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Keywords

destination, image, validly, measuring, studies, survey

Disciplines

Business | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Validly measuring destination image in survey studies

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Destination image is among the most frequently measured constructs in empirical survey research. Academic tourism researchers tend to use multi-category scales, often referring to them as "Likert scales," while industry typically uses "pick-any" measures. But which leads to results that are more valid? Findings from a large-scale experimental study show that a "forced-choice full binary" format (where respondents have to tick YES or NO for each destination attribute combination) performs better than both current preferred formats in academic and applied studies.

Keywords: destination image, image measurement, brand image, Likert, DLF IIST, binary

Introduction

Destination image measurement has a long history both in academic tourism research and in applied research conducted by or for the tourism industry. According to Pike (2002), destination image measurement has developed to become the single most popular topic of investigation in tourism research. Suh and Gartner (2004) refer to destination image studies as "a staple of destination market research" (p. 40). The reason for the high level of interest in destination image is the acknowledgement that destination image affects both destination preference and tourists' intention to visit (Mayo 1973; Hunt 1975; Goodrich 1978). According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), the "initial image formation stage before the trip is the most important phase in tourits' [sic] destination selection processes" (p. 869). Empirical evidence also suggests that destination image significantly affects recommendation behavior of destinations (for example, Bigne, Sanchez & Sanchez 2001). Destination image is one of the key building blocks of successful tourism marketing. Both academic researchers and tourism marketing managers thus frequently measure destination image in empirical survey studies to: 1) assess how tourists currently view a destination, 2) define how the destination would like to be perceived by tourists, 3) develop and implement marketing action to modify destination image and, 4) check if the intended change in destination image has occurred.

The success of both the assessment and the attempt to modify the image of a destination depends on valid empirical measurement. A wide range of approaches have been taken in survey studies in the past: the top three tourism journals internationally (*Journal of Travel Research, Tourism Management* and *Annals of Tourism Research*, see Appendix for full list of reviewed articles) published a total of 86 journal articles on destination image in the past decade. Studies view different entities as "destinations". In most studies (43 percent) the destination was a country (for example, New Zealand, China, Turkey); while in 14 percent of studies it was a city (for example, Las Vegas, Seoul); in 8 percent of cases it was attractions (for example, museums) and in 17 percent of cases the destination was a state in the US or a region in a different country.

Of all reviewed studies, 85 percent included an empirical component that involved measuring destination image. A number of studies used qualitative methods (such as content analysis, word association tests, content analysis of webpages, visitor

employed photography) to determine destination image, but the majority of the empirical studies (75 percent) ask respondents to assess destination image using a questionnaire and following the operationalization of brand image as proposed by Keller (1993), which involves assessing the association of destinations with a list of attributes.

When analyzing in detail which measures or answer formats were used in these studies, a very clear pattern emerges: the dominance of seven- and five-point scales. The vast majority (89 percent) of all empirical survey studies on destination image published in the *Journal of Travel Research*, *Tourism Management* and *Annals of Tourism Research* in the past 10 years used one of those two answer formats. More specifically, two percent used a nine-point scale, 40 percent used a seven-point scale, six percent used a six-point scale, 48 percent used a five-point scale and four percent used a binary question format.

Despite the wide range of approaches used, no attempt has been made to date to assess the comparative validity of these different quantitative measures of destination image and little guidance is available to researchers and data analysts on which measure should be preferred. Filling this research gap is the aim of the present study. More specifically, the performance of six different methods of measuring destination image which can be used in survey studies is compared using three key criteria of data quality: concurrent validity, survey completion time, and stability (or test-retest reliability). Prior work only investigated stability in the examination of a range of different answer formats (Dolnicar & Grün, 2007). Dolnicar, Grün and Leisch (2011) used similar criteria but only compared two different answer formats.

The recommendation on how to measure destination image validly in a survey study, which results from this study, has significant implications for both knowledge development in academia and empirical market research in tourism industry. Knowledge development about certain objects or phenomena can only occur if the objects or phenomena are measured validly. The same holds for market research which is used by tourism industry to inform strategic and tactical decisions: high quality market research data improves the quality of strategic tourism planning, tourism marketing and operation of tourism businesses.

