

When in Rome...

The effect of providing examples in a survey question across countries

Eva Aizpurua, Gianmaria Bottony & Rory Fitzgerald

European Social Survey HQ



europeansocialsurvey.org

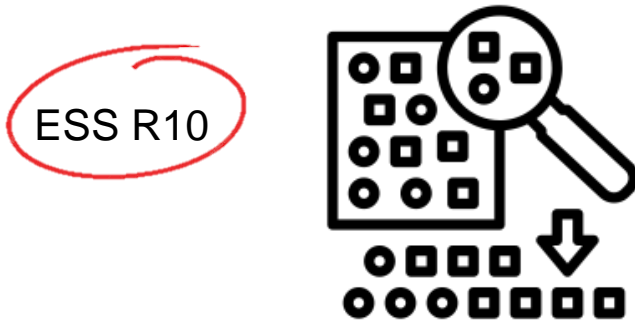
ESS is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC)



The use of examples in survey questions

Using examples is quite common

“During the last 12 months, have you posted or shared anything about politics online, *for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter?*”



Impact on comprehension

- 👍 Clarify the scope or specificity of a question

Impact on retrieval

- 👍 Stimulate recall for instances which might go unnoticed... but
- 👎 Inhibit recall for non-examples

→ “Focusing hypothesis”

The use of examples in survey questions

What do we know?

Respondents are more likely to select the examples which are provided to them (Aizpurua et al., 2020; Tourangeau et al., 2016)

Why is more research needed?

→ Most studies have been conducted in the US, with questionnaires in English



The current study

- **Design**
ESS Cross-National Online Survey panel (CRONOS 2016/2017)
- **Countries and languages**
Estonia (Estonian and Russian), Slovenia (Slovenian), and Great Britain (English)
- **Population**
Individuals 18+ who participated in the ESS (Round 8)
- **Survey length (per wave)**
20 minutes
- **Response rates (ESS gross sample)**
15% GB – 25% Estonia
- **Participation rates (those invited to join CRONOS)**
56% GB – 78% Estonia



Experimental Design

- **Condition 1**

How much confidence do you have in social media?

- **Condition 2**  

How much confidence do you have in social media *like Facebook and Twitter?*

- A great deal
- Quite a lot
- Not very much
- None at all

- **Follow-up question**

In the previous questions you were asked about social media. Please indicate whether you considered each of the following social media platforms.

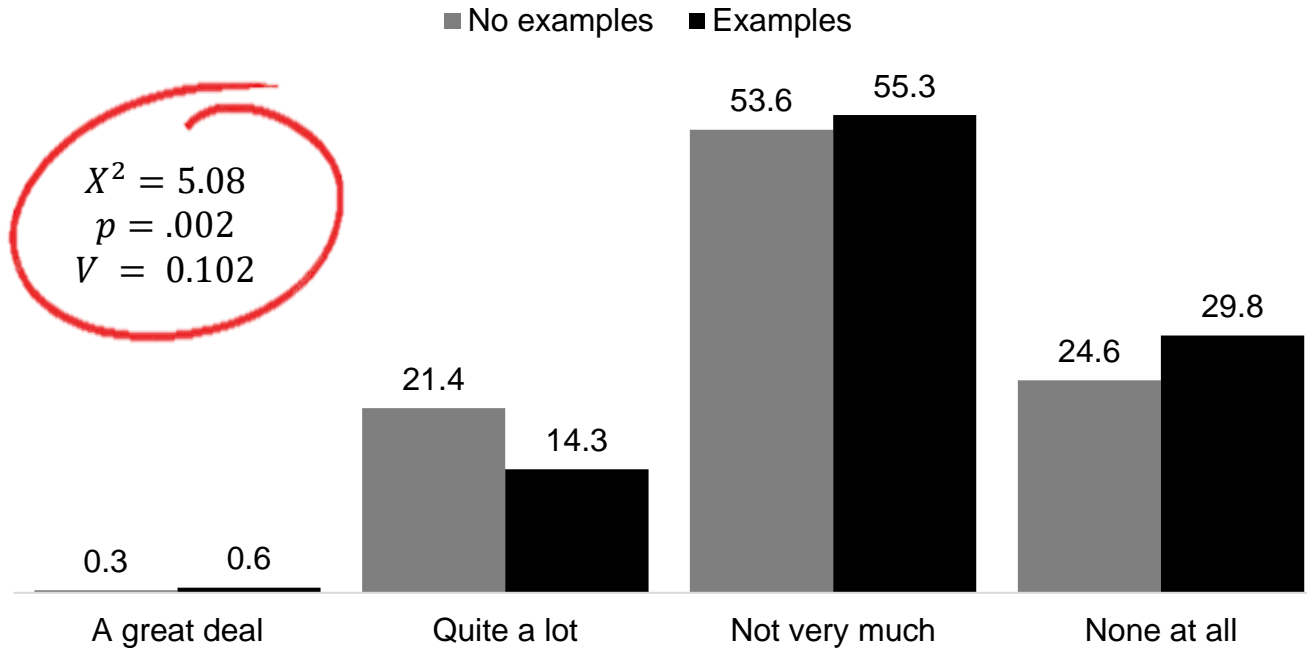
	Yes	No
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Linkedin	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...		

