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# Research on advertising in Spanish university. Characteristics and topics areas of doctoral theses (1976-2016)

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## Abstracts

**[ES] Introducción.** Se analiza la producción científica sobre publicidad en la universidad española a través de la identificación y caracterización de las tesis doctorales sobre ese tema defendidas entre 1976 y 2016, ayudando así a un conocimiento actualizado del mapa de la investigación publicitaria en España. **Metodología.** La investigación realizada se basó en un análisis bibliométrico de 520 tesis doctorales con el fin de conocer la evolución temporal de la producción científica, caracterizarla formal y temáticamente, y caracterizar los autores y centros de producción. **Resultados y conclusiones.** Se concluye que la producción científica sobre publicidad en las tesis doctorales presentadas en las universidades españolas entre 1976 y 2016 ha alcanzado una situación de madurez o consolidación, tras el importante auge investigador de los últimos quinquenios. Entre sus características, se señalan las siguientes: destacada multidisciplinariedad, baja concentración entre universidades, baja internacionalización, elevada concentración temática y tendencia hacia la especialización.

**[EN] Introduction.** The scientific production on advertising in the Spanish Universities is analyzed through the identification and characterization of doctoral theses presented on the subject, between the years 1976 and 2016. This will set the current state of knowledge on advertising research in Spain. **Methodology.** The research conducted was based on a bibliometric analysis of 520 doctoral theses to better understand the time evolution of the scientific production, to formally and thematically characterize such evolution as well as the authors and production centres. **Results and conclusions.** It was found that scientific production on advertising, according to the doctoral theses presented at

Spanish Universities between the years 1976 and 2016, had reached a state of maturity or consolidation, after an important research surge in the last five years. Among their characteristics, we found the following: prominent multidisciplinary, a low concentration level among universities, low internationalization and a high concentration of topics while favouring specialization.

### **Keywords**

[ES] bibliometría; publicidad; investigación; España; tesis doctorales; universidad.

[EN] bibliometrics; advertising; research; Spain; doctoral theses; university.

### **Contents**

[ES] 1. Introducción. 2. Metodología. 3. Resultados. 4. Conclusiones. 5. Fuentes. 6. Bibliografía

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## **1. Introduction**

Doctoral theses are a field of special relevance for characterizing the research on a specific scientific discipline and to know its evolution over time or its level of development and consolidation. It is worth mentioning that these are original studies that constitute the culmination of the student's educational effort and an essential step in his or her research career. But usually these are not only individual projects but instead they incorporate into the structures and research groups of institutions they are defended in. In fact, theses are tutored and endorsed by the academic community, in such a way that their study also allows to identify the main research lines and even scientific schools in the research production of a discipline. Likewise, its analysis allows to study the future evolution of said discipline because in most cases the findings and scientific contributions of theses are disseminated to the scientific community in its entirety mainly through scientific journals or also through other communication vehicles of the scientific knowledge, besides the fact that theses tend to orientate the research line the doctorate student will follow in the future and that, in an aggregated manner, will also orientate the future evolution of the research on a specific discipline.

Despite that, the meta-research studies based on the analysis of doctoral theses have been rather scarce; as a matter of fact, in the past years the study of research published on scientific journals has been prioritized because these constitute a fundamental element in the current scientific dissemination and even in the certification of the career of researchers. In the field of communication, there are worth mentioning the different studies that have recently dealt with the communicologic research in Spain since the study of the doctoral theses either about communication in general (Casanueva and Caro, 2013; Jones, 2000), or focusing instead on a specific geographic scope (Gallardo Vera, 2016; Gil Soldevilla, Galán Cubillo and Marzal Felici, 2016; Herrero Solana and Arboledas Márquez, 2011; Jones, 2007; Jones and Baró i Queralt, 1997; Landa Montenegro, 2004; Martínez García, 2016) or referring to some particular thematic area of communication (Díaz-Campo, 2016; Díaz-Campo, 2014;

Oliva Marañón, 2014; Repiso, Torres-Salinas and Delgado López-Cózar, 2013; Repiso, Torres-Salinas and Delgado López-Cózar, 2011a; Repiso, Torres-Salinas and Delgado López-Cózar, 2011b; Repiso, Torres-Salinas and Delgado López-Cózar, 2011c; Sánchez-Vigil, Marcos-Recio and Olivera-Zaldua, 2014). In other cases, the study of communicologic research is based on the analysis of doctoral theses, but not only in them -but also in other instruments such as books, papers, R+D projects, etc.- and also referring to communication in general (Díaz-Nosty and Frutos, 2017, Caffarel-Serra, Ortega-Mohedano and Gaitán-Moya, 2017) as well as specific areas thereof (Barranquero Carretero and Limón Serrano, 2017; Gaitán Moya, Lozano Ascencio and Piñuel Raigada, 2016; López-Berna, Papí-Gálvez and Martín-Llaguno, 2011).

