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Roldós y Compañía, the oldest operating advertising agency in the world

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to review the history of Roldós y Compañía, one of the oldest advertising agencies in the world and the oldest currently operating. This research aims to highlight the importance of this agency and its founder, Rafael Roldós Viñolas – the first documented advertising agent in Spain to this day – in shaping the emerging Spanish advertising industry at the end of the 19th century.

Design/methodology/approach – The methodology used in this paper is based on a review of period and contemporary literature, as well as on newspaper sources and documents from the private archive of Roldós, S.A.

Findings – In its early years, the agency's participation in two of the most significant events for the modernization of the city of Barcelona, the Universal Exhibition of 1888 and the International Exhibition of 1929; as well as the ideation and implementation of several urban projects with the aim of finding new formulas and advertising media are factors that make it one of the most important in the country. In 1929, the alliance Roldós-Tiroleses, S.A. de Publicidad, the first great merger of advertising agencies in Spain, which lasted three years, was led. The outbreak of the Civil War and the subsequent post-war period marked a few years of business irregularities and advertising silences that gave instability to its activity. During the last third of the 20th century, the agency was immersed in the generalized advertising euphoria around the world. With the arrival of North American agencies in Barcelona and the consequent business movements, Roldós, S.A. specializes in the processing of advertisements and media planning. The 21st century began with important changes in the media planning sector, and the agency was forced to restructure its services and organizational structure. In 2022, it celebrates 150 years of uninterrupted activity, recognized by the country's business sector.

Practical implications – This research aims to internationalize the history of the Roldós y Compañía agency, so that it can be studied together with other names of Anglo-Saxon advertising pioneers who were contemporaries of Rafael Roldós.

Originality/value – Scientific research on the history of advertising agencies, especially in Spain, is scarce, so this paper aims to help fill this gap.

Keywords Advertising agencies, History of advertising, Spain, Roldós, Rafael Roldós

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

While some works delve into the history of Spanish advertising (García Ruescas, 1971; Eguizábal, 1998; Herreros, 2000; Checa, 2007), little research focuses on advertising agencies. Fernández Poyatos' work (2010) provides an overview of Spanish advertising agencies between 1912 and 1934, classifying them based on their capital or the services offered, among other criteria. Similarly, Hesse and Lurie (2020) examine the German advertising sector, although it covers a more recent and extensive period (1950–2018). However, very few studies focus on the history of a specific agency or advertiser, as is the case outside Spain. Notably, some works narrate the stories of pioneering agencies

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in the USA or Great Britain, such as N.W. Ayer and Son (Hower, 1949), J. Walter Thompson (Gennaro, 2009; West, 2006) and even the trajectory of Mojo-MDA (Crawford, 2020), the first Australian multinational agency. From the perspective of advertisers, works such as Sreekumar and Pratap's (2022) explore the advertising history of the century-old Indian corporation Tata Steel. The closest precursor to this work is the research on the trajectory of the founder of the Centro de Anuncios Roldós y Compañía, Rafael Roldós Viñolas, included in one of the author's doctoral thesis (Serra, 2015), which partially covers the agency's trajectory.

According to Fernández Poyatos (2013), one of the reasons why Spain lacks a research tradition into the history of advertising comparable to countries such as the USA or Great Britain is the recent institutionalization of advertising in Spain, which took place in 1971. This article aims to contribute to our understanding of Spanish advertising history by focusing on the world's oldest continuously operating advertising agency: Roldós y Compañía.

In the last third of the 19th century, the development of the advertising professions in Spain, specifically in Barcelona, paralleled the industrial boom. This economic expansion facilitated the export of goods and fostered the emergence of a much larger social fabric as the new bourgeoisie engaged in commercial activities. The vision of these first merchants "occurred almost at the same time as the press was increasing in popularity and circulation" (Voltes, 1976). This period marked a transformative era in Barcelona that boosted commerce and gradually established advertising as a profession. New cultural trends, the gradual popularization of culture and, in particular, the development of the press played a crucial role in advancing the professionalization of advertising in Spain.

At first, advertising agencies were individual entities represented by press agents, acting as brokers for newspapers and other publications. At that time, their work was limited to managing advertising space. Over time, these agents reoriented their services toward clients, providing added value that was previously non-existent. These advertising agents gave rise to the first advertising agencies. At that time, specifically in 1872, Rafael Roldós Viñolas and his partner Antonio Pujol y Samsot founded the Centro de Anuncios Roldós y Compañía, which rapidly grew into one of Spain's most significant advertising agencies. By 1878, the agency's advertising was featured in major newspapers in Spain, outlining the agency's variety of services. Throughout the 20th century, the agency experienced short-lived mergers – Empresa Española Roldós-Tiroleses, S.A. de Publicidad and Roldós-Gispert, Sociedad Anónima de Publicidad – as documented by Serra and Martorell (2019) and underwent slight modifications in its commercial name. However, it retained the founder's surname. Today, after more than 150 years of activity, Roldós Media is the oldest advertising agency in operation.