Method

In preparation of the online survey study, which was conducted to obtain the data required for the analysis, an extensive qualitative study phase was implemented. Qualitative pre-studies to destination image surveys are critical to the valid measurement of image in surveys because they provide insight into the associations people have about the destination entity under study. It is unlikely that any standard set of image attributes would apply to any destination. In this particular study the qualitative study was even more necessary because the destination entity was a continent. The qualitative phase provided insight into the kinds of attributes tourists associate with continents as a whole. Specifically, 30 unstructured interviews were conducted with respondents who reside in cities and regional areas asking them to think about travelling to another continent for a vacation and state which attributes they would use to describe continents. This approach led to the intended outcome of collecting a very broad set of attributes. Two experts categorized the list of 54 attributes into themes independently and then compared categorizations and jointly developed the final set of 13 attributes (offers many activities for tourists, authentic, clean, has good climate, crowded, has cultural attractions, easy to travel, exciting, expensive, friendly, has beautiful natural environment, relaxing, safe). One example of such a categorization is the following: individual attributes named by respondents included "personal safety", "political stability", "riots", "civil right violations", and "crime rate" which were all included in the final attribute "safe". This list of items was then pre-tested in the process of questionnaire development and was assessed to be meaningful in the context of continents as destinations by the respondents.

Once the list of attributes and the questionnaire were finalized, a large-scale experimental study using an international online survey panel was conducted. Respondents from four continents (North America, Australia, Europe, and Asia) were asked to assess the images of seven continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia, South America, North America, and Antarctica).

The final sample size amounted to 2,532 respondents (594 from the US, 669 from Australia, 689 from the UK, and 580 from India). The large sample size was required because subsets of the sample were exposed to different answer formats. Between 408 and 434 respondents were randomly assigned to one of six answer formats. Within

each answer format approximately 100 respondents were from each of the four continents.

Answer formats included in the study

Pick-any format (n = 418)

This format lists all attributes for each destination and asks respondents to tick those attributes that they associate with the destination. Ticking a box indicates that they positively associate that attribute with the destination. Not ticking the box indicates t of

that they do not asso	ciate the attribu	ite with the des	tınatıon. F	However, this choice also
offers respondents a	way of not resp	ponding to the o	question. I	In the data set this format
is coded as binary, w	where a 1 means	s that the respon	ndent tick	ed the destination-
attribute combination	n and a 0 mean	s that the respon	ndent did	not tick it. An example of
the pick-any format	is provided bel	ow:		
As a HOLIDAY	Y DESTINATION	I, I would describe	ANTARCT	ΓICA as:
Please select as		i, i would describe	munaci	11071 45.
r lease select as	many as appry			
	Safe			
	Expensive			
	Friendly			
Forced-choice full bi	nary format (n	= 425)		
This format is also c	oded as binary	in the data set,	but is coll	lected in a very different
	•			are asked to indicate
•			-	ig the "yes" option), or
•			. •	y ticking the "no" option).
This is a forced-choi				
		_	_	them. An example is
provided below:	sunation brand	association pro	sented to	them. The example is
provided below.				
As a HOLIDAY	Y DESTINATION	I, I would describe	ANTARCT	ΓICA as:
			Yes	No

Safe

Expensive	
Friendly	

Bipolar Likert five-point format (n = 434)

This format asks respondents to state their agreement level on a five-point scale. It is a bipolar scale, meaning that one extreme answer is a high positive value and the other extreme value is a high negative value. Answer options are verbally labeled "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neither agree nor disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." Such data are coded with the values -2, -1, 0, 1, and 2 in the data set to indicate a bipolar nature. An example is provided below:

As a HOLIDAY DESTINATION, I would describe ANTARCTICA as:

Safe	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Expensive					
Friendly					

Bipolar Likert seven-point format (n = 426)

This format is similar to the Likert five-point format, except that it offers seven rather than five options. The additional two options are "slightly disagree" and "slightly agree." Data are coded as -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, and 3 to account for the bipolar nature of the answer format. An example is provided below:

As a HOLIDAY DESTINATION, I would describe ANTARCTICA as:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Safe							
Expensive							
Friendly							

Semantic differential seven-point format (n = 421)

This format also offers seven answer options and is bipolar. For each attribute opposed pairs are offered, for example, "unsafe–safe." The respondent is asked to tick one of seven boxes located between these pairs of extremes. The seven options are labeled: "very," "moderately," "slightly," "neither," "slightly," moderately," and "very," where the left side of the scale refers to one extreme (for example, unsafe) and the other to the other extreme (for example, safe). Data are coded as -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, and 3 to account for the bipolar nature of the answer format. An example is provided below:

