

Loss framing and social norms nudges to encourage enrollment in an employee wellness program: A pragmatic trial

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Background

We examined whether using loss framing or social norms can increase enrollment in an employee wellness program at a large, mostly rural health system.

- Although wellness programs have the potential to reduce health risks and encourage healthy behavior among employees, not everyone takes advantage of them.
- Presenting social norms can increase behaviors like vaccination¹ and hand washing.²
- Although evidence is mixed on the comparative effectiveness between gain and loss framing, both can be equally persuasive when there is low motivation to process the information.³
- We separately examined people who previously enrolled in the program and those who have never enrolled in the program, as different appeals might work for those groups (e.g., endowment effect for those who previously got the program's benefits⁴).

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 3. X. Nan, K. Daily, Y. Qin, Relative persuasiveness of gain- vs. loss-framed messages: a review of theoretical perspectives and developing an integrative framework. *Rev. Commun.*, 18, 370-390 (2018).
 4. D. Kahneman, J.L. Knetsch, R.H. Thaler, (1991). The endowment effect, loss aversion, and status quo bias: Anomalies. *J. Econ. Perspect.* 5 (1), 193-206 (1991).

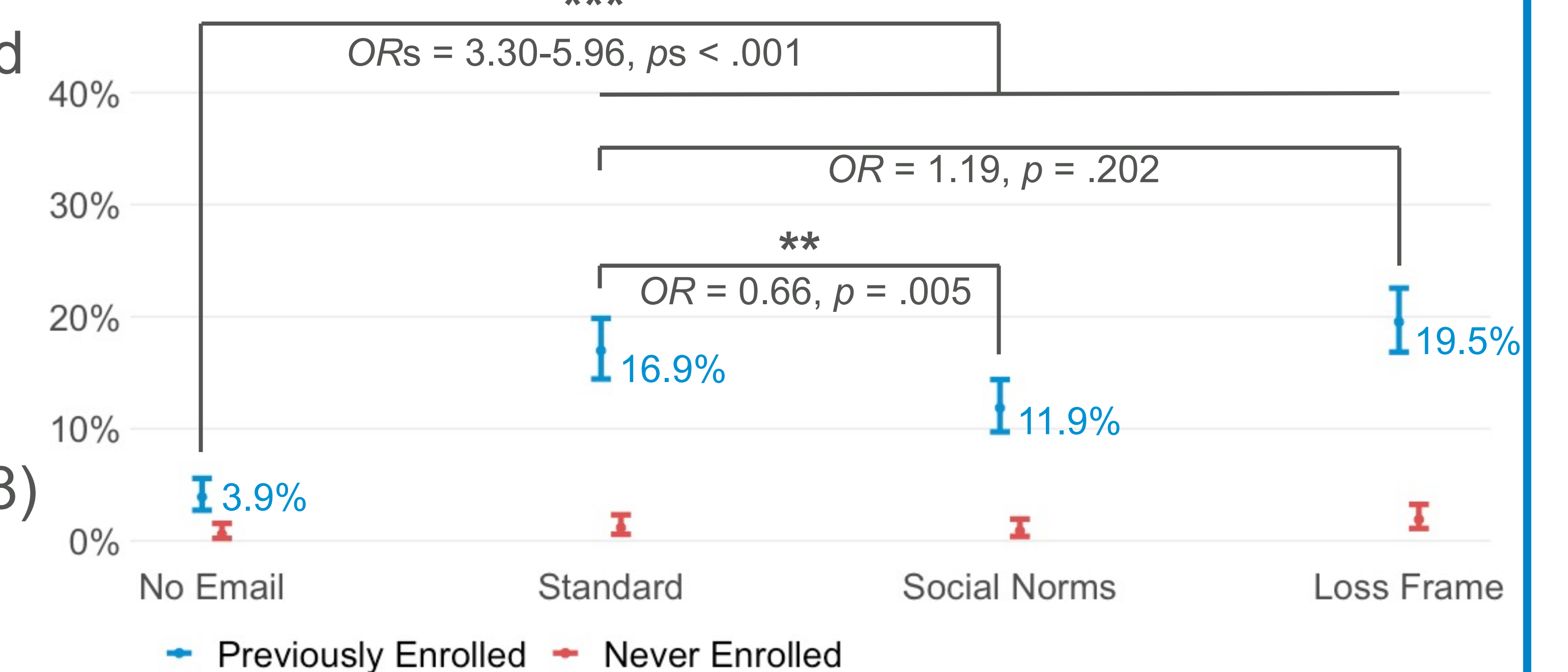
Study 1

For those who previously enrolled in the program, any email led to greater enrollment than no email; social norms were less effective than standard emails.

