

Do planning prompts suggesting a default plan increase follow-through?



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Two, 1-million person field experiments

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Introduction

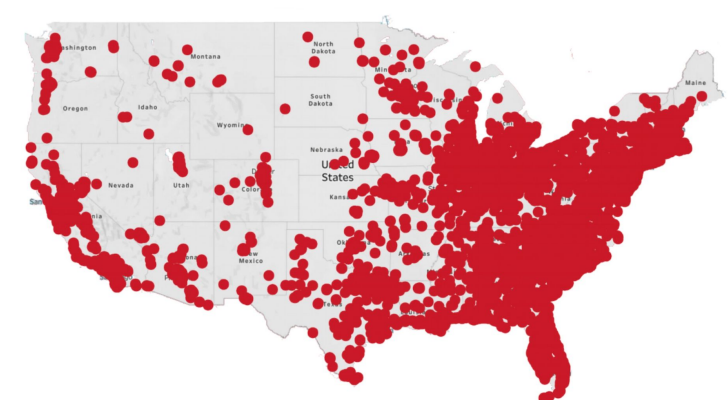
Prior research has shown that encouraging individuals to make concrete and specific plans can be a highly effective strategy¹ for increasing follow-through. However, prompts to plan—or ‘**planning prompts**’—typically require individuals to deliberate before forming their own plans. Could planning prompts be enhanced by suggesting a **default plan** that outlines when and where to take an action?

Theoretical Background

Research in psychology and goal-setting suggests that default suggestions may reduce the effectiveness of planning prompts by (1) reducing agency and lowering commitment to goals² and (2) hindering embedding in memory (and thus recall) by removing the chance to think through their own plans³. However, research in JDM and economics suggest that a default suggestion might enhance planning by (1) simplifying decisions⁴ and (2) reducing psychological effort, especially when preferences are unclear⁵.

Methods

We conducted **two pre-registered field studies** (total n = 2,005,492) in the context of promoting vaccination. Our partner was a large U.S. pharmacy chain with ~9,000 retail locations.