Focusing on the specific case of research on advertising, object the paper herein, there are barely worth mentioning, the contributions of Martínez Pestaña (2004; 2011) based on the doctoral thesis of this researcher (Martínez Pestaña, 2010), as well as the subsequent update of data (Marcos Recio, Martínez Pestaña and Blasco López, 2012). There are also worth mentioning other minor studies about specific scopes of advertising research (De Vicente Domínguez, 2011) or about other studies close to advertising such as marketing or public relations (Castillo and Xifra, 2006; Ortega Martínez, 2010; Xifra and Castillo, 2006). Consequently, there is a relevant gap in the study of doctoral theses on advertising in Spain considering that the study of Martínez Pestaña, of greatest scope up until now, only covers until 2001 and the subsequent extension of data published by several authors ends in 2010. However, the past years have been very important in the culmination of doctoral theses in the Spanish University from the quantitative perspective (Hernández Armentero and Pérez García, 2017: 111); for instance, in 2010, 8,747 theses were defended in the Spanish University system, a number that increases progressively year after year and that in 2014, it already reached 11,316 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 2016: 72). This increase is especially prominent in the field of communication in general and advertising in particular driven by the youth of many centres and doctorate programmes, which makes necessary to conduct updated studies on advertising meta-research based on the analysis of doctoral theses, so to know with a stronger basis, the panorama of advertising research in Spain.

The changes in the Spanish regulation of doctorate studies are also positioned as background of the evolution in the analysis of doctoral theses. Currently, these studies are regulated by the Royal Decree 99/2011, 28 January, that govern the official doctorate studies. But other legal key milestones in the evolution of these studies were: the Royal Decree 1393/2007, 30 October, that established the ordinance of the official university studies; the Royal Decree 56/2005, 1 January, that regulate official post-graduate studies; the Royal Decree 778/1998, 30 April, that regulates the third cycle of university studies, the obtention and issuance of the PhD title and other post-graduate studies; and the Royal Decree 185/1985, 23 January, that regulates the third cycle of university studies, the obtention and issuance of the PhD title and other post-graduate studies. With the last regulation, the aim was to stop the high rotation in the doctorate programmes or increase the relation between doctoral theses read and the different research groups, as well as with the scientific and business needs; the result is a considerable decrease in the number of programmes up to 60% in 2015 compared to 2012 (Castillo Esparza, Ruiz Mora and Álvarez Nobell, 2016: 709), but not in the case of doctoral theses defended, as we will confirm later.

## 2. Methodology

The objective of our research was to know the scientific production on advertising in the Spanish

university through the identification and characterization of doctoral theses about the subject defended between 1976 and 2016, both inclusive. The aim was to offer an updated knowledge about the issue, considering that the scarce preceding similar studies -mentioned previously- do not deal with the research boom of the past years; there was needed a study that included the most recent research and that, this way, helped offering a better knowledge of the current panorama of advertising research in Spain. That general objective was concretized in the following four specific objectives: - objective 1: to know the evolution over time of the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses in the analysed period; - objective 2: to characterize their authors and centres of production; - objective 3: to formally characterize that scientific production; - objective 4: to characterize said scientific production by topics.

The starting point was 1976, since it is the year when entries were collected in the database *Teseo* (Theseus) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, which has been the first and main information source used for the collection of doctoral theses analysed in our research. The range of the time period studied, which comprises forty years until the inclusion of 2016, guarantees the representation of results offered. The date for theses extraction was set on 1 October 2017, collecting all the studies included in the Theseus up until then and that were defended between 1976 and 2016 (independently of the fact that new entries were incorporated to the database after that date). In addition, starting in 1976 is also justified because it is not until the implantation of communication studies in the Spanish university, in the early seventies, that advertising is approached as study object in doctoral theses; in fact, according to Marcos Recio, Martínez Pestaña and Blasco López (2012: 435), the first theses on advertising topic was made by Sánchez Guzmán back in 1974, in the Faculty of Economics at *Universidad Complutense*, and in 1979, the first thesis on advertising was defended in a Faculty of Information Sciences. Martínez Pestaña (2011: 123) describes the production of doctoral theses in these early years as “almost irrelevant”, defending only three theses until 1976, the year where our research initiates.

Using Theseus as the main source of information does not guarantee a total coverage of the theses read in the Spanish universities; for instance, Fuentes and Arguimbau (2010: 76) confirmed that for the period 1998-2007, the percentage of doctoral theses registered in this database was 87.3% over the total of theses read according to the numbers of the National Statistics Institute. Despite these limitations, Theseus is still the main source of reference in quantitative studies on doctoral theses in Spain, therefore we also decided to use it in our research, besides the fact that its wide coverage guarantees by far the representation of the sample of analysis although it does not reach one hundred percent of the production. In any case, the gaps of information in this database about the registries of some theses of the sample were tried to be completed by going to other secondary sources like: *Dialnet-Universidad de La Rioja* <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/>; *Cisne-Universidad Complutense* <http://cisne.sim.ucm.es/>; *Rebiun-Red de Bibliotecas Universitarias Españolas (Spanish Universities Library Network)* <http://rebiun.org/>; *TDR-Tesis Doctorales en Red (Doctoral Theses on Internet)* <http://www.tesisenred.net/>; *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes (Virtual Library Miguel de Cervantes)* <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/>; and databases or repositories of doctoral theses of each university.

