

# **ASK ME NOW OR LOSE ME LATER**

The Impact of Timing of the First Panel Wave on  
Participation Rates, Retention and Data Quality in Web  
Panels

# About us

- The SOM Institute – a university-based research organization and a national infrastructure for survey data
- Main research projects:
  - The annual SOM surveys, has been conducted since 1986
  - The Swedish Citizen Panel (SCP)
    - Non commercial online panel with over 70 000 active panellists, both probability and non-probability recruited

## Purpose & aim

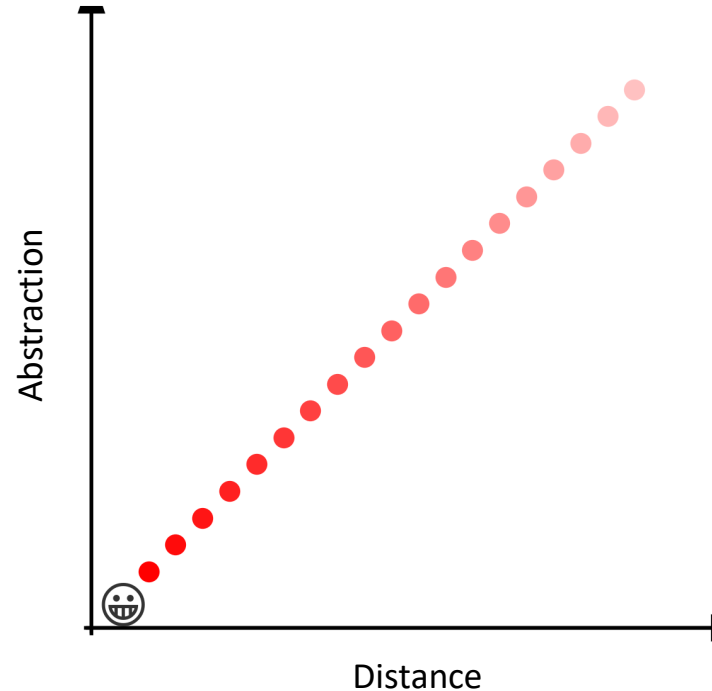
- Problem: How do we ensure high participation rates and respondent retention in web panels?
- Solution: Can the time interval between recruitment and the invitation to the first panel wave affect respondents' engagement?

## Previous research

- Limited research on the effects of follow-up timing in online panels
- “Foot-in-the-door” technique
  - A small initial request followed by a larger second request
  - Example: Sign a petition → donate money (Guéguen & Jacob, 2004)

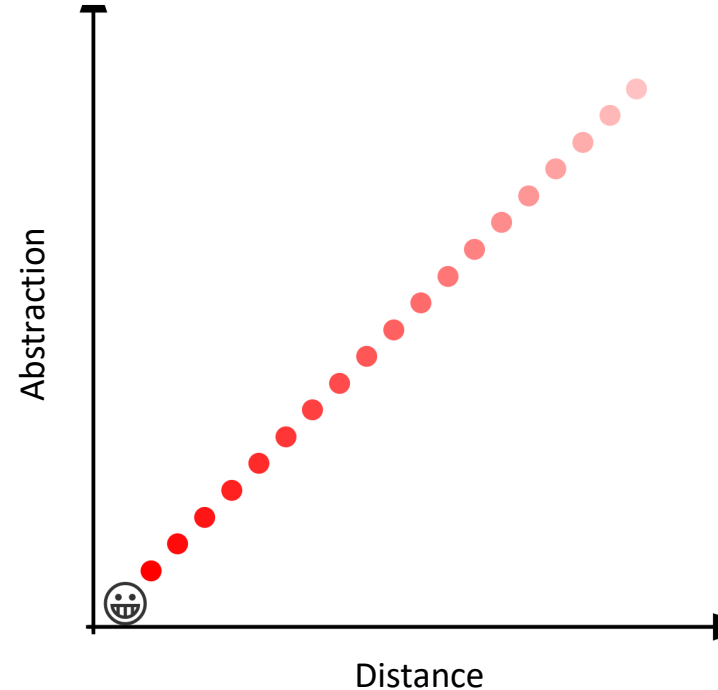
# Construal level theory (CLT)

- Concept: Psychological distance (temporal, spatial, social, hypothetical) influences how we perceive tasks
- Key Idea:
  - The **greater** the psychological distance the more **abstract** the perception of a task
  - The **closer** the distance, the more **concrete** the perception
- Key Reference: Trope & Liberman (2010)



