

LORE methodological note

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Panel recruitment in the beginning or end of a survey

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ABSTRACT

This methodological note examines whether placing a recruitment question in the beginning or the end of a questionnaire matters for recruitment rates. No significant differences are found between the two variants, but there are some indications that it might be slightly better to place in the end of the questionnaire, although further studies are needed to verify this effect.

Background, hypothesis

A topical panel regarding the introduction of congestion charges in Gothenburg was carried out in three waves between June 2012 and June 2013. In the final wave respondents were asked whether they would like to join the Citizen Panel and regularly answer future web surveys. As is the case with most survey-related topics, it has been assumed that placement in the questionnaire also matters for how respondents react to the recruitment question. The main hypothesis is that placing the recruitment question in the end of the questionnaire would decrease the recruitment rate due to survey fatigue.

Data and results

The data was collected in May-June 2013. 7,439 respondents were invited to the survey, and 4,739 responses were collected, which implies a gross participation rate of 64 percent (comparable to AAPORs COMR or RR5 standards). Three reminders were sent; on field days 8, 15 and 22. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two placements of the recruitment question.

Results show that the difference is very small, only 0.6 percent, which is not significant when two-sample tests of proportions are performed (two-tailed test: $p=0.68$).

Table 1: Recruitment rates in the beginning and end of a survey

	Non-recruited	Recruited	N _{Non-recruited}	N _{Recruited}	N _{Total}
Recr. in the beginning	35.7	64.3	854	1,539	2,393
Recr. in the end	35.1	64.9	824	1,522	2,346
Total	35.4	64.6	1,678	3,061	4,739

Not only do the results show no difference between the two placements, but the direction of the difference also suggests that the hypothesis is wrong. When the question is placed at the end of the questionnaire, a slightly higher recruitment rate is observed. But this conclusion is highly tentative. No significant differences are found among subgroups (gender, age, education and political interest). The most significant difference was found among respondents with high political interest, where 2.6 percent more respondents were recruited late in the questionnaire than when it was placed in the beginning ($p=0.16$). This is a finding which could indicate that placing recruitment questions in the end of a questionnaire is better than in the beginning for some groups.

On a speculative note, a possible interpretation of a higher recruitment rate in the end than in the beginning is that towards the end of the survey respondents know what kind of questions they can expect if they sign up. However, in this particular case the recruitment question was included in the third wave of panel study, so these respondents should already know fairly well what kind of questions to expect.

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