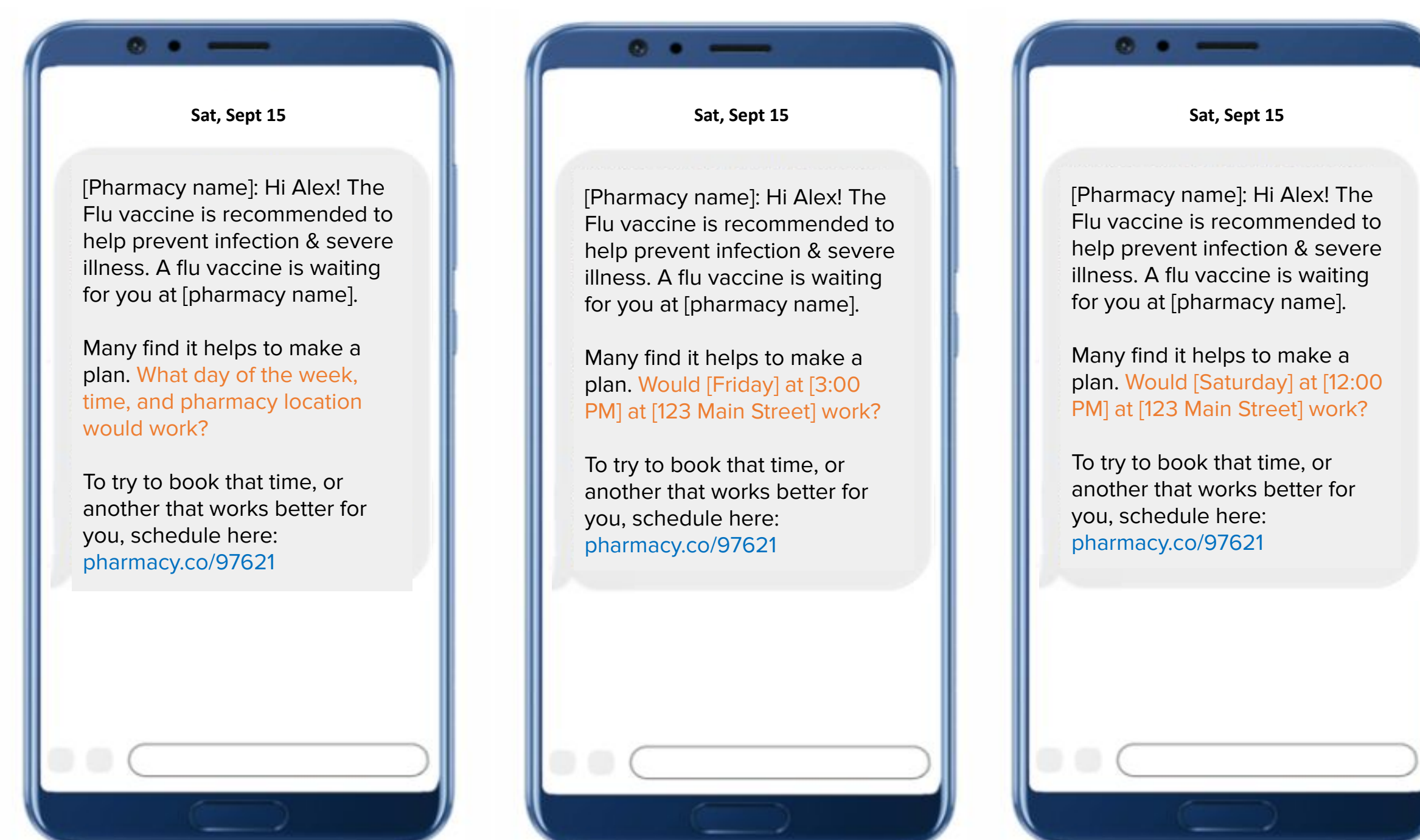
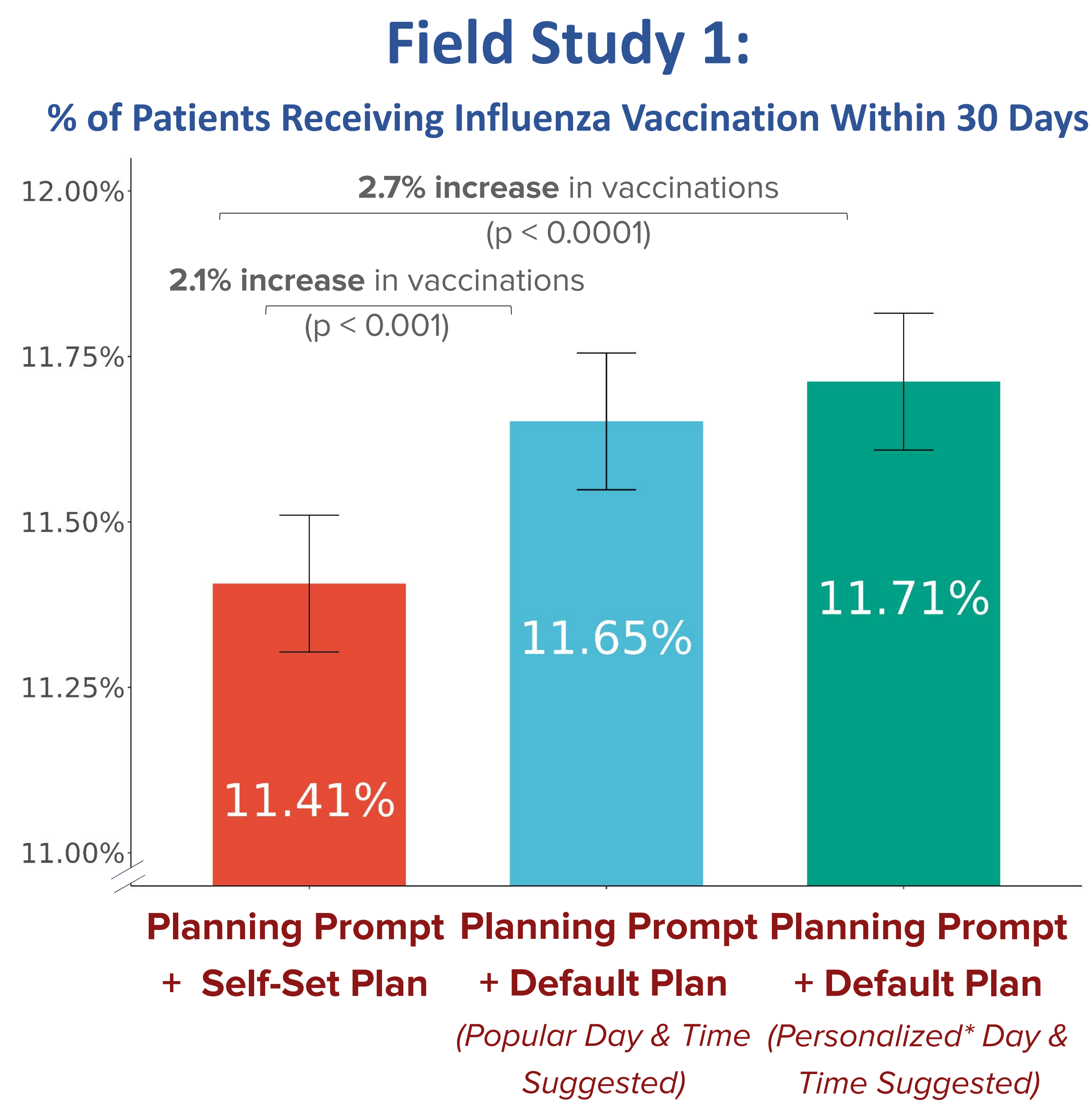
FIELD STUDY 1: Influenza Vaccination (n = 1,020,347)

