

Department of Marketing



Research Seminar Series | Nov. 8th, 1-3pm | AD.0.090

Martijn de Jong Erasmus University Rotterdam (NL)

Assessing Sensitive Consumer Behavior Using the Item Count Response Technique

Abstract: Marketing managers, policy makers, and researchers are often interested in assessing the prevalence and drivers of “dark side” and “vice” consumer behaviors, such as illegal movie streaming, software downloading, shoplifting, tax evasion, consumption of prohibited drugs, pornographic material, alcohol, or tobacco. Because of their sensitive and sometimes unlawful nature, consumers may not respond truthfully to direct questions about such behaviors even when these are common. This article proposes a new truth-telling technique and statistical model called “Item Count Response Technique” (ICRT) to assess the prevalence and drivers of sensitive consumer behavior. Monte Carlo simulations and a large scale application to self-reported cigarette consumption among pregnant women ($n = 1,315$) demonstrate the effectiveness of the procedure. The empirical application reveals a significant downward bias in prevalence estimates when questions about cigarette consumption are asked directly. It finds lower smoking prevalence with higher levels of education and being further into pregnancy, and a much higher prevalence among unmarried respondents.