To select the theses analysed a search strategy in different stages was followed. In a first moment, a first search in Theseus was conducted using the Descriptor field and the indexed registries with the descriptors corresponding to these two UNESCO codes were selected: 531101.Advertising and 611401.Advertising techniques. Due to the lack of standardization in the use of descriptors, and

considering that many doctoral theses that would be part of the study object of the research are not registered with any of those two descriptors, in a second moment there were selected those that in their Title and/ or Abstract contained the term *publici*\* (N.T: first three syllables of advertising in Spanish). The result was a rather high volume of registries that, in a third moment, needed to be screened out through in-depth analysis of the abstracts of doctoral theses selected to exclude those which study object was not actually advertising despite they were generated by the search results in Theseus. Regarding this last issue, it is worth mentioning that the studies with unique and strictly advertising topic were selected, therefore there were excluded: on the one hand, theses that even though dealt with advertising they did so partially and together with other communicational phenomena; and on the other hand, those that analysed areas related to advertising but not strictly, such as propaganda and political communication, public relations or communication in organizations, marketing and branding management, or consumption and consumers behaviour, unless the approach was eminently advertising-related. Finally, a total of 520 doctoral theses were identified for analysis.

Next, a coding card was used for each one of these analysis units, composed of different variables referred to the different specific objectives of our research. After defining the analysis guidelines and the coding protocol, a double-check system was conducted for said coding, that was done concurrently by two encoders; the contradictions that arise were reviewed in the group meetings of the research team. This system enabled a coding as rigorous as possible, considering that, especially regarding thematic variables, with the double coding there was avoided the fact that the value judgement of a single encoder affected the final results of the study. Based on the information in the cards, a database was elaborated for its later exploitation and analysis using the statistical tool SPSS, composed of 520 entries (collected theses) for a about twenty variables, all those categorical except for the year of publication and the number of registry.

### 3. Results

Regarding the objective 1 of our research (to know the evolution over time of the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses presented in Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016) a steady growth in the number of defended theses is observed, except for slight annual fluctuations. For a greater clarity in the analysis and thus, relativize those logical fluctuations, the time period analysed was divided into five-year periods (table 1), concluding that the most significant quantitative jump in the scientific production occurs in the five-year period ranging from 1997 to 2001; there is a sustained growth and even prominent at percentual level also in the previous five-years periods, even though the limited number of doctoral theses of those moments evidence an embryonary situation of the scientific production on advertising. The indicated five-year period establishes an inflection point towards the consolidation of advertising research in the Spanish university and, in fact, in the early years of the new century, the scientific production of doctoral theses will continue to grow, increasing in a very relevant manner in the last five-year period analysed; thus, until 2001 barely 25.6% of the total of 520 theses identified in our study were defended and only in 2016, there were presented 11.7% of them.

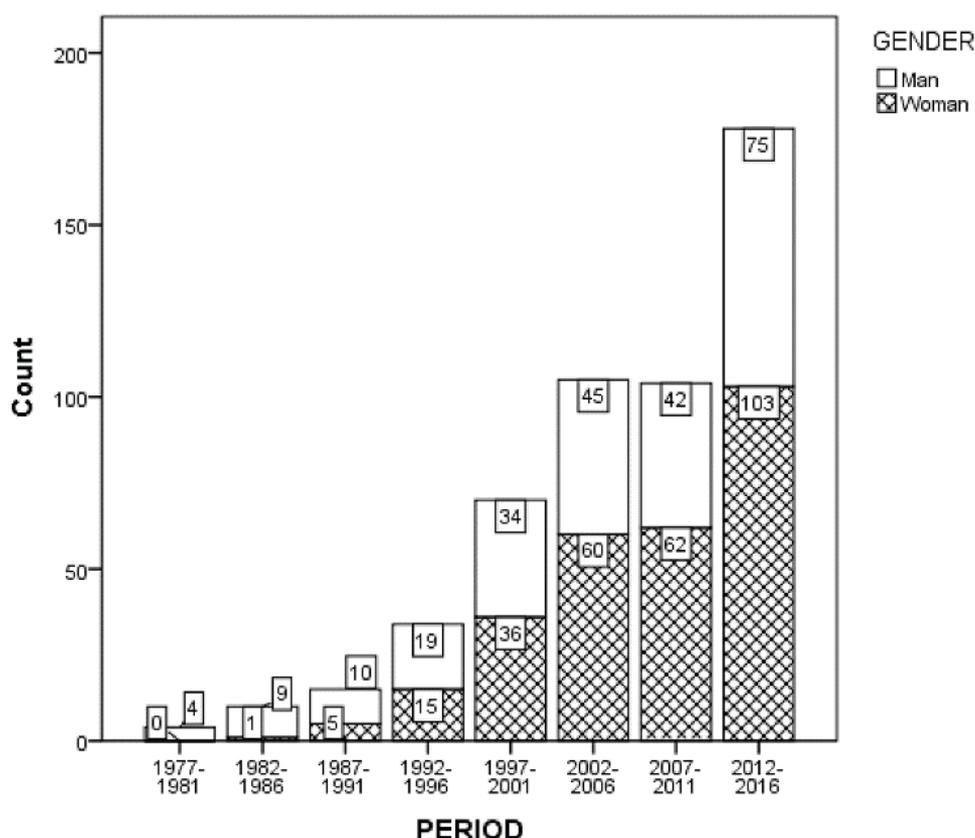
The steady evolution in the number of doctoral theses on advertising is visually confirmed on graphic 1, where also a datum regarding objective 2 of our study is collected (to characterize authors and centres of scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses defended in the Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016). Precisely starting by authors, a higher relevance of women compared to men is observed: 54.2% women researchers versus 45.8% of men researchers.

