Assessing Presidential Priorities: A Comparison of Three Methods

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Two methods are commonly used to assess priorities for the benefits in a product or service category from individual customers: ratings and constant-sum allocation. A common problem with the ratings approach is that it does not explicitly capture priorities; it is easy for the respondent to say that every benefit is important. The traditional constant-sum approach overcomes this limitation, but with a large number of (ten or more) benefits, it is difficult for the respondent to divide a constant sum among all the benefits. ASEMAP (pronounced Ace-Map, Adaptive Self-Explication of Multi-Attribute Preferences) is a new web-based interactive method for assessing customer priorities. It consists of the respondent first grouping the benefits into two or more categories of importance (e.g., more important, less important). The respondent then ranks the benefits in each of the categories from the most important to least important. In order to estimate quantitative values for the priorities, the computer-based approach breaks down the attribute importance question into a sequence of constant-sum paired comparison questions. The paired comparisons are chosen adaptively for each respondent to maximize the information elicited from each paired comparison question. The respondent needs to be questioned only on a small subset of all possible paired comparisons. Importances for the benefits are estimated from the constant-sum paired comparisons by log-linear multiple regression. Unlike ratings and the traditional constant-sum method applied across all the benefits, the proposed approach provides standard errors for the priorities.

The empirical context was that of assessing priorities for seventeen issues by the Presidential candidates for the U.S. election. The study was conducted in summer, 2008 prior to the U.S. election. In addition to Constant Sum and ASEMAP, a state-of-the-art method called MAXDIFF was also compared. The ASEMAP method provided a statistically significant and substantially better predictive validity than the traditional constant sum method and MAXDIFF.