

# The profile of PR professional in Spain: sector's situation and future trends

## El perfil del profesional de las relaciones públicas en España: situación y tendencias del sector

*O perfil do profissional de Relações Públicas na Espanha: situação e tendências do setor*

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**ABSTRACT** | The main objective of this work is to develop an approach to the Spanish public relations sector through its professionals. We used a qualitative Delphi analysis among experts and a quantitative study through Qualtrics aimed at those professionals. The results determine strengths such as the sector's momentum thanks to diversification, influencer management and the generation of valuable content achieved by digital transformation, while they also show threats generated by that technological disruption where the sector changes at great speed; this can mean a loss of confidence in the content generated in the media by disinformation and fake news. This research's results will be able to guide business decision-making in communication in matters of people management; they also show the specific training needs of professionals and students. The main conclusion of this point of the study consists in the demand for a balance between soft and hard skills. The first will maintain their importance over time while the latter require professionals to continuously update in technical aspects.

**KEYWORDS:** public relations; trends; soft skills; hard skill; mass media; Spain.

### HOW TO CITE

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**RESUMEN** | *El objetivo principal de este trabajo es aproximarse al sector de las relaciones públicas en España a través de sus profesionales. Se condujo un análisis cualitativo Delphi entre expertos y un estudio cuantitativo en Qualtrics orientado a estos profesionales. Los resultados determinan fortalezas –como el impulso del sector gracias a la diversificación, la gestión de influencers y la generación de contenidos de valor conseguidas por la transformación digital– y detallan también amenazas generadas por esa disrupción tecnológica donde el sector cambia a gran velocidad, lo que puede suponer una pérdida de confianza en el contenido que generan en los medios por la desinformación y las fake news. Los resultados podrán guiar la toma de decisiones empresariales en comunicación en materia de gestión de personas, a la vez que muestran las necesidades formativas específicas de profesionales y estudiantes. La principal conclusión consiste en la exigencia de un equilibrio entre las habilidades blandas -soft- y duras -hard-: las primeras, transversales y que mantendrán su importancia en el tiempo; las segundas exigen a los profesionales una actualización continua en aspectos técnicos.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *relaciones públicas; tendencias; competencias blandas; competencias duras; medios de comunicación; España.*

**RESUMO** | O objetivo principal deste trabalho é desenvolver uma abordagem ao setor de Relações Públicas na Espanha através de seus profissionais. Metodologia: é desenvolvido um estudo com dupla metodologia: uma análise Delphi qualitativa entre especialistas; e um estudo quantitativo através da Qualtrics dirigido aos profissionais de Relações Públicas espanhóis. Resultados: Os resultados determinam pontos fortes como a dinâmica do setor graças à diversificação, à gestão de influenciadores e à geração de conteúdos valiosos alcançados pela transformação digital; ao mesmo tempo que também detalham as ameaças geradas por essa disrupção tecnológica em que o setor muda a grande velocidade, o que pode significar uma perda de confiança nos conteúdos gerados nos meios de comunicação por desinformação e fake news. Discussão: Os resultados desta pesquisa podem nortear a tomada de decisão empresarial em comunicação na área de gestão de pessoas, ao mesmo tempo que mostram as necessidades específicas de formação de profissionais e estudantes. Conclusões: As conclusões são mais do que positivas, uma vez que a investigação apresentada poderia promover ações de intervenção, formação e melhoria para os itinerários de aprendizagem da profissão, empresas e profissionais de comunicação em Espanha. A principal conclusão deste ponto do estudo, consiste na exigência de um equilíbrio entre as competências soft -macia- e hard-hard. Soft skills transversais que manterão sua importância ao longo do tempo e hard skills que requerem que o profissional se atualize continuamente nos aspectos técnicos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Relações Públicas; tendências; habilidades interpessoais; competências difíceis; meios de comunicação; Espanha.*

## INTRODUCTION

At the international level, the public relations (PR) sector has experienced sustained year-on-year growth, in line with the economic situation in recent years (Meng & Berger, 2019; Moreno, 2019). From a North American perspective, according to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* prepared by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>), employment of public relations professionals is projected to increase by 11% between 2020 and 2030, faster than the average for all activities. Indeed, PR has positioned itself as a discipline that continues to thrive even in times of economic crisis (van der Meer et al., 2017; Vujnovic et al., 2021) and in situations of particular complexity, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Almansa-Martínez & Fernández-Souto, 2020; Xifra, 2020). It is an industry that today, more than ever, is responsible for the communication and transparency of organizations (Meng & Berger, 2019).

Jordi Xifra emphasizes that “those organizations that are visible in times of normality must remain so, but to do their part to help find solutions, sanitary and communicative, that respond to what their audiences and society demand of them” (2020, p. 14). For this reason, an in-depth understanding of the profile required of PR professionals, their competencies and skills, is valuable to better understand the sector in Spain and the panorama they will face.

The PR and Communication courses in our country train thousands of future professionals, not always taking into account the real needs of the sector. Along with them, the group of professionals who are already developing their careers in PR consultancies face a particularly changing sector that requires them to respond to the new needs of their clients and of society itself. Digitalization, the importance of strategy, creative skills, and the management of large amounts of data and information are some of the trends that professionals will need to be trained for in order to continue developing in the sector in the coming years (Etiqe, 2021; Krishna et al., 2020).