2. Objectives and methodology

This research aims to contribute new data derived from primary sources to the history of Spanish and Catalan advertising by examining the trajectory of Roldós y Compañía, the oldest active agency globally. This article analyzes the significant role Rafael Roldós Viñolas played, the first documented advertising agent in Spain and one of the architects of the inception of advertising activity in Spain. In addition, we will delve into the advertising agency founded in 1872, which is still operational today under the name Roldós Media. Therefore, this work aims to analyze the agency's role within the broader context of the history of Spanish advertising from its inception to the present day. Until now, the information published by the agency is confusing, inaccurate and incomplete. Despite its considerable influence over the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, to the best of the authors'

knowledge, no prior research addresses the agency's trajectory throughout its more than 150 years of activity. Consequently, this research aims to shed light on some of the data and fill the existing information gaps.

The research follows a chronological structure to address different aspects of the agency, including its structure, client portfolio, workforce in different periods and professional profiles across different eras, among other features.

Given the limited information on the subject, a combination of different types of sources was examined. On the one hand, all kinds of material from the Roldós family's personal archives were analyzed, encompassing documents dating from the end of the 19th century to the present. These materials included photographs, official documents, notarial deeds, account books – containing the agency's operating accounts, personal professional and institutional correspondence, copies of original letters from Mr. Rafael Roldós outlining client media plans from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, etc. The documentary collections from institutions such as the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya or la Associació Empresarial de Publicitat, as well as historical archives from Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona or Archivo Histórico de la Oficina Española de Patentes y Marcas were also consulted. Digital archives specializing in the conservation of 19th- and 20th-century print publications such as Arxiu de Revistes Catalanes Antigues or the Biblioteca virtual de la prensa historica – and the newspaper archives from some of Spain's oldest media, *ABC* or *La Vanguardia* – have also been explored. Primary sources such as interviews with former agency employees, various shareholders and members of the company's Board of Directors were also conducted. Secondary sources, both contemporary and period, were also analyzed to enrich the narrative of both the history of Roldós y Compañía and the broader context and evolution of advertising activity in Spain.

3. Rafael Roldós Viñolas, Spain's first documented advertising agent

In the second half of the 19th century, written advertisements had an informative function, and in general, their composition was based solely on text crafted by the newspapers themselves. Advertising soon became a vital source of income for the press, converting the task of finding and retaining advertisers into a means of ensuring survival. Out of this necessity, the press agent emerged, a figure who "worked on behalf of and for the newspaper to manage advertising spaces, which is why they are also called 'space brokers'. The newspapers themselves were in charge of writing the text" (López Lita, 2001).

The career paths of these first agents significantly influenced the development of their own activity and the relationships they established with the media and businesspeople. Volney B. Palmer, regarded as the first American advertising agent and writer, commenced his activities in 1840 (Checa, 2007). Rafael Roldós Viñolas, the first advertising agent in Spain, followed suit just two decades later. In addition, Roldós was encouraged by his father to study typography, "Roldós was a student, like so many others, but at the same time as he was attending classes, his good father made him learn a new trade, and for a few years, he was an expert typist, and that is how his interest in journalism developed" (*Las Noticias*, October 23, 1918).

As an agent, he managed the entire advertising process, from receiving projects from individuals or small companies to placing the advertisements in the chosen medium. In fact, Rafael Roldós Viñolas personally wrote the advertisements in the newspaper's workshops and delivered them to the printing house manager. The following morning, he would go to the newspaper to gather "as many copies as he had inserted and, on delivery of a copy to the client, so that he could check that his advertisement had appeared, he was paid for his work"

(Pérez Ruiz, 2001). At that time, advertising was still in its infancy, as the theoretical basis for measuring the results of advertisements had not yet been established (Vidal, 2020).

The growth in advertising highlighted the need to advertise to gain visibility. Over time, press agents expanded their services, gaining autonomy while their relationship with the media weakened. Their work was still oriented toward buying and selling spaces, but they enjoyed greater independence. As López Lita (2001) highlighted, the advertising agent emerged as a figure who worked for themselves and the advertisers, providing advertisement writing services while treating the sale of spaces as a secondary task. However, despite their increased participation, they were still intermediaries between the newspaper and the advertiser. In the last third of the 19th century, the first agencies worldwide originated from the vitality and professionalism of these first agents. Once again, the origin of the advertising agencies in Spain coincides with that of other countries, "They were usually individual companies, and the agent was originally only a broker at the service of the newspapers, from which they received a commission that was deducted from the price-tariff, which was otherwise flexible" (García Ruescas, 1971).

However, as aforementioned, in the early years, the press and advertising agents' roles were not always clearly differentiated since "the decisive step towards sectoral specialization had not yet taken place" (Solanas, 2011).

Gradually, the agent evolved into a company, both economically and professionally, forming advertising agencies as we know them today. Rafael Roldós Viñolas' entrepreneurial spirit drove him to promote various initiatives, both in advertising – such as the creation of new advertising supports, for instance, on public urinals or cigarette rolling machines – and in art – through the establishment of the Sociedad de Artistas Españoles, a company centered on the reproduction of artworks – and, in particular in the journalistic sector. In 1986, he founded the newspaper *Las Noticias*, which soon became one of the leading newspapers in terms of circulation in Catalonia.