As a HOLIDAY DESTINATION, I would describe ANTARCTICA as:

	Very	Moderately	Slightly	Neither	Slightly	Moderately	Very	
Unsafe								Safe
Inexpensive								Expensive
Unfriendly								Friendly

Unipolar seven-point format (n = 408)

Compared to the Likert formats and the semantic differential, the extreme values in the unipolar format do not indicate highly positive, compared to highly negative, values. Instead, the lowest value indicates no association, and the highest value indicates the highest possible association. The anchors of the extremes in the questionnaire are therefore "not" and "very," and the data are coded with values that range from 1 to 7.

As a HOLIDAY DESTINATION, I would rate ANTARCTICA as:

Safe	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very
Expensive	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very
Friendly	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very

As mentioned above, each respondent was randomly assigned to one of these answer formats, and twice completed the destination image part of the survey, with one week in between each test. This design enabled computation of one of the criteria: test-retest reliability, or stability (which requires two measurements from the same individuals).

In the following, if answers over different answer formats are to be compared, the scores are transformed to be in the interval [-1, 1], where the extreme answers at the endpoints of the answer formats are assigned the values -1 and 1.

In the first wave 3,625 respondents filled in the questionnaire; only 2,532 of these also completed the questionnaire a second time. A comparison of dropout numbers across all answer formats indicates no significant difference between formats that could bias the random assignment ($\chi^2 = 2.81$, df = 5, p-value = 0.73).

The three criteria used to assess the performance of each of the answer formats

Test-retest reliability (stability)

Stability is a necessary condition for a measure to be valid (Rossiter, 2011). Testretest reliability is measured by presenting the same respondent with the same destination-attribute combination; for example, "US" and "safe" twice, and asking them to provide a response to the same question twice. Stability can be measured in several different ways. In this study three measures that differ in their level of strictness were used: in the case of **strict stability** merely giving the exact same answer twice counts as a stable response. For the binary measures, this means that the respondent must have two 1s or two 0s for the response to be counted as stable. For the answer formats with more than two options, the exact same option must be ticked; for example, "slightly agree." The second measure, which is slightly less strict, is commonly referred to as the Jaccard coefficient and is therefore in the following denoted as Jaccard stability. In this case, all data are binarized. This is achieved for all non-binary (except for the unipolar seven-point) formats by transforming all positive values to a 1, and transforming all negative values as well as the neutral option to a 0. For the unipolar seven-point format also the three options indicating strongest agreement are transformed to a 1 and all other answer options to a 0 similar to the other seven-point answer formats. Then all the stable agreements (respondents answered with a 1 twice in a row) are divided by the sum of the stable agreements, and all the unstable answers (all cases where respondents have a value of 1 on one, and a value of 0 on the other occasion for the same destination-attribute combination). In this measure, two repeated 0s are omitted, implying that not associating an attribute with a destination twice in a row is not a stable response. Removing the repeated 0s is crucial if a risk exists that people use 0s to avoid responding, rather than truly answering the survey question in the negative. Finally, the least-strict measure of stability is referred to as **binary stability**. In this case, a repeat response that remains the same for the binarized answers across the two measurements is counted as a stable response.

Concurrent validity

Concurrent validity tests whether the measure of destination image can predict another construct (measured at the same time), which is seen as depending on a tourist's perception of the destination. In the present study the following question was used to assess concurrent validity: "Please select the continent that you think is MOST DESIRABLE for a holiday." A drop box was provided with all continents, and the respondents had to choose one only. The selected option was coded as 1; all others were coded 0 in the data set. Multinomial conditional logit models were computed with the information about which continent was seen as the most desirable for a holiday serving as the dependent variable. As independent variables the measured destination image items were used with their corresponding scores. For a fair comparison, tenfold cross-validation was performed. The data were split into 10 parts, and each part was used once for prediction, while the remaining data were used to fit the model; that is, the model was fitted to 90 percent of the data and the remaining 10 percent of data were used for validation comparing the predicted destination to the actual observed value. The correct classification rates on the left-out data were compared over answer formats using an analysis of variance.

Survey completion time

Survey completion time (the time that each respondent took to complete the survey) is critical because it affects the engagement of respondents with the survey as well as fieldwork cost. Brand image studies are known to be particularly tedious. According to Dolnicar and Rossiter (2008) commercial market research surveys on brand image include as many as 100 pairs of brands and attributes.