As Morato and colleagues explain:

The skills required by employers rarely correspond to a single degree, but rather to a mix of skills from different disciplines. Therefore, the requirements should be analyzed in terms of the skills and knowledge required and how they match with the skills acquired in the program, rather than in terms of the degree required (2016, p. 177).

Moreover, “the digital evolution forces companies dedicated to advertising and media to have professional profiles with skills to create, transform and distribute information in different traditional and digital media”

(Álvarez-Flores et al., 2018, p. 137). In this regard, the authors speak of new job opportunities that combine transversal skills, understanding of the digital ecosystem and mastery of web design, SEO and SEM (Álvarez-Flores et al., 2018). In terms of attitudes or soft skills, creativity, teamwork and passion for continuous learning stand out (Álvarez-Flores et al., 2018).

This view is supported by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>), which notes that it is expected that the use of social media will also create opportunities for public relations specialists, who will be needed to help their clients use these new types of social media effectively, which on the other hand has also been previously noted by Aced (2018). Likewise, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>) emphasizes soft skills to train new professionals, highlighting interpersonal, organizational, problem-solving, speaking, and writing skills as fundamental qualities, in line with other authors (Brunner et al., 2018; Meganck et al., 2020; Theaker, 2020). Almansa-Martínez and Fernández-Souto (2020) point out that this is indeed a dynamic profession in which skills such as management, coordination and direction, and leadership must be complemented by a vision of the future.

However, there is a gap between this current vision of the future PR professional, who has transversal digital skills, and the skills and descriptions offered in the last version of the *Libro Blanco de los Títulos de Grado en Comunicación* (White Paper on Bachelor's Degrees in Communication) prepared by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA, by its Spanish acronym) (2005), which has not been updated since. García-Nieto and his colleagues speak of a “terminological confusion of the professions”: “the previous concepts that underpinned the theories and propositions of communication and business management have, in some cases, become obsolete” (2020, p. 2). The discrepancy in ANECA's white paper is also caused by the integration of four different professional profiles within the Advertising and Public Relations degree: 1. Communications director, researcher and strategic consultant in advertising and PR; 2. Researchers, media planners and media buyers; 3. Creative and designer; 4. Corporate communications manager

This last aspect means, according to the ANECA White Paper, that when analyzing the professional skills of Advertising and Public Relations graduates, they are less valued on average due to the diversity of profiles and skills. In terms of academic competencies, it is interesting to note that the ability to lead is highlighted for the Corporate Communications Manager profile. Finally, with regard to other specific competencies, the book highlights that practically all of them are related to the ability to organize and control the work process, which is necessary for the type of professional demand that exists in the degree. In this sense, it lists a

series of competencies related to the soft skills mentioned above, specifically the ability to relate to people and the environment without losing their autonomy, to work in a team and to analyze, synthesize and make critical judgments; to be perceptive, inventive and creative; to be willing to take risks, to manage time, to act freely and responsibly, to manage the economic and budgetary aspects of their field of activity and to analyze reality objectively and extract valid considerations (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de Calidad y Acreditación, 2005).

Table 1 shows the official degrees offered in Spain in the area of specialization in the field of public relations. For this purpose, we have used the latest radiography of degrees from ATIC (Spanish Association of Universities with Degrees in Information and Communication) (Civil i Serra, 2018):

In light of the above, this research seeks to know the competencies of corporate communication professionals, taking into account the sector’s need to be updated and prepared for a future marked by uncertainty after the COVID-19 crisis. The main objective is to create a guide that functions as a reference on the current and future profile of PR professionals in Spain.

Three secondary objectives can be derived from this general objective. First, to understand the current situation of the PR sector and its professionals in Spain, along with the main challenges and opportunities that will arise in the coming years. To this end, it is essential to gather qualitative information and perceptions from leading representatives of the sector in Spain. This will also allow us to design a quantitative questionnaire aimed at the professionals as a whole. The second secondary objective is the mapping of the competencies that define professionals in the sector today and their future needs. The third objective is to observe significant differences related to sociodemographic variables or to the position held in the organization.

Advertising and Public Relations Protocol and Event Organization Journalism and Corporate Communications Advertising, Public Relations and Marketing Marketing and Business Communication	<i>The degrees are particularly suited to the management of communications and media relations, as well as the design of advertising strategies that combine marketing actions and the creation of PR campaigns.</i>
Corporate Communication, Protocol and Event Organization Global and Strategic Communication Communication and Public Relations Event Organization, Protocol and Institutional Relations	<i>The postgraduate programs, although not listed on the left due to their enormous variety, aim to provide students with an interdisciplinary profile and make them highly qualified professionals, developing personal, professional, digital and linguistic skills.</i>

**Table 1. Official PR degree programs offered in Spain**

*Source: Own elaboration based on Civil i Serra (2018).*

## **METHODOLOGY**

On the one hand, we propose a qualitative analysis using a Delphi methodology, with a sample composed of senior professionals with a long career in the sector, along with a sample of younger professionals with management positions specialized in different key areas of current PR, such as digital communication or innovation, among others.

