

Making Up for Failure: A Simple Nudge to Improve Goal Persistence

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At a Glance

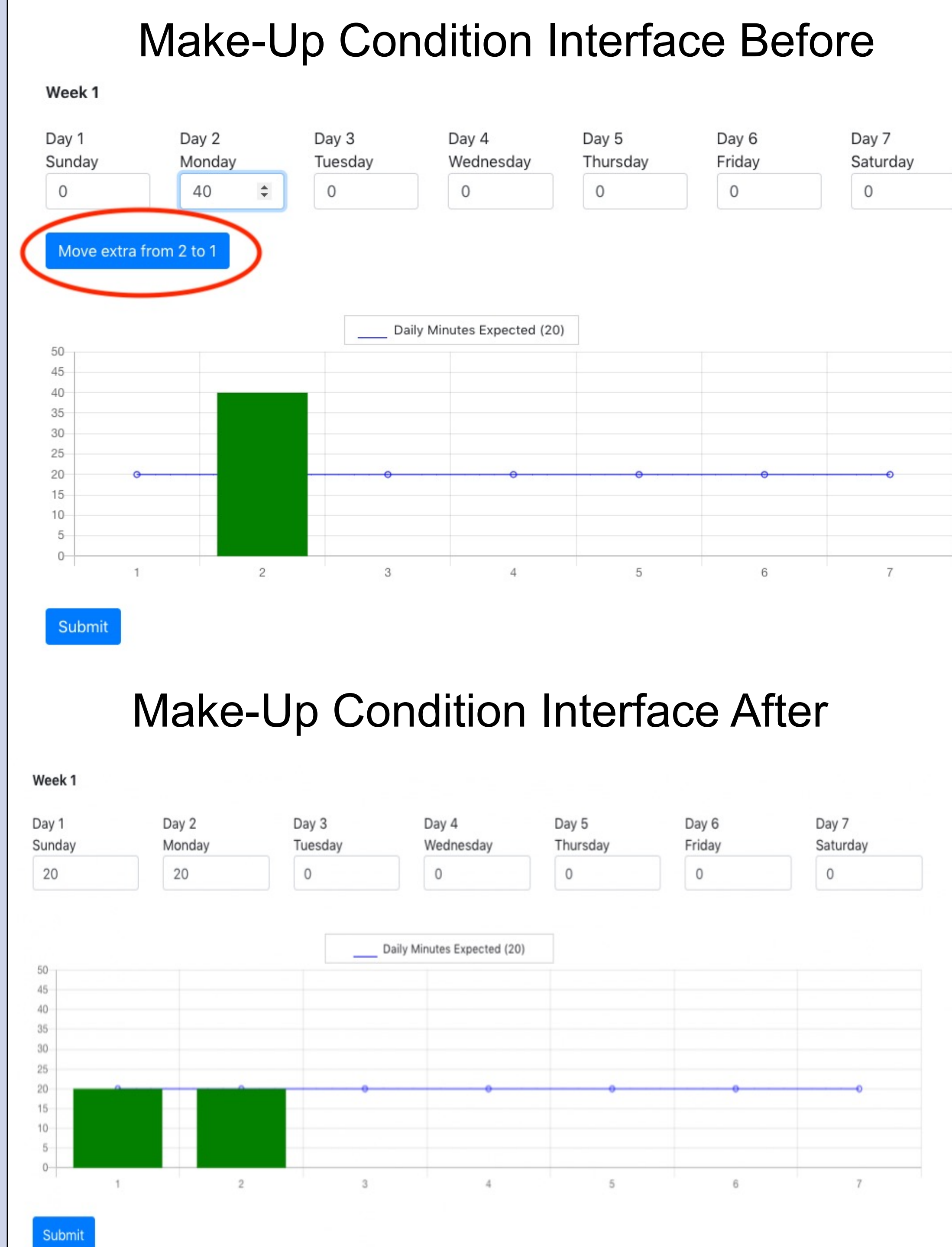
Research Question	Can encouraging consumers to make up for small failures during goal pursuit increase goal persistence?
Methods	3 week-long real behavior experiments testing the making up for failure nudge in two different goal domains.
Key Result	Making up for failure nudges increase consumer goal persistence.