Results

- 1) Do examples influence levels of confidence in social media?
- 2) Do the number and the specific platforms considered by respondents vary depending on the experimental condition (*focusing hypothesis*)?
- 3) If effects are found, are they homogeneous across countries?

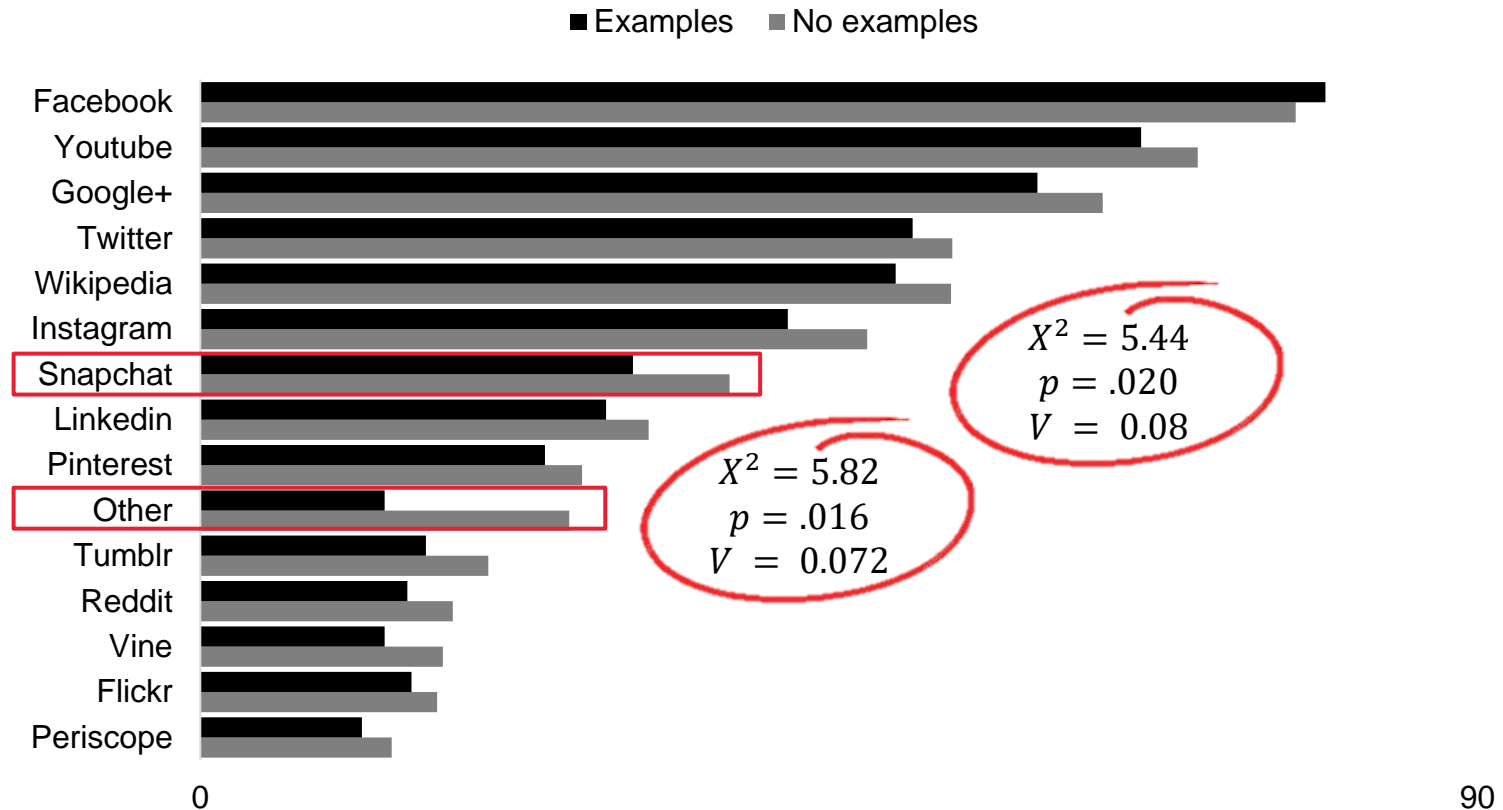
Confidence in social media by experimental condition

