

Hierarchy of Effects: Summary of Replies

ELMAR Contribution by J. Scott Armstrong
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I received eleven replies to my Hierarchy of Effects (HoE) message on ELMAR dated March 25, 2005.

Main conclusion: No one was able to describe a study showing that HoE leads to improved decision making.

There was no shortage of opinions, pro and con HoE. Those against HoE were frustrated by the lack of evidence and are suspicious of the value of HoE. Some of those in favor claimed that HoE has been helpful to them, and two people saw no need for scientific studies in this area.

One person thought that the value of HoE could simply be demonstrated by logic. That does not work for me. My hypothesis is that those who use HoE develop less effective (less profitable) advertising campaigns than those who do not. The biggest danger I see is that HoE might lead advertisers to focus too heavily on awareness, and to, consequently, ignore higher-level objectives such as changing or maintaining behavior (and, in firms, on Return-on Investment). This would happen because awareness is much easier to measure (except for direct response advertising). In effect, HoE legitimizes poor objective setting. This is a testable hypothesis.

The respondents suggested the references below. The three marked with asterisks were described as empirical studies on HoE. I am familiar with most, but not all of these studies. Those that I have read provide no evidence on the value of HoE.

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