Motivation

- Small failures during goal pursuit are inevitable and often derail people from reaching their overall goals. (e.g., Soman & Cheema, 2004).
- There is a lack of research examining how to help consumers persist after these small failures.
- We propose a simple, cost-free nudge to increase persistence: allowing consumers to make up for failures on the path to their goal.

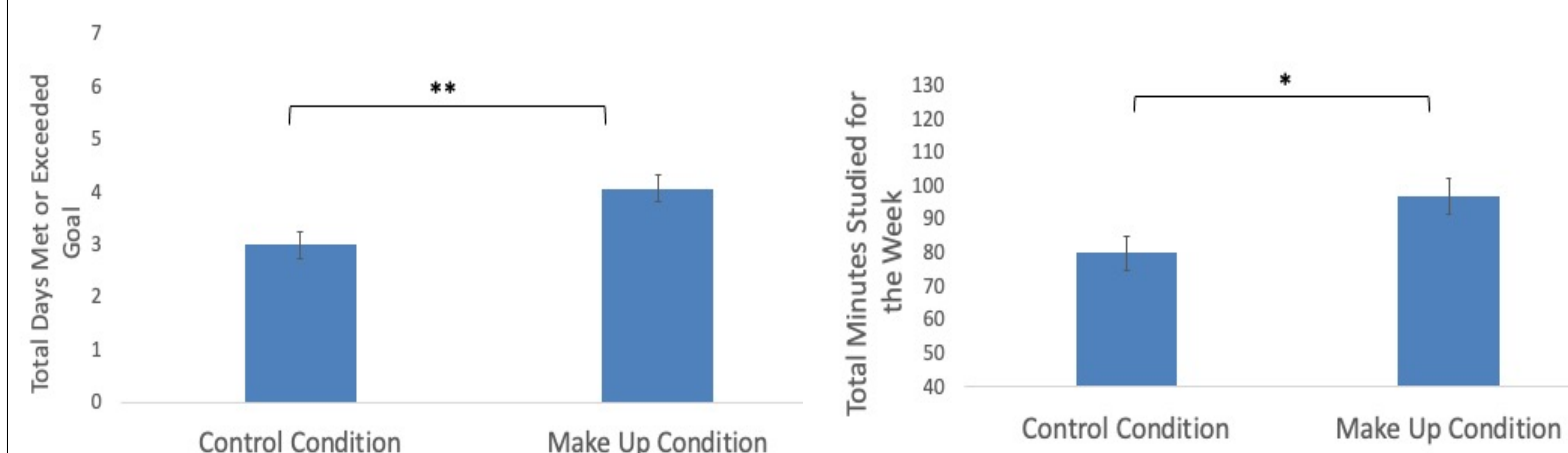
Across-Study Methods

- In all 3 studies, participants were given a week-long goal.
- In the Control condition, participants reported their minutes engaging in the goal and viewed their progress.
- In the Make-Up conditions, participants were given an additional functionality: they could make up for their past failure (e.g., if they failed to reach their goal on day 1, and surpassed their goal on day 2, they could reallocate their extra minutes from day 2 to day 1).



