

LORE methodological note

2014:15

Altruistic or egoistic framing, and placement of recruitment questions in on-line surveys

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ABSTRACT

An altruistic framing, asking respondents to contribute to the common good, of a recruitment question to a web panel within another web survey is found to result in a higher recruitment rate than an egoistic framing, which alludes to respondent's wish to voice their opinions. The placement of the recruitment question is also found to significantly impact the recruitment rate with a later placement in the survey yielding a higher recruitment rate than recruitment questions placed in the beginning of the survey. The same pattern is found when analyzing the completion rates where respondents receiving the altruistic framing and a late placement of the recruitment question are more prone to answer the whole survey.

Background and data

In the 2014 election to the European parliament LORE constructed an election compass (Voting Advice Application, VAA) in collaboration with Kieskompas and Aftonbladet. The election compass was published and promoted on the website of the daily newspaper Aftonbladet and was taken by 1.6 million users. On the results page of the election compass it was possible for participants to answer an online survey and sign up to the Citizen Panel at the University of Gothenburg. Part of this opt-in recruitment was conducted as an experiment where some respondents received the question to join the Citizen Panel early in the survey, in the middle of the survey, or as the last question occurring in the survey. Each of these groups also randomly received either an altruistic framing of the question, appealing to the respondent's good will of contributing to democracy research, or an egoistic framing of the question, appealing to the respondent's need to express his/her views on politics and society. The experiment thus has a two by three factorial design with a total of six experimental groups. This particular recruitment experiment was open from May 20th to May 22nd 2014; during these days 6,598 people started answering the survey out of which 545 decided to join the Citizen Panel, which gives us an average recruitment rate of 8.26 percent.

The aim of this methodological note is to evaluate this recruitment effort and evaluate the placement of the recruitment question and the wording of the question in terms of recruitment rates. More specifically, we will evaluate three number of hypotheses specified below.

We expect later placement to produce higher recruitment rates since respondents have then had time to see what the Citizen Panel is about and what type of questions to expect. However, if a survey would start off with very demanding or sensitive questions the opposite might happen.

- H1: Later placements of recruitment questions have higher recruitment rates than earlier placements.

Further, we expect an altruistic wording of the recruitment questions to yield a higher recruitment rate following earlier studies showing that an altruistically framed invitation e-mail is better than an egoistically framed e-mail (Fazekas et al 2014). However, it is noteworthy that many commercial opt-in online panels often use a “voice your opinion” type of argument to motivate respondents.

- H2: Altruistically framed recruitment questions have higher recruitment rates than egoistically framed recruitment questions.

Lastly, we also expect that placing a recruitment question very early in a survey will lead some respondents to quit the survey, thus decreasing the completion rate. The idea is that this might happen because respondents feel that we are asking for too much too early. Asking for their e-mail address when they only had the intention to answer a survey can create more negative attitudes towards the researchers behind the survey.

- H3: Early placements of recruitment questions have higher breakoff rates than later placements.

Results

Table 1 displays the recruitment rate in the six different experimental groups. There is a significantly higher recruitment rate among respondents receiving an altruistic recruitment question than among those receiving an egoistic recruitment question; this pattern is true in all different placements of the questions in the survey. The recruitment rates in table 1 are calculated only for the respondents who saw the recruitment question, i.e. excluding those who quit the survey before it appeared. The mean recruitment rate for the altruistic question was 14.7 percent whereas the mean recruitment rate for the egoistic question was 9.2 percent, more than five percentage points lower. Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported.

Table 1: Recruitment rates depending on framing and placement of the recruitment question

Placement	Altruistic	Egoistic
Beginning	9.0 ^{ab} (n=1,097)	4.92 (n=1,138)
Middle	19.2 ^{cd} (n=574)	14.0 ^{ace} (n=572)
End	20.8 ^d (n=611)	13.1 ^{be} (n=557)

Comment: Groups that are *not* statistically different from each other at least at the 90% confidence level are indicated by a common superscript letter. Consequently, all groups that do not share joint superscript letter (a, b, c etc.) are significantly different.

In line with hypothesis 1 a late placement of the recruitment question in the survey does yield a higher recruitment rate than an early placement. This finding is significant both for the altruistic and the egoistic framing of the recruitment question where the middle and late placements are significantly better than the early placement. There is, however, no evidence that placing the recruitment question at the end of the survey is better than in the middle of the survey.

To complement the evaluation of the recruitment strategies and evaluate hypothesis number 3, table 2 examines the percentage of respondents finishing the whole survey depending on the treatment group they belong to.