Based on the Delphi results, we applied a quantitative questionnaire provided by the Qualtrics tool to a broader sample of professionals in the sector. In both cases, we had the support of the Association of Public Relations and Communication Consulting Firms (ADECEC, by its Spanish acronym), which facilitated access to experts. It should be noted, however, that non-associated consulting firms also participated. The different communication agencies distributed the questionnaire among their professionals. Both studies were approved by the Ethics Committee of the Universidad Loyola Andalucía.

### **Qualitative Delphi study**

In order to achieve the different research objectives, we first followed the Delphi method (Helmer Hirschberg, 1966), since it facilitates the extraction of information and data to explain a phenomenon and predict trends, based on the judgment of experts (Neill, 2021).

This method involves the execution of a series of phases that can be summarized as follows (Astigarraga, 2008):

- a. Formulation of the problem. In our case, we want to delve into the challenges and opportunities faced by the PR sector and its professionals in Spain.
- b. Selection of experts. The fifteen experts interviewed were selected on the basis of their proven experience and diverse knowledge of the subjects of analysis (table 2).
- c. Consultation. A questionnaire or script was prepared covering the various topics on which information was to be gathered: threats and opportunities for the sector and for professionals, trends for the coming years, and industry initiatives to respond to these circumstances (appendix 1). The interviews were then conducted one by one and transcribed. The information gathered in this phase was analyzed for the next phase. The fieldwork was carried out during the months of September and October 2019.
- d. Consensus. In order to achieve the greatest possible consensus among the experts, rounds of consultations were held with the participants until the conclusions presented in this analysis were reached, which in turn served as the basis for designing the next phase of quantitative research.

Position	N
Presidents and CEOs	7
General Managers	5
Digital or innovation managers	2
HR Managers	1
Total	15

**Table 2. Delphi study participants by position**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

### Exploratory questionnaire

Based on the conclusions of the expert Delphi study, we designed an exploratory questionnaire aimed at PR professionals in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their profile and their perception of future requirements in terms of their competencies. The questionnaire considered:

1. Sociodemographic parameters: age, gender, experience, education, English proficiency, position in the company, etc.
2. Level of current self-perceived skills and level of future relevance of these skills.
3. The future of the sector in terms of skills: age and gender differences, as well as analysis of the gap between declared skills and those to be developed in the future.

The total sample consists of 346 professionals (m=95%, e=5.27%) working in companies and communication agencies based in Spain. This geographical distribution is concentrated in Madrid and Barcelona, cities where the main agencies and consultancies in the sector are located. After excluding those who did not complete the entire survey, the final sample consists of 256 people (M=95%, E=6.13%), with a higher proportion of women (68.3%) than men (31.1%). The fieldwork was conducted in October 2019, using a snowball sampling method.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Results of the Delphi analysis: PR challenges and trends

First of all, we should highlight the possible growth that the PR sector in our country will experience in the coming years. According to the 15 experts who participated in the Delphi, the evolution of the sector will be driven by diversification through digital transformation, the generation of valuable content and the management of influencers, among other activities. In fact, the sector offers a more comprehensive and complete communication, collaborating with other disciplines such as marketing and advertising in the conception and branding strategies.

In terms of threats to the sector, the interviewees highlight the possible loss of trust in the content generated by the media due to disinformation and fake news, as well as the speed at which the sector is changing due to technological disruption. They also agree that the growing competition (sometimes defined as intrusiveness) from large consulting firms from related disciplines, such as marketing and advertising, freelancers or even the media, is becoming one of the main threats to the sector. In particular, and related to this, they highlighted the growing difficulty in attracting talent.

Among the main challenges, the majority consider it essential to adapt professionals to new platforms and digital consumption habits, as well as to invest in training and specialization. They emphasize the growing importance of data analysis -big data- for business intelligence, investment in research, the creation of a management position for reputation and brand managers, and even making allies out of the media.

Focusing on PR opportunities, the respondents note that innovation is fundamental to achieving greater added value in communication, highlighting the integration of creativity, strategic planning, management of intangibles and research related to the advancement of technology (blockchain and artificial intelligence), as well as the exploitation of data (big data and business intelligence). They are also interested in the creation of content and stories relevant to audiences (storytelling), whether written, audiovisual or interactive, adapting to new languages and digital formats. Finally, they believe that personal relationships, the interrelationship and connection between corporate departments, the media, and a deep understanding of the rest of the key audiences (stakeholders) are fundamental to anticipating their needs. However, they point out that there are still less prepared and inflexible clients who choose not to innovate in their activities, with limited marketing knowledge or complex to advise, hindering the transformation of the sector in our country.

Generally speaking, there seems to be a consensus that the most important skills of a good professional have to do with the so-called soft skills, as opposed to the more technical or hard skills. In particular, elements such as common sense, innovation and creativity, as well as a general and specific media culture, stand out. In terms of attitudinal skills, teamwork, openness, constant curiosity to learn, resilience, flexibility, and the ability to cope with change and adapt stand out (Brunner et al., 2018; Meganck et al., 2020).

Writing and English language skills are highly valued. Interdisciplinarity in such a diverse and ever-changing environment as PR is also considered desirable, as are interpersonal skills, public speaking, leadership and empathy with clients. Others point to the importance of passion for the profession, analytical and synthesis skills, people skills and critical thinking.