The shorter the completion time of a survey (1) the less likely will fatigue effects occur in respondents which have been shown to have negative effects on data quality (Johnson, Lehmann & Horne, 1990), and (2) the cheaper the fieldwork cost will be. The practical implication is that if two answer formats are found to perform equally well with respect to stability and validity, it is preferable to choose the answer format which is quicker to use. In the present study survey completion time was recorded by the fieldwork company automatically. Given that the study was conducted in an online environment, respondents could interrupt their answering of the questions and

return later. Consequently, a large number of outliers indicating extremely long completion times exist in the data. To compare whether completion times were significantly different across the answer formats, a robust statistical test procedure based on the ranks was used in order to account for these outliers. A Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test was computed to test for significant differences over all answer formats and a Wilcoxon rank sum test to assess significance of pair-wise comparison.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 illustrates the nature of data used for all continents assessed using Antarctica as an example. In this case, respondents assessed Antarctica using 13 attributes. In Figure 1 the bars represent the average results for Antarctica using one answer format. The line with a circle at the end represents the overall assessment across all objects; in this case, continents. The figure shows that Antarctica was generally perceived as: offering fewer activities, being cleaner, having a less pleasant climate, being less crowded, less cultural, less easy to travel within, less friendly and relaxing, but more expensive than other continents. For some items the interpretation varies across answer formats. For example, if measured using the forced-choice full binary answer format, Antarctica was perceived as safer; if measured by the pick-any format, it was perceived as less safe. Such differences occur despite the fact that Antarctica has the most distinct image of all continents, and they tend to occur for attributes associated with Antarctica to a similar extent as with other continents.

Test-retest reliability (stability)

Figure 2 provides stability results. Results for each of the answer formats are displayed in the rows, and are given for all measures of stability in columns. The stability measures are determined separately for each respondent. The differences between the answer formats are statistically significant (analysis of variance: F_{SS} = 664.6, F_{BS} = 15.1, F_{JS} = 76.3, df_1 = 5, $df_{2,SS}$ = $df_{2,BS}$ = 2526, $df_{2,JS}$ = 2513, p-value < 0.0001, where SS denotes strict stability, JS Jaccard stability and BS binary stability).

In Figure 2 the different stability values of the respondents are summarized for each answer format using box plots. The box plot consists of a box that indicates where the middle 50 percent of the data is located. The length of the box corresponds to the interquartile range. The line within the box shows the median, which is the value of the observation in the middle of the data list after sorting. The whiskers stretch out of the box to indicate the minimum (maximum) value observed if it lies within 1.5 times the length of the box. Observations more than 1.5 times the box length away from the box are indicated using circles. By comparing the medians, differences in location between the answer formats are assessed. The significance of the difference is indicated by the length of the boxes, which serve as a measure of variability.

The forced-choice full binary measure produces more stable results than any other answer format on all three stability measures. These differences are significant according to *t*-tests comparing the different answer formats to forced-choice full binary using linear models (all *p*-values < 0.0001). All seven-point formats perform lowest when strict stability was assessed. This is not unexpected, because — under this measure — respondents are expected to tick exactly the same answer option (out of seven possible). This finding cannot be declared as a mere statistical artifact. Rather, it has major theoretical implications in terms of the validity of measurement in the social sciences: if it is not expected that respondents can repeatedly tick the exact same option without any external factors having changed their beliefs about an object (which is the underlying assumption of the strict stability measure), it has to be questioned whether any response on such a format is valid. For example, if a respondent ticks 2 for "Antarctica" and "safe" the first time, and 1 the second time, which response actually reflects their true belief? Does this respondent think Antarctica is "very safe" or "safe"?

A standard image study would only take the measure once, and that response would be used in the data analysis on the assumption that it was the respondent's true belief and that they would replicate the response when asked the question again. Therefore, comparing answer formats using this criterion is not unreasonable, and actually reflects the underlying assumptions by the researcher: that each answer option in each answer format is indeed meaningful to the respondents.