# Construal level theory applied

- Recruitment to the SCP:
  - Sign-up stage: Abstract motivations ("research is important")
  - Participation stage: Immediate, concrete concerns ("I don't have time right now")



# Experimental design

- Two groups
  - Group 1: Early invitation to participate (one month after recruitment)
  - Group 2: Late invitation to participate (six months after recruitment)
- Both groups received the late invitation
- Two similar questionnaires were used for both early and late invitations

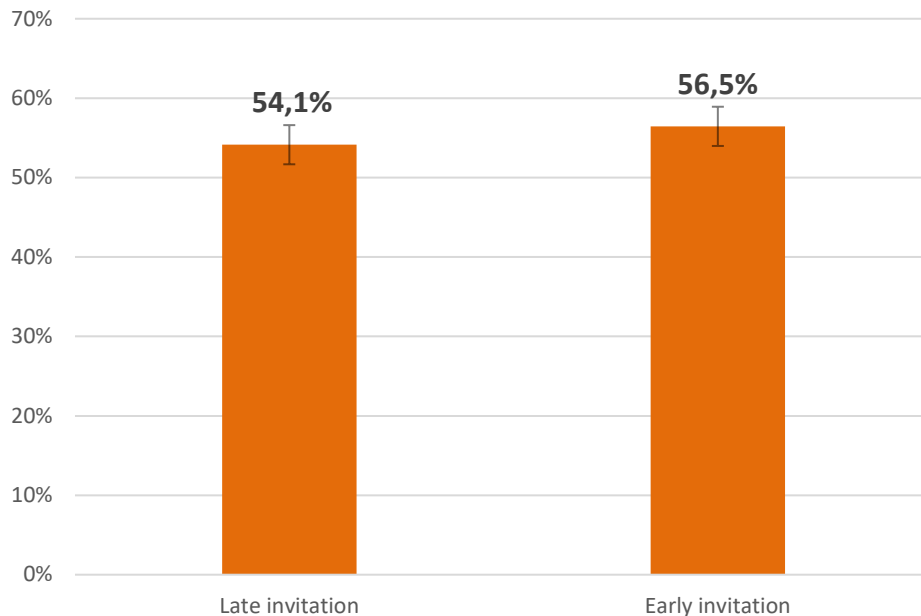
# Sample

- Panellist recruited in May 2024 (non-probability)
- $N = 3\,120$
- Two experimental groups
  - Early invitation:  $n = 1\,570$
  - Late invitation:  $n = 1\,570$



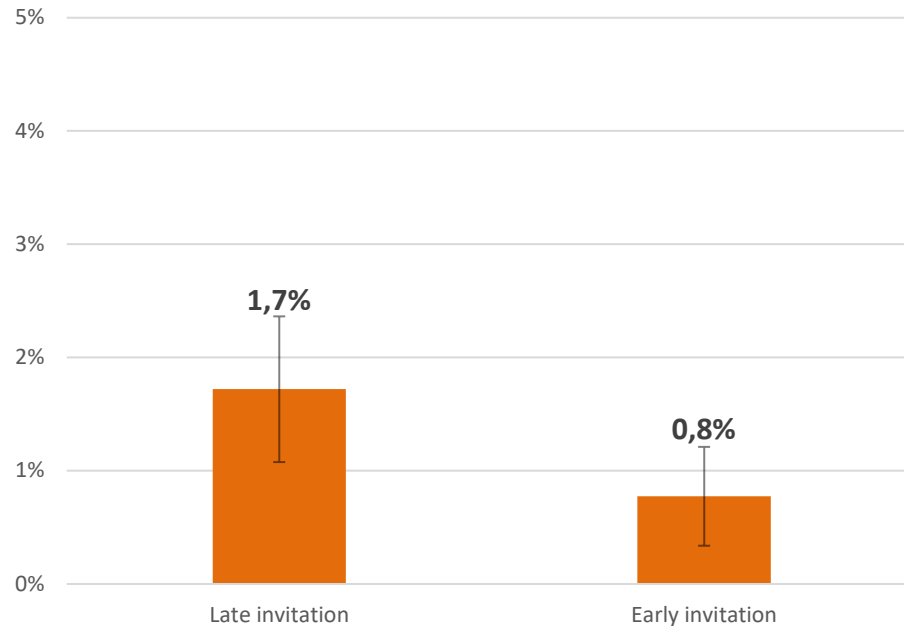
## Participation rate

- Higher participation rate in the group that received an early invitation
- No significant difference ( $p = .182$ )