4. Center of advertisements Roldós y Compañía during the first two decades of the 20th century

After gaining several years of experience in the advertising business, Rafael Roldós Viñolas decided to apply his knowledge by creating an advertising center. As López Lita (2001) highlighted, after carrying out the activity "on a solo basis during some time [. . .], he gradually expanded his client base and specialized until he co-founded Roldós y Compañía" with Antonio Pujol Samsot.

Rafael Roldós leveraged his knowledge of Barcelona's commerce to set up the strategically located headquarters in Barcelona, on Carrer Escudellers de Barcelona, numbers 5, 7 and 9, and to specialize in processing advertisements for insertion in various newspapers in Spain and abroad.

Despite the prevailing perception of advertising as a burdensome, difficult-to-recover and uncertain expense during this period, advertising activity became increasingly professionalized under the structure of the first advertising agencies. Spain saw the emergence of several advertising centers, such as the "Sociedad General de Anuncios" or the "Centro de Anuncios." Simultaneously, in Barcelona, advertising agencies such as "Centro de Anuncios de Grañen y C^{a}," "Amengual y Cía" or "Cebrián y Cía, Centro Internacional de Anuncios" (Herreros, 2000) emerged. However, the profession faced challenges in its early stages due to the perception that some sectors had toward it:

> Despite Roldós moving around Barcelona, undoubtedly the most modernized city in Spain, had a difficult start, as advertisements [. . .] were considered a lavish expense, and it was not easy to convince advertisers that it could be money well spent (Eguizábal, 1998).

Regarding the company's location, Roldós y Compañía underwent several location changes over the last two decades of the 19th century. The first occurred in the mid-1880s, as can be corroborated in the advertisements published in the press. From Carrer Escudellers 5, 7 and 9, it moved to Escudellers, 41 and Aglá, 9 (Diari Català, 1880). In 1882, the agency relocated to number 30, Carrer Escudellers (*La Publicidad*, 5 January 1883), published twice as a news item in *La Vanguardia*. In October 1982, it was reported that "The advertising center of Roldós' y compañía advertising center has moved to Carrer de Escudillers 30, on the corner of Obradors, where advertisements for Barcelona, Madrid, and other regions in Spain, Overseas and Abroad are received" (*La Vanguardia*, 17 October 1882). A month later, in November, another news piece about the move was published, but this time, it was longer, and its content resembled that of an advertorial. Whether the issuer was the agency itself or *La Vanguardia* – which maintained close ties with Roldós y Compañía – the publication of this news resulted in a mutual benefit, as it boosted their respective reputations:

> Roldos y Compañía, owners of the oldest "Centre of advertisements" in the capital, have just moved [. . .] To be convinced of the universal relations that this house maintains, it is enough to enter these offices and contemplate the endless shelving comprising the different sections of newspapers from the Penisula, Overseas and abroad, each of which occupies a fixed department (*La Vanguardia*, November 12, 1882).

In mid-1893, it relocated to Rambla del Centro number 37, remaining until 1920. However, Rafael Roldós Viñolas began to develop his final project as early as 1914: the creation of a new headquarters to house his advertising agency and the newspaper *Las Noticias* (Permit file to Mr. Rafael Roldós [. . .], 1915) at Rambla de los Estudios, 6, directed by the architect Antonio Pons. However, "when he had taken care of the machine location when he had decided on the layouts [. . .] and when the works to allow the newspaper to be set up there had already begun, death came to surprise him" (*Las Noticias*, 23 October 1918). On October 22, 1918, Rafael Roldós Viñolas died two years before moving to the new headquarters. His untimely death was covered in several pages in the Spanish press, given that "Mr Roldós had excellent qualities that won him great sympathy" (*El Eco de la Comarca*, October 27, 1918). From that moment on, his sons Ruperto and Rafael Roldós took over the advertising agency and the newspaper.

During the 1920s, Prat Gaballi's scientific foundations, which facilitated the advancement of the profession's technical aspects, and the publication of the first magazines on advertising techniques laid the groundwork for what would become modern advertising in Spain (Vidal, 2020). In this context, Roldós Rapid, the technical section of the agency, was created with a specific focus on crafting modern advertising campaigns: drawings, leaflets, posters or catalogs, and their distinctive signature can be seen in many of the advertisements from that era (*La Vanguardia*, December 23, 1924; *La Vanguardia*, May 19, 1926). Using graphic resources in the typography of these advertisements – capital letters, underlining, tall boxes in complete words, etc. – to highlight the cities where he offered advertisements in newspapers and the services he provided is particularly noteworthy.

