

# LORE methodological note 2016:2

## The effect of including survey evaluation rating questions on subsequent open ended comments

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### ABSTRACT

This report examines if including survey evaluation questions influences respondents propensity to leave open-ended comments at the end of a survey and if so whether they affect the content of open-ended comments. Our results show that including survey evaluation questions do not affect how likely people are to leave any kind of open-ended comment at the end of the survey, but the comments become more directed towards the survey itself rather than towards other topics such as societal issues. Further, respondents also become somewhat more critical of the survey in their comments when first asked to evaluate four aspects of the survey.

### Introduction

The Citizen Panel has almost since the start included an open-ended text box on the last page of the surveys where respondents have been able to leave any kind of comments they like. As previous reports have showed (LORE Methodological Note 2016:1) these comments mainly tend to be about the survey itself, and a smaller share of the comments concern other societal or political topics the respondent wish to share their views on. Previous reports also confirmed that such comments tend to be negative rather than positive in their tone.

Since late 2013, in Citizen Panel wave 8, the Laboratory of Opinion Research has sometimes also included a set of rating questions at the end of each survey where respondents are asked to evaluate the survey they have just answered. The first time these survey evaluation questions were tried they were only included for one fifth of the respondents through random assignment.

The purpose of this report is to examine whether including specific survey evaluation questions influences how likely respondents are to leave open-ended comments in the standard final text box and if so whether it affects the content of such open-ended comments. More specifically, three questions are answered: 1) whether evaluation questions affect the share of respondents leaving any kind of open-ended comment, 2) whether they affect the share of respondents leaving open-ended comments specifically

about the survey itself rather than other topics, and 3) whether they affect the tone (positive/negative) of such survey related comments.

## Data and methods

The data used in this report comes from wave 8 of the Citizen Panel at the University of Gothenburg. The survey was fielded during November and December 2013. As part of this survey 20 percent of the respondents were randomly assigned to receive four survey evaluation rating scales before the final open ended comment. These four questions concerned whether the survey was interesting, difficult, entertaining, and took a long time (0 to 100 slider rating scales).

To enable analyses of the type of open-ended comments respondents make and the tone of the survey related comments the auto-coding procedure outlined in LORE Methodological Note 2016:1 was used.

## Expectations

Our empirical expectations are not clear-cut. On the one hand such evaluation items might act as a substitute for leaving open-ended comments and thus lower the share of people leaving open ended comments – at least survey related comments. This assumes that part of those who would otherwise have left a comment in the text box feel that they have been able to express their opinion about the survey through the evaluative rating questions instead. On the other hand, answering the survey evaluation items might instead encourage respondents to search their memory for all relevant considerations about the survey that they can think of. This would rather make them more likely to also leave an open-ended comment since considerations about the survey are more easily accessible in their memory and they are more likely to actually have an opinion about the survey than if they had not seen the evaluative rating scales.

## Results

We start by examining whether including survey evaluation questions before the open ended comment field affects the share of respondents leaving any kind of open comment or not. As seen in Table 1, the answer is no. Approximately 19 to 20 percent of those participating in wave 8 of the Citizen Panel left any kind of open comment at the end of the survey, and this share is the same in both groups.

Table 1. Proportion of commenters by evaluation opportunity

	Percent	SD	N
No evaluation questions	19.6	39.7	6,379
Evaluation questions	19.4	39.5	1,498
Total	19.6	39.7	7,877

The result is different if we examine the share of respondents who leave any kind of comment that does so in order to remark on something about the survey itself rather than on other issues. Table 2 shows that the share of people leaving survey related comments increases significantly (77 versus 68 percent) if the open ended questions is preceded by the four survey evaluative items ( $p=.003$ ).

**Table 2. Proportion of comments about the survey**

	<b>Percent</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
No evaluation questions	68.3	46.5	1,251
Evaluation questions	77.2	42.0	290
Total	70.0	45.8	1,541

*Comment:* The numbers in Table 2 are based on the part of the sample that responded to the open-ended question at the end of the survey.

Lastly, we also examine whether the tone of survey related comments is affected by the inclusion of survey evaluation questions preceding the open ended question. It turns out that this is indeed the case. Table 3 demonstrates that the share of negative comments among the survey related comments increases at the expense of the share of positive comments when the evaluative items are included. This difference is also statistically significant ( $p=.007$ ).

**Table 3. Average tone of comments about the survey (row percent)**

	<b>Negative (-1)</b>	<b>Neutral (0)</b>	<b>Positive (+1)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
No evaluation questions	32	37	31	0,00	0,80	855
Evaluation questions	42	33	25	-0,17	0,80	224
Total	34	36	30	-0,04	0,80	1,079

*Comment:* The numbers in Table 3 are based on the part of the sample that responded to the open-ended question at the end of the survey and gave a survey-related comment.

To sum up, the evaluative questions do not seem to affect how likely people are to leave any kind of open-ended comment at the end of the survey, but they do indeed influence the content of these comments to some extent. The open-ended comments are directed more towards the survey itself rather than towards other topics. In addition, respondents seem to become somewhat more critical of the survey in their comments when first asked to evaluate four aspects of the survey. Whether this effect has any long term influence on respondents' attitudes towards the Citizen Panel surveys have not been evaluated.

## References

- Markstedt, E. & Martinsson, J. (2016) *Survey evaluations and coding of open-ended comments*.  
LORE Methodological Note 2016:1



The Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE) is an academic web survey center located at the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg. LORE was established in 2010 as part of an initiative to strengthen multidisciplinary research on opinion and democracy. The objective of the Laboratory of Opinion Research is to facilitate for social scientists to conduct web survey experiments, collect panel data, and to contribute to methodological development. For more information, please contact us at:

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