Study 1: Making up for failure increases studying over one-week

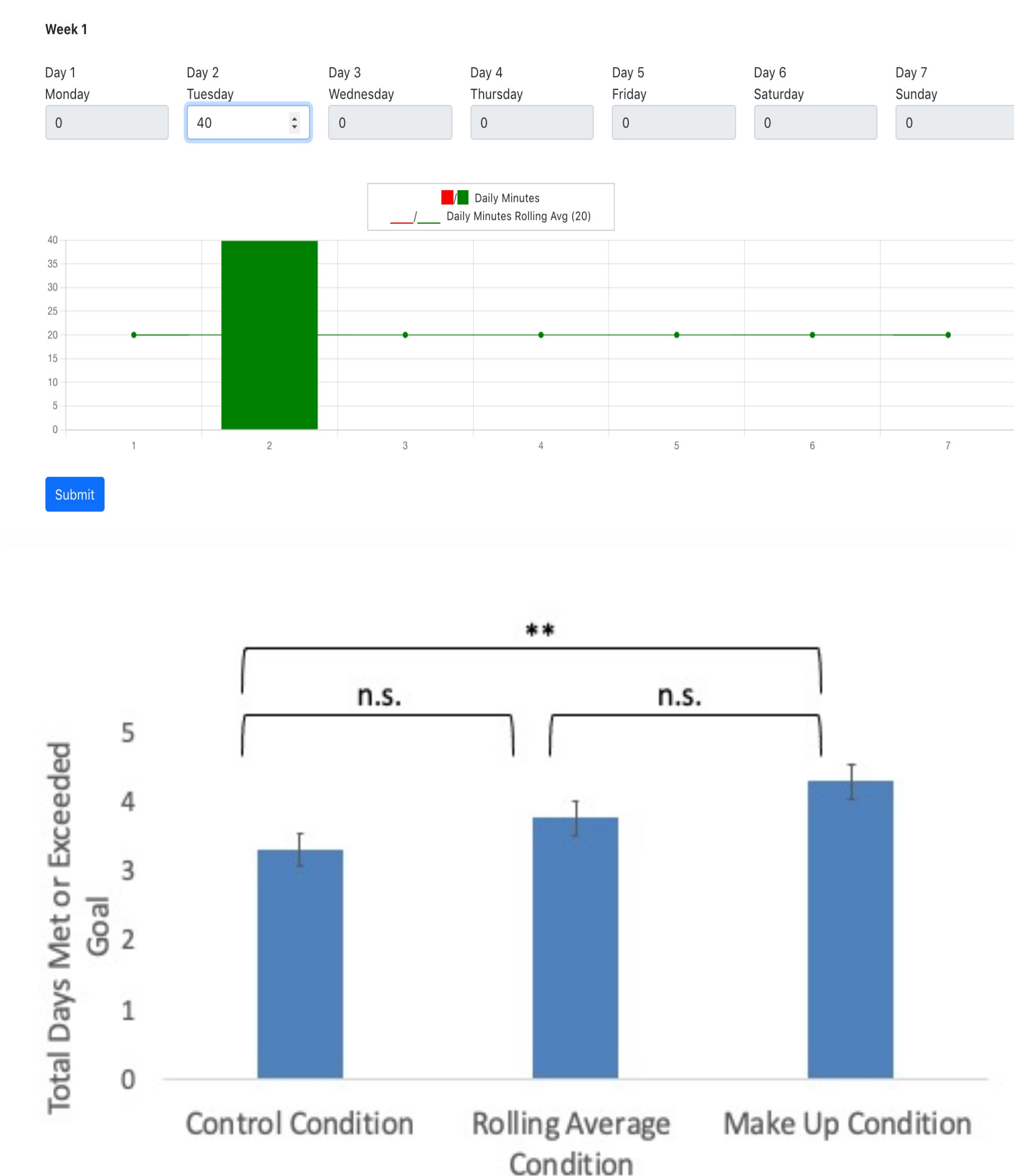
- 270 MTurkers were asked to study a new language for 20 minutes a day on their phone.
- Control or Make-Up condition
- DVs: Days Met or Exceeded Goal, Total Minutes Studied



Study 2: Making up for failure increases goal persistence through cost salient flexibility

- 428 Mturkers were asked to work out for 20 minutes a day using phone app.
- Added third condition: Rolling Average. The interface was like Control but showed a line with their rolling average for the week.
- DVs: Total Minutes Exercised, Days Met or Exceeded Goal
- Results for minutes mirrored days met or exceeded goal.