Another interesting finding relates to the criterion of stability of the pick-any answer format. The pick-any format performs well when the binary stability measure or the strict stability measure is used as criterion of comparison. However, when the Jaccard criterion is used, its performance drops to effectively the worst-performing of all answer formats. This occurs because the pick-any format only records instances where respondents associate an attribute with a brand by ticking a 1. However, a 0 can either mean that the respondent does not associate the attribute with the brand or that the respondent was too lazy to think about all the questions and just ticked a few to complete the survey task. Krosnick (1991) calls this behavior "satisficing." In both the binary measure and the strict measure, 0s are treated as a response, and a repeated 0 across the two measurements is assumed to mean stability in response — although

this is only partially the case, because it actually captures evasion behavior on the part of the respondent.

Figure 3 shows that this is indeed the case. It shows the distribution of responses across all continents across all attributes (left), and for the attribute "relaxing" only (right). The frequency of responses indicating that the object is not associated with the attribute (lighter grey) for all answer formats is similar; only the pick-any format has a much higher frequency. This effect is strongest for the attribute "relaxing," where clearly the vast majority of respondents indicate that all destinations are relaxing. Despite this, using the pick-any format misleads the researcher to believe that in fact a reasonably high proportion (36%) of respondents does not associate the destinations with being relaxing, while for all other answer formats this proportion is 4–12 percent (including neutral answers).

Concurrent validity

Our research found that differences in concurrent validity were not significant (F = 1.00, $df_1 = 5$, $df_2 = 54$, p-value = 0.43). This is likely due to two factors: first, destination image is only one of many factors that can affect how desirable a destination is for a holiday for a respondent. Second, respondents may tend to associate more attributes with their preferred destination regardless of the answer format, which would then be the main reason for leading to correct predictions.

Survey completion time

Table 7 provides results for survey completion times, including the median time taken by respondents to complete the survey in survey waves 1 and 2. In addition, the length of the interquartile range is provided as a measure of variation in parentheses. In survey wave 1, respondents were asked a larger number of questions because a section on their socio-demographics and general travel-related behaviour was included. In wave 2 they were only asked to complete the image questions. The second wave was therefore used for the comparative analysis.

Results indicate that significant differences existed in completion times (Kruskal-Wallis $\chi^2 = 235.1$, df = 5, p-value < 0.0001). The pick-any measure emerged as the

quickest. This is unsurprising, given that this format allows respondents to skip tasks without completing them properly because only a response in the affirmative requires them to tick a box in the survey. The second-quickest answer format was the forced-choice full binary measure. In our tests it was 13 percent quicker than the next-quickest answer format (the Likert five-point answer format). This difference is statistically significant (Wilcoxon rank sum test: $W = 6.66 \cdot 10^8$, p-value < 0.0001). The bipolar seven-point answer formats (Likert seven-point and semantic differential) took respondents the longest time to complete.

Conclusions

A number of key conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) differences in concurrent validity across different answer formats are not statistically significant;
- 2) the forced-choice full binary measure is the most stable for all stability measures. This result confirms prior findings reported by Dolnicar and Grün (2007) on stability of brand image measures. Seven-point answer formats are the least stable when the strict stability measure is applied;
- 3) the pick-any answer format "invites" respondents to evade questions, thus leading to fewer stated object-attribute associations;
- 4) the pick any as well as the forced-choice full binary formats are quicker than any of the multi-category answer formats, and the bipolar seven-point formats take the longest time to complete.

In light of these results, researchers conducting image studies generally, and more specifically in the context of touristic image studies, may need to rethink the currently dominant and generally accepted measurement approaches used by image measurement. The measure used most commonly in industry (the pick-any measure) produces misleading results because it allows respondents to evade responding. The most common measure used by academics (the multi-category Likert scale) does not perform well on the strict stability measure and takes longer to complete.

It is therefore recommended that researchers make increased use of the forced-choice full binary measure, because it performs better than competing approaches in terms of stability, and outperforms most other answer formats in terms of speed of completion.

Note that the use of the forced-choice full binary answer format does not have any disadvantages with respect to data analysis. Most commonly used statistical methods can be applied to binary data: frequency counts for descriptive statistics and χ^2 -tests to test for an association between variables. Cluster analysis can be conducted if distance measures suitable for binary data (e.g. Jaccard distance) are used; analysis of variance is possible if the brand image item is used as an independent variable; and correlation-based analyses such as factor analysis and structural equation modeling are possible if polychoric correlations are employed.

