

Measuring public attitudes to reality tv | methodology



1. Outline the considerations you would make in deciding between using the Thurstone, Likert or Osgood method. Highlight the particular context and conclude with a clear decision about which of the three methods you would chose.

The three social research methods of attitudinal measurement are appropriate for use in this experiment as they all give statistical evidence to support the questions relating to various attitudes taken from a general consensus of people. However, each has its own merits to be considered.

The Thurston, Likert and Osgood methods can give a representation of social attitudes toward Big Brother, however, which is the most ideal requires some consideration of their procedural processes. The nature of measurement and descriptive qualities in each method was considered before a test was decided and questionnaire constructed.

Thurstone was one of the primary social scaling theorists. He used the average rankings of a set of attitudinal statements based upon a given topic to determine a set of agree/disagree responses. He formulated three different methods that all worked upon a uni-dimensional scale. These were the method of equal-appearing intervals, the method of successive intervals, and the method of paired comparisons (Thurston, 1928). The three methods crucially differed in how the scale values for each item were constituted from their base source. However, in all three cases, the resulting scale was rated the same way by respondents. This labour-some method did not take into account any indifference towards the statements or the degree to which negative and positive attitudes could vary. In questionnaire format it relies upon closed questions to gain its data and measure attitude. Furthermore, it

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indicates a mean average as its descriptive data between that of agreeing and disagreeing in each statement category, which does not capture the nature of the deviation or sway of general trends in attitude. Neither does it allow for a consideration of word connotation within the statements. Due to these considerations this method of measuring attitude was rejected for this experiment.

The Likert technique was developed after the Thurstone scale. With this method to social research a set of attitudinal statements were also presented to subjects. Subjects were asked to express agreement or disagreement according to a five point or seven point scale measuring the variance of attitude towards the statements (Likert, 1932). Each degree of agreement or disagreement was given a numerical value from one to five / seven rather than being defined as a closed agree or disagree category. A total numerical value was then to be calculated from the total number of responses. This method is suited to our experiment as it can be applied to established attitudinal theories such as Ajzen's Theory of planned behaviour as a way of drawing out not only attitude but intention and concepts that help shape our attitudes. Essentially, the Likert method can be broken down into segments pertaining to the theory of planned behaviour to reveal a more sophisticated set of results that indicate a fuller relationship than that of the Thurstone method. However, one more method that relates to the Likert method should be considered before moving on.

The Osgood method was developed in conjunction with the Likert technique.

Using the scale as the basis for the measurement of attitude, Osgood

concerned himself with the significance of meaning, and in particular
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connotation of words. Typically subjects would be given a word or concept, such as race, and would subsequently be presented with an array of adjectives in which to describe that word / concept (Osgood, 1957). The adjectives would then be represented at either end of a five point / seven-point scale similar to the likert scale. Due to this, Osgood was able to contrive a map or model of people's connotations for given concepts from which attitudes could be understood. However, there are problems for using this method for our experiment. Firstly, there is the problem that this map depends entirely on the presumption that all adjectives mean the same to everyone. Because of this, the method itself becomes contradictory as it begins from the general assumption that people's connotations for certain concepts differ. However, it also depends upon the assumption that, for certain words at least, they do not differ. And secondly, there is nothing in this test that attempts to negate the onset of socially desired responses from participants. For this reason, the Osgood test for connotational attitude was dropped as the method for this experiment in place of the five category Likert test.

2. Provide a detailed description of the steps you would need to take at each stage of scale construction, using your chosen method.

In the first stage of developing the Likert method for this experiment, relevant attitudinal questions would have to be established and drawn up. Based upon the preliminary research into certain perceived attitudes towards Big Brother, these questions should be drawn up and applied to a five point scale ranging from strong agreement through to strong disagreement. These should be comprised into sets of varying attitudinal

question types that relate to the different categories apparent in the Theory of Planned behaviour. These sets should consist of questions relating to social norms, attitudes and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). For example, the first two sets of questions should be taken into account, that is the subjective norm and the attitude, and categorised as one set. For example, based upon the measurement method of the likert five category system, typical questions relating to these sets could be 'do you think Big Brother is valid?' and 'do your friends think big brother is valid?'. These provide us with indicators of varying attitudes from which behaviour could be measured as an outcome. For instance, questions then asking 'would you watch Big Brother?' or 'is it your intention to watch Big Brother?' would give us an indication of the strength and nature of the forces creating the attitudes towards Big Brother. A third set of questions relating to the perceived behavioural control could then tell us of how people perceive the viewing of Big Brother and how that affects their attitudes and intentions towards watching the show. According to the theory of planned behaviour, these three attitudinal variables inform the intention from which behaviours can be understood (Ajzen, 1988, 1991).

By taking the findings of this questionnaire through the method of the Likert scale, we are providing ourselves with a technique which can register, incorporate and analyse the findings of a limitless amount of subjects and find trends in the different ways that people have formed attitudes towards Big Brother. It is with the Likert model that an attitudinal questionnaire based upon the theory of planned behaviour was constructed to answer the main question put forward by this experiment. An example of the three sets

of questions based primarily upon the theory of planned behaviour and developed at this stage are as follows:

I like to Watch Big Brother? Strongly Agree / Agree / Indifferent-Unsure-Never Seen It / Disagree / Strongly Disagree.

My Friends Think People Should Watch Big Brother? Strongly Agree / Agree / Indifferent-Unsure-Never Seen It / Disagree / Strongly Disagree.

It is Morally Acceptable to Watch Big Brother? Strongly Agree / Agree / Indifferent-Unsure-Never Seen It / Disagree / Strongly Disagree.

The next stage should be firstly concerned with eliminating ambiguous or leading questions such as those involving the terms ' hate' and ' love' or ' nice' and 'kind of' etc. This can be done where confusion is noticeable manually or where indicated on the results of pilot studies. This stage should then be concerned with content validity. This can also be done via a pilot test; by using the questionnaire to test a group whose attitudes are well established. For example, you would expect members of a Big Brother fan club or groups that promote Big Brother to score positively on attitudinal questions relating to Big Brother. However, if the results show that they did not score positively then this can be taken as an indication that there is something wrong with the questionnaire. Conversely, if they do score positively then the pilot test can be deemed valid. Alternatively, a professional or expert in matters of attitudinal tests could be consulted for clarity.

After these questions have been arranged according to category and the pilot test and/or expert has given sufficient content validity, a sample group should be targeted and asked to participate. On defining that target group, an introduction giving them the required and ethical briefing should be performed, and on their completion a debriefing and contact address should be disclosed. On retrieval of the results, an appropriate measurement should be carried out to establish the descriptive and inferential statistics of the likert test. The procedure for the Likert does not involve mean averages as these merely convolute the sway of the attitudinal range. Rather, median and modes are better equipped to give descriptive data as the significant range is concerned with general trends rather than precise measures.

Bibliography

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