



Wittenbrink, B., & Schwarz, N. (Eds.). (2007). *Implicit measures of attitudes*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Reviewed by: [Robina Xavier](#)

As public relations academics and practitioners, we are often faced with the challenge of trying to find out what people think about an issue and what might be influencing their position. Attitudinal research goes some way to helping us answer these important questions but what, and how, to measure is no easy decision. Wittenbrink and Schwarz have brought together more than 20 leading academics to explore new research in the area of implicit measures, an important area for attitudinal researchers to consider.

Researchers in areas such as public health have long recognized the limitations of self report style research where participants may not be willing to report their true beliefs on a controversial topic or even be aware of the position that they hold. More recent work has focused on reducing such reliance on self reports by identifying indirect measures, minimizing the opportunity for strategic responding as well as digging deep to uncover the underlying attitudes that may not be clear to the respondent themselves. These measures also offer researchers the opportunity to reduce the influence of context dependency, a long standing issue in attitude research which questions the basic foundation of attitudes as stable evaluations stored in ones memory.

This book tracks the growth of research in implicit measures of attitudes from early work in the 1980s through to its current status as a growing and influential field in attitudinal research. With 11 chapters, divided into two parts, the book firstly explores the state of implicit measures research, highlighting the measures that are most commonly applied by researchers in this field. Secondly, it explores the need for further research, in conjunction with the key issues that are likely to drive this research.

The chapters in the book vary greatly from the general to the specific. The opening chapters on the development of attitudes are highly accessible and useful reading for all public relations academics who use attitudinal research as an important aspect of public opinion formation. These chapters map the development of attitude research from Allports work in the 1930s onwards which may assist academics to reshape their teaching material to help students better understand this important area.

The remaining chapters in Part 1 are less accessible to the general reader, however, they would be of significant use to someone trying to use one or more of the methods in their research design. A wide range of methods are included from techniques that involve direct responses from research participants using pencil and paper through to technologically advanced methodologies that assessing physiological reactions and brain activity to certain stimuli. Specific measures include response time measures such as concept and evaluative priming and response competition procedures, paper and pencil measures such as the Stereotypic Explanatory Bias and the Linguistic Intergroup Bias, and measures of physiological responses and brain activity. While many of these measures are probably not immediately recognizable by some public relations academics, they may be useful additions to our research toolboxes to enhance current methods in the discipline.

These chapters map each of the techniques in detail with relevant examples and tables from previous experiments. Most of the examples are US based, draw heavily on sociological fields and represent seminal historical studies rather than current perspectives. These chapters are difficult to read without a specific context in mind, a little like reading not just the ingredients for a recipe but also the detailed instructions when you arent planning on making the particular dish any time soon. Each chapter is written by a different set of authors so there is significant repetition in parts, however, this creates an interesting way of seeing the different perspectives taken by each group on the same topic.

The field of implicit measures of attitudes is not without its controversies as clearly addressed in this book in Part II. The value of indirect measures of attitudes is grounded in the assumption that attitudes exert a systematic influence on peoples performance on a variety of tasks and that the size of this influence can serve as an index of the underlying attitude (p. 3). Thus, the usefulness of data gained through these methodologies is largely dependant on the assumption that links some observed response to an underlying attitude. Part II challenges this assumption, providing useful reading for those interested in exploring this debate.

As the book suggests, there is no one method, either implicit or explicit, that claims to identify a persons ?real attitude. This book is a useful primer for academics or graduate students interested in better understanding attitudinal development and ways to enhance research design to uncover attitudes. Its extensive reference and resource list also will be useful for those who wish to dive more deeply into this growing field. As implicit measures are not widely used in contemporary public relations research, this book may inspire researchers to take a new perspective on uncovering stakeholder attitudes through different and well documented research techniques being used in complementary fields.

About the reviewer: *Robina Xavier (FPRIA, Senior Lecturer, School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations, QUT) is the public relations major co-ordinator at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane. She specialises in teaching the areas of public relations management, crisis management and shareholder communication. Her research focus is in evaluation in public relations campaigns and the impact of crises on organisational legitimacy. She is currently undertaking doctoral studies and holds a Master of Business (Research), a Graduate Diploma in Applied Finance and Investment, and a Bachelor of Business (Communication).*

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