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Developing the Next-Generation Don Draper

Valerie K. Jones
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, valeriejones@unl.edu

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College of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, USA

Corresponding author – Valerie K. Jones, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 341 Andersen Hall, PO Box 880443, Lincoln, NE 68588-0443, USA, telephone +1 402 613 7328, email valeriejones@unl.edu

Abstract
Technology and the proliferation of data have transformed the advertising industry. Those with digital and analytical skills are now more employable than those with "traditional" advertising skills. At the same time, colleges and universities face increasing emphasis on job placement rates. Are advertising programs providing students with the skills needed to win jobs today and become successful employees tomorrow? Today's "next-generation Don Drapers" must be fluent not only in creativity and big ideas but also in analysis and Big Data.

Keywords: digital media, data, analytics, advertising, education

Introduction

Technology has radically changed the world we live in, particularly in the past decade. These changes have affected the type of jobs available, the way jobs are performed, and the skills required to get hired for these jobs in nearly every industry, including the advertising industry. The proliferation of available data has transformed how advertisers determine their target audience, the methods used to connect with the audience, the content developed for the audience, the timing of communication, and the evaluation of advertising efforts. This has led to a radical shift in the advertising industry toward digital advertising that has jeopardized the job security of those with traditional advertising skills.[1] Job candidates with traditional backgrounds are being overlooked, and computer programmers and those with analytical skills are more employable. A 2013 study of advertising and Fortune 500 marketing executives by the Online Marketing Institute found a talent

gap between the digital skills/specialties marketing executives value the most and the skills their talent currently has.[2] These gaps were largest for brand marketers in the area of analytics: 76 percent of brand marketers believe analytics is a very important/important skill to have, but only 39 percent believe their talent is stronger/much stronger than that of other teams. Agency respondents indicated a gap of 30 percent for analytics skills. More than one-third of the respondents reported not hiring in the past year because of not knowing where to find the digital talent they need.

At the same time, colleges and universities are under pressure to help graduates secure jobs and are increasingly judged on their job placement rates.[3] The recent recession—the worst in the USA since the 1930s—has called into question the expense, value, and "return on investment" of higher education. Many recent college graduates find themselves underemployed with record-high student debt. In fact, a 2013 paper from the Center for College Affordability and Productivity argued that about 48 percent of employed US college graduates work in jobs that require less than a four-year college education, while 37 per cent are in jobs that require only a high school diploma.[4] To justify the value of higher education, colleges must provide students with the skills they need to compete in today's marketplace.

Are advertising programs providing their students with the skills they need to compete and win jobs today? That question was the genesis of this conceptual paper. This notion of an advertiser savvy in analysis, technology, and data contrasts sharply with the stereotypical view of an "ad man," focused solely on the "big idea." The television show *Mad Men* captures the drama of an advertising agency in the 1960s and features a brooding creative genius named Don Draper. Draper is far from analytical. He is insightful but seems to arrive at his ideas magically—certainly not through research or data. In the era in which the show is set, virtually none of the data now available would have been accessible. Today's best ad men (and women) must be fluent not only in creativity and the generation of big ideas but also in analysis and the application of Big Data.

This presents serious challenges for those involved in the education of this next generation—from professors to professional advisory board members, the dean to the program donor, the advertising agency training program lead to the adjunct instructor/full-time practitioner. How do we best foster both right-brained creative thinking and left-brained analytical thinking? How do we help advertising students get over their apprehension about numbers and embrace them?[5] How does the curriculum adapt fast enough to keep pace with the skills needed for successful new hires? How do researchers establish what those skills are?

The first step in examining those questions is to establish what can be learned from the current literature. Developing the next-generation Don Draper requires relevant curricula and course content, and a clear focus on the goals of advertising education. A brief literature review follows to highlight some of the current knowledge in these areas.

Current Education of Advertising Students

Advertising curricula have historically focused primarily on three advertising subjects: creative, media, and research/account planning.[6] Many programs also offer advertising

management courses, although this is a broad and somewhat vague subject. The most frequently mentioned topics of focus in advertising courses are strategies, integrated marketing communications (IMC), branding, positioning, consumers, planning/research, creative strategy/messaging/brief, media strategies/planning, objectives and situation analysis.[7] There were a few mentions of interactive media in the curricula studied and no specific mentions of analytics, which may indicate that the teaching of advertising is lagging behind the actual practice in the professional world.

