

The SOM Institute's Notes on Survey Methodology – 2025:3

Sender gender – The effect of signatory gender in an invitation on web panel participation

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has found that the gender of the sender may influence survey participation. We report an experiment where the invitation letter to join a web panel was signed either by a man or a woman, and its effect on recruitment rates. No significant difference was found between the two experiment groups. Thus, the gender of the sender did not affect people's propensity to join a web panel.

INTRODUCTION

There are several aspects of signatures on invitation letters that may impact individuals' propensity to participate in surveys or, in this case, to join a probability-based online access panel. For example, people were more likely to participate when the signature included the sender's professorial title and the respondent was greeted by name (Joinson & Reips, 2007) or when green, rather than black, colored ink was used (Taylor et al., 2006). In the fall of 2023, the SOM Institute went from having a male director to having a female director. This note therefore examines whether the gender of the signatory in an invitation letter affects propensities to join a probability-based online access panel.

Previous studies have shown mixed results when it comes to the effect of the sender's gender on willingness to participate in surveys. Keusch (2012) found that a female sender increased response rates in a survey of a male dominated population. Guégen and Jacob (2002) found an effect of the sender's gender when a photo was included, but when a photo was not included, the sender of the gender did not affect propensities to participate in the survey. Other studies found no effect of the gender of the sender on the response rates (Dodd & Markwiese, 1987; Feild 1975; Pourjalali & Kimbrell 1994).

To test whether the gender of the sender affects the likelihood to be recruited to an online access panel, an experiment was conducted in the recruitment to the Swedish Citizen Panel (SCP) administered at the end of 2023. In that recruitment, half of the invited individuals were randomly assigned to receive an invitation letter with the signature of the former male director, and half were sent a letter with the signature of the new female director.

HYPOTHESIS

Following the previous research that found support for an effect of the gender of the sender (Keusch, 2012; Guégen & Jacob, 2002), the first hypothesis was as follows.

H1: Individuals who receive an invitation letter from a female sender may be more likely to join the web panel than those who receive a letter from a male sender.

Since Keusch (2012) found an effect of the signatory in a sampling frame with over ninety percent men, the second hypothesis assessed whether the sample persons' gender moderated the treatment effect.

H2: The effect that the gender of the sender may have on recruitment rates may be stronger among male invitees than female invitees.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

SAMPLE

In this panel recruitment, invitations to join the SCP were sent out to 35,945 people living in Sweden between the ages of 18 and 85. The sample was pulled from Statistics Sweden and was stratified based on sex, age, education, and country of birth.

PROCEDURE

The invitations to join the SCP were mailed on November 14, 2023, and the possibility to join the panel closed on February 15, 2024. A reminder was sent via text message (SMS) ten days after the first invitation was mailed, and was followed by a reminder via mail three weeks after the first invitation was mailed. The invitation letter contained a URL to the questionnaire, login information, and a unique QR code by which to access the questionnaire. On the first page of the questionnaire, the invitees consented to joining the panel and reported their e-mail address.