- Does a planning prompt suggesting a **default** plan lead to **more follow-through** than a planning prompt encouraging a **self-set** plan?

FIELD STUDY 2: COVID-19 Boosters (n = 986,145)

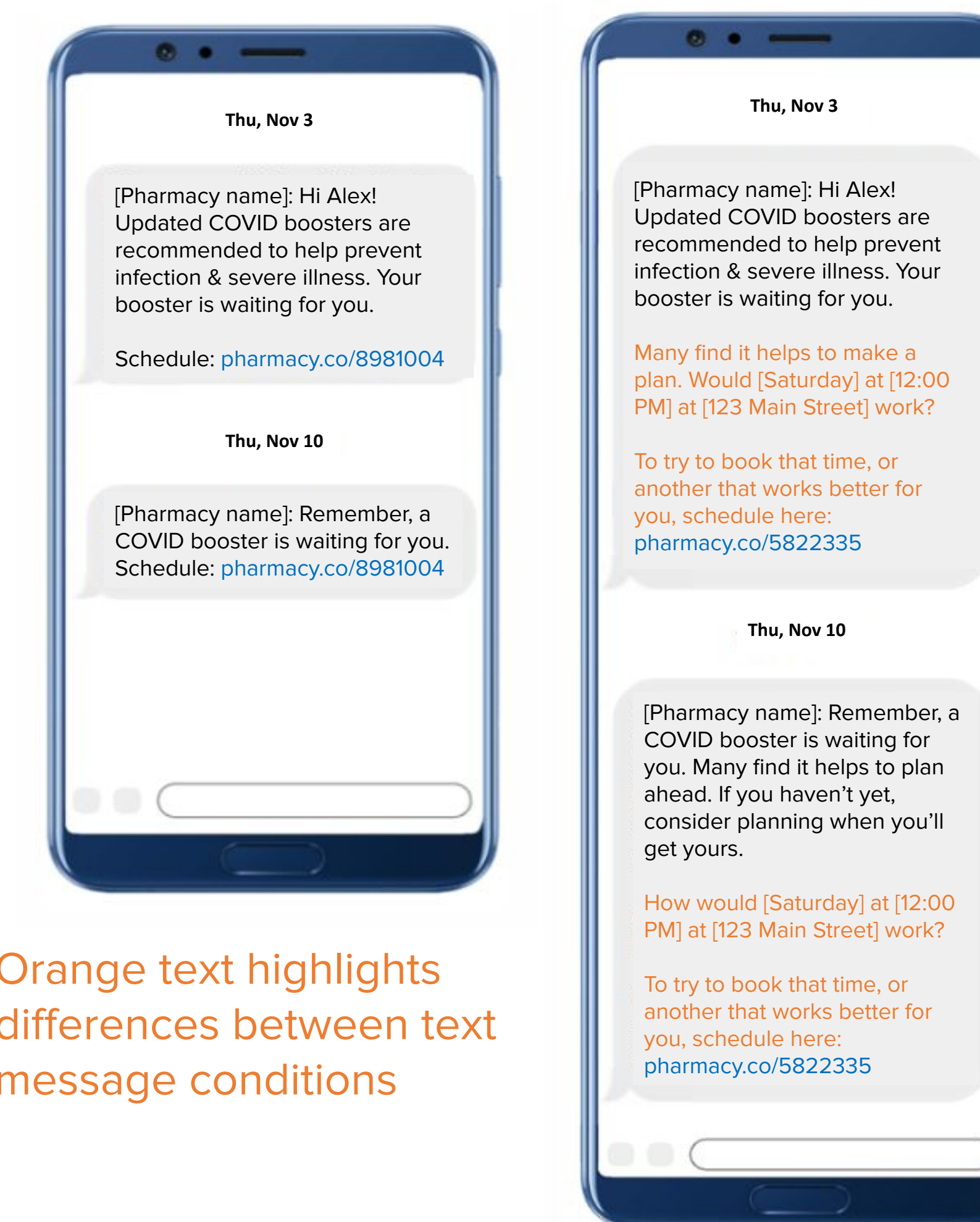
