The Impact of Response Scale Direction on Survey Responses in Web Surveys

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One feature of response scales that is understudied is the direction of scales. Previous research found mean shifts under different scale directions. However, it is not quite clear yet whether this effect is independent of other scale features.

It is also not clear what the impact of scale direction is on the reliability of resulting answers.
Methods

LISS Panel Data

Wave 1; n=3,007  
(September 2014)

Wave 2; n=2,740  
(October 2014)

15 items in both waves
Mindfulness (6), political efficacy (4), electoral integrity (5)

Experimental factors

• Scale direction
• Scale type: Attitudinal vs. Frequency
• Scale length: 5-point vs. 7-point
• Scale labeling: Fully-vs. End-labeled
- **DVs**
- % of R choosing from options appearing first on original order
- **Internal consistency alphas**
- **Test-retest reliability coefficients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W1 Answers</th>
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<th>W2 Answers</th>
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<th>Alphas</th>
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<th>Test-Retest Reliability</th>
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<td><em>Pr &gt; F</em></td>
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AGREEMENT SCALE

FREQUENCY SCALE

0.70
0.60
0.50
0.40
0.30
0.20
0.10
0.00

5_end
5_full
7_end
7_full
5_end
5_full
7_end
7_full

QDET2

5

alphas_low2high
alphas_high2low
rel_low2high
rel_high2low
Conclusion

• Scale direction does affect response distribution
  ▪ Primacy effects observed
  ▪ Interacts with scale type, scale length, and scale labeling

• Scale direction does NOT affect reliability
  ▪ Sig. interaction between direction and labeling
    ▪ High->Low: fully labeled>end-labeled
    ▪ Low->High: fully labeled<end-labeled