In terms of hard skills, many experts agree on the importance of strategic capacity and vision, knowledge of digital tools and their storytelling potential, as pointed out by Brunner and colleagues (2018) or Meganck and colleagues (2020). They also emphasize the relevance of other skills from related fields, such as advertising or marketing, putting the emphasis on a more holistic view of communication. Some point to the importance of research and data analysis and visualization. Finally, they point to the relevance of audiovisual design and production skills and business intelligence.

With regard to the services that will be most in demand in the coming years, the experts agree on those related to the digital field and to communication and data management (big data). They also pointed out a great diversity of work areas that will be requested by clients: those related to content and messages and the relationship with external audiences. On the one hand, they emphasized the need for services related to content and messaging and the relationship with external audiences, through the creation of relevant content and stories in different formats, digital advertising management, institutional relations, strategic planning and sincere listening (search for insights) to personalize messages; creativity, creation of brand experiences and consumer-facing strategies to generate leads; and relationships with influencers and opinion leaders.

On the other hand, they highlighted services related to internal stakeholders: internal communication, activities linking internal and external communication, internal reputation, employer branding and change management. Finally, they pointed to the growing demand for more strategic aspects for companies: management of intangible assets, especially corporate reputation; optimal crisis management; social responsibility; communication of social innovation; and research and measurement services.

The Delphi study concluded with a consultation on the changes and initiatives PR consultancies are taking to address the challenges identified. Most of the respondents agree that Spanish agencies have undergone a profound change in their organization and internal structures, eliminating hierarchies and incorporating new types of professionals such as creatives, planners and data experts, and to a lesser extent design, audiovisual, sociologists or politicians. Some experts believe that there is a specialization of tasks in the sector, while others believe that there are multidisciplinary agencies where the boundaries between marketing, PR, advertising and communication have disappeared.

### **Survey results: profile of the PR professional**

Regarding the profile of professionals, the self-perceived level of 29 defined competencies is analyzed (table 3), based on the results obtained from the expert panel.

To complement this information, the respondents were asked to define the fundamental aspects of the future PR professional by assessing the same set of competencies.

Level	Skills	Declared level				Total
		Technician	Senior technician	Middle management	Senior management	
Very high	Curiosity and ability to learn	9	8.8	9.2	8.8	8.9
	Teamwork, ability to co-create, collaborative work	8.8	8.7	8.9	8.7	8.8
	Flexibility, adaptability, ability to change	8.7	8.6	8.7	9	8.7
	Empathy, understanding of customer needs	8.5	8.7	8.7	8.8	8.6
	Interpersonal communication, listening skills	8.7	8.7	8.4	8.3	8.5
	Written communication, copywriting	8.3	8.8	8.2	8.6	8.4
	Critical thinking skills	8.5	8.3	8.6	8	8.3
	General culture	8.1	8.3	8.1	8.3	8.2
	Resilience	7.9	8.1	8.4	8.3	8.1
	Innovation and creative thinking	8	7.8	8.3	8.2	8.1
High	Strategic planning and visioning	7.5	7.8	8.1	8.9	8.1
	Story creation and storytelling techniques	7.5	7.4	7.6	8.1	7.6
	English language skills	7.4	7.6	7.9	7.7	7.6
	Leadership skills	6.9	7.1	7.9	8.4	7.5
	Rhetoric, persuasion, public speaking	7.1	7.5	7.8	8	7.5
	Creativity applied to public relations	7.1	7.2	7.9	8	7.5
	Corporate Reputation Management	6.7	7.6	7.3	8.3	7.4
	Internal communications	7.2	7.7	6.7	7.4	7.2
	Industry specialization, in-depth industry knowledge	6.4	7.3	7.4	7.7	7.1
	Marketing and advertising skills	6.9	6.5	7.4	7.1	7
Middle	Social responsibility activities	6.7	6.8	6.9	7.5	7
	Influencer and opinion leader relations	6.7	7.2	6.8	7.2	6.9
	Communications research and measurement	6.7	6.7	7.1	7.2	6.9
	Communications Crisis Management	6.2	7	6.3	7.8	6.7
	Institutional relationship management	5.6	6.7	6	6.4	6.1
	Audiovisual editing and creation	5.6	5.4	4.9	4.7	5.1
Low	Digital advertising management	5.3	4.5	4.9	4.4	4.8
	Big data analysis	4.4	3.5	5.1	5.1	4.6
	Graphic design	4.5	4.1	4.2	3.7	4.1
	Total	7.1	7.3	7.4	7.5	7.3

**Table 3. Declared level of competence of PR professionals by position**

Source: Own elaboration.

### **Sociodemographic results. Differences according to type of position**

In order to further explore the differences related to the position, the positions were divided into four different groups:

- a. Technicians: managers, consultants, associates and juniors, among others. Professionals with less years of experience and usually without dependents.
- b. Senior technicians: various positions that are recognized as senior in your organization, either by years of experience or by having someone in charge.
- c. Middle management: team leaders and managers, whether they are account directors, heads of some area of specialization or various profiles considered as managers. Professionals who supervise several people and have responsibilities in their companies, but who are not part of the top management of the company.
- d. Senior management: this group includes CEOs, presidents or vice presidents, office, division or department heads. These are individuals with the highest level of responsibility in the organization and extensive experience.