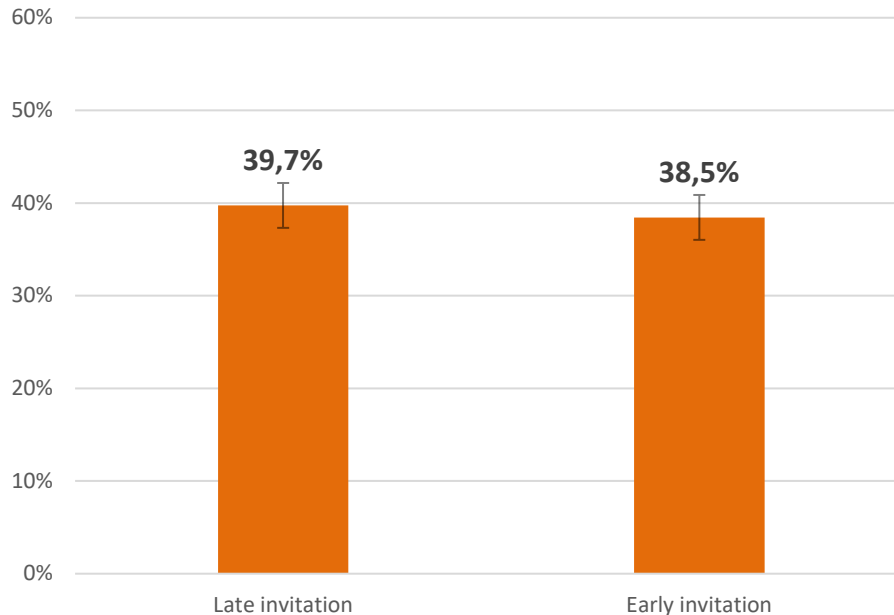
## Break-offs

- Fewer participants dropped out of the survey in the group that received an early invitation.
- No significant difference ( $p = .187$ )



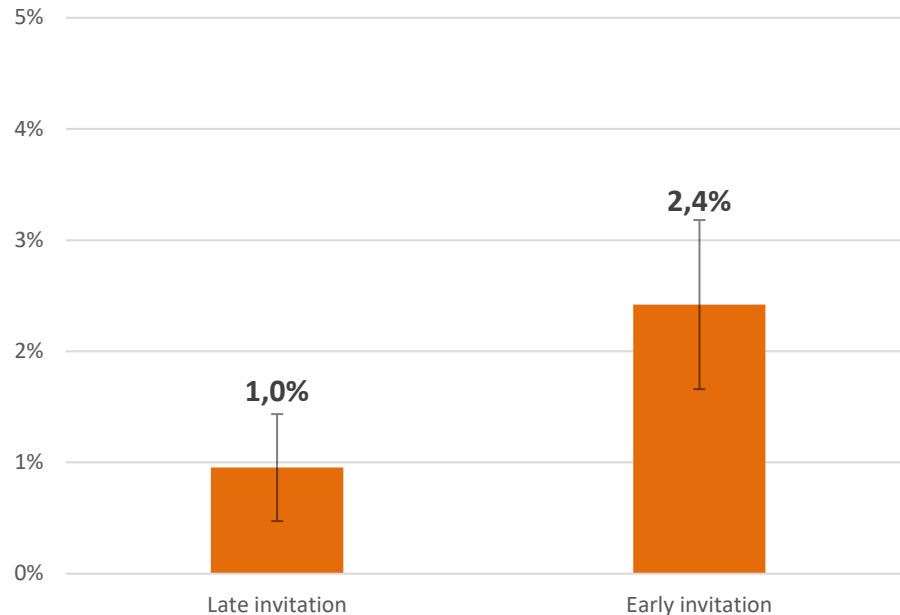
## Refusals

- Panellists who received the invitation but did not click on the link
- Higher percentage refusals among those who received a late invitation
- No significant difference ( $p = .304$ )



# Unsubscriptions

- More unsubscriptions from the panel among those who received an early invitation
  - More contact -> more unsubscriptions?
- Significant difference ( $p = .001$ )



# Implications

- Participation rates not significantly affected by timing of invitation, but expected directions were observed implying that timing may be somewhat associated with panel engagement
- Further studies are needed investigating more time intervals ( $>2$ ) between recruitment and first invitation
- Future studies should also follow newly recruited panellists to potentially determine an optimal number of invitations/studies per year for maximum engagement

# Thank you for listening!

Ask Me Now or Lose Me Later - The Impact of Immediate Follow-Up on Participation Rates, Retention and Data Quality in Web Panels

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The SOM institute's research on survey methodology

<https://www.gu.se/en/som-institute/publications/research-on-survey-methodology>