The experimental approach used in this study proved to be appropriate for the research problem at hand. An improvement that could be made in a follow-up study is to collect a different dependent variable for the assessment of concurrent validity. In the present study the test for concurrent validity was based on correctly predicting which each respondent's favorite continent is. Results in terms of concurrent validity may be different if respondents were asked to nominate a set of continents they are considering or if they are asked to rank all continents by likelihood that each respondent will visit them in future. Another improvement would be to conduct the qualitative study, which was instrumental in determining the attributes, in all countries from which respondents for the quantitative study were sourced.

Further studies are needed to explore the issue of measurement validity in empirical tourism research. With respect to destination image it would be interesting to investigate if the size of the destination entity influences results. Furthermore, comparative studies of empirical measures should be conducted for constructs other than image. Key constructs regularly investigated in tourism survey studies include satisfaction, intentions to return and loyalty. These constructs are different in nature to brand attribute associations and thus warrant separate investigation (Dolnicar & Grün, 2009). Another issue is that of scale development in empirical tourism research, which currently predominantly follows the traditional Churchill (1979) approach which has recently been questioned by a number of measurement researchers in marketing, most prominently Rossiter (2002, 2011) arguing that it puts Psychometrics before validity, often at the expense of validity.

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Tables and figures

Table 1 Comparison of median completion times (interquartile range)

	Wave 1	Wave 2
Pick-any	25 min (15 min)	7 min (4 min)
Forced-choice full binary	27 min (17 min)	9 min (5 min)
Unipolar seven-point	26 min (15 min)	10 min (6 min)
Likert five-point	28 min (16 min)	10 min (7 min)
Likert seven-point	29 min (23 min)	11 min (7 min)
Semantic differential seven- point	29 min (16 min)	11 min (7 min)

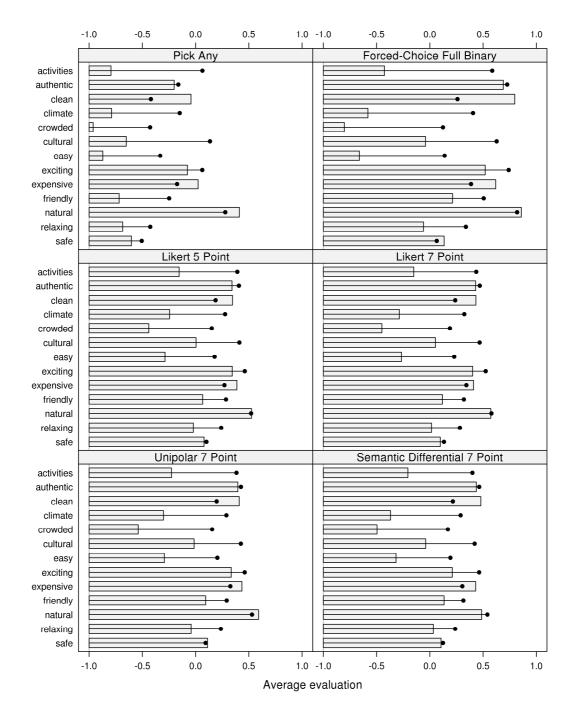


Figure 1 Image of Antarctica

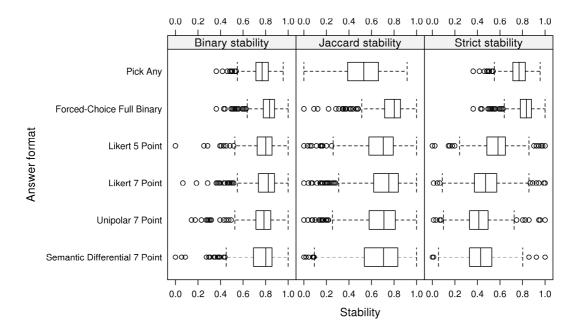
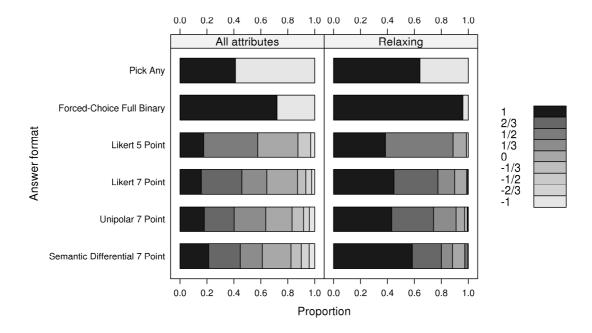


Figure 2 Stability comparison



Notes: left: across all objects and attributes; right: across all objects for the attribute "relaxing" only.

Figure 3 Comparative distribution of responses