

USING CORPORATE ROLE MODELS TO TEACH MARKET SEGMENTATION:  
A SLIDE SHOW IN THE MARKETING CLASSROOM

Mary Cullinan, California State University, Hayward

ABSTRACT

Companies are increasingly using psychographic indicators to help pinpoint specific target markets. The slide show and exercises outlined in this article use VALS categories to help students understand market segmentation and to evaluate the images companies develop through the use of role models.

INTRODUCTION

In 1957, Eleanor Roosevelt sold Gold Luck margarine on national television. In the 1960's, Joe Namath rocked the world by shaving off his Fu Manchu moustache in a commercial for Schick's electric razor. More recently, the appearance of Dallas star Larry Hagman in a bedsheet commercial brought about a torrent of enthusiastic calls that broke down the customer service telephone at Cannon Mills.

In a sometimes frantic effort, companies vie with each other to find role models that will both capture the fleeting attention of the American consumer and embody qualities of their corporate images. Every company hopes to find a spokesperson who will transmit qualities as enduring as those of the Marlboro cowboy or the Jolly Green Giant. At the same time, companies gamble that their spokespersons will attract specific targeted consumers.

As advertising becomes ever more sophisticated, companies are increasingly using psychographic as well as demographic indicators to help pinpoint specific target markets. For example, after studying the Values and Lifestyles (VALS) typology developed by SRI International, Dr. Pepper determined that its product should be aimed at inner-directed consumers.

To heighten students' awareness of such sophisticated marketing strategies and to illustrate the application of psychographic segmentation, a slide show can be used in conjunction with in-class exercises. This approach enables students to study corporate images that they have previously taken for granted and to evaluate the effectiveness of those images.

The slide show and exercises also help students perceive how companies use psychographic segmentation to target particular consumers. Since the VALS categories provide a simple, up-to-date, and comprehensive typology, they are a useful model for these exercises.

The following exercises may be used together or separately; if used together, they will take up at least 90 minutes of class time. Instructors may use these exercises while discussing market segmentation or, later, in classes on promotional strategies.

BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

The two exercises outlined here are both educational and exciting for students.

1. Students learn the basics of psychographic segmentation.
2. They learn the VALS system in depth and assess its utility and drawbacks.
3. They sense the subtle tonal qualities that marketers want consumers to associate with companies and products.
4. They assess the strengths and weaknesses of a number of advertisements.
5. They perceive which market segments are most heavily targeted by marketers.
6. They learn how marketers use aspirational and associative elements to target precise groups; they may also perceive flaws in some companies' choices of role models.
7. They analyze themselves as consumers and discuss what marketing approaches might work for them.

CLASS PREPARATION

To prepare for this class, instructors should collect at least fifteen advertisements that use real or fictional characters to represent products. Choosing these advertisements from a range of publications--Newsweek, Seventeen, Sports Illustrated, People--ensures that a variety of consumer types will be targeted.

At the same time, instructors should collect at least twelve pictures of well-known people who are not representing a product (at least in that photograph). Both sets of pictures should be made into slides.

When preparing a lecture for this class, instructors should compile examples of people who have become closely and successfully identified with their products--like Lee Iacocca with Chrysler and Dennis Weaver with Great Western Savings. Also, since students always enjoy hearing about marketing mistakes, instructors might want to discuss errors such as Marlboro's early advertisements using women models to target female consumers.

Instructors should also describe the connections

between VALS categories and specific advertising campaigns. For instance, the U.S. Army's "Be All You Can Be" slogan can be cited as an example of a strategy aimed at a particular group (the VALS' I-am-me category).

Handing out sheets with the VALS typology helps students to remember the categories and shortens the necessary lecture time on the subject.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH: EXERCISE 1

This exercise teaches students the attributes of the nine VALS categories and introduces them to many of the decisions marketers face as they match psychographic profiles with aspirational corporate symbols.

1. The instructor lectures on psychographic segmentation and discusses the nine VALS categories.
2. The instructor provides students with a handout (see Figure 1) listing the VALS categories and the fifteen companies/products illustrated in the first part of the slide show.