**Table 1. Time evolution of the production of doctoral theses**

Five-year period	Frequency	Percentage	Accum %
1977-1981	4	.8	.8
1982-1986	10	1.9	2.7
1987-1991	15	2.9	5.6
1992-1996	34	6.5	12.1
1997-2001	70	13.5	25.6
2002-2006	105	20.2	45.8
2007-2011	104	20.0	65.8
2012-2016	178	34.2	100.0
Total	520	100.0	

As observed in the graphic, in the early years analysed the male presence was a majority, but after the end of the nineties this tendency inverts; in the five-year period 1997-2001 -a five-year period that, as we have seen, is key to understand the consolidation process of the scientific production on advertising in the Spanish universities – women overtake men for the first time with 51.4% of authorships; a percentage that has been reinforced in the past years with a presence of women that is currently about 58% and which is slightly superior in the case of private compared to public universities.

**Graphic 1. Time evolution and gender of authors**



Regarding the characterization of production centres of doctoral theses on advertising, the unquestionable role of the public university is observed. Thus, 85.4% of the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses defended in the Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016 (444 out of the 520 analysed theses) develops in public universities compared to 14.6% produced in private universities. As observed on table 2, where the first positions in the ranking of most productive centres are shown with ten theses published or more, the contribution of the *Universidad Complutense* is essential, which has produced 20% of the total of theses on advertising; followed by far by two public universities: *Autónoma de Barcelona* (which was pioneer together with *Complutense* in offering the Bachelor degree on advertising in 1971) and *Universidad de Málaga* (which started to offer advertising studies in 1992). Only two private centres position in this ranking, *Universidad de Navarra* (in fourth place) and *Universidad Ramon Llull* (in sixth place). In general, it is confirmed that the first seven universities of the ranking of the 53 identified, are responsible for almost half of doctoral theses on advertising defended in Spain, and the first 16 universities compose 72.7% of the production. However, the Herfindahl-Hirschman index, calculated over the total of theses, shows a result of 637, corresponding to a low level of concentration.

**Table 2. Ranking of most productive universities**

University	Frequency	Percentage	Accum %.
Universidad Complutense de Madrid	104	20.0	20.0
Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona	34	6.5	26.5
Universidad de Málaga	26	5.0	31.5
Universidad de Navarra	24	4.6	36.2

Universidad de Alicante	21	4.0	40.2
Universidad de Sevilla	20	3.8	44.0
Universidad Ramon Llull	20	3.8	47.9
Universidad de Vigo	18	3.5	51.3
Universidad Jaume I	18	3.5	54.8
Universidad de Granada	16	3.1	57.9
Universidad de Salamanca	16	3.1	61.0
Universidad de Valladolid	16	3.1	64.0
Universidad de Valencia	15	2.9	66.9
Universidad de Santiago de Compostela	10	1.9	68.8
Universidad del País Vasco	10	1.9	70.8
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos	10	1.9	72.7

It is worth mentioning that out of the 16 universities of the ranking, in 4 of them, official advertising degree studies are not taught and neither have been taught recently. Therefore, there is evidence of the multidisciplinary nature of the advertising research, since advertising constitutes a discipline that is often analysed from different scopes of knowledge. A proof of this is that often the departments where doctoral theses are defended do not belong to advertising and not even to communication, and something similar happens with the doctorate programs. Although at this point, it has not been possible to confirm one hundred percent of the departments and programs where the 520 doctoral theses analysed have been defended, it can be said that out of the total of departments analysed, only 28% have a denomination alluding to advertising, while 26.8% are generic departments of communication and the remaining 45.2% belong to scopes of knowledge different from communication. Regarding doctorate programmes, those that are focused, even partially, on advertising represent 17.8% of the total programmes identified; 37.6% are programmes which denomination refers to communication and the remaining 44.6% are programmes of other areas where there is not even generic reference to communication.

