

Comm 2376 Chapter 4 Notes

Attitude Measurement

- Attitude measurement plays a critical role in the study and practice of persuasion.
- Provides the instrumentation to test hypotheses and to track changes in attitudes and beliefs

Overview

- Louis Thurstone- “Attitudes Can Be Measured”
- There are three standard attitude scales:
 - o Likert
 - Recommended that researchers devise a series of opinion statements and ask individuals to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement along a numerical scale.
 - Assumes that each item taps the same underlying attitude and there are significant interrelationships among items.
 - Presumes that there are equal intervals between categories.
 - 5-point scale: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.
 - o Guttman
 - Progresses from items easiest to accept to those most difficult to endorse.
 - Those who get a high score on a Guttman scale agree with all items.
 - Those with moderate attitudes agree with questions that are easy and moderately difficult to endorse.
 - o The Semantic Differential
 - Explored the meanings that people attach to social objects, focusing on the emotional aspect of the attitude.
 - Semantic- Asks people to indicate feelings about an object on a pair of bipolar, adjective scales.
 - Differential- The scale assesses the different meanings people ascribe to a person or issue.
 - One adjective lies at one end of the scale; its opposite at the other end.

Pitfalls in Attitude Measurement

- Inaccuracies result from such factors as:
 - o Respondent carelessness in answering the questions.
 - o People’s desire to say the socially appropriate thing rather than what they truly believe.
 - o A tendency to agree with items regardless of their content.
- Wording of questions
- Two key survey design factors that can influence attitude responses are:

- o Context
 - Questions occurring early in the survey can influence responses to later questions.
- o Wording

Asking Good Questions

- The next time you are asked to develop a self-report survey, you might consider:
 - o Use words that all respondents can comprehend.
 - o Write specific, unambiguous terms.
 - o Avoid double negatives.
 - o Pretest items to make sure people understand your questions.
 - o Ask questions in different sequences.
 - o Avoid politically correct phrases that encourage socially desirable responses.
 - o Do your questions deal with sensitive, threatening issues? Ask these at the end of the survey.
 - o Allow people to say “I don’t know.”
 - o Include many questions to tap different aspects of the attitude.
- Open-Ended Measures
 - o The main advantage of attitude scales is that they offer an efficient way to measure social attitudes accurately; also their main drawback.

Indirect Methods to Measure Attitudes

- Unobtrusive Measures
 - o Researchers can observe individuals unobtrusively or without their knowledge.
 - o Behavior is used as a surrogate for attitude.
- Physiological Measurements
 - o There are a host of ways of tapping attitudes through physiological techniques:
 - Galvanic Skin Response- A change in the electrical resistance of skin
 - Pupil Dilation
 - Facial Electromyographic- Tap movements in facial muscles.
- Response Time
 - o Assess the latency or length of time it takes people to indicate if they agree or disagree with a statement.
 - o The longer it takes people to access their attitude, the less well developed or strong the attitude it is.

- o Implicit Association Test- Individuals are presented with a series of items; provides a measure of the strength of association between an attribute, such as race, and positive or negative feelings.

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