The agency's location remained unchanged until the end of the 1920s, with its activity evolving in step with the growing credibility and effectiveness of advertising. Throughout this period, the agency managed campaigns for a diverse range of advertisers, including Uricure, a specific product designed to combat uric acid, Magnesia S. Pellegrino purgatives, Phoscaro soluble cocoa, Veramon painkillers, La Física department store, various Higea products, Netol cleaner, Nelia soluble chocolate, El Siglo department store and Bambú cigarette paper, among others. Its creative services extended to clients such as Rob-Vida Miret, the record and gramophone company César Vicente, Calisay liqueur, Juncosa chocolates, Resyl or La Flor de Oro syrups.

5. Roldós in 1930: alliances, mergers and war

On December 29, 1928, the incorporation of the advertising agency Empresa Española Roldós-Tiroleses, S.A. de Publicidad, better known as Roldós-Tiroleses, was signed, a business alliance created for the "exploitation of advertising and propaganda in all its branches and aspects" (Certificate of Incorporation by Empresa Española Roldós-Tiroleses, S.A. de Publicidad, 1928). It also allows the agency to "establish as many head offices, branches, delegations or representations it deems appropriate" (Certificate of Incorporation by Empresa Española Roldós-Tiroleses, S.A. de Publicidad, 1928).

With a share capital of 8 million pesetas, represented by 16,000 nominative shares of 500 pesetas each, the companies involved in this merger included Roldós y Compañía, Los Tiroleses S. L., Helios, Prado Tello, Agencia Reyes and Sociedad General de Anuncios de España with branches in Barcelona – Barcelona was the only city with two offices – Madrid, Zaragoza, Valencia, Sevilla, Bilbao, La Coruña, Santander, San Sebastián, Gijón and Vigo (Serra, 2015). Individually the contribution of each shareholder is as follows: Manuel Pérez Aguirre – who contributed three amounts corresponding to the three companies he owned: 1,350,500 pesetas from the valuation of Los Tiroleses S.L., 82,000 pesetas from the Agencia Sevillana de Publicidad, and 238,500 pesetas corresponding to the undivided half of the Reyes agency – and the brothers Rafael and Ruperto Roldós – who contributed a total of 1,650,500 pesetas for Roldós y Compañía – are the ones who invested the most. They are followed by Francisco Ardid and Luís Gispert, with 728,000 pesetas from the Helios agency. The offices of Tiroleses de Barcelona and San Sebastián, owned by Simón Pérez Aguirre, were valued at 483,500 pesetas. Manuela Brunet and Dorotea Quintero contributed 257,000 pesetas from the Sociedad General de Anuncios de España, Rodolfo Pérez participated with 45,000 pesetas as part of the overall value of the Prado Tello agency. The other half of the Reyes agency, owned by Alfonso Reyes, was also valued at 238,500 pesetas *(Certificate of incorporation by Empresa Española Roldós-Tiroleses, S.A. de Publicidad*, 1928).

This alliance indicates Spain's emerging advertising landscape in this period. For some, this merger was not merely a business alliance between companies but the collaboration of several business people who:

> Envisioning a broad horizon open to advertising, they decided to create a new agency to offer comprehensive and efficient services to those who were gradually increasing their client list to see what was then called propaganda with greater faith (García Ruescas, 1971).

By 1929, the agency boasted over 200 employees, with each agency owner managing its respective division (García Ruescas, 1971). The significance of this business initiative lies in three fundamental aspects. First, it was Spain's first major merger of advertising agencies, making it a reference for the Spanish advertising sector. Second, the agency broadened its territorial reach in key cities in Spain, ensuring maximum service coverage for clients. Finally, it promoted and fostered various advertising initiatives in subsequent years, including exhibitions, congresses and competitions (Serra and Martorell, 2019).

From 1931 to 1936, Catalonia became the epicenter for developing and consolidating the advertising phenomenon (Costa, 2016). This led to numerous events being held in advertising, especially in Barcelona, in which Roldós-Tiroleses actively participated. A notable event was the 1st National Advertising Congress, organized by Publi-Club on the 30 and 31 August in 1929, marking the first gathering of "all those involved in the challenging art of advertising. Technicians, artists, businesspeople, agencies, photoengravers, printers, etc." (Eguizábal, 2009). The thriving state of advertising in Catalonia was evident during this congress, as 94 of the 123 congress participants were Catalans (Eguizábal, 2009).

Among the scheduled events was a visit to the Roldós Tireoleses agency (*La Vanguardia*, August 31, 1929).

Just a couple of weeks after inaugurating the 5th International Congress of the Technical and Professional Press (*La Vanguardia*, September 17, 1929), and in November of that same year, the Week of Commercial Organization was held, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and Navigation. During this event, various advertising-related events were held, including the first advertising competition held in Spain, organized by the Committee (*La Publicitat*, November 12, 1929), in which Rafael Roldós Gómez participated as a member of the jury, which included the presentation of the "Copa Roldós-Tiroleses" award (*La Vanguardia*, November 12, 1929).