**Table 3. Advertising typology by geographical scope**

		Local	Regional	National	International	Not applicable	Total
Commercial advertising	Count	10	6	143	64	21	244
	%	55.6%	30.0%	49.8%	56.6%	25.6%	46.9%
Institutional advertising	Count	1	5	13	3	1	23
	%	5.6%	25.0%	4.5%	2.7%	1.2%	4.4%
Political advertising	Count	1	0	6	2	1	10
	%	5.6%	0.0%	2.1%	1.8%	1.2%	1.9%
	Count	0	1	10	5	0	16

Social advertising	%	0.0%	5.0%	3.5%	4.4%	0.0%	3.1%
	AMBGEOG						
Self-advertising	Count	0	0	2	0	0	2
	%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Miscellaneous	AMBGEOG						
	Count	2	5	62	23	37	129
Not applicable	%	11.1%	25.0%	21.6%	20.4%	45.1%	24.8%
	AMBGEOG						
Total	Count	4	3	51	16	22	96
	%	22.2%	15.0%	17.8%	14.2%	26.8%	18.5%
Total	AMBGEOG						
	Count	18	20	287	11	82	520
Total	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	AMBGEOG						

In addition to what was mentioned up until now, to meet the objective 3 of our research (to formally characterize the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses defended in Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016) there was also coding of the language in which the thesis was written. The great majority uses Spanish (93.7% of cases), being the use of other foreign languages quite minoritarian, like English (1.5%), Portuguese (1.2%) or French (0.4%). The scarce use of foreign languages could be understood as a conditioning factor for the internationalization of research on advertising conducted in Spanish universities; even though the use of English slowly increases, in the most recent of the five-year periods analysed it is barely used in 4 theses, that represent 2.2% of that period. Meanwhile, the use of other co-official Spanish languages is marginal as well, such as Galician or Basque and, to a lower extent, Catalan, in which 2.5% of the 520 theses analysed are written.

Objective 4 (to characterize the scientific production on advertising by topic in the doctoral theses defended in Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016) justified the need for a double coding by using an inter-encoders protocol that guaranteed the reliability of final results, considering the complexity of said characterization by topics. Firstly, the advertising typologies managed in the core study object of doctoral theses were identified (table 3). In the scientific production analysed, the commercial advertising is the most studied (in 46.9% of cases) and in a very minoritarian manner there has been research about institutional (4.4%), social (3.1%), politics advertising (1.9%) or self-advertising (0.4%); in any case, it is worth emphasizing there is a relevant percentage of studies that are not focused on a typology in particular because they analyse several typologies at the same time or because its study object does not justify a delimitation by advertising typology. On the other hand, the greatest study of institutional advertising is noteworthy in those theses in which the study object is of regional scope.

**Table 5. Geographical scope by five-year period**

	1977-1981	1982-1986	1987-1991	2007-2011	2012-2016	Total
Local Count	0	1	0	6	7	18

	% Five-year period	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	5.8%	3.9%	3.5%
	Count	0	0	0	5	6	20
Regional	% Five-year period	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	3.4%	3.8%
	Count	2	3	8	56	104	287
National	% Five-year period	50.0%	30.0%	53.3%	53.8%	58.4%	55.2%
	Count	1	0	2	24	49	113
International	% Five-year period	25.0%	0.0%	13.3%	23.1%	27.5%	21.7%
	Count	1	6	5	13	12	82
Not applicable	% Five-year period	25.0%	60.0%	33.3%	12.5%	6.7%	15.8%
	Count	4	10	15	104	178	520
Total	% Five-year period	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Secondly, precisely the geographical scope was another one of the variables to be considered in the thematic coding of the sample analysed (table 4). The 55.2% of the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses defended in the Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016 deal with the national advertising reality, while 21.7% of study objects in the researches are of international scope; the studies of regional (3.8%) or local (3.5%) scope are minoritarian. Somewhat higher is the percentage of doctoral theses that analyse the local or regional reality in the case of the ones focused on press advertising (together they sum 11.8%) or in outdoor advertising (sum 30%), while there are no local or regional studies on advertising in cinema or Internet. In any case, from the data collected on table 4, an increasing research interest in the past years to conduct studies of international scope is deduced, reaching in the last five-year period analysed, practically half compared to the number of national scope studies.

In third place, regarding said mediatic scopes (table 5), almost a third of the 520 doctoral theses analysed do not focus their study object in an advertising medium in particular, but instead study the advertising phenomenon in a global manner. In those studies that do so, often there is focus on press (it happens in 19.6% of cases) and television (16.9%); advertising on Internet is still studied the least (6.7%) even though most of the volume from the total of defended theses concentrates in the past five-years periods, therefore after years of presence and advertising exploitation of Internet. Advertising on radio, non-conventional media, cinema and outdoor advertising are, in this order, the least analysed mediatic scopes in the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses presented in Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016. Disaggregating data by advertising typology, it is confirmed that the study of advertising in press is even higher in the case of studies focused on commercial advertising (28.3%); meanwhile, the studies about institutional, politics or social advertising practically do not focus on press and tend to be more generic and non-focused on specific mediatic scopes. On the other hand, depending on the geographical scopes, it seems logical that among the doctoral theses that

analyse local scopes there is a higher tendency to the study of advertising in press (38.9%) in detriment of television as well as the analysis of outdoor advertising (16.7%), a tendency that also happens in regional scope studies.