Naturally, the older the professionals, the higher up the hierarchy they go. However, it is a profession in which we find many young managers. In fact, 49% of middle managers are between 32 and 38 years old, and 16% are younger. Up to 36% of senior managers are in the 32-38 age group. The profession is relatively young, with 65.7% of respondents under the age of 38, 33.7% under the age of 32, and 32% between the ages of 32 and 38.

In keeping with the predominantly female nature of the profession, almost 70% of respondents are women in positions of responsibility and just over 30% are men.

The majority of degrees are in communications, with 42.4% of professionals having a degree in journalism and 30.6% in advertising and PR. However, there are professionals with other university degrees, such as marketing and business administration, politics, law, psychology or sociology.

Although we did not find significant data in relation to the Master's degree in the group of technicians, we did in the other categories, with a doubling of the percentages. In other words, there seems to be a direct relationship between postgraduate education and access to a position of greater responsibility.

The English language is an essential aspect in positions of responsibility, where the majority of professionals have a medium to high level, mainly B2 and C1. In contrast to other positions, senior management tends to have a C2 level of English,

while more than 50% of technicians have a B2 level and almost 30% a C1 level. In any case, this is an English-speaking sector, with 36.1% declaring that they have a B2 level in this language and 28.9% a C1 level.

Skills	Man		Woman		Total	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	Average	SD
Written communication, text writing	8.1818	1.63402	8.4918	1.28079	8.4045	1.40394
Audiovisual editing and creation	5.1636	2.623	5.0574	2.42678	5.0899	2.47537
Story generation, storytelling techniques	7.3636	1.88919	7.7295	1.4717	7.6292	1.62176
Graphic design	4.5091	2.62377	3.9344	2.44523	4.118	2.50257
Planning and strategic vision	7.7455	1.68015	8.1721	1.41242	8.0506	1.51181
Digital advertising management	4.6	2.42365	4.9344	2.80713	4.8315	2.68385
Creativity applied to Public Relations	7.1455	2.05857	7.6803	1.68251	7.5281	1.8232
Internal communication	6.7636	2.05448	7.3279	1.72221	7.1573	1.84053
Institutional relationship management	6.4364	2.5001	5.918	2.41069	6.0899	2.4409
Relationship with influencers and opinion leaders	6.1455	2.4677	7.2623	2.01565	6.9213	2.21563
Corporate reputation management	7.1091	2.24988	7.5164	2.04589	7.4045	2.11649
Social responsibility activities	6.1455	2.54164	7.3197	1.81484	6.9719	2.13772
Sector specialization, in-depth knowledge of sectors	6.9455	2.21458	7.1967	2.22547	7.1292	2.21707
Communication crisis management	6.3273	2.6321	6.9098	2.16281	6.7472	2.33328
Communication research and measurement	6.5273	2.55933	7.0738	1.97993	6.9045	2.17767
Marketing and advertising expertise	6.7091	2.18304	7.1311	1.69565	7.0112	1.8655
Data analysis (big data)	4.8	2.76486	4.5492	2.65075	4.618	2.67656
Flexibility, adaptability, capacity for change	8.3455	1.57783	8.8689	1.11304	8.7135	1.29403
Innovation and creative thinking	7.9273	1.68715	8.1311	1.32958	8.0787	1.45147
General culture	8.2545	1.51802	8.1148	1.26096	8.1685	1.34657
English language skills	7.3455	1.66909	7.7213	1.57597	7.6067	1.60591
Teamwork, ability to co-create, collaborative work	8.2545	1.61266	8.9754	1.13882	8.7528	1.33853
Leadership	7.4364	1.57249	7.5984	1.57281	7.5449	1.56613
Rhetoric, persuasive ability, public speaking	7.4	1.95884	7.5984	1.45829	7.5449	1.6263
Interpersonal communication, listening skills	8.1091	1.46152	8.6639	1.21022	8.4888	1.31157
Critical thinking	8.2364	1.58656	8.3607	1.27963	8.3315	1.38075
Empathy, understanding customer needs	8.2909	1.48664	8.7541	1.1805	8.618	1.29759
Curiosity and ability to learn	8.5273	1.65389	9.1148	1.1797	8.9382	1.3661
Resilience	7.7636	1.89506	8.2951	1.54111	8.1404	1.67313
Total	7.0520	2.0269	7.3932	1.7273	7.2943	1.8380

**Table 4. Q19.- Professional skills. Descriptive data by gender**

Source: Own elaboration.

## Skills of the PR professional

According to the self-assessment of 29 skills, we profile a professional who declares to be very competent in general and high-level issues such as planning and strategic vision, critical thinking, general culture, flexibility, adaptability, capacity for change, innovation and creative thinking, general culture, teamwork, critical thinking, empathy and curiosity, and learning ability, in addition to written communication. On the other hand, we are faced with a professional who declares to be not very competent in very specific technical subjects such as editing and audiovisual creation, graphic design, digital advertising management and data analysis.