In 1931, a highly significant initiative for the advertising sector unfolded: the establishment of the Asociación de Empresas de Publicidad de Barcelona, whose statutes were authorized by Lluís Companys as Civil Governor, on May 19, 1931. This association, promoted by several advertising companies, intended to bring together those who work in "the exploitation of advertisements and who have joined the association and who are registered in the corresponding contribution and have joined the Association in compliance with the precepts set out in these Statutes" (Statutes of the Asociación de Empresas de Publicidad de Barcelona, 1931).

In the years following the dissolution of the Roldós-Tiroleses merger in March 1932, the Roldós agency remained actively involved in notable events: one such event was the I Salón Nacional de Fotografía Publicitaria, held in May 1932, also organized by Publi-Club. This event clearly illustrates the growing significance of photography in advertising (Pérez Ruiz, 2001).

Apart from participating actively in all these events, Roldós-Tiroleses spearheaded other initiatives, such as the Exhibition of Advertising Ideas for Posters and press Advertisements, which was inaugurated in 1931 in the agency's offices and was targeted at "all those people interested in commercial propaganda manifestations will be able to appreciate what can be done in Spain in this important sphere of activity in modern life" (*La Publicitat*, June 13, 1931).

The agency's popularity reached such heights that playwright Enrique Jardiel Poncela used the name Roldós-Tiroleses in his tragicomedy *Tú y yo somos tres*. As Pedro Laín describes, "Taking advantage of the popularity that 'Roldós-Tiroleses' enjoyed at the time, Jardiel makes a girl say 'tiroleses' and 'siameses' and then explodes the witticism" (Laín, 1981, p. 198).

However, following the euphoria of the International Exposition in 1929 and the subsequent economic and commercial boom, Roldós-Tiroleses faced several challenges, including low production in some branches and a long list of unpaid debts. Despite positive results obtained in key cities, for some months, they "are earmarked for cleaning up the accounts of loss-making branches, so the overall situation of the company is not encouraging, with total results being negative" (Serra and Martorell, 2019). Undoubtedly, this led to the acceleration of the company's dissolution in 1932, with the agency informing its clients that "in the best interests of the firms making up this entity, it has been resolved by common and friendly agreement between them to dissolve the company" (Letter from the Roldós agency to its clients, 1932). This marked the end of "the first large-scale agency cooperation in the history of Spanish advertising" (De Andrés, 2002).

After dissolving the company, Roldós-Tiroleses rebranded as Agencia Roldós, which was established with the "satisfaction of informing you that the members of the former companies Roldós y Cía., Agencia Heliosa and Los Tiroleses, of this city (. . .) have formed a new entity which, under the name 'Agencia Roldós,' will continue the same type of business" (Letter from Agencia Roldós addressed to its clients, 1932). However, this name only lasted a few months, as on March 3, 1933, it underwent a new merger with Publicidad Gispert. The newly created entity, Agencia de Publicidad Roldós-Gispert, S.A., was located at 11 Vergara

Street and had a capital of 600,000 pesetas (Serra, 2015) and was composed of several members from the previous merger: Rafael and Ruperto Roldós Gómez, Luis Gispert, Simón Pérez Aguirre and Francisco Ardid. This new joint merger continued until 1939.

The agency's services focused on "hiring and assigning advertisements of all types, providing drawings and models to advertisers and other acts related to propaganda and advertising in the broadest sense necessary" (*Incorporation of the Public Limited Company* "Agencia de Publicidad Roldós-Gispert Sociedad Anónima," 1933). A month later, on April 11, 1933, some articles in the company's Articles of Association were modified, including the one referring to the company's name: the agency would be incorporated under the name Roldós-Gispert, S.A. de Publicidad, instead of Agencia de Publicidad Roldós-Gispert, S.A. (*Amendments to articles from Roldós-Gispert Sociedad Anónima de Publicidad*, 1933).

In the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War, a nascent welfare society emerged due to the slight increase in consumption in Spanish society. At the same time, an artistic revolution was having a profound impact on advertising in which technical agencies, advertisers and brands incorporated innovative and daring artists, experimenting with all kinds of graphic and photographic techniques, which were well received in Spain, especially in Barcelona (Montero, 2010). This allowed the agencies to increase the rotation of artists and count on foreign names to contribute new design techniques to their work (Pelta, 1999). According to Checa Godoy, "Many of these agencies are incorporating young cartoonists, who soon begin to produce very innovative advertising, both in terms of freshness and creativity" (2007).

The emergence of new composition trends in advertisements coincides with the introduction of unseen trends and products in the market decades earlier, such as cars, radios or household appliances. Some of the most influential brands in the sector attracted large American advertising agencies. They set up offices in Spain to offer their services and help companies reach new consumers (Serra, 2015). Roldós-Gispert once again participated in most of the events, signifying the modernization of advertising agencies. "With this history, it seems beyond doubt that Roldós was one of the agencies that exercised professionally with the greatest vigor during this period" (Pérez Ruiz, 2001).

In general, Roldós-Gispert's client portfolio does not differ from previous periods, with most clients originating from Roldós Agency or Roldós-Tiroleses. The agency also actively maintained exclusivity in processing and managing advertisements for many newspapers. Notable clients included Pastillas Aspaime, Casa Vilardell, Calzados Segarra, Sports Drink, Frigidaire or Mentholina toothpaste by Dr. Andreu.

6. Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Roldós family

However, these years of economic, cultural and artistic prosperity were cut short by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The war-induced insecurity permeated the economic and financial spheres, paralyzing any commercial activities and leading to a loss of advertisers, which resulted in a drastic reduction in the use of advertising.

In this context, the Roldós brothers' political trajectory profoundly affected their most successful companies: the advertising agency and the newspaper. In the 1920s, both were Rotary Club members, and in the early 1930s, they joined the Radical Republican Party. Rafael Roldós's political career began in 1932 when he officially joined the Radical Republican Party. Only two years later, he took up his first political position until February 1936 as president of the Labour Council of the Generalitat. Throughout the war, he faced constant persecution by the Republican side, leading him to join the Red Cross until the end of the Civil War. Afterward, he returned to work, distancing himself from politics. Ruperto Roldós Gómez's political career is akin to figures like Lluís Companys, Francesc Macià and

Joan Pich i Pon, among others, which took a turn during the civil war. In addition to his ties to the Lerroux party, he was appointed deputy mayor of the Municipality Office of the Gracia District of Barcelona in 1934. However, the course of the Civil War changed his career as he was forced to relocate to Aiguafreda. He became the municipality's first mayor, replacing Francesc Casacuberta after the Civil War, holding the position from February 4, 1939, until July 26, 1940. Afterward, he returned to Barcelona and resumed his professional duties outside politics.

From the onset of the Civil War, both *Las Noticias* and Roldós-Gispert fell victim to the process of collectivization that unfolded in Spain.

As previously highlighted, the newspaper served as the unión general de trabajadores (UGT's) dissemination tool in the first instance. Once the conflict was over, the Franco regime prohibited its reprinting because among other accusations, it was "biased towards the Republican left-wing parties" (Checa, 1989) and had access to privileged information, "Las Noticias published the Statute before anyone else. How did they do it? Mystery? No, there is no mystery for us. Mr Roldós (Tiroleses) will personally organize the services" (*El Be Negre*, 1931).

In the agency's case, it went on to be managed by a Works Committee while maintaining representation by the agency's shareholders. From that time onwards, it was renamed Roldós-Gispert Empresa Colectivazada de Publicidad, a name kept until the end of the conflict (Serra, 2015). From November 1936, agency workers produced the newspaper Estímul, a socially oriented publication focused on reminding people about the absence of bases and working hours at the front, fostering a mentality centered on sacrificing their personal needs for the war effort (Ballester, 1996). Throughout the war, the only board member who remained in charge of the agency was Luís Gispert; until the end of the conflict, Francisco Ardid, Rafael and Ruperto Roldós resumed their respective positions. On May 15, 1939, the company's shareholders decided to dissolve the agency Roldós-Gispert, giving rise to a new name for the company: Roldós, S.A Agencia Española de Publicidad (Deed of modification of the statutes of the Compañía "Roldós S.A. Agencia Española de Publicidad," 1939). The founding members were Mr Rafael Roldós Gómez, Ruperto Roldós Gómez and Francisco Ardid (García Ruescas, 1971), maintaining its headquarters in the calle Vergara, 11 in Barcelona.

Following the war, the Spanish advertising sector experienced a decline compared to its early days (Herreros, 2000). The modest industrial structure Spain built in the 1930s disappeared, marking "a phenomenon of regression from which the nation did not manage to recover until the mid-1950s" (Montero, 2012).

7. Roldós, S.A. Spanish advertising agency in the postwar period

In the early stages of the Francoist dictatorship (1939–1975), the agency resumed work, continuing its activity under the same name until December 1953, when a minor adjustment took place: the agency's statutes were adapted to the requirement to the Law of July 17, 1951 on the Legal Regime of Public Limited Companies. At this time, the agency was headquartered in Barcelona and had a branch in Valencia, on Calle Lauria (Pérez Ruiz, 2001); *La Voz de Galicia*, April 21, 1945).

According to the Anuario Artístico Publicitario GARÚ of 1948, there were 280 advertising agencies that year, spread across 44 cities in Spain, of which 67 were located in Madrid, 58 in Barcelona and 24 in Valencia (Pérez Ruiz, 2001).

To reclaim the prestige it had maintained throughout its history, Roldós, S.A. agency was restructured. Important professionals from the national scene were incorporated into the agency, such as Agustín Centelles, who, thanks to his expertise as a photographer, had

had had the opportunity to work for the most prestigious agencies in the country, such as Roldós, OESTE or Danis (Ferré, 2012).