Advertising creative courses

What is taught
Educators in advertising creative courses struggle with the juggling act between spending time on strategic thinking and creating adverts for portfolios. In advanced courses, 70 percent of respondents in a survey of educators by Robbs and Wells reported spending 75 percent or more of the course on portfolio development.[8] The primary way educators teach students to create advertising is by having them do it, and then by discussing it together in class. This method of "authentic assessment" is valuable and educationally appropriate, especially for more advanced learners such as those in higher education. Conceptual thinking, however, was still the most frequently cited instructional goal (85 percent), followed by strategic thinking, portfolio development, idea generation, visual thinking, copywriting, layout, and mastering computer programs (21 percent). It would be useful to collect more recent data and examine how these goals have evolved as technology and digital media have become critical elements of advertising.

Using data
How is and how can data be incorporated into creative courses? Data were shown decades ago to be vital in the associative process, often used to spark ideas that serve as the foundation of advertising. In this process, a person associates provided research data to ultimately develop creative, problem-solving advertising communication.[9] Without data to associate—some kind of factual information base—creatives cannot effectively do their jobs. Creatives, however, sometimes ignore data and pursue their own lines of thinking. Like Draper himself, sometimes creatives have already decided on the ad pitch by the time they receive the data.

It is vital to ensure that students understand not only how to translate data into creative solutions to problems but also the importance and role of such data to help generate and justify ideas.

Divergence has been identified as an important indicator of advertising creativity.[10] Five factors within divergence were shown to be the primary determinants of advertising creativity: flexibility, originality, synthesis, elaboration, and artistic value. "Flexibility" was used to describe adverts that contain different ideas or switch from one perspective to another. "Originality" was defined as adverts that contain elements that are rare, surprising, or move away from the obvious and commonplace. "Synthesis" referred to adverts that combine, connect, or blend normally unrelated objects or ideas. "Elaboration" described adverts that contain unexpected details, or finish and extend basic ideas so they become

more intricate, complicated, or sophisticated. "Artistic value" was defined as adverts that contain artistic verbal impressions or attractive colors or shapes. Understanding these factors is important in developing advertising students into practitioners and creating exercises that focus on these factors. Data can be used in these exercises to help drive synthesis by identifying objects or ideas that are important to the audience, or artistic value by proving, through real-time online testing, what colors the audience is most likely to respond to.

Some research also suggests that there are specific patterns in quality adverts that are "identifiable, objectively verifiable, and generalizable across categories."[11] These creativity templates serve as a foundation for producing quality adverts by providing a path to focused creativity and more effective outcomes. Goldenberg et al.[12] posit that the "template taxonomy facilitates the focused cognitive effort involved in generating new ideas, the capacity to access relevant information, and enables high memorability of the reduced set of information needed to perform the tasks." Clearly, these templates can be highly useful to understand and apply in order to educate the next generation of data-driven, analytical-yet-creative Don Drapers.

Advertising media courses

What is taught

In Don Draper's world, the media guy had to fight for a place at the table. He seemed to be regarded as an unfortunate but necessary evil. Today, media planners are more important than ever, sometimes regarded as "the new creatives." Media planners and buyers in advertising are essentially responsible for evaluating and identifying target audiences; creating plans that outline what media should be used for communicating with them, when, and then buying those media. According to a study of media planning educators by Kim and Patel,[13] the primary challenges of teaching media fell into three areas: teaching "new" (digital or interactive) media along with fundamentals, identifying media industry changes and integrating those changes into the curriculum. Six critical topics were identified to focus on in media planning courses: (1) learning fundamental terminology, (2) understanding strategic planning, (3) applying concepts and strategies to create a media plan, (4) understanding traditional media, (5) understanding new media, and (6) staying informed about media industry changes.

Not surprisingly, the single most challenging topic to teach was new media. Over half felt that they needed to include greater coverage of emerging media in the course, but 44.7 percent agreed that "keeping up with industry changes was frustrating." The authors observed that there were a wide variety of definitions for the term "new media" as well, contributing to the difficulty of studying what is being taught in that realm.