We sent reminder emails to employees who had not yet enrolled in the program in 2019 ($n = 5,697$), comparing four conditions:

- No email
- Standard reminder email (typically sent by health system)
- Loss frame email ("throwing away" around \$2,000 in savings)
- Social norms email ("78% of your colleagues" enrolled in 2018)

We separately examined people who previously enrolled and never enrolled in the program.

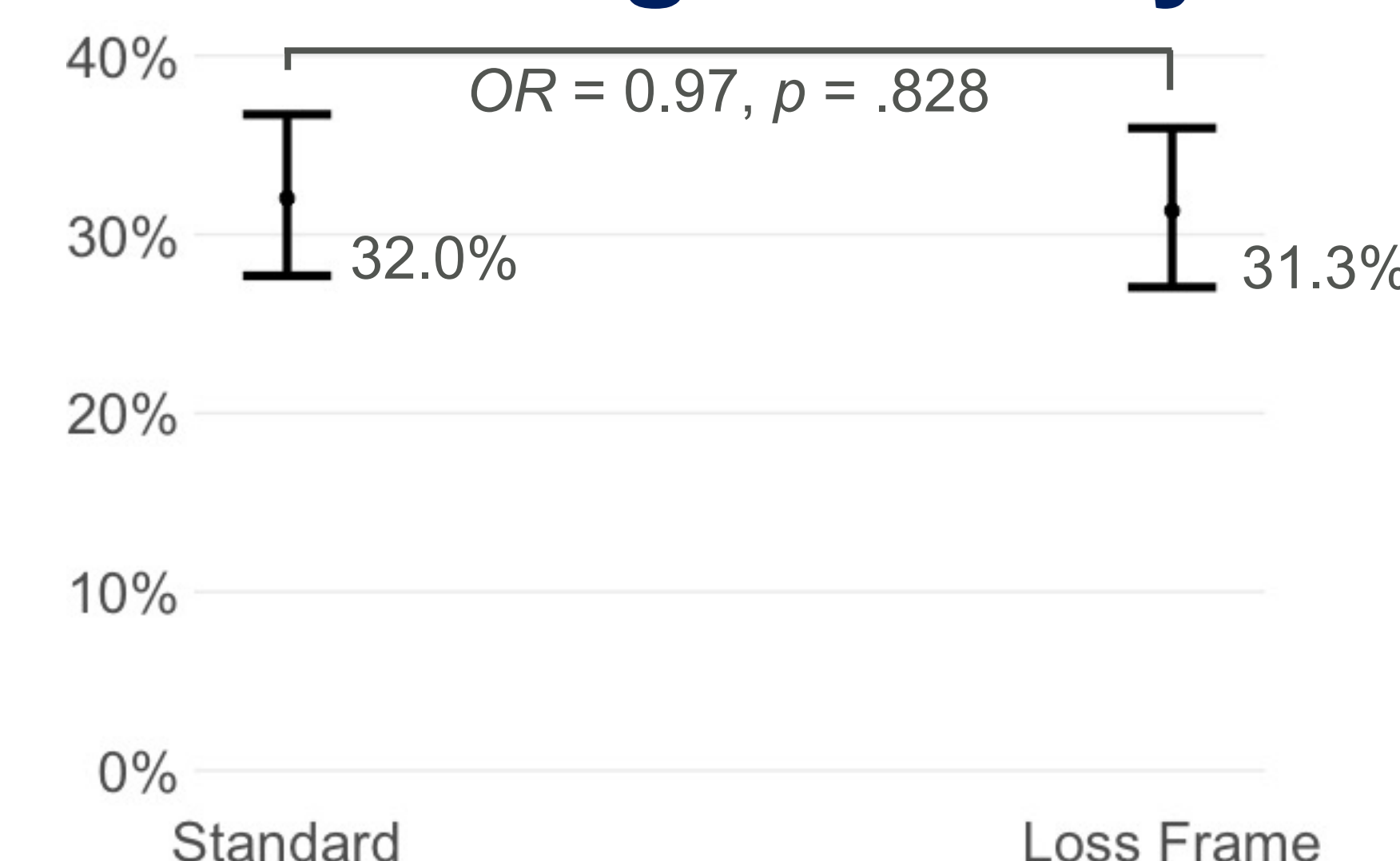


Study 2

For new hires (never enrolled), loss frame and standard emails did not differ significantly.