Interval age	Less than 32		32-38		More than 38		Total	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	Average	SD	Average	SD
Written communication, text writing	8.0645	1.64836	8.5273	1.03377	8.6393	1.3788	8.4045	1.40394
Audiovisual editing and creation	5.3065	2.6771	4.8545	2.17237	5.082	2.53834	5.0899	2.47537
<i>Story generation, storytelling techniques</i>	7.3226	1.89714	7.8	1.36626	7.7869	1.50682	7.6292	1.62176
Graphic design	4.3387	2.56677	3.9091	2.27932	4.082	2.64761	4.118	2.50257
Planning and strategic vision	7.4516	1.71471	8.1455	1.29698	8.5738	1.25776	8.0506	1.51181
Digital advertising management	5.0645	2.83347	5.1273	2.6038	4.3279	2.56724	4.8315	2.68385
Creativity applied to Public Relations	7.129	2.23595	7.8	1.33888	7.6885	1.6886	7.5281	1.8232
Internal communication	7.2742	2.05793	6.9091	1.4941	7.2623	1.8965	7.1573	1.84053
Institutional relationship management	5.4516	2.84966	6.0909	1.93671	6.7377	2.25759	6.0899	2.4409
Relationship with influencers and opinion leaders	6.7581	2.83818	6.9636	1.71014	7.0492	1.90111	6.9213	2.21563
Corporate reputation management	6.5323	2.42066	7.6182	1.50912	8.0984	1.97235	7.4045	2.11649
Social responsibility activities	6.5484	2.31656	7.0364	1.8152	7.3443	2.17474	6.9719	2.13772
Sector specialization, in-depth knowledge of sectors	6.0323	2.42911	7.7273	1.56885	7.7049	2.0924	7.1292	2.21707
Communication crisis management	5.6129	2.54375	6.9455	1.66019	7.7213	2.16126	6.7472	2.33328
Communication research and measurement	6.6613	2.53464	7.3273	1.74329	6.7705	2.11655	6.9045	2.17767
Marketing and advertising expertise	6.8065	2.17918	7.1273	1.47892	7.1148	1.8448	7.0112	1.8655
Data analysis (big data)	4.4516	2.83235	4.8727	2.55353	4.5574	2.64905	4.618	2.67656
Flexibility, adaptability, capacity for change	8.5484	1.45622	8.9273	1.11976	8.6885	1.25885	8.7135	1.29403
Innovation and creative thinking	7.7903	1.73807	8.2909	1.13321	8.1803	1.36025	8.0787	1.45147
General culture	7.7581	1.61637	8.4	1.13203	8.377	1.12789	8.1685	1.34657
English language skills	7.6129	1.70202	7.6364	1.44483	7.5738	1.66792	7.6067	1.60591

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Teamwork, ability to co-create, collaborative work	8.7419	1.56745	8.6364	1.17637	8.8689	1.2312	8.7528	1.33853
Leadership	6.8871	1.82069	7.8182	1.18776	7.9672	1.37801	7.5449	1.56613
Rhetoric, persuasive ability, public speaking	7.0645	1.88932	7.7091	1.27181	7.8852	1.5286	7.5449	1.6263
Interpersonal communication, listening skills	8.5323	1.53343	8.4909	1.10341	8.4426	1.25863	8.4888	1.31157
Critical thinking	8.2903	1.5617	8.3818	1.23964	8.3279	1.32566	8.3315	1.38075
Empathy, understanding customer needs	8.3065	1.69463	8.7091	0.89593	8.8525	1.07759	8.618	1.29759
Curiosity and ability to learn	8.9194	1.64265	9	1.1547	8.9016	1.24773	8.9382	1.3661
Resilience	7.7742	1.91986	8.2909	1.32878	8.377	1.64483	8.1404	1.67313
Total	7.00112	2.09372	7.41631	1.50861	7.4822	1.7503	7.29427	1.838

**Table 5. Q19.- Professional skills. Descriptive data by age in intervals**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

The specific values broken down by sex and age –in intervals– can be seen in table 5 above and table 6 below.

The applied K-S normality test, which was intended to contrast significant differences in means, revealed non-normal distributions in all items, so the applied test for comparing means in the case of gender was non-parametric (Mann Whitney U) once the only subject of the “other” gender was eliminated. In the case of age, a 1-factor ANOVA test was applied, as shown below (table 6).

Looking at the relationship between the type of position and the reported level of the competencies assessed, we can see that, in general, the higher the position, the higher the reported level of most competencies. However, as table 3 shows, the means do not differ significantly.

However, the competencies in which we observe a greater difference as we move up the hierarchy of positions are corporate reputation management, communication crisis management, leadership, planning and strategic vision, and sector specialization, in-depth knowledge of sectors.

On the other hand, the skills in which the technical profiles differ from those of the higher ranks are those that are considered more technical and, in turn, belong to the group with the greatest need for development, as we will see in the last section of the report. We refer to the skills listed at the end of table 3, such as interpersonal communication, listening and critical thinking skills, graphic design, audiovisual editing and creation, and digital advertising management. In each case, we observe a sector in which professionals, regardless of their position, declare high competencies in flexibility, capacity for change, empathy, knowledge of client needs, written communication, copywriting and teamwork, capacity for co-creation and collaborative work (Álvarez-Flores et al., 2018; Meganck et al., 2020).

