

Analyzing Likert Attitude Data with Varying Response Style
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Researchers often collect Likert attitude data to measure individuals' underlying attitude towards an entity such as medication, abortion, or the individuals' country. The data consist of responses to statements such as "I am ashamed of my country" and "My country is better than all others"; responses are selected from ordered categories ranging from total agreement to total disagreement. Individuals' responses are affected by their underlying attitude, and also by their response style (a consistent and content-independent pattern of response category selection, such as a tendency to agree with all statements). Models that ignore response style differences can produce biased inferences, especially when respondents are demographically diverse and the proportions of favorable and unfavorable statements are not equal. This talk introduces a new latent variable model that allows response style, as well as one or more underlying attitudes, to affect the data. The model can be used to examine the effects of background covariates on underlying attitudes. As an illustration, data from the 1995 National Identity Survey (NIS) are used to investigate whether Americans or the British have more favorable attitudes towards their respective countries. The results are adjusted for American and British differences in response style; to better measure these differences, additional NIS data on immigration attitudes are included in the analysis.