**Table 5. Mediatic scope**

Mediatic field	Frequency	Percentage	Accum %.
Adv. in general	168	32.3	32.3
Adv. in press	102	19.6	51.9
Adv. in television	88	16.9	68.8
Not applicable	72	13.8	82.7
Adv. in Internet and NICT	35	6.7	89.4
Outdoor adv.	20	3.8	93.3
Adv. in cinema	15	2.9	96.2
Adv. in non-conventional media	11	2.1	98.3
Adv. in radio	9	1.7	100.0
Total	520	100.0	

In fourth and last place, for the characterization by topic of the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses presented in the Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016 fourteen generic thematic areas were defined that allowed an adequate comparative analysis of the total of the scientific production analysed and that are the ones described as follows in order of higher to lower representation in the analysed sample: creativity and advertising message (studies about the theory of advertising creativity, strategies and creative resources, as well as the analysis of advertising creativities and the advertising representation in those creativities); effects of advertising and targets (studies about reception and the effects of advertising, both generic as well as referred to specific targets and even of social or economic nature); advertising media and media planning (studies about the different advertising media and advertising media planning); advertising law (juridical analysis and legal implications of the advertising activity); history of advertising (studies that analyse the advertising phenomenon on its different facets from a historical perspective); theory of advertising and culture (studies about epistemology of advertising and cultural implications of the advertising phenomenon); structure of the advertising system (studies about the advertising market, advertising management and the different actors that participate in the advertising system); advertising professionals (analysis of the labour market, routines and productive processes of professionals, professional profiles and education of advertising professionals); advertising formats (studies about modalities or specific advertising formats); advertising and education (studies about the use of advertising in education and its didactic implications); art and advertising (studies about the relationship between the artistic expression and the advertising discourse); ethics and advertising deontology (studies of advertising professional ethics and self-regulation of the sector); advertising documentation (studies about the documentary treatment of the advertising message); and advertising meta-research (studies about the scientific production on advertising as well as about research on advertising activity).

**Table 6. Thematic area**

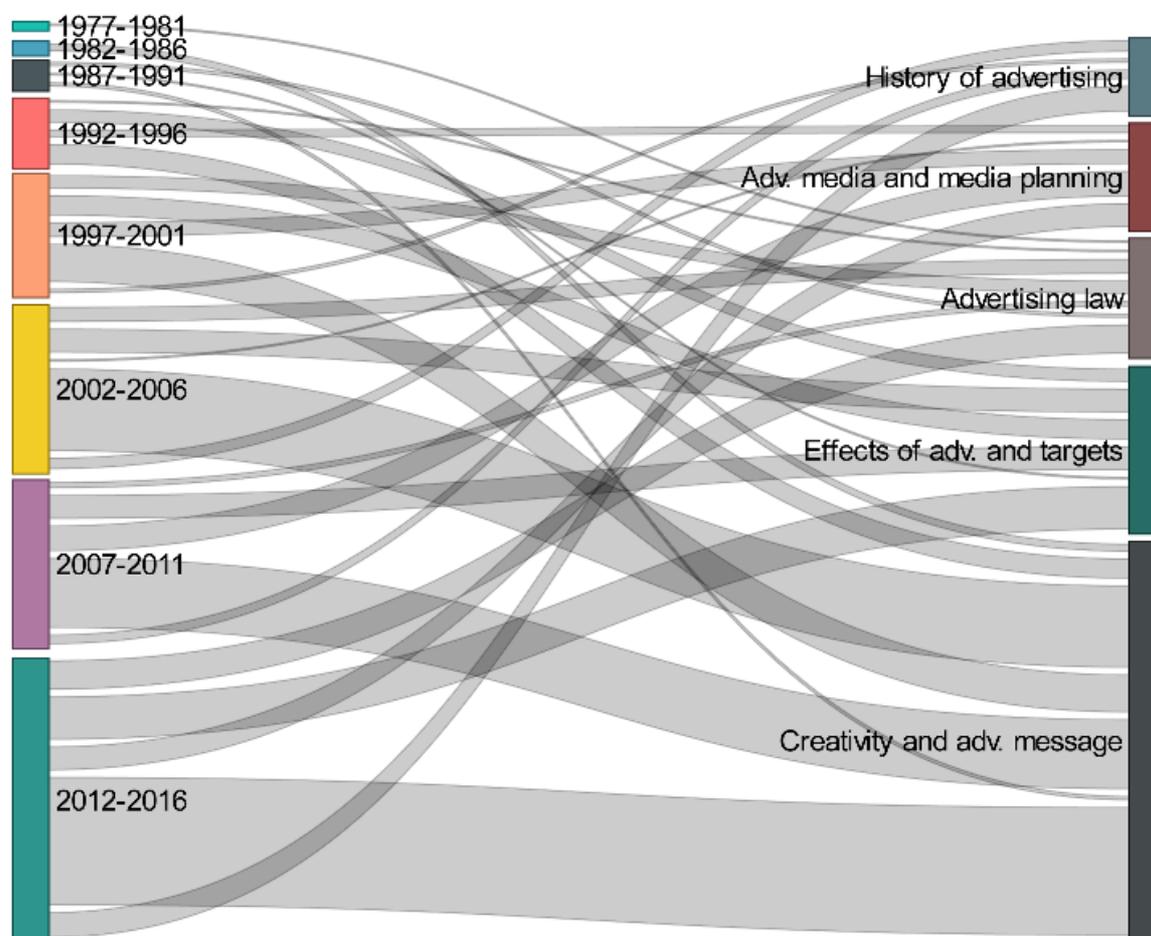
Thematic area	Frequency	Percentage	Accum %.
Creativity and adv. message.	202	38.8	38.8
Effects on adv. and targets	75	14.4	53.3
Adv. media and media planning	45	8.7	61.9
Adv. Law.	45	8.7	70.6
History of adv.	31	6.0	76.5
Adv. Theory and culture	25	4.8	81.3
Structure of the adv. system	24	4.6	86.0
Adv. professionals	21	4.0	90.0
Adv. formats.	18	3.5	93.5
Adv. and education	14	2.7	96.2
Art and adv.	6	1.2	97.3
Ethics and adv. deont.	5	1.0	98.3
Adv. documentation	5	1.0	99.2
Adv. meta-research	4	.8	100.0
Total	520	100.0	