We sent reminder emails to newly-hired employees in 2019 ($n = 831$), comparing two conditions:

- Standard reminder email
- Loss frame email

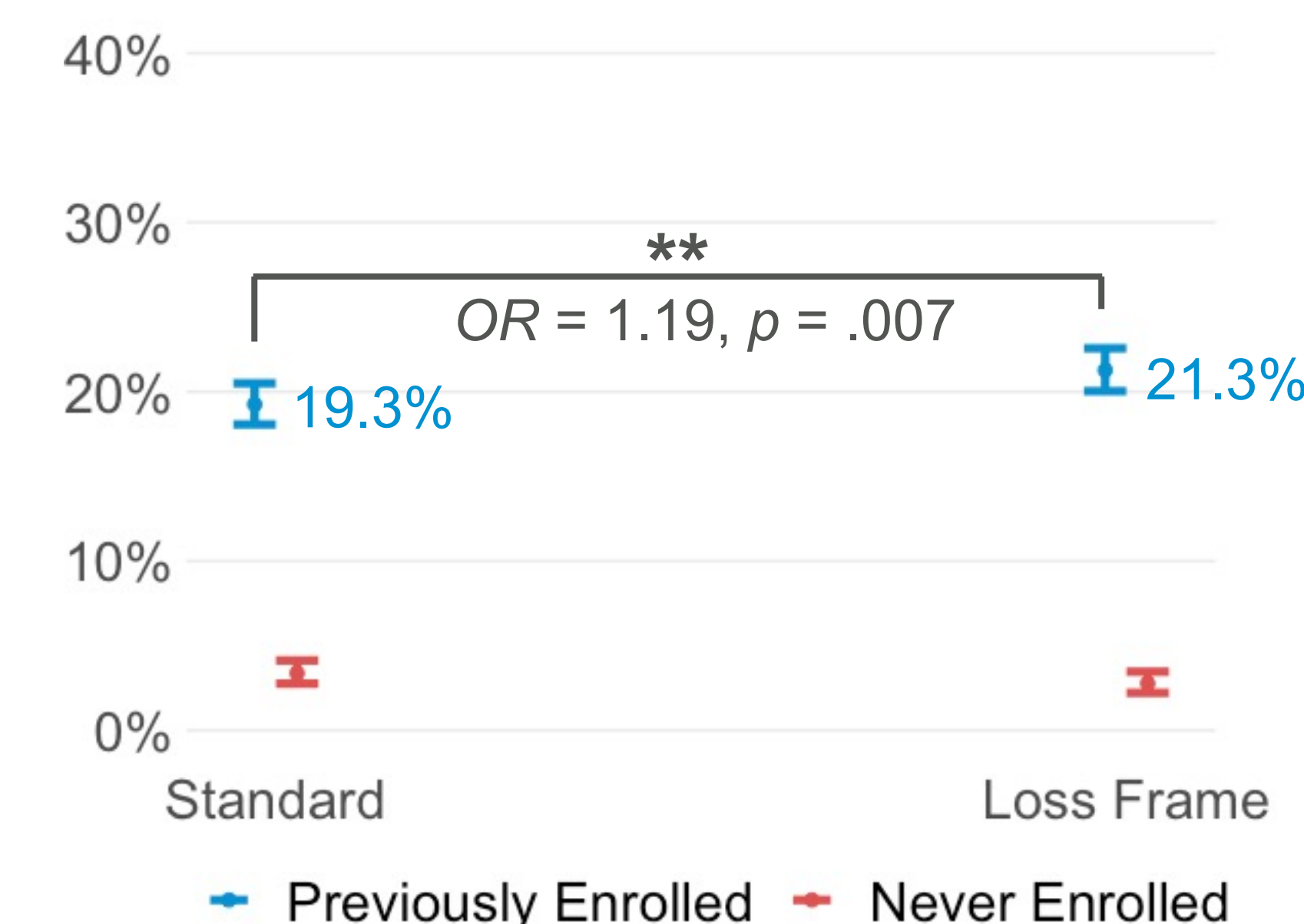


Study 3

For those who previously enrolled, loss frame emails were more effective than standard emails.

We examined the loss frame effect from Study 1 with a larger sample of employees who have not yet enrolled in the program in 2020 ($n = 13,546$), comparing two conditions:

- Standard reminder email
- Loss frame email



Summary of Findings

Using loss framing in reminder emails can increase uptake of an employee wellness program, but only among those who have previously enrolled in it.

- Loss framing may be particularly effective for those who have experienced the benefits of the program and have something to lose (i.e., endowment effect⁴).
- Those who never enrolled may have significant obstacles that might reflect their true preferences (e.g., lack of motivation).
- The social norms email might not have shown a high enough percentage to be convincing and was a longer email, when compared with the other conditions.
- Promoting company policies and benefits among hesitant or new employees might benefit from more than a lightweight intervention.