

A PUBLISHED BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH CASE STUDY

THE HEAD START EFFECT

Why visible progress changed
loyalty-card completion.

NUNES & DRÈZE / 2006

A car-wash field experiment.
An editorial analysis of external research.



Original study: Nunes & Drèze (2006)

YOUR NEXT REWARD

SAME EIGHT PURCHASES REMAINING

YOUR NEXT REWARD

✓

✓

Can a head start change the willingness to finish?

Two cards offered the same reward for the same remaining effort.

YOUR NEXT REWARD

☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	☐	☐

8 SLOTS / 0 STAMPS

Eight paid washes still required

YOUR NEXT REWARD

☒	☒	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10 SLOTS / 2 BONUS STAMPS

Eight paid washes still required

ONE CHANGE IN FRAMING. A BEHAVIOURAL OUTCOME.

300 CUSTOMERS

Random allocation: 150 cards in each condition.

9-MONTH FOLLOW-UP

Visits were stamped and dated; completed cards were redeemed.

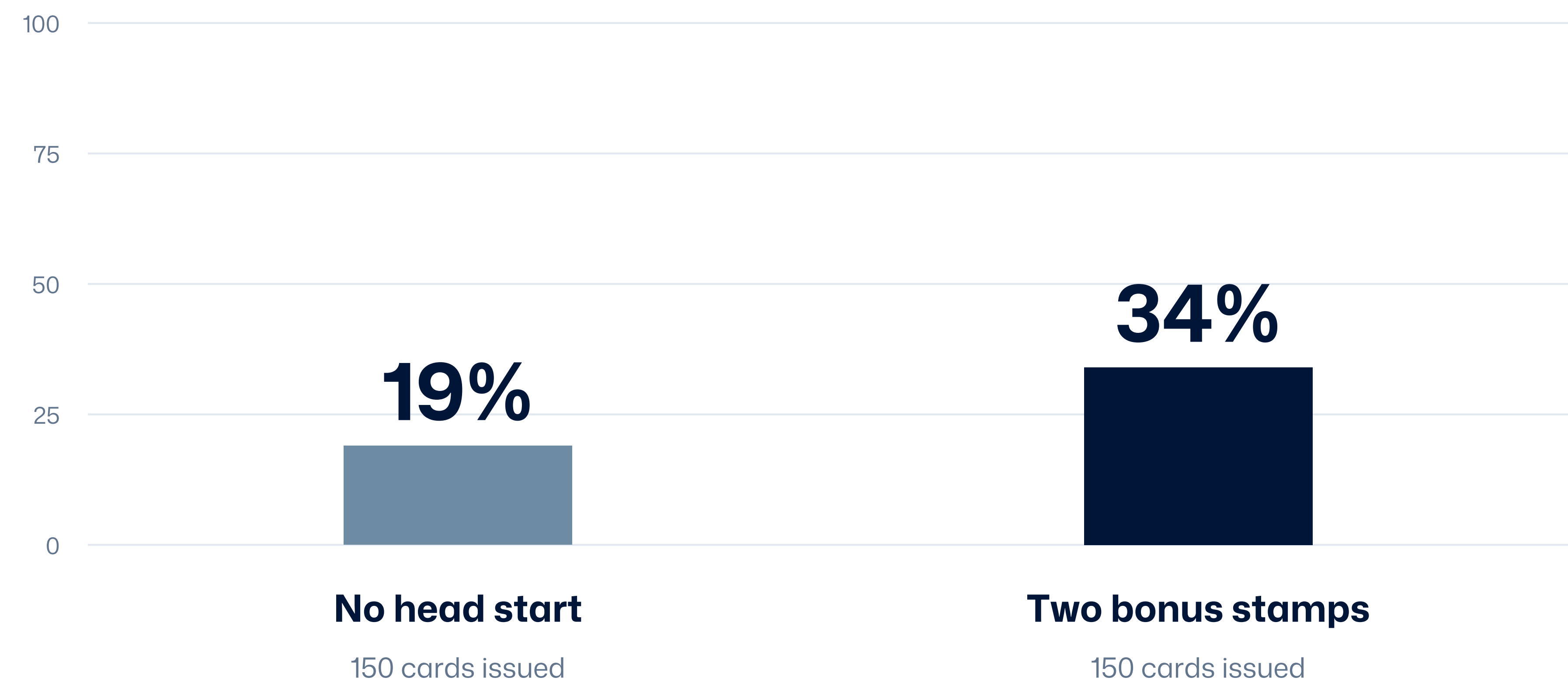
SAME REQUIREMENT

The bonus was explained as a promotion. Both groups needed eight paid visits.

Outcome: reward redemption, rather than stated intention to return.

MORE CUSTOMERS REACHED THE REWARD.

Redemption rates after the same remaining purchase requirement.



+15

PERCENTAGE POINTS

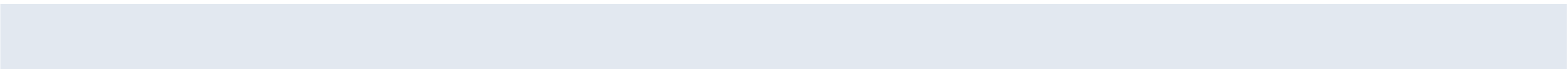
Difference between the published rounded rates.

0-100% axis. The paper reports $p < .01$; this is a study result, not a commercial forecast.

PROGRESS CAN CHANGE THE STARTING POINT.

ILLUSTRATIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CARD FRAMING

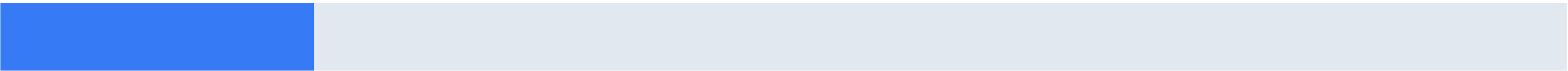
NOT YET STARTED



0%

Initial stamps / total spaces

ALREADY UNDERWAY



20%

Initial stamps / total spaces

The authors interpret this as endowed progress. The design did not isolate every possible mechanism; the effect is context-dependent.

TEST PROGRESS WITHOUT HIDING THE WORK.

Proposed application - not a result from the original experiment.

MAKE IT EXPLICIT

Explain any bonus, the reward and the exact remaining effort. Check that customers understand.

HOLD VALUE CONSTANT

Randomise the progress display while keeping reward value, eligibility and purchase requirements equal.

MEASURE NET VALUE

Track redemption and time to return alongside margin, repeat visits and customer understanding.

Set the test duration and sample size in advance. Do not assume the historical uplift will recur.

MAKE PROGRESS VISIBLE. KEEP THE VALUE CLEAR.

A reward programme is also a decision journey. Test how people understand their starting point, remaining effort and reason to return.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Nunes, J. C. & Drèze, X. (2006). The Endowed Progress Effect: How Artificial Advancement Increases Effort. Journal of Consumer Research, 32(4), 504-512. Study 1.

doi.org/10.1086/500480

One service setting; 300 customers. Results concern redemption, not proven profitability or long-term retention. Published research, not Core Behaviour client work.