Like the previous thematic variables, the 520 theses were coded according to the core study object and the results are collected on table 6. It is confirmed that the category “Creativity and advertising message” gathers most of the scientific production, specifically 38.8%, followed by “Effects of advertising and targets” (14.4%) and to a lesser extent by studies about media planning and advertising law (8.7% in both cases). It is also considerable, although to a lower, the number of doctoral theses about the history of advertising (6%), advertising theory (4.8%), advertising structure (4.6%), advertising professionals (4%) or advertising formats (3.5%), while the numbers are more marginal in the case of the rest of categories by thematic areas. The level of thematic concentration is considered high, according to the Herfindahl-Hirschman index obtained from 1986.

It is noteworthy to analyse the evolution in time of the main thematic areas, using a Sankey diagram to do so. Despite that said representation is broadly used to depict flows in the areas of engineering and ecology (for instance, energy flows and their distribution among several sources, or the value flows in complex systems at operational level (Schmidt, 2008), it is also possible to use those diagrams to view multidimensional data (Lupton and Allwood, 2017), such as the ones coming from bidimensional contingency tables, being the thickness of connections proportional to the relative relevance (frequency). Graphic 2 shows two features: the first one, the specialization by topic since the five-year period 1992-1996, when the five main topics are present; secondly, the clear prominence of creativity and the advertising message, showing a great difference over the following categories, that alternate the order of relative relevance as five-year periods elapse.

**Graphic 2. Sankey diagram of time evolution by thematic area**

### PERIOD vs. THEMATIC AREA



On the other hand, if we cross different thematic areas categories by the different advertising typologies mentioned before, there are no substantial differences in the different thematic areas for each one of these typologies, except in the case of studies on institutional advertising, less focused on the effects (4.3%) and more on other issues such as history (21.7%) or advertising theory (17.4%). From the perspective of the media on which the study object of the theses is focused, some issues of interest are worth mentioning: a greater presence of theses about television advertising in the categories of creativity and effects (54.5% and 23.9%, respectively) or about advertising in press in the category of creativity (65.7%), a greater number of studies about advertising media and media planning in the case of studies on Internet advertising (28.6%), and a greater relevance of the advertising law (20.8%) in those doctoral theses that study advertising in general without focusing on any specific mediatic scope; the reduced volume of theses in the rest of categories does not allow extracting other significant conclusions. Finally, by geographical scope on which focuses the study object of the doctoral theses in the sample, also eluding marginal categories, the frequency distribution is similar to the group of theses except in the case of those that study international topics, in which case the study of the effects becomes minoritarian (only in 3.5% of cases).

#### 4. Conclusions

The results of our study allow to progress in a better knowledge of the panorama of research on advertising in Spain. We have focused on doctoral theses because they are a fundamental field to characterize and know the level of development of a specific discipline, in this case advertising; no wonder, despite being individual research studies, they integrate into the trends and research groups of the academic institutions that endorse them, therefore their study also allows to identify the research lines of a discipline and even its future evolution. With the data exposed herein, we understand that an updated knowledge of said subject is offered, compared to the scarce previous studies about the issue that, in addition, did not analyse the research boom experienced in the Spanish university in the past years.