Distribution by experimental condition (weighted data)

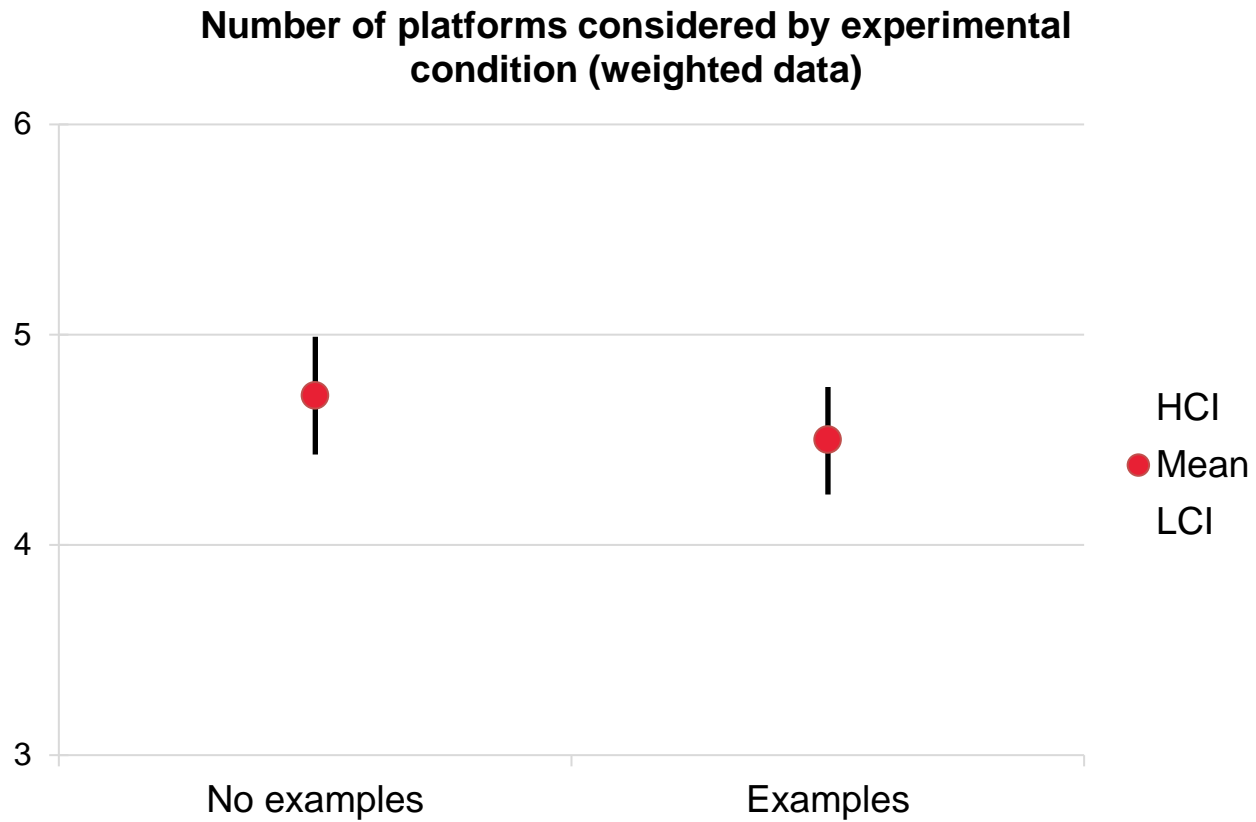


Social media platforms by experimental condition

Platforms considered by experimental condition (weighted data)



