

## Measuring attitudes

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Attitudes can be measured by:

- Questionnaires/rating scales
- Physiological observation, e.g. galvanic skin responses (GSR), pupil responses, body language or facial responses. Based on the critical assumption that behaviour and attitudes are consistent (Not totally reliable).
- Opinion polls
- Sociometry
- Structured interviews.

These forms of measuring attitudes may not be totally reliable and valid. There are three main scales that are normally used to measure people's attitudes, these have been developed by Thurston, Likert and Osgood.

The attitude scales make certain basic assumptions:

- That attitudes can be expressed by verbal statements
- That statements have the same meaning for all participants
- That attitudes when expressed as verbal statements can be measured and quantified.

### **Thurston scale (1931)**

A list of statements representing a wide range of views in relation to a specific attitude object is prepared. These are then given to a group of judges who rate the statements on an 11-point scale, from positive to negative. Any statements which produce considerable disagreement are thrown out until 20 statements are left. Each statement is then allocated a rating value. A self-report questionnaire is then filled out by participants who state which of the statements they agree with. A mean attitude score is calculated from the value of the selected statements.

### **Likert scale (1932)**

This scale is most commonly used. It comprises of a balanced number of statements with regards to a specific attitude object. The participant is then asked how they rate each statement, usually on a 5-point scale: 1 strongly agrees to 5 strongly disagree. The subject's attitude is measured by totalling the scores for each statement, usually showing a correlation. These scales have an advantage because they do not expect a basic yes/no answer as they allow for degrees of opinion.

### **Semantic differential scales Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957)**

Participants are usually asked to rate on a 7-point scale between two opposite words, e.g. good and bad, which describe their feeling towards a particular attitude object.

The questionnaires would have at least two of these scales constructed around the three main factors associated with the meaning of words or attitude objects. For example:

- Evaluative factor (good/bad)
- Potency factor (strong/weak)
- Activity factor (active/passive)

There are some problems associated with attitude measurement these are;

- Inappropriate/ambiguous questions
- Response bias
- People trying to present socially acceptable viewpoints
- People attempting to deliberately distort the results
- People tending to always answer yes or no or preferring certain points on the scale (people tend to agree rather than disagree)
- The way in which the questions are asked can also influence the answer.