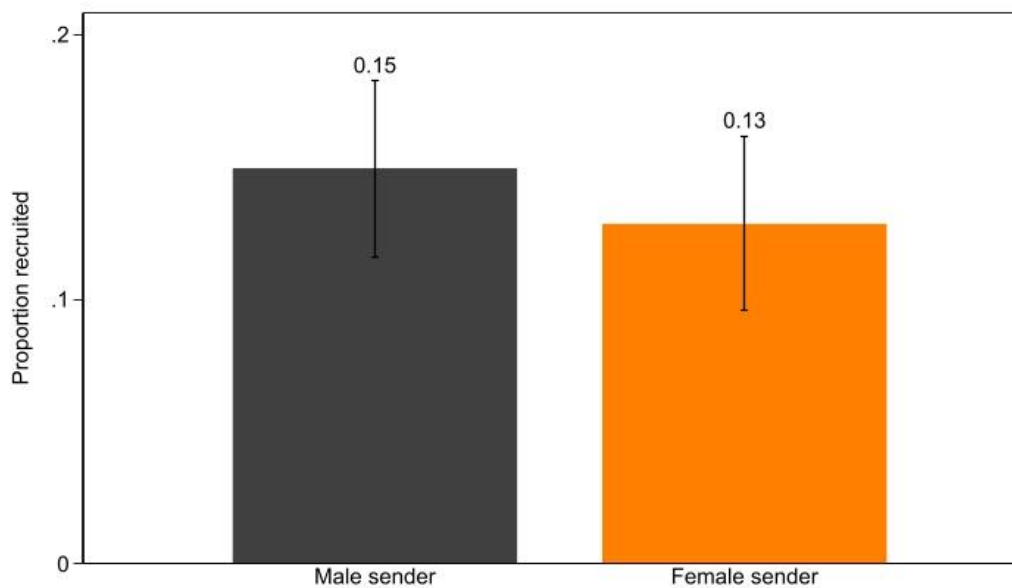
The invited individuals were randomly assigned to receive either an invitation with the signature of the previous male director or one with the signature of the current female director (see Appendix 1). The recruitment also contained another experiment where half of the invited individuals got a piece of candy in their first letter as an incentive to join the panel. Therefore, the people who were invited were randomly assigned to one of four groups (male sender x candy, male sender x no candy, female sender x candy, and female sender x no candy). The present note focuses on the signatory of the letter and not on the inclusion of incentive.

To compare the recruitment rate between the experiment groups, the initial recruitment rate was estimated (AAPOR, 2023). The invitees that consented to join the panel and reported their e-mail address were considered to be recruited.

RESULTS

The gender of the sender did not affect the propensity to join the panel. Individuals who received an invitation from a male sender were not more likely to join the panel ($M = .15$, $SD = 0.36$) than individuals who received an invitation from a female sender ($M = .13$, $SD = 0.33$; $b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .38$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not confirmed.

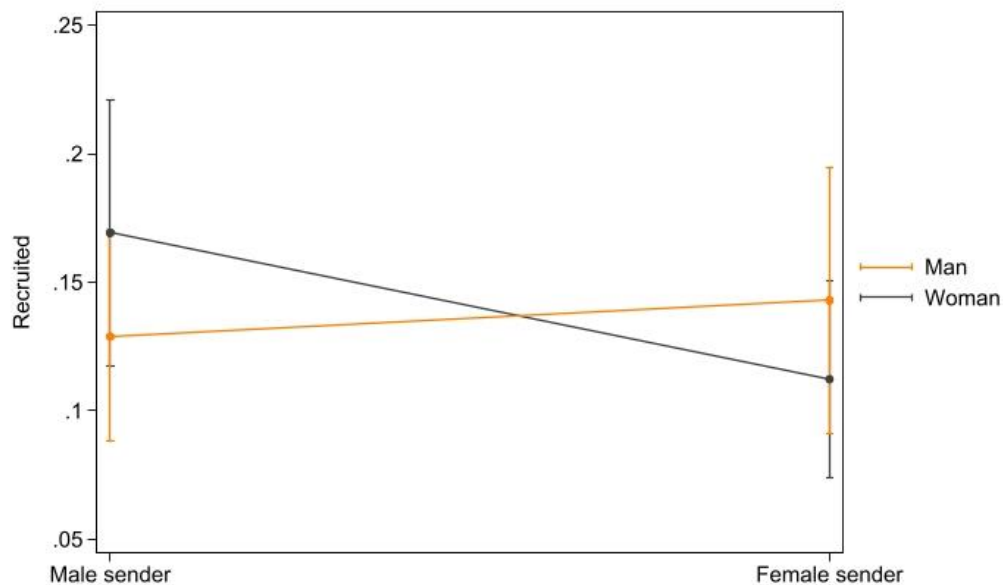
Figure 1. *Proportion of invited people who were recruited by gender of sender.*



Note. $N = 35,945$. Cell-weighted results.

Since one of the studies that did find an effect of the gender of the sender did so in a male-dominated sample, an analysis that checked for interaction effects with the gender of the respondent was conducted. Men were not more likely to be recruited by a female sender than women were ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .13$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed either.

Figure 2. Effect of gender of sender on recruitment, by gender of invited person.



Note. $N = 35,945$. Cell-weighted results.

