

The Framework

Motivations and resources determine how a person will express himself or herself in the marketplace.

People buy products and services and seek experiences that fulfill their characteristic preferences and give shape, substance, and satisfaction to their lives. An individual's primary motivation determines what in particular about the self or the world is the meaningful core that governs his or her activities. VALS™ isolates the patterns that reinforce and sustain a person's identity as the person expresses it in the marketplace.

Some consumers choose what is "best."

Individuals motivated by *ideals* are grounded in knowledge and principles. For some people, this motivation is manifest in intellectual curiosity and quiet philosophical searching. For others, it expresses in an adherence to a personal or social code of conduct, such as religious, moral, or ethical convictions. In either case, the tendency is to base decisions on abstract, idealized criteria such as quality, integrity, and tradition.

Others are motivated by symbols of success.

People who are motivated by *achievement* strive for a clear social position. They seek explicit responsibilities and approval from a valued social group. Their focus is often on collective activities, such as those at work and with family, and on positive evaluation and reward. They base their choices on the expected reactions, concerns, and desires of people in the groups to which they belong or aspire to belong.

And some are driven by experience.

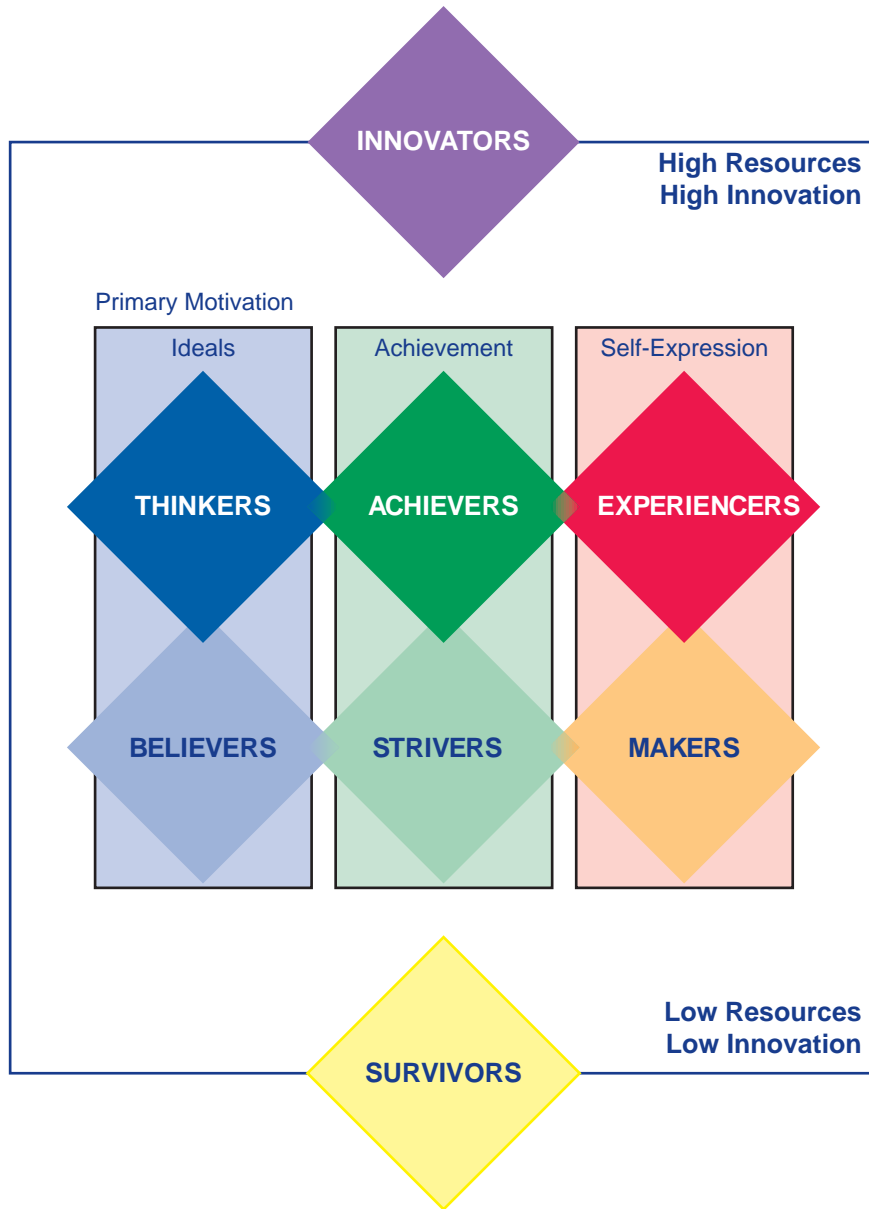
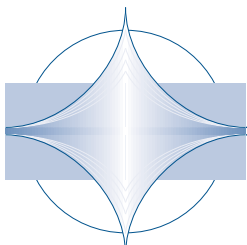
Individuals motivated by *self-expression* value actions for their impact on the physical world or the pleasure and excitement associated with them. A vital, emotional attachment to experiences is typical of this primary motivation, as is resistance to social controls that threaten experimentation and self-reliance. These action-oriented consumers make choices that emphasize individuality and personal challenge.

