



Chapter 5: Indices and Scales

Questions

1. If you compare the affluence of the population of one location with that of another there are difficulties if you use monetary values. For example, if you use the total value of personal wealth, the effect of population size will distort the comparison. If you use per capita wealth, then differences in population structure will distort the result. Indices help to overcome this problem by allowing the researcher to provide a standardised method of comparing values. An index will be constructed from a number of concept dimensions that are standardised for each location in the study so that like is compared with like. The method of doing this is explained in the chapter. Another value of an index is that it is not distorted over time as values in real terms change (e.g. the effect of inflation).
2. Likert scales are very good at gaining information about a respondent's attitudes towards an issue, event or activity. By measuring the degree of agreement (or disagreement) with statements, you are able to differentiate between individuals and identify differences in attitudes between groups on the issue or event.
3. A ranking question would be used if you wanted a respondent to place items in order according to some stated criterion. A rating question would be used if you wanted a respondent to make a judgement about a particular item according to a stated criterion. The question in this tutorial asked which of these would be best to use when asking a respondent to rank the relative importance of items in a set of items covering the concept of 'a good life'. A rating question will do this, but as an ordinal measure it cannot differentiate between individuals in terms of how important any particular item is to them. Therefore, you can use a ranking question to identify the degree of importance, and then a ranking question to place them in order of importance.
4. Whereas a Likert scale will measure the degree of agreement with a particular statement, a semantic differential is used to measure a respondent's reaction to an issue, event or activity on a bi-polar scale. It is a very useful way of determining how a respondent 'feels' about the issue, event or activity, as opposed to determining attitudes. Unlike a Likert scale, where a respondent may strongly disagree with a statement, the semantic differential places the respondent somewhere on a continuous scale between two directly opposite qualities (e.g. Good / Bad; Contented / Discontented).