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymptotic sign (bilateral)
Written communication, text writing	3059	4599	-0.969	0.333
Audiovisual editing and creation	3340	10843	-0.048	0.962
<i>Story generation, storytelling techniques</i>	3099.5	4639.5	-0.83	0.406
Graphic design	3001	10504	-1.132	0.258
Planning and strategic vision	2898.5	4438.5	-1.481	0.139
Digital advertising management	3150	4690	-0.654	0.513
Creativity applied to Public Relations	2871.5	4411.5	-1.569	0.117
Internal communication	2894.5	4434.5	-1.485	0.137
Institutional relationship management	2852	10355	-1.611	0.107
Relationship with influencers and opinion leaders	2529.5	4069.5	-2.653	0.008
Corporate reputation management	2987.5	4527.5	-1.184	0.236
Social responsibility activities	2440.5	3980.5	-2.938	0.003
Sector specialization, in-depth knowledge of sectors	3074	4614	-0.905	0.366
Communication crisis management	3032	4572	-1.038	0.299
Communication research and measurement	3012	4552	-1.103	0.27
Marketing and advertising expertise	3107.5	4647.5	-0.797	0.425
<i>Data analysis (big data)</i>	3110.5	10613.5	-0.78	0.435
Flexibility, adaptability, capacity for change	2716	4256	-2.109	0.035
Innovation and creative thinking	3221.5	4761.5	-0.434	0.664
General culture	2939	10442	-1.367	0.172
English language skills	2959.5	4499.5	-1.278	0.201
Teamwork, ability to co-create, collaborative work	2355.5	3895.5	-3.309	0.001
Leadership	3242	4782	-0.368	0.713
Rhetoric, persuasive ability, public speaking	3301.5	4841.5	-0.174	0.862
Interpersonal communication, listening skills	2559.5	4099.5	-2.605	0.009
Critical thinking	3296	4836	-0.192	0.848
Empathy, understanding customer needs	2718.5	4258.5	-2.114	0.035
Curiosity and ability to learn	2591	4131	-2.566	0.01
Resilience	2823.5	4363.5	-1.729	0.084
Total	2937.34	5505.448	-1.359	0.298

**Table 6. Q19.- Professional skills. Average differences by gender**

Source: Own elaboration.

### Perceptions on the future of the PR profession

Overall, and noting that the values for the professional of the future are generally higher than those obtained by today's professionals, technical skills such as editing and audiovisual creation, story generation and storytelling, and English are highlighted. On the other hand, the professional of the future must have more personal skills such as creativity, strategic vision, flexibility, innovation, empathy and curiosity.

In terms of position (table 7), there is an interesting difference between the levels of responsibility in certain competencies. In particular, technicians, as opposed to managers, consider it more necessary to develop competencies in which they consider their skills to be insufficient, such as audiovisual editing and creation, graphic design or digital advertising management. In general, they all stress the importance in the future of skills such as planning and strategic vision, flexibility, adaptability, capacity for change and innovation, and creative thinking.

Importance	Skills	Position				Total
		Technician	Senior technician	Middle management	Senior management	
Crucial	Planning and strategic vision	9.3	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Innovation and creative thinking	9.2	8.9	9.2	9.1	9.1
	Flexibility, adaptability, ability to change	9.2	9.2	9	9	9.1
	Story generation, storytelling techniques	9.1	8.7	9.3	8.9	9
	Empathy, understanding client needs	8.9	9	8.9	8.9	8.9
	Editing and audiovisual creation	9.3	8.9	8.9	8.3	8.8
	Creativity applied to public relations	8.7	8.6	8.8	9.1	8.7
	English language skills	8.8	8.8	8.9	8.3	8.7
Very important	Curiosity and ability to learn	8.5	8.7	8.9	8.5	8.6
	Teamwork, ability to co-create, collaborative work	8.6	8.5	8.4	8.6	8.5
	Corporate reputation management	8.4	8.3	8.5	8.7	8.5
	Big data analysis	8.6	8.6	8.7	7.7	8.3
	Communications Crisis Management	8.3	8.3	8.3	8.4	8.2
	Corporate social responsibility activities	8.7	7.9	8.1	8.2	8.2
	Resilience	8.3	8.1	8.6	8.1	8.2
	Interpersonal communication, listening skills	8.4	8.1	8	8.2	8.2
	Relationships with influencers and opinion leaders	8.3	8.1	8.3	8.3	8.2
	Critical thinking skills	8.3	8.2	8	8.3	8.2
	Rhetoric, persuasion, public speaking	8.4	8	8	8	8.1
	Graphic design	8.7	7.8	7.9	7.6	8
	Internal communication	8.3	7.7	7.8	8.1	8
	Leadership research	8	7.9	8.1	8	8
Important	Communication research and measurement	7.9	7.6	8.3	7.8	7.9
	Written communication, copywriting	7.7	8.2	7.5	7.9	7.8
	Corporate culture	8.3	7.6	7.5	7.7	7.8
	Institutional relationship management	7.9	7.4	7.5	7.5	7.6
	Industry specialization, in-depth industry knowledge	7.7	7.6	7.5	7.4	7.5
	Marketing and advertising skills	7.6	7.7	7.5	7.3	7.5
	Digital advertising Management	8	7.4	7.9	6.4	7.4
Total	8.5	8.2	8.3	8.2	8.3	

**Table 7. Importance of competencies for the future of the PR profession by position**

Source: Own elaboration.