Table 2: Completion rate depending on framing and placement of the recruitment question

Placement	Altruistic	Egoistic
Beginning	40.7 (n=1,102)	34.9 (n=1,140)
Middle	51.8 ^{abc} (n=1,062)	50.1 ^{ade} (n=1,083)
End	52.8 ^{bd} (n=1,122)	49.1 ^{ce} (n=1,089)

Comment: Groups that are *not* statistically different from each other at least at the 90% confidence level are indicated by a common superscript letter. Consequently, all groups that do not share joint superscript letter (a, b, c etc.) are significantly different.

Interestingly, both the placement and framing of the recruitment question affect to what extent respondents finish the entire survey. The survey was of moderate length and took on average around 8 minutes to finish. An early placement of the recruitment question decreases the share that finishes the survey significantly for both the altruistic and egoistic recruitment framing. Only a third of the respondents receiving the egoistically framed question in the beginning of the survey actually finish the entire survey.¹ This can possibly be because recruitment questions often are associated with the end of a survey and the respondents thus do not feel obliged to answer further questions after the recruitment question. Again there are no differences found between the middle and late placement of the recruitment question. When having answered half a survey respondent tend to continue answering regardless of whether they receive a recruitment question or not and how it is framed. There is also no significant difference found between the altruistic and the egoistic recruitment question with the middle placement, indicating that the impact of the wording decreases the further the respondent has answered the survey when it comes to the proneness to finish the survey.

¹ The completion rates seen in table 2 are unusually low for web surveys. This is because this particular survey was not run from an existing web panel, but connected to a banner-ad on a web site following a voting advice application. This means that many people probably clicked it out of curiosity, hence the relatively low completion rates.

Concluding remarks

This methodological note has found that both the framing and the placement of the recruitment question impacts the opt-in recruitment rate to a web panel. An altruistic framing, stating that the respondent is important to help democracy research, yields a significantly higher recruitment rate than an egoistic framing, arguing that the respondents can make themselves heard. It thus seems that being a good person contributing to the common good is a more appealing argument to potential respondents of a non-commercial university run web panel than allowing people to make them heard in the public debate through surveys. Perhaps an explanation is that it is not seen as favorable to view one's own political views as more important than somebody else's. A late placement of the recruitment question does also significantly increase the recruitment rate. The more the respondents know what the survey is about, the more probable are they to join the Citizen Panel. This goes against the earlier finding in LORE methodological note 2014:2 where no significant effect of the placement of the recruitment question was found. This study was however different in the sense that the respondents had participated in three earlier waves of the Citizen Panel before being asked to join the panel.

The same pattern is found when analyzing the completion rate, where those receiving the altruistic framing are more prone to finish the survey, and an early placement of the recruitment question decreases the probability to join the Citizen Panel.

References

- Fazekas, Z., Wall, M. T. & Krouwel, A., (2014). "Is it what you say, or how you say it? An experimental analysis of the effects of invitation wording for online". *Research Note. International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. 26(2), 235-244.
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Appendix 1, Altruistic framing

Hjälp demokratiforskningen vid Göteborgs universitet och anmäl dig till Medborgarpanelen!

Medborgarpanelen är en vetenskaplig och oberoende undersökning som löpande genomförs av Sveriges ledande opinionsforskare vid Göteborgs universitet. Syftet är att utveckla svensk demokratiforskning och bidra till samhällsdebatten genom en bättre förståelse för Sveriges befolknings åsikter om aktuella händelser, politik och samhälle. Dina svar är mycket viktiga för oss och kommer ligga till grund för analyser i rapporter och vetenskapliga uppsatser.

Genom att lämna din e-postadress här kan du hjälpa Göteborgs universitets demokratiforskning genom att besvara liknande undersökningar framöver:

Du som lämnar din e-postadress här kommer ca fyra gånger per år att få inbjudningar till fler enkätundersökningar via e-post från Göteborgs universitet. Självklart är allt deltagande frivilligt, dina svar behandlas anonymt, och du kan när som helst avanmäla dig från vidare utskick.

Appendix 2, Egoistic framing

Uttryck dina åsikter och anmäl dig till Medborgarpanelen vid Göteborgs universitet!

Vad tycker du om politiken och samhällsutvecklingen? Genom att anmäla dig till Medborgarpanelen vid Göteborgs universitet kan du uttrycka dina åsikter. Medborgarpanelen är en vetenskaplig och oberoende undersökning som löpande genomförs av Sveriges ledande opinionsforskare vid Göteborgs universitet. Dina svar är mycket viktiga för oss och kommer ligga till grund för analyser i rapporter och vetenskapliga uppsatser.

Genom att lämna din e-postadress här kan du vara med i kommande undersökningar från Göteborgs universitets liknande denna:

Du som lämnar din e-postadress här kommer ca fyra gånger per år att få inbjudningar till fler enkätundersökningar via e-post från Göteborgs universitet. Självklart är allt deltagande frivilligt, dina svar behandlas anonymt, och du kan när som helst avanmäla dig från vidare utskick.

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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