It was also the first advertising agency where Marçal Moliné worked, who described it as "an institution that went back to I don't know when." Joaquim Muntañola was another noteworthy cartoonist who collaborated with the agency, whose popularity soared after receiving a commission from the agency in 1944. Over a year, he drew a daily cartoon for the agency's client, Potax meat stock cubes, as part of the advertising campaign under the slogan "Every day a laugh. Every day a Potax." The campaign was displayed on a giant billboard – 2.50 × 1.50 meters in color – on the facade of a large building in Plaza Cataluña at the corner of Vergara Street. According to his testimony, his work routine was as follows: "In the basement of Mr. Roldós' house, the advertising agency for which he worked, set a space where they put the papers to do seven drawings a week and then I would draw them in two or three days" (Contel, 2008).

Illustrator Carme Barbarà began her professional career at Roldós, S.A., at the age of 15 (Barbarà, 2013). Barbarà worked at the agency for over a decade with professionals such as Fernando Ezquerro Espinosa, Tito Álvarez, Mario de Chalons, Joan Giralt, Alejandro Parriego, Luis Álvarez and Manuel Mayoral (Barbarà, 2011).

The agency boasted an extensive client list during this period. Some of the most prominent names are Palacio Balañá, the footwear company Torrens, household appliances Tungsram, Labarotorios Viñas, the cosmetics company Laurendor, Chartreuse liqueur, Grupo Caballero drinks, the household appliance company Linde or Gorila footwear, among many others.

8. End of dictatorship and democratic transition

The 1960s marked a period of prosperity in Spain following the long postwar period; the end of autarchy, improvements in the international economic climate and the beginning of the tourist phenomenon benefited the Spanish economy and contributed to the emergence of a "consumer society" (Solà, 2005).

The influx of foreign companies in Spain fostered the rise of multinational companies due to the pre-existing relationships between these large companies and their respective international agencies and the underdeveloped image of the advertising industry in Spain (Eguizábal, 1998). The latter half of the 20th century saw the establishment of a wide range of advertising agencies in Spain, especially in Barcelona, where significant mergers between local agencies and recently arrived multinationals took place, giving rise to the "advertising boom" in Spain (Sabaté *et al.*, 2011).

The rapid development of the Spanish advertising sector from this decade onwards facilitated the growth of Roldós, S.A., as it did the rest of the agencies. Against this backdrop, Roldós S.A. continued with its activity, offering comprehensive advertising services, and it had:

> [. . .] its own general offices and technical services of studios, printing and recording, and technical equipment workshops in Calle de Vergara 11, ground floor and basement, spacious premises in which it employs 60 people, with a mechanized administrative section, with modern equipment and machines for invoicing, data, statistics and so on (Dun and Bradstreet, 1969).

The company transitioned from exclusively managing advertising for forty-three public entertainment venues to organizing and administering "campaigns for a variety of industrial and commercial firms, operating in all forms of advertising media" (Dun and Bradstreet, 1969).

In response to advertisers' growing creative demand, the agency separated creative services from processing and managing advertising services in 1970. Under this premise, Roldós-Tuset was established: General Advertising, which offers very different services than Roldós Vergara (advertisements), focusing on press and direct advertising.

Roldós-Tuset: Publicidad en General was located at Calle Tuset, 23–25, 4th floor, and was established for reasons of space and practicality. Its structure "brings together the technical-advertising departments (creativity, marketing, editorial, art, and media) in a dynamic entity with a comprehensive mastery of the latest General Advertising techniques" (Roldós, 1970). This cutting-edge agency, equipped with the latest technologies and a professional staff capable of managing entire advertising campaigns, particularly excelled in its creative services. Its primary media channels were television, radio, press, magazines and billboards. The agency's services included the study, creativity, production, distribution, control of advertising campaigns and promotional actions. It also provided marketing and public relations consultancy and motivational research. Moreover, it housed a graphic arts and design studio and a photography studio (Roldós, 1970). Roldós-Tuset's organizational structure included a creative director, marketing manager, art director, manager of the client service division (or account division) and an executive assigned to the corresponding account, a copywriter and a media manager (Roldós, 1970).

Roldós Vergara's focus on advertisements led to the establishment of Anuncios en Prensa y Publicidad Directa, which focused on processing all types of small-scale arrangements and advertisements- mainly classifieds for individuals and small businesses. Located at number 10 Calle Vergara, this shift in business strategy left behind the old premises situated at number 11 Calle Vergara, opposite what would be the new headquarters; it also offered direct advertising services. Specifically, this office excelled in creating direct advertising messages, including sending distinct inserts based on selected lists, choosing addresses from its archives according to professions and specialties and inserting advertisements in the national and foreign press by millimeters or words (Roldós, 1970).

The late 1970s were marked by profound economic crisis, which impacted the Spanish advertising sector. In this scenario, some national agencies grappling with the country's recession and intensified competition from multinational agencies were forced to reconsider their agency model (Eguizábal, 1998) or even close their agencies, as was the case with Vila, Reclamo, Carvis Publicidad or OESTE. Large multinationals took over other agencies, such as the case of BBDO or Danis, by Benton and Bowles. The restructuring of the sector also required profound changes:

> The crisis prompted a restructuring of the advertising industry but also brought about a change of philosophy. It was no longer possible to continue operating with the mentality from the 1960s; new times seemed more complex and more competitive, and it was necessary to make way for other people who arrived to the advertising business with fresh ideas (Eguizábal, 1998).