### Skills development needs. The gap between the professional of today and the professional of tomorrow

Finally, our research analyzes the differences between the declared level of each of the competencies analyzed and the importance given to them by the professionals, thus defining the future of the profession. The difference or gap between the two values allows us to observe the different development needs of the skills and to identify those in which the professionals declare that they have more training than the importance given to them.

Four skills with a high need for development were identified as fundamental for PR professionals: graphic design, editing and audiovisual creation, big data analysis and digital advertising management, for which they said they did not have the skills to develop. The skills that are not considered necessary to develop are mainly written communication and text writing and general culture. The participants believe that they have more than they really need.

These results can be compared with those obtained in the Delphi with experts. In this qualitative analysis, there was also a concern for the same technical competencies that the experts had identified and placed in the group with a high need for development. However, the experts highlighted the need to improve skills such as written communication, text writing, general culture, interpersonal communication, listening skills and teamwork, especially for younger people. However, professionals consider that they have acquired these skills sufficiently.

Skills	Nivel declarado (sobre 10)	Importance level (out of 10)	Difference
Graphic design	4.1	8	3.9
Editing and audiovisual creation	5.1	8.8	3.7
Data analysis -big data-	4.6	8.3	3.7
Digital advertising management	4.8	7.4	2.6
Communication crisis management	6.7	8.2	1.5
Institutional relationship management	6.1	7.6	1.5
<i>Story generation and storytelling techniques</i>	7.6	9	1.4
Social responsibility activities	7	8.2	1.3
Relationship with influencers and opinion leaders	6.9	8.2	1.3
Creativity applied to PR	7.5	8.7	1.2
Planning and strategic vision	8.1	9.1	1.1
English language skills	7.6	8.7	1.1
Corporate reputation management	7.4	8.5	1.1
Innovation and creative thinking	8.1	9.1	1

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Communication research and measurement	6.9	7.9	1
Internal communication	7.2	8	0.8
Rhetoric, persuasive ability, public speaking	7.5	8.1	0.5
Marketing and advertising skills	7	7.5	0.5
Leadership	7.5	8	0.4
Sector specialization, in-depth knowledge of sectors	7.1	7.5	0.4
Flexibility, adaptability, ability to change	8.7	9.1	0.3
Empathy, understanding customer needs	8.6	8.9	0.2
Resilience	8.1	8.2	0.1
Critical thinking	8.3	8.2	-0.2
Teamwork, ability to co-create, collaborative work	8.8	8.5	-0.2
Interpersonal communication, listening skills	8.5	8.2	-0.3
Curiosity and ability to learn	8.9	8.6	-0.3
General culture	8.2	7.8	-0.4
Written communication, text writing	8.4	7.8	-0.6
Total	7.3	8.3	1.0

**Table 8. Differences between the reported level and the level of importance of the PR professional's competencies**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

## CONCLUSIONS

As pointed out by Meng and Berger (2019), among others, communication and public relations are one of the backbone functions of modern institutions and business organizations. Their direct and indirect impact on society is constant and continuously growing (Moreno, 2019). The ability of these professionals to shape the public opinion of a country in different areas is very relevant. Therefore, this study allows an in-depth analysis of the sector in Spain through its main actors, the professionals.

Having reached this point, we consider it necessary to recall the main purpose of the research: to contribute to an orientation of the professional reality of the sector, in order to transform it and adapt it to the new demands, because in times of crisis, as Xifra (2020) states, PR must be visible and active in the search for solutions that benefit their audiences.

With regard to the results concerning the gap between the skills possessed by professionals and the competencies they consider essential for the future, we can conclude that they see a need for development in very technical areas. It is clear that training in the subjects with the largest gap would be most in demand a priori, although the competencies that should have a medium level of development are also of interest. Thus, we find a more extensive list of 11 skills, which shows the need to reinforce certain aspects, such as the improvement

of storytelling, since the respondents declare that they have a high but not optimal level of this skill. Similarly, training in crisis management and influencer relations is considered very important, but professionals report having a medium level. In other words, it seems that for the PR professional it is less important to know how to do things (technical skills) than to have more or less innate personal dispositions –or acquired in the first years of life. Comparing the results of the survey with those of the Delphi survey of experts carried out in the first part of the analysis, the main conclusion is the need for professionals to have a balance between soft and hard skills. Finally, the study shows that there are no significant differences in terms of age or gender. As far as gender is concerned, although at first glance it might seem that there are major differences in the perception of the future PR professional, the reality is different: the differences are exclusively due to a question of magnitude. In other words, women score higher on all items, but there are no structural changes: both genders emphasize to a greater relative extent the same skills and technical competencies described above for the sample as a whole.

In short, this study has the prudence to be considered as an approximation to the radiography of the sector in Spain through the professionals. Therefore, it should be pointed out that there is a need for continuity in the follow-up of the main results obtained and an expansion of the work with different methodologies to keep the study of the sector alive in the country. However, as the study shows, the PR sector is based above all on the skills and talents of its professionals, who must focus on providing rapid responses to an increasingly demanding public in a changing environment characterized by uncertainty. To this end, the acquisition and development of the skills outlined in the study will enable professionals to design and implement innovative communication strategies and techniques, which will be the most effective way to meet the current and future demands of PR. As Etike (2021) or Krishna and colleagues (2020) have already pointed out, continuous training in all the areas and facets we have seen will be the key to success.

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