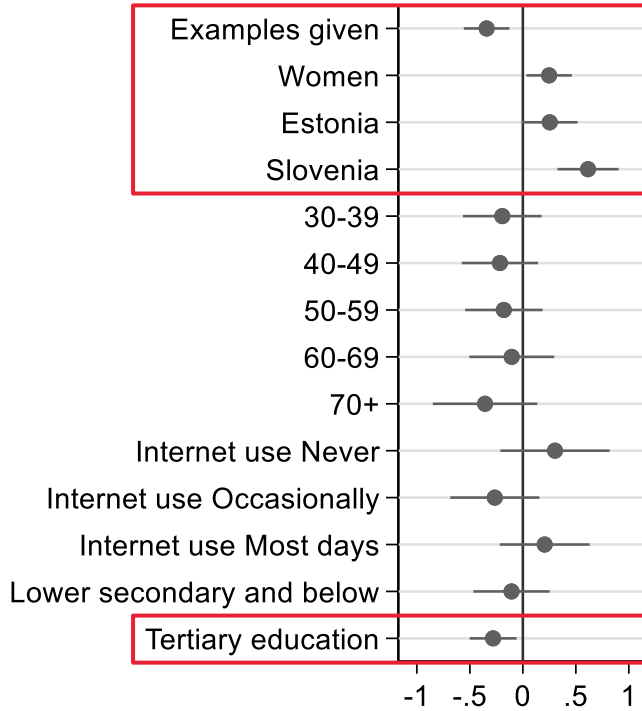
Social media platforms by experimental condition