Roldós, S.A. managed to overcome the economic and advertising crisis without making any significant business changes. Despite some attempts, the agency remained inflexible in the face of structural changes, such as the participation in a new merger or the transfer of the commercial exploitation of the Roldós S.A. brand. However, it could not prevent the company from being downsized due to the economic situation, and in 1982, Roldós Tuset closed its doors. To remain competitive, Roldós, S.A. had to "specialize primarily in advertising services, abandoning a whole series of works that were still undertaken by national agencies" (Eguizábal, 1998). Therefore, from that moment onwards, mainly specializing in the processing and management of advertisements – it also maintained creative services but with a more modest staff – all its activities were concentrated at Calle

Vergara, 10, where it would be located until the early 21st century. Faced with the impossibility of competing with the new wave of multinational agencies and other newly created local agencies, Roldós, S.A. redirected its services toward regional or national and smaller clients – small- and medium-sized companies and individuals with more specific communication needs.

In February 1989, PYMEC awarded Roldós S.A the "Premi Mil·lenari 88. Petita i mitjana empresa de Catalunya" for being the oldest company in the Asosiación Empresarial de Publicitat.

In 1992, the agency removed its name "Agencia Española de Publicidad" and simplified it to Roldós S.A., which has endured to the present day. Its commercial name, however, underwent slight changes: Roldós Publicitat until 2018, and since then, Roldós Media, in line with its current service orientation.

9. Roldós media, an agency at service of media planning in 21st century

The 21st century has ushered in significant changes for Roldós, S.A. In 2006, the agency relocated from its offices on Calle Vergara to Paseo de Sant Joan, number 160 in Barcelona. The agency's new location coincided with a global restructuring and a shift in the agency's services. Until then, the agency had carried out most initiatives in the emerging digital landscape and engaged in media planning campaigns of a particular scale. However, its primary focus was creating, managing and processing press advertisements. The early 2000s marked a new era in the advertising sphere with the rise of digitalization, which posed challenges for the agency's future. The gradual expansion of the internet, which offered advertisers autonomy and immediacy, appealed to small advertisers, who were Roldós, S.A's leading clients. The anticipation of a drop in sales and the consequent crisis in print media forced the agency to reorient its activities again. While it continued to offer services for managing and processing diverse advertisements across various media for any advertiser, by the end of the 2000s, Roldós, S.A. had evolved into a media agency also specializing in online media planning (Roldós, 2013). Confronted with an increasingly complex media landscape, where media planning has become an increasingly complex process, Roldós, S.A. is now a media agency specializing in online media planning. (Roldós, 2013). This complex media landscape made media planning "an arduous and extraordinarily sophisticated discipline" (Eguizábal, 1998); as a result, the agency restructured its organizational chart to cater to the advertising planning needs of small and medium-sized advertisers. Integrating the new digital channels into everyday life in society led advertisers and agencies to incorporate them into their communication strategies.

This strategic reorientation has not only enabled the agency to attract new advertisers but has also improved the quality of its services, two pivotal factors contributing to the agency's survival and its establishment as a benchmark in the sector. Consequently, the agency and its founder, Rafael Roldós Viñolas, have received several awards in the past few years. Notably, the exhibition held at the Palau Robert in Barcelona, "La Publicitat a Catalunya (1857–1957). Roldós i els pioners," along with the distinction of Rafael Roldós Viñolas as an Honorary Member of the Academia de la Publicidad in 2012. Furthermore, in 2022, Roldós Media celebrated its 150th anniversary, a milestone recognized with the Carlos Ferrer Salat award for SME of the year, presented by the Catalan employers' organization Foment del Treball.

10. Conclusions

Although the figure of the advertising pioneer Rafael Roldós Viñolas has been studied in depth over the last decade, sparking interest among researchers and professors, several diverse media and even becoming the subject of a doctoral thesis (Serra, 2015), to the best of the authors' knowledge, no article has examined the entire trajectory of the Roldós agency.

Roldós S.A was established in the 1970s, one of the first advertising centers in Spain, laying the foundation for various initiatives in the last third of the 19th century, such as self-advertising, popularizing promotions through advertisements featuring discount coupons and participating in the Guild of Advertising Agents or Entrepreneurs.

In addition, its close ties to the newspaper *Las Noticias* made it one of the agencies with the highest advertising production in Barcelona during the early 20th century.

It quickly rose to prominence as an advertising agency in Spain. It represented the trends that followed throughout the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries while reorienting its business several times to adapt to market needs and the changing media landscape. The involvement of Rafael Roldós Viñolas' descendants in numerous sector initiatives, such as advertising congresses, competitions and the creation of professional associations, has been instrumental to the agency's credibility and recognition in the Spanish advertising sector across its dimensions. Today, it has been transformed into a media agency; Roldós Media continues to be a benchmark in the sector; its enduring success is underpinned by its extensive history, profound knowledge of the sector and expertise in advertising media.

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