Psychological attributes strongly influence a person's ability and desire to buy.

A person's tendency to consume goods and services extends beyond age, income, and education. Energy, self-confidence, intellectualism, novelty seeking, innovativeness, impulsiveness, leadership, and vanity play a critical role. These personality traits in conjunction with key demographics determine an individual's resources. Different levels of resources enhance or constrain a person's expression of his or her primary motivation. The resource dimension gives VALS a hierarchical design, with the segments at the top of the map having a greater impact in the marketplace.



An SRI International Business Partner



Innovators

Take-charge
Sophisticated
Curious

Thinkers

Reflective
Informed
Content

Achievers

Goal oriented
Brand conscious
Conventional

Experiencers

Trend setting
Impulsive
Variety seeking

Survivors

Nostalgic
Constrained
Cautious

Believers

Literal
Loyal
Moralistic

Strivers

Contemporary
Imitative
Style conscious

Makers

Responsible
Practical
Self-sufficient

The Segments

VALS™ segments the U.S. English-speaking population age 18 or older into eight consumer groups. Their primary motivation and ability to express themselves in the marketplace distinguish the groups.

Innovators

Innovators are successful, sophisticated, take-charge people with high self-esteem. Because they have such abundant resources, they exhibit all three primary motivations in varying degrees. They are change leaders and are the most receptive to new ideas and technologies. Their purchases reflect cultivated tastes for upscale, niche products and services.

Thinkers Motivated by ideals; high resources

Thinkers are mature, satisfied, comfortable, and reflective. They tend to be well educated and actively seek out information in the decision-making process. They favor durability, functionality, and value in products.

Believers Motivated by ideals; low resources

Believers are strongly traditional and respect rules and authority. Because they are fundamentally conservative, they are slow to change and technology averse. They choose familiar products and established brands.

Achievers Motivated by achievement; high resources

Achievers have goal-oriented lifestyles that center on family and career. They avoid situations that encourage a high degree of stimulation or change. They prefer premium products that demonstrate success to their peers.

Strivers Motivated by achievement; low resources

Strivers are trendy and fun loving. They have little discretionary income and tend to have narrow interests. They favor stylish products that emulate the purchases of people with greater material wealth.

Experiencers Motivated by self-expression; high resources

Experiencers appreciate the unconventional. They are active and impulsive, seeking stimulation from the new, offbeat, and risky. They spend a comparatively high proportion of their income on fashion, socializing, and entertainment.

Makers Motivated by self-expression; low resources

Makers value practicality and self-sufficiency. They choose hands-on constructive activities and spend leisure time with family and close friends. Because they prefer value to luxury, they buy basic products.

Survivors

Survivors lead narrowly focused lives. Because they have the fewest resources, they do not exhibit a primary motivation and often feel powerless. They are primarily concerned about safety and security, so they tend to be brand loyal and buy discounted merchandise.

History and Methodology

VALS™ pioneered the quest for greater consumer understanding.

Arnold Mitchell was a consumer futurist who wanted to explain the fragmentation of U.S. society in the 1960s and the implications for the economy and society. His work led to the development of the original VALS™ system as a model to explain various attitudes toward society and institutions. This work drew the attention of visionary marketers who encouraged Mitchell to enhance and extend his work as a marketing tool. SRI International formally inaugurated the VALS program in 1978, which led to a 1983 best-selling book, *Nine American Lifestyles*. *Advertising Age* cited VALS as “one of the ten top market research breakthroughs of the 1980s.” Mitchell’s pioneering method of applying psychographics to business management and marketing research led marketers to become interested in VALS as a way of thinking of consumers beyond demographics.

VALS™ evolved to explain the relationship between psychology and consumer behavior.

In the late 1980s the original VALS system’s ability to predict consumer behavior was weakening as attitudes evolved. The VALS team realized that it should make improvements. From 1986 to 1989, the team built a new system to maximize the ability to predict consumer behavior using psychology as a more stable platform. A team from SRI International, Stanford University, and the University of California, Berkeley, determined that individual differences affect purchase behavior more directly than do societal trends and that consumer personality dimensions are more stable over time than shared values and beliefs.

A new VALS system emerged. Still grounded in the philosophy that mind-set and demographics are more powerful than demographics alone, VALS now uses psychology to describe the dynamics underlying consumer preferences and choices.

The current VALS system also incorporates a resource dimension and focuses less on social maturation than did the original system. Consumers are constrained in their full expression of self through behavior and purchase. So VALS also measures a person’s ability to express himself or herself in the marketplace.

VALS™ identifies the psychological motivations that predict consumer differences.

The foundation of the VALS approach is that behavior is controlled by relatively independent psychological traits. VALS uses proprietary psychometric techniques to measure concepts that researchers have proved empirically to correlate with consumer behavior. The inherent stability of the system 15 years after its development is testimony to the theories of the development team.