CONCLUSION

The gender of the sender did not affect the propensity of people to join the SCP. And, in contrast to indications of previous research, men were not more likely to be recruited when the sender was female than women were. The findings presented in this note are in line with a number of previous studies finding no effect of the gender of the sender on response rates (Dodd & Markwiese, 1987; Feild 1975; Pourjalali & Kimbrell 1994).

Based on these results, the gender of the sender does not seem to affect people when they decide whether or not to join a web panel. However, it is possible to question whether this lack of effect is because people really are not affected by the gender of the sender or if it could be because people simply do not notice the name of the sender. To explore this further, it would be interesting to build on Guégen and Jacob (2002), who only found an effect of the gender of the sender when a photo was included. A stronger test of whether there is an effect of the gender of the sender on the propensity to join a web panel would

be to include a picture of the sender – to really put the sender, along with their gender, into focus.

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APPENDIX 1. INVITATION LETTERS

Invitation letter from male sender:



Inbjudan till SOM-institutets Medborgarpanel

Du har blivit utvald att delta i Medborgarpanelen, en forskningsbaserad webbpanel som drivs av den oberoende undersökningsorganisationen SOM-institutet vid Göteborgs universitet. Att delta i Medborgarpanelen innebär att du ungefär fyra gånger per år får en kort webbenkät skickad till din e-postadress. Genom att gå med i Medborgarpanelen bidrar du till kunskap och forskning om vad människor i Sverige tycker och tänker om dagens samhälle.

Din adress har vi fått från Statistiska Centralbyrån som tagit fram ett urval av befolkningen åt oss. Att delta är helt frivilligt och du kan när som helst sluta svara på enkäten eller gå ur panelen. För mer information, se baksidan av detta brev. Dina svar och just dina åsikter är viktiga för att forskningen som bedrivs med hjälp av Medborgarpanelen ska spegla alla människors åsikter i Sverige.

För att komma till anmälan, skriv in länken nedan i adressraden på din webbläsare eller scanna QR-koden inuti den svarta rutan nedan.

Gå in på: www.gu.se/mp/anmalan

Anmäl dig med användaruppgifterna till höger om den blå pilen.

Du kan också scanna QR-koden till höger för att komma direkt till anmälan.

➔

Användarnamn:
Lösenord:

Hälsningar,

Johan Martinsson
Föreståndare för SOM-Institutet
Info@medborgarpanelen.gu.se
Tel: 031-786 30 60 (vardagar kl 13.00-15.00)



**GÖTEBORGS
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Invitation letter from female sender:



SOM-INSTITUTET
SAMHÄLLE OPINION MEDIER





**Medborgar-
panelen**

Inbjudan till SOM-Institutets Medborgarpanel

Du har blivit utvald att delta i Medborgarpanelen, en forskningsbaserad webbpanel som drivs av den oberoende undersökningsorganisationen SOM-institutet vid Göteborgs universitet. Att delta i Medborgarpanelen innebär att du ungefär fyra gånger per år får en kort webbenkät skickad till din e-postadress. Genom att gå med i Medborgarpanelen bidrar du till kunskap och forskning om vad människor i Sverige tycker och tänker om dagens samhälle.

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Anmäl dig med användaruppgifterna till höger om den blå pilen.	
Du kan också scanna QR-koden till höger för att komma direkt till anmälan.	<div>Användarnamn: Lösenord: </div>

Hälsningar,



Annika Bergström
Föreståndare för SOM-Institutet
Info@medborgarpanelen.gu.se
Tel: 031-786 30 60 (vardagar kl 13.00-15.00)



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The SOM Institute is an academic organization located at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Since 1986 the SOM Institute conducts annual cross-sectional surveys among the Swedish population with a focus on Society, Opinion, and Media, as well as administering the web panel called the Swedish Citizen Panel. The annual surveys and the web panel both function as infrastructures, enabling researchers and public organizations to effectively collect research and opinion data in collaboration with researchers at the SOM Institute.

In order to strengthen contemporary research on Swedish society, as well as to contribute to international methodological development, the SOM Institute frequently publishes notes on methodological research. These are made available for scholars and the public alike at <https://www.gu.se/en/som-institute/publications/research-on-survey-methodology>

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