Confidence in social media by condition and country

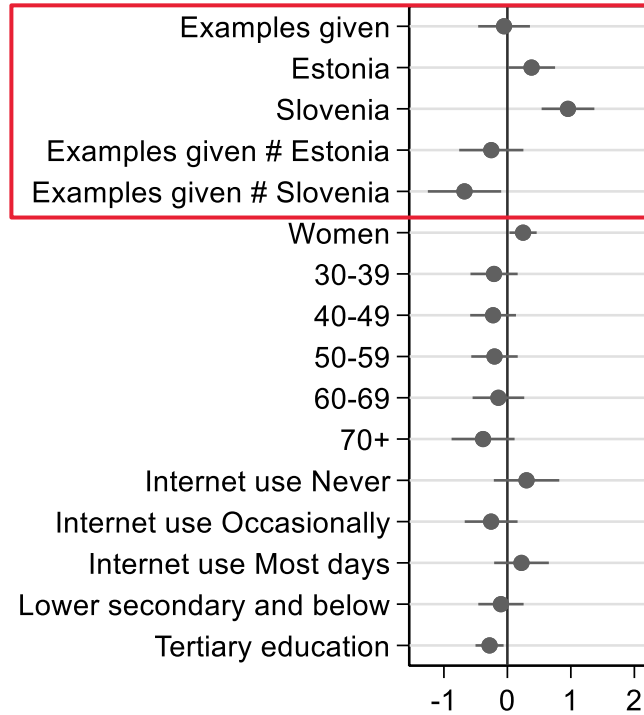
Confidence in social media

Ordinal regression (OR) - Weighted data



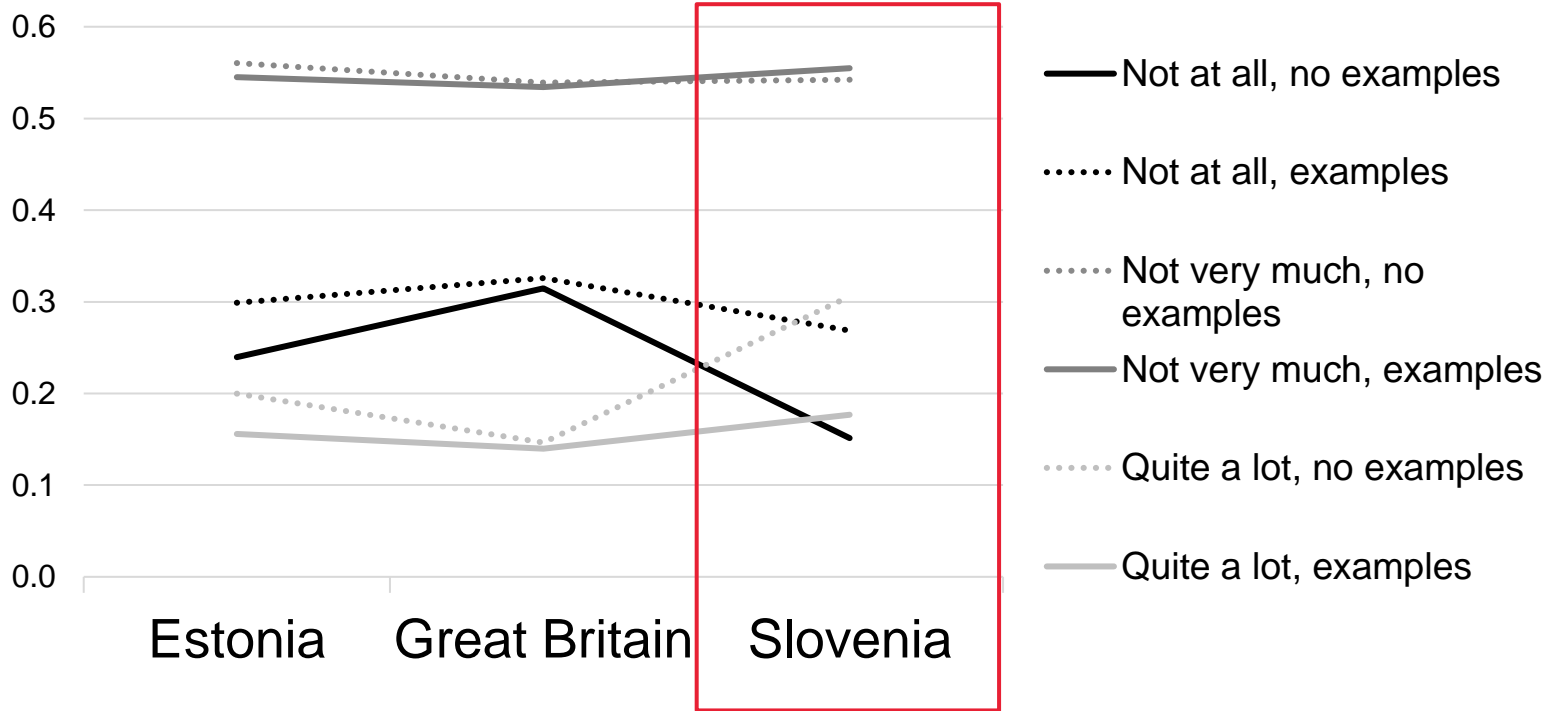
Confidence in social media

Ordinal regression (OR) - Weighted data



Confidence in social media by experimental condition

Predicted probabilities



Conclusions and Implications

Main takeaways

Implications for cross-national surveys

Limitations & Future research

Conclusions

- **Levels of confidence in social media varied depending on whether the question stem included “Facebook and Twitter” as examples**

When these examples were offered, confidence was reduced, although the effect size was small.



- **Significant differences were found across countries, with Slovenia mostly driving the overall differences**

This suggests that the effect of providing examples might vary across cultural or linguistic groups



Comparison error



If examples are included in cross-cultural surveys, carefully pre-testing of questions with different groups is required

Conclusions

- **No evidence that the use of examples improved the recall process**

On average, respondents in both groups indicated having considered between four and five different platforms



- **The fact that the examples provided to respondents were typical might contribute to explain these findings** (Tourangeau et al., 2014)

- **Future research**

- Different sets of examples
- Wider and more diverse set of countries



Contact

✉ Eva.Aizpurua@city.ac.uk

🌐 europeansocialsurvey.org

📘 EuropeanSocialSurvey
in European-Social-Survey

🐦 ESS_Survey

📺 EuropeanSocialSurveyERIC