There are courses that specifically focus on digital media, which is sometimes used synonymously with new media. A study by Kim[14] examined the prevalence of digital media courses and the pedagogical focus of those courses in the curricula of US communication schools. Findings showed that a total of 1,632 courses in digital media were offered by 185 schools. Approximately 10 percent of those were considered advertising or public relations courses. More than half of the 1,632 courses were considered skills courses, focused on topics such as digital media production and editing, web design, online news reporting,

online presentation of multimedia content and programming. Advertising/public relations courses had a more balanced emphasis on skills and conceptual knowledge than telecommunications, business/marketing or journalism courses.

Using data
Data have been vital to media planning for decades, but now there is greater volume, variety, and velocity. Data are used to determine the target audience, the methods used to connect with the audience, the content developed for the audience, the timing of communication, and the evaluation of advertising efforts. Advertising programs, however, may be limited in the volume and variety of data they can access—budgetary constraints always present challenges and subscriptions to data sources can be expensive. How can educators teach students to use data if they can only access limited university versions of Mediamark Research and Intelligence? How can they get students excited about it? How many programs teach students to use digital analytics to evaluate the effectiveness of programs? A more detailed look at the content of media courses is needed to better illuminate what is being taught and how data are being used to develop analytical as well as creative thinkers.

Advertising research/account planning courses

What is taught
The third subject that advertising curricula historically have been focused on is research/account planning. Draper had a clear disdain for research, but the effective collection, analysis, and application of data are critical to the next generation of advertisers. Account planners can be thought of as the left side of a creative brain. They are tasked with identifying consumer insights that spark and guide the development of effective advertising. Account planners must understand both qualitative and quantitative research and approach both with analytical and creative, innovative minds. They need to be able to engage deeply but also provide quick, top-line research and answers. Account planning students need to interact with planning challenges similar to those in the workplace, with professionals from the industry, and apply the lessons learned in class with guidance from the instructor. Mackert and Munoz[15] suggest that students also need to study the history of account planning in order to understand where it is heading and why.

Using data
Research skills often are woven into advertising courses but sometimes are taught in standalone courses. Nevertheless, there seems to be a lack of useful literature to illuminate this question of what advertising students are currently being taught in advertising research courses and how they are taught to develop, identify, interpret and apply data.

Goals of Advertising Educators

The instructional goals for specific types of courses have already been highlighted. Before curricula are changed, strategic goals of the advertising program, however, must be established. Examining the goals of advertising education more broadly reveals a philosophical

question about emphasizing skills or emphasizing conceptual and strategic thinking. As noted by Stuhlfaut and Davi,[16] some schools of journalism and mass communication approach the discipline from a journalistic perspective that frames education as a craft, consisting of the skills needed to create, produce, and place advertising. Stuhlfaut and Davi challenge the field to consider whether we are "teaching a skills-oriented pedagogy to produce carpenters, or a strategic-oriented pedagogy to produce architects." It would be beneficial to examine both educator and practitioner perspectives on this question in order to understand how they align and what the implications might be for the employment of future graduates.

Conclusion

Literature about digital media education is limited, and literature about teaching how Big Data and analytics are used in advertising seems to be nonexistent. Considering the pressure on colleges and universities to place graduates and the interest of employers in hiring talent with digital media and analysis skills, the field of advertising education seems to be lagging behind—at least, the research about it is. There also does not appear to be significant empirical research examining advertising curricula as a whole, as opposed to specific courses, and whether or not programs have evolved sufficiently to prepare students and new hires for the new advertising environment that requires digital and analytical skills.

One can certainly argue that curricula cannot change every time a hot new advertising trend comes around just to accommodate the most desirable skill set for addressing that trend. As noted earlier, professors are already frustrated with keeping up with industry changes. Nevertheless, there is certainly a need to stay current and in touch with the industry, adjusting courses, and incorporating new content. This can be a challenge for professors with "yellow note syndrome"—those who have become comfortable with a course and continue to teach it in the same way, year after year—but it is necessary to remain current in trends and pedagogy to remain viable. In fact, it is not just necessary, but mandatory, in order to train students for the advertising job market of today and tomorrow.

Author biography
Valerie K. Jones is an assistant professor of advertising and public relations at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications. She brings more than 15 years of expertise in integrated marketing communications, branding, digital media strategy, and analytics from Starcom, Fox Interactive, IBM, and her consultancy into her research and teaching. Her recent research focuses on the influence of social media on attitudes toward public policy and the implications of voice-powered artificial intelligence assistants for the future of marketing. She holds a master's degree in integrated marketing communications from Northwestern University.

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