



## Point of view: Does advertising cause a "Hierarchy of Effects"?

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This paper addresses three general questions about hierarchy models of advertising effects: (1) Why hierarchy-of-advertising-effects models do not provide an accurate description of the effects of advertising, and (2) Why these hierarchy-of-advertising-effects models are not an accurate conceptualization of how advertising works as a marketing force in the real world, and, (3) Why, as long as our thinking about advertising and its effects is dominated by the hierarchy-of-advertising-effects frame of mind, it is unlikely that we will ever measure the true effects of advertising. In addition, the implications of these shortcomings of hierarchy models of advertising effects for the concept of integrated marketing communications are discussed.

ADVERTISING IS GENERALLY SEEN as a means of communicating persuasively with consumers. This communication process--if it is successful--ultimately results in the sale of the product or service advertised to at least some of the consumers that have been exposed to the advertising. If such sales do not happen, the advertising is judged not to have been effective.

As Russell Colley (1961) put it:

Advertising's job purely and simply is to communicate, to a defined audience, information and a frame-of-mind that stimulate action. Advertising succeeds or fails depending on how well it communicates the desired information and attitudes to the right people at the right time at the right cost.

What specific kinds of effects should advertising strive to produce? In the first place, it must be recognized that advertising must produce different effects in different people because, at any one time, not all people are equal with respect to attitudes toward, the information they have about, or their images of the brand that is to be advertised.

Advertising's role, therefore, is to make consumers, whatever their current state of attitudes toward, information about, or images of a brand, more informed about the brand and more generally favorable to it. Advertising must, that is, produce some sort of mental change in the consumer: he or she must think differently about the brand after being exposed to successful advertising.

The exact nature of this communications process has consistently been described in the marketing literature as a "hierarchy of advertising effects." Advertising is, in this formulation, responsible for creating a series of successive responses from individual consumers that lead, when the advertising is successful, to a completed sale.

Thus, in the hierarchy-of-advertising effects models of how advertising works, it is posited that advertising has multiple tasks:

- \* If the consumer has never heard of the brand, advertising must, first, cause brand awareness.
- \* If the consumer has heard of the brand but knows nothing of it, advertising must, second, arouse interest.
- \* As the consumer's interest is being aroused, advertising must, third, describe the characteristics-- physical and ephemeral--of the brand so that the consumer will understand and fully appreciate them.
- \* Once the consumer is aware of and understands the brand's characteristics, the advertising must, fourth, convince the consumer that the brand is superior to its competitors and should be purchased.
- \* Finally, fifth, the consumer acts--he or she buys the brand, or mentally prepares to do so.

Hierarchy-of-advertising-effects models have been around in the literature of marketing, in one form or another, for more than 100 years.

For example, a hierarchy-of-personal-selling-effects formulation appeared in the literature as early as 1898 and it was later adapted to advertising, according to Edward Strong (1925). The crucial thresholds in this early formulation were

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