We can conclude that the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses presented in the Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016 has reached a situation of maturity or consolidation, after almost fifty years of the existence of university studies on advertising in Spain; a proof of this, is that this production has grown in a sustained manner during the complete time period analysed. This has been influenced, in first place, by the steady increase in the number of advertising research and education centres; in fact, until 1988 there only existed in Spain 3 universities teaching official advertising studies and in the nineties is when new entities, both public and private start to teach them, 11 new centres in total, becoming exponential the increase in the number of university centres with education on advertising in the early years of the new century (there are currently 39 centres offering degree studies on advertising). As a consequence, advertising has been a study object more and more investigated in Spanish universities, mainly after the last five-year period of the 20th century, which sets a true point of inflection in the evolution of the scientific production, as witnessed by the fact that 3 out of 4 doctoral theses on advertising are presented in the new 21st century. Secondly, that scientific interest about advertising is not exclusively due to the growth in the number of university centres that teach advertising studies, as evidenced by the fact that almost half of analysed theses have not been defended in specific departments or doctorate programmes on advertising and not even of communication sciences. Therefore, there are other factors to consider, that in any case are rooted in a basic feature of the research on advertising: its multidisciplinary nature. Thus, there have been identified 53 universities where the doctoral theses on advertising have been defended, 30 of which do not teach studies on advertising, even though it is true that the most productive universities do have advertising studies among their educational offer. In third place, to understand the evolution year after year in the number of doctoral theses on advertising, it is also necessary to refer to the successive regulatory standards that govern doctorate studies in Spain (in 1985, 1998, 2005, 2007 and 2011), that by stablishing limit periods for the reading of theses, according to the extinct regulation, there has been an influence on punctual agglomerations of theses in some of the years analysed. For instance, like 2016, since it is the last year for the defence of thesis in compliance with the regulation of 2005 and the next-to-last year according to the law of 2007; somewhat more than 1 out of each 10 doctoral theses identified in the forty years analysed was presented in 2016.

Besides its multidisciplinary nature, another feature of the scientific production about advertising in the doctoral theses presented in the Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016 is the prominent role of the public university and the research concentration in a few university centres. Regarding this last subject, the contribution of *Universidad Complutense* is fundamental, that gathers 1 out of every 5 doctoral theses on advertising. And regarding the aforesaid, less than 15% of the 520 doctoral theses have been presented in private universities. Although this could be influenced by their greatest youth,

therefore greatest difficulties to build a research mass, the truth is that in the past years, the relevance of private universities compared to public has remained practically stable despite the accumulation of years of teaching and research trajectory: in the five-year period 1997-2001 they represented 11.4%; 15.2% in 2002-2006; 16.3% in 2007-2011; and 14.6% in 2012-2016. Therefore, a lower research orientation is perceived in private universities, mainly due to the fact that their scarce scientific production of doctoral theses contrasts with an increasingly relevant role in the advertising teaching, considering that 25 out of the 39 degree studies on advertising currently taught in Spain are offered by private centres.

On the other hand, it is concluded that another feature of the scientific production analysed is its scarce internationalization. Firstly, other foreign languages such as English are barely used: only 17 out of the 520 doctoral theses analysed are written in a language different from Spanish, 8 of them in English. And secondly, in approximately 2 out of 10 doctoral theses on advertising the study object has an international scope, being a majority the research on national scope advertising reality; now, it is also worth mentioning there are more and more studies of international reach and in fact in the past five years analysed the percentage is already 27.5% of the total of defended theses. The need for a greater internationalization is, in any case, an emergency in the Spanish university institution, therefore it seems quite reasonable that it is also transferred to the scientific production emanating thereof. Probably the greatest promotion of international R+D groups and projects – not so frequent in the research on advertising conducted in Spanish universities- together with a greater option for compared research and the analysis of the international advertising reality would allow an effective internationalization of the Spanish scientific production on advertising and therefore, its greater competitiveness in the worldwide panorama.

Finally, the thematic analysis of the scientific production on advertising in the doctoral theses presented in Spanish universities between 1976 and 2016 also allow us to conclude that, in general, a high concentration of thematic areas is observed and a tendency towards specialization (specially creativity and the advertising message), as well as a certain imbalance between the interests of researchers and those of the advertising professional sector; both regarding advertising typologies investigated as well as the mediatic scopes or thematic areas. Regarding advertising typologies, the focus of the scientific production is almost always done on commercial advertising, being other not less relevant scopes hardly analysed even from the perspective of the investment they involve such as the case of institutional advertising, since the State still is, year after year, the main advertiser in Spain and nonetheless only incites the interest of a minority of researchers. This imbalance among researchers' interests and the relevance of specific scopes in the advertising professional sector is also observed regarding mediatic scopes; advertising in non-conventional media is barely investigated, when it represents a majority in terms of advertising investment by advertisers and, likewise, it is rather surprising that a medium in crisis such as press hoards more research attention than television or even Internet, both media of undoubtful relevance both from the advertising investment perspective as well as social influence. And regarding the thematic areas, more than half of doctoral theses are either creativity studies and analysis of the advertising message or studies about the effects of advertising; meanwhile, there are scarcely explored areas in the scientific discipline of advertising despite its relevance in the advertising professional activity, like the case of media planning or the structure of advertising, therefore a greater thematic opening of the advertising research would be advisable so that it is adjusted not only to academic motivations but also to the actual needs of the professional sector, as well as for a better theoretical foundation of specialized areas that are essential in the advertising education like the two aforementioned. In any case, it is worth emphasizing that it might seem logical

that these imbalances are perceived when the scientific production is analysed in a period of forty years as a whole. However, considering that most of said scientific production corresponds to the last years of the period analysed, a greater adjustment would be desirable, even though the constant change that characterizes the dynamism of the advertising professional activity could cause that the university research about this subject is in danger of being permanently left behind. Hence, the relevance of keep delving into studies of advertising meta-research that allow not only to perform a diagnosis of the past or present situation but also to identify proposals for the improvement of said research towards the future.

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