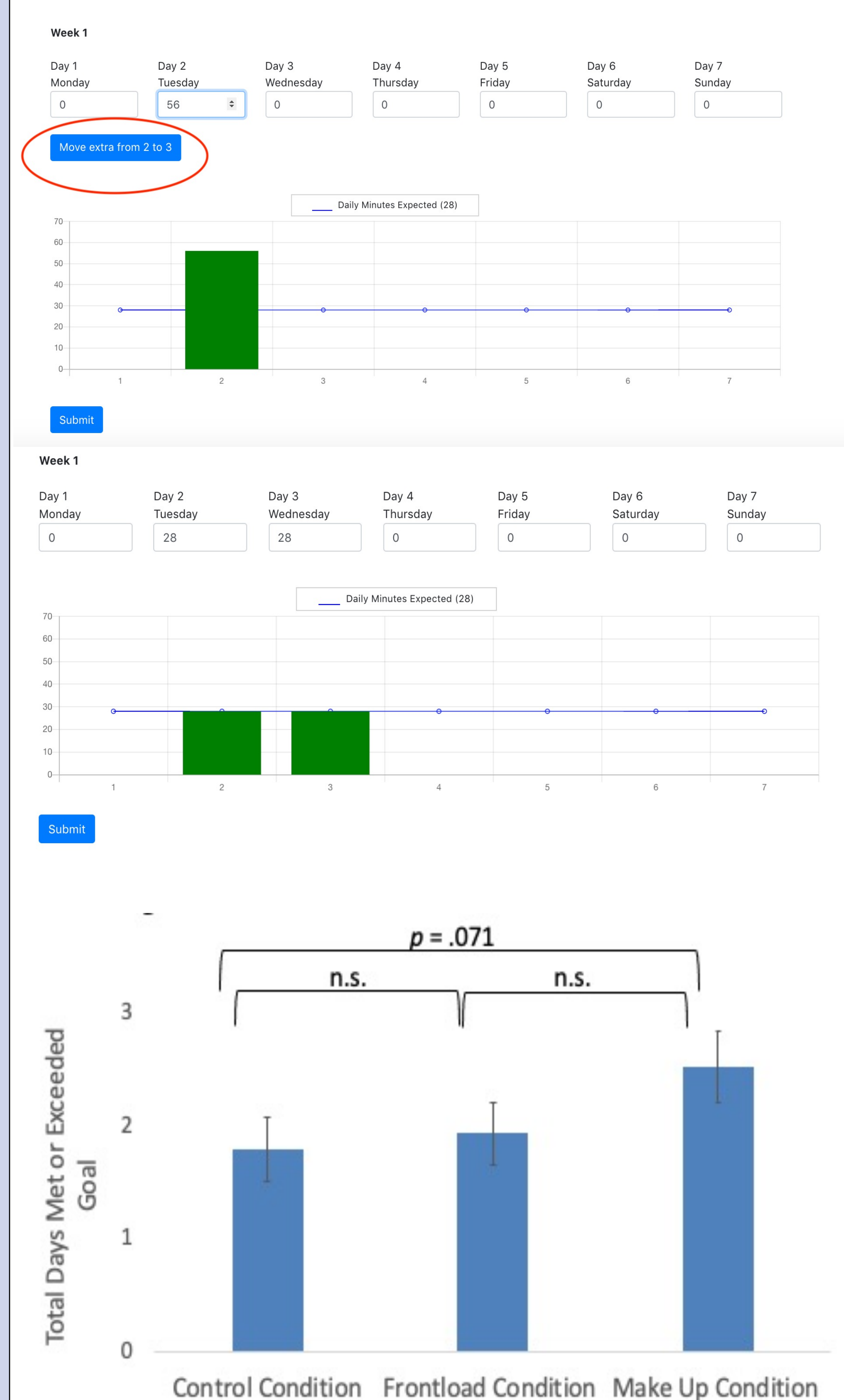
Rolling Average Interface



Study 3: When one makes up for failure matters

- 249 lab participants asked to work out for 30 minutes a day using phone app.
- Replaced Rolling Average condition with Frontload condition. Interface like Make-Up but could only complete extra minutes in advanced to make up for future failure.
- Results for minutes mirrored days met or exceeded goal.
- Significant interaction over time such that Make-Up's advantage declines over time relative to Control ($p = 0.01$).
- The long-term motivational impact of the make up for failure nudge may depend on the difficulty of the goal.

Frontload Interface



Discussion

- Making up for failure nudges increase goal persistence.
- Effective because the nudge increases the saliency of failures' costs before it happens and reduces the sense of failure after it happens.
- Nudge likely works best for shorter/easier goals.