion is, the more likely it is to see the organization's name in the headline. The percentage of the national, regional and local are, in this order: 61.9%, 68.25% and 70.85%.

Maintaining the idea of the original headline in the final title would also constitute a way to please advertisers. Results show that as newspapers' circulation grows and as also raises the number of advertisements, the probabilities of having the same ideas in both headlines increases. In other words, national newspapers, which receive considerably more advertisements, tend to repeat the original headline's idea more often than regional or local publishers, which receive much less advertisements. Respectively, the number of news stories divulgated with the same idea in the headline by each group of newspapers is: 62.1%, 57.1% and 43.7%. However, not every single company in every single newspaper is beneficiated by this rule, as results show that it is a general rule.

4. Conclusions

Contrary to the initial suppositions of this study, big newspapers are more likely to please their advertisers than do small newspapers. Results of this research show that as newspapers' circulation raises, the number of advertisements increases, and so does the number of advertisers' press releases that are published. Big newspapers are also more likely to repeat the idea of the original headline in the news story divulgated.

There have not been found differences, nonetheless, between advertisers and non-advertisers in other aspects related to the divulgation of the press release, no matter the circulation of the publisher. This is the case of the extension of the news piece, and the probability to have photographs accompanying the story and their extension. Advertisers have not either more chances to see their names in the newspapers headlines or having their stories covered in odd page (although it is more probable that this may happen in small newspapers).

However, taking into consideration the results of this research in general, it can be stated that newsworthiness continues to be one of the main aspects considered when selecting press releases. Furthermore, sending a high amount of news releases does not imply that they will be more easily divulgated.

5. References

ARCE MEDIA and MEDIA HOTLINE (2012): "Índice inversión publicitaria. Enero-diciembre 2011", in *Arce Media*: <http://www.arcemedia.es/images/i2p2011.pdf>. [Accessed on: 3 August 2012].

- ASOCIACIÓN DE REVISTAS DE INFORMACIÓN (ARI) (2012): “Inversión publicitaria general”, in: http://www.revistas-ari.com/attachments/article/317/ARI-Inversion_Publicitaria_General_2011.pdf. [Accessed on: 8 September 2012].
- BASSAT, Luis (2009): *El libro rojo de la publicidad (ideas que mueven montañas)*. 9 ed. Barcelona, Debolsillo.
- BUSTO SALINAS, Lorena (2012a): “Aplicación de la teoría de la redacción periodística a la nota de prensa”. *Revista de Comunicación Vivat Academia*, nº 118. Madrid, Facultad de Ciencias de la Información de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, pp. 102-121.
- BUSTO SALINAS, Lorena (2012b): “Uso y modificación de las notas de prensa dependiendo de las características de los periódicos”. *Revista de Comunicación Vivat Academia*, nº 117. Madrid, Facultad de Ciencias de la Información de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, pp. 63-76.
- CHOI, Jinbong and PARK, Sanghee (2011): “Influence of advertising on acceptance of press releases”. *Public Relations Review*, nº 37. London, Elsevier, pp. 106-108.
- CUTLIP, Scott M.; CENTER, Allen H. and BROOM, Glen M. (2000): *Effective public relations*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall.
- DE LARA GONZÁLEZ, Alicia (2011): “El peso del contenido publicitario en la prensa alicantina: El caso del diario Información y La Verdad”. *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación Social*, nº 2. Alicante, Departamento de Comunicación y Psicología Social de la Universidad de Alicante, pp. 59-71.
- EGUIZÁBAL MAZA, Raúl (2007): *Teoría de la publicidad*. 2ª ed. Madrid, Cátedra.
- ELÍAS, Carlos (2003): “Adaptación de la metodología de ‘observación participante’ al estudio de los gabinetes de prensa como fuentes periodísticas”. *Empiria: Revista de Metodología de Ciencias Sociales*, nº 6. Madrid, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), pp. 145-162.
- ENTWISTLE, Vikki (1995): “Reporting research in medical journals and newspapers”. *BMJ*, nº 310, issue 6984. Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 920-923.
- FERNÁNDEZ SOUTO, Ana Belén (2006): “Las relaciones públicas como elemento tangencial entre la publicidad, propaganda, información y otras áreas de la comunicación”. *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*, nº 196. Ciudad de México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, pp. 159-172.
- GRUNIG, James E. and HUNT, Todd (1984): *Managing public relations*. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- HIMPE, Tom (2006): *Advertising is dead: Long life advertising!* London, Thames & Hudson.
- INFOADEX (2012): “Estudio InfoAdex de la inversión publicitaria en España 2011”, in *Asociación de agencias de medios*: <http://www.agenciasdemedios.com/pdf/LIBRO%20COMPLETO%20ESTUDIO%20INVERSIONES%202011.pdf>. [Accessed on: 8 September 2012].

- JEFKINS, Frank (1980): *Public relations*. London, Macdonald & Evans LTD.
- KIRAT, Mohamed (2005): "Public relations practice in the Arab world: A critical assessment". *Public Relations Review*, n° 31. London, Elsevier, pp. 323-332.
- NIELSEN WIRE (2009): "Ad spending in U.S. down 11.5 percent in first three quarters of 2009", in *Nielsen Blog*: <http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/consumer/adspending-in-u-s-down-11-5-percent-in-first-three-quarters-of-2009/> [Accessed on: 5 August 2012].
- NIELSEN WIRE (2012): "2011 closed with 7.3 percent increase in global advertising spend", in *Nielsen Blog*: <http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/consumer/2011-closed-with-7-3-percent-increase-in-global-advertising-spend> [Accessed on: 5 August 2012].
- PALENCIA-LEFLER, Manuel (2011): *90 técnicas de comunicación y relaciones públicas*. 2ª ed. Barcelona, Profit Editorial.
- RICHARDS, Jeff I. and CURRAN, Catherine M. (2002): "Oracles on 'advertising': Searching for a definition". *Journal of Advertising*, n° 31, vol. 2. Austin, American Academy of Advertising, pp. 63-77.
- RIES, Al and RIES, Laura (2004): *The fall of advertising and the rise of PR*. New York, HarperCollins.
- RINALLO, Diego and BASUROY, Suman (2009): "Does advertising spending influence media coverage of the advertiser?" *Journal of Marketing*, n° 53. American Marketing Association, pp. 33-46.
- ROJAS, Octavio (2008): *Relaciones públicas: la eficacia de la influencia*. 2ª ed. Madrid, Escuela Superior de Gestión Comercial y Marketing, ESIC.
- SPRINGSTON, Jeffrey K. and WEAVER LARISCY, Ruth Ann (2005): "Public relations effectiveness in public health institutions". *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, n° 28, vol. 2. Randallstown (Maryland), Southern Public Administration Education Foundation, pp. 218-45.
- VILLAFAÑE, Justo; BUSTAMANTE, Enrique and PRADO, Emilio (1987): *Fabricar noticias: Las rutinas productivas en radio y televisión*. Barcelona, Mitre, D.L.
- WILCOX, Dennis L. (2006): "The landscape of today's global public relations". *Anàlisi: Quaderns De Comunicació i Cultura*, n° 34. Barcelona, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, pp. 67-85.
- WILCOX, Dennis L. and CAMERON, Glenn T. (2011): *Public relations: Strategies and tactics*. Boston, Allyn & Bacon.
- XIFRA, Jordi (2007): *Técnicas de las relaciones públicas*. Barcelona, Editorial UOC.

Lorena BUSTO SALINAS
Universidad de Burgos
Becaria FPI
lbusto@ubu.es