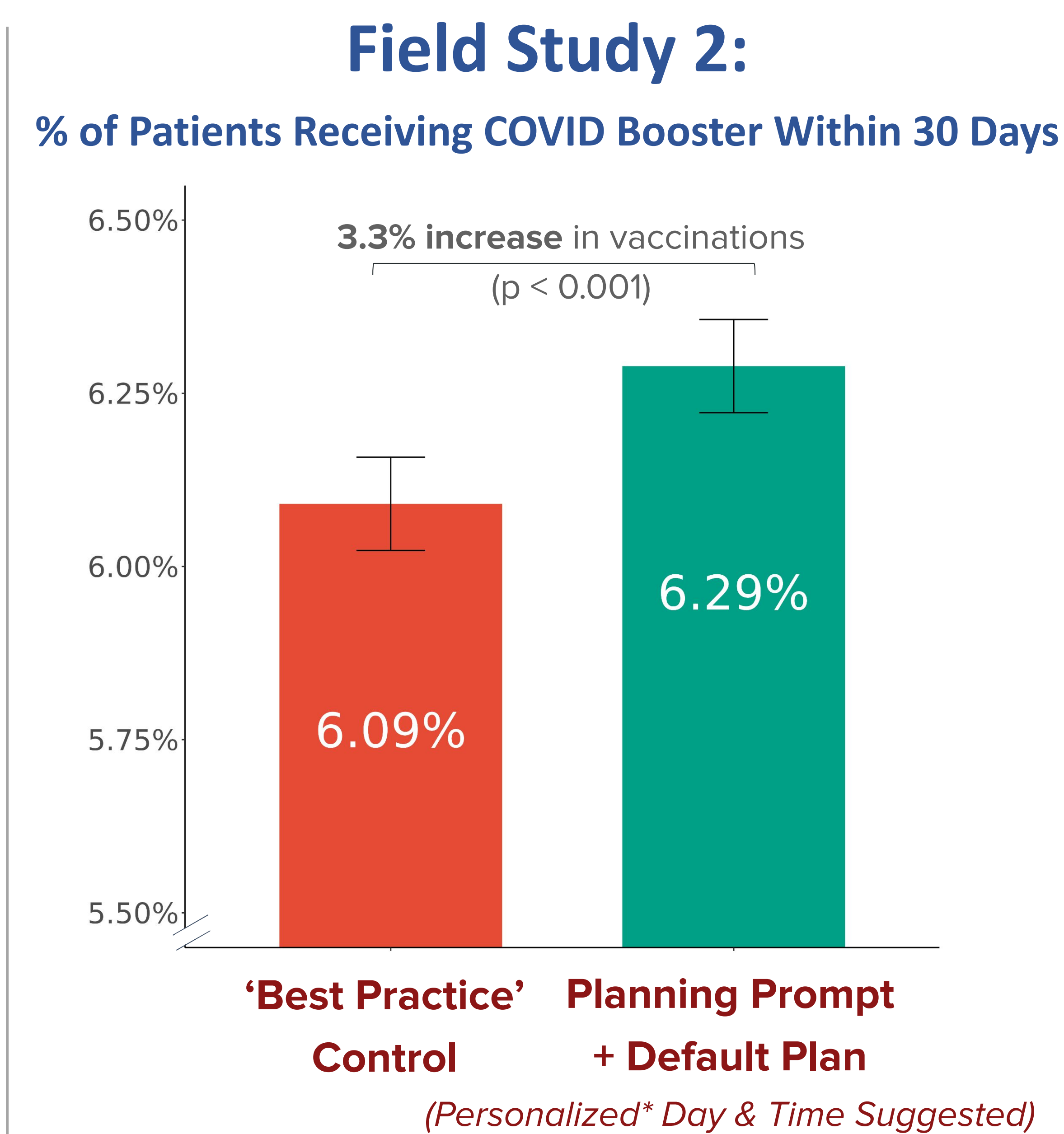
- Does a planning prompt suggesting a **default** plan lead to **more follow-through** when compared to current **best practice vaccination messages**?