Figure 1. VALS CATEGORIES/CORPORATE IMAGES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Citibank									
2. IBM									
3. ABC Radio									
4. Wang									
5. Seirnoff									
6. Marlboro									
7. Save the Children									
8. Metropolitan Life									
9. Jordache									
10. Teleasia									
11. Virginia Slims									
12. Scoundrel									
13. Levi's									
14. Konika									
15. K-Mart									

1 = Survivors      4 = Enthusiasts      7 = Experiential  
 2 = Sustainers    5 = Achievers        8 = Societally Conscious  
 3 = Belongers     6 = I-Am-Me         9 = Integrated

3. The instructor breaks the class into groups of three or four students each and then shows slides of the fifteen advertisements. Between each slide, the instructor pauses while the groups decide which VALS categories are being targeted.
4. The instructor and the class discuss which categories were chosen for each advertisement. (The instructor may find it helpful to show the slides again during discussion of each ad.) While isolating qualities in the ads that led them to their decisions, group members identify elements such as color, copy, and visual arrangements as well as the personal qualities of each spokesperson.

5. The instructor then involves students in a discussion regarding the effectiveness of the spokespersons chosen by each company. Questions such as "Is Jaclyn Smith an appropriate image for K-Mart?" and "Can you think of a better image for Metropolitan Life than Snoopy?" lead to lively discussions that touch on a number of issues vital to marketers.

By the end of the discussion, students should be able to rate the respective advertisements with regard to their effectiveness in (1) attracting precise target markets and (2) reflecting appropriate corporate values or culture.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH: EXERCISE 2

The second exercise demands even more creative thinking from the students. Now, working individually rather than in groups, they must fit a famous figure to a product. To do this, they must consider both consumers and corporate images.

1. Pass out a list of well-known people and a list of products. There should be roughly two more names than there are products (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. PEOPLE AND PRODUCTS: MIX AND MATCH

1. Sylvester Stallone	A. Epson home computer
2. Phil Donahue	B. Sassoon hair products
3. Bob Dylan	C. Time-Life history series
4. Nikita Khrushchev	D. mid-price Toyota sedan
5. Booyi Strop	E. Procter and Gamble feminine hygiene products
6. Michael J. Fox	F. Braun's kitchen towels
7. Sting	G. Chanel No. 5 perfume
8. Gerald Stachson	H. Food the Money program
9. Groo James	I. expensive Eddie Bauer sports outfit for men
10. Elanbever	J. Liz Claiborne wool suit
11. Dr. Ruth	
12. Ringo Starr	

Directions: In the space next to the name of each famous figure, write the letter of the product that person would best represent. Be prepared to defend your decisions.

Which figures did you decide NOT to choose? Why? Can you think of a product for which these two figures would be effective representatives? Explain.

2. Show a slide depicting each of the famous people listed on the sheet and ask the students to match the person with one appropriate product. Students should also answer the questions at the bottom of the sheet: these may help students identify qualities that companies do not want to be associated with.
3. The instructor may collect these sheets, review the data, and initiate a discussion of the following class meeting based on the students' decisions and comments. Or the instructor may choose simply to get overall responses through informal class discussion. Debates will often ensue as students describe advertising campaigns they had imagined with their chosen famous person as a focus.

4. As the discussion progresses, the instructor should begin to isolate various emerging themes through specific questions. "Why did nobody choose Dr. Ruth for the Toyota ad?" "Why isn't Gerald Stockman a popular choice for marketing kitchen towels?" "Why did so few of you choose Ringo for one of your products?"

The answers to these questions will help students to identify qualities that marketers consider when formulating both advertising campaigns and corporate images.

5. Instructors may choose to have students develop their ideas further in a homework assignment. For example, students could be asked to design an advertisement or commercial based on one of the people/product combinations they chose.

Or students could write a brief paper based on the exercise and the ensuing discussion. Papers could focus on issues such as the relationship between corporate imagery and target markets or the role of aspirational or associative groups in a marketer's decision-making.

A final homework assignment could ask students to determine their own places in the VALS categories and evaluate advertisements that most closely target that segment. This assignment leads to questions concerning the validity of the VALS categories and helps students see both the strengths and the limitations of psychographic segmentation itself.

#### CONCLUSION

While generating enthusiasm and debate in the classroom, these two exercises deepen students' understanding of the complex strategies involved with choosing corporate images that match a company's targeted consumer. In addition, they bring to life the nature of a marketer's choices and decision-making during the entire promotional process.