

In a large-scale national study, the authors evaluated the effectiveness of several preference elicitation techniques for predicting choices. The criteria for accuracy included both individual hit rates and a new measure, the mean absolute error predicting aggregate share using a logit choice simulator. The central finding is that hybrid models combining information from different preference elicitation tasks consistently outperform models based on one task. For example, ACA, a method that combines a self-explicated prior with relative preference measures on pairs, predicts choices better than full-profile conjoint when warmup tasks are lacking. However, there is no difference between the models if ACA's prior is combined with the full-profile information. Further, the most accurate method combines data from all three sources, suggesting that each preference elicitation technique taps a different aspect of the choice process in the validation task. Finally, full-profile conjoint is found to be significantly more accurate after rather than before, other preference elicitation tasks, implying that its performance can be improved with warmup exercises.

The Effectiveness of Alternative Preference Elicitation Procedures in Predicting Choice

Preference elicitation methods reveal systematic components that underlie people's evaluations of objects. These methods can be classified into compositional and decompositional (Green and Srinivasan 1978; Pessemier et al. 1971). Compositional methods ask respondents to assess values for attribute levels, and use these values to build up preferences for attribute bundles or profiles (Huber 1974). Decompositional methods begin with overall evaluations of objects defined on multiple attributes and derive values for attribute levels from these evaluations. With either method one can predict choice from a broad range of alternatives specified by the domain of the original attributes. Once individual choice has been modeled, the prediction of choice shares in simulators has been of great value to managers as a way

to estimate the impact of a change in product formulation and/or price (Bucklin and Srinivasan 1991; Green and Srinivasan 1990; Wittink and Cattin 1989).

Both decompositional and compositional methods typically take *judgments* as inputs. These judgments are often assumed to be intervally scaled measures of preferences or of the importances of attributes. What one cares most about is *choice*, the selection of one brand from a set of available alternatives. Though this distinction between judgment and choice may at first appear to involve merely substituting categorical choice for an assessment of degree of preference, numerous researchers have stressed the differences in the psychological demands of judgment and choice (Bettman and Park 1980; Huber and Klein 1991; Payne 1976, 1982; Tversky, Sattath, and Slovic 1988). In particular, choice has been shown to reflect a maze of heuristics in which decision makers seek to simplify the choice process through cutoff strategies and other noncompensatory processes (Johnson and Russo 1984; Klein and Bither 1987; Olshavsky and Granbois 1979). In contrast, repetitive evaluative judgments on objects or attributes may lead subjects to formulate relatively consistent compensatory rules that help them get through the task easily.

If the foregoing is true, any single preference elici-

*Joel Huber is Associate Professor, Fuqua School of Business, Duke University. Dick R. Wittink is Professor of Marketing and Quantitative Methods, Johnson Graduate School of Management, Cornell University. John A. Fiedler is Principal of POPULUS Inc., Boise ID. Richard Miller is President of Consumer Pulse, Inc., Birmingham, MI.

The authors thank Bill Boulding, Richard M. Johnson, and three anonymous *JMR* reviewers for their constructive input.