Adding a default suggestion—for when and where to get vaccinated—boosted the effect of reminders prompting planning, increasing vaccinations by 2.4%



Orange text highlights differences between text message conditions

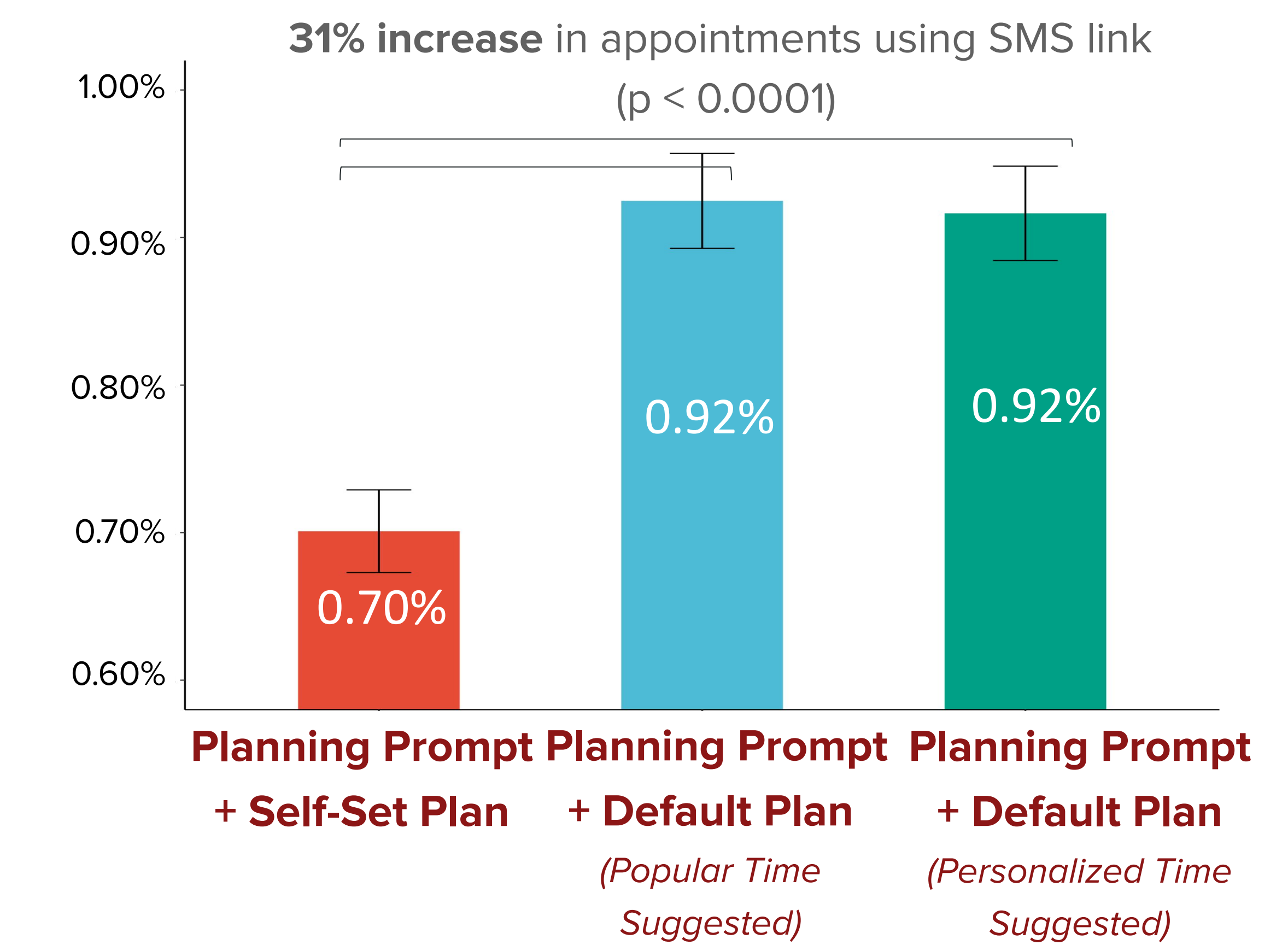
* The personalized default plan condition recommended the day of week and time of the patient's last vaccination according to pharmacy records



Orange text highlights differences between text message conditions

Did Defaults Suggestions Make Decisions Easier?

% of Patients Who Scheduled an Appointment with the Scheduling Link in Our Reminder



Results from Study 1 suggest that planning prompts with a **default suggestion** may make scheduling feel easier.

Did Patients Take Our Default Suggestions?

Since we are merely *suggesting* a default plan (not booking appointments by default), patients are free to ignore these suggestions. While patients could have received a vaccination on the day of week and time of our default suggestions, **the vast majority of vaccinated patients (98%) did not follow our default suggestions.**

Summary

- Study 1:** Adding a default suggestion **enhances** the effectiveness of planning prompts
- Default suggestions may make decisions easier, yet patients do not stick with suggested defaults
- Study 2:** Our novel intervention **outperforms** a “best practice” nudge for encouraging vaccination
- Effects sizes are modest, yet this upgraded reminder can be sent at **zero marginal cost**

References: (1) Rogers et al., 2015; (2) Klein et al., 1999, 2013; (3) Gollwitzer, 1999; (4) Sunstein, 2013; Madrian, 2014; (5) Johnson & Goldstein, 2013