**Increasing Appointment Attendance in Skinsmiths UK Clients Using Behaviourally Weighted Text Messages**

**Introduction**

No-shows, defined as clients who schedule an appointment but neither attend nor cancel it (Bean et al., 2014; Dantas et al., 2018), are a widespread operational challenge across service industries. In the healthcare and beauty sectors alone, missed appointments result in significant losses of time, revenue, and resource availability. In the UK NHS system, for example, an estimated 7.2 million outpatient appointments were missed in 2019, costing approximately £1 billion annually (NHS Digital, 2020). For smaller, membership-based services like Skinsmiths UK, even modest improvements in attendance could translate into measurable improvements in staff utilisation and customer retention.

Several interventions have been employed to address this issue, ranging from requiring deposits or upfront payments, to implementing strict cancellation policies. However, these approaches often introduce friction into the customer journey and may be perceived as punitive or off-putting — especially for new clients. In contexts where the service is offered for free or at an introductory rate, as with Skinsmiths’ initial consultations, such sanctions are likely to be counterproductive, undermining trust and engagement.

A growing body of behavioural science literature suggests that such behaviour may be influenced more effectively — and less intrusively — through the strategic use of nudges. As defined by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), nudges are subtle changes in choice architecture that influence behaviour in predictable ways without restricting options or significantly altering incentives.

One of the most promising methods for delivering nudges is through text messaging; a low-cost, high-frequency channel already integrated into the booking journey. Evidence from the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) and related researchers has demonstrated that behaviourally informed messages can improve attendance across a range of domains:

* In the NHS, adding a single sentence to appointment reminders (e.g., “Not attending costs the NHS £160”) reduced missed appointments by 25% across two randomised controlled trials (Hallsworth et al., 2015).
* BIT’s school attendance trials found that sending weekly SMS updates to parents about missed days increased the proportion of students maintaining good attendance (≥95%) by 4 percentage points (BIT, 2012).
* In mental health services, supportive and personalised text messages increased the rate of therapy session completion (BIT, 2020).
* In the context of further education, behaviourally guided text messages were used to improve attendance and retention in maths and English programmes (BIT, 2018).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the behavioural principles of personalisation, social identity, and reciprocity may be powerful tools in encouraging appointment attendance, particularly when framed in a way that is warm, respectful, and easily digestible by the client. This project investigates whether similar behavioural nudges can be successfully applied in the commercial wellness space to reduce no-shows at Skinsmiths UK clinics.

**Problem statement**

Skinsmiths UK, a membership-based skincare clinic, offers free consultations and introductory treatments as part of its client acquisition strategy. However, this approach has resulted in a high rate of no-shows—clients failing to attend or cancel their booked appointments. This behaviour leads to inefficiencies in clinic operations, lost revenue, and missed opportunities to convert first-time clients into long-term members. Traditional deterrents like deposits or penalties risk introducing friction into the customer journey. This project investigates whether behaviourally informed SMS reminders—incorporating nudges such as personalisation and reciprocity—can reduce no-show rates while maintaining a positive client experience.

**Experimental design**

This field experiment was conducted across Skinsmiths UK clinics over an eight-week period, with the goal of reducing appointment no-shows using behaviourally informed SMS reminders. Text messages were sent automatically via the client booking system at the time of appointment scheduling, ensuring the intervention was both simple to implement and consistent in delivery. By embedding nudges into these existing operational touchpoints, the intervention introduced no additional friction to the client journey and required no changes to staff behaviour.

Clients were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions, each receiving a different version of the SMS reminder. These conditions varied systematically in their use of behavioural components, specifically personalisation and reciprocity, to test their independent and combined effects on attendance behaviour.

To ensure all messages adhered to the 160-character SMS limit, the text messages were carefully formulated to remain concise while still delivering the behavioural content. Approximate character counts (excluding name variability) were:

* Control and +Scheduler: ~115 characters
* ClientName only: ~110 characters
* +Reciprocity: ~137 characters

This ensured consistent deliverability across devices and avoided splitting messages, which could undermine their intended impact.

The four experimental conditions are outlined in the table below.

| **Condition** | **Message Formulation** | **Behavioural Component(s)** | **Example** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 0. Control | “Hey you! You’re all booked in with [therapist] at Skinsmiths [location] on [date] at [time]. See you there.” | None (neutral baseline) | “Hey you! You’re all booked in with Firdosa A. at Skinsmiths Tower Bridge on 30/01/2019 at 05:45 PM.” |
| 1. ClientName | “Hi [client name], you’re all booked in with [therapist] at Skinsmiths [location] on [date] at [time]. See you there.” | Personalisation (client identity) | “Hi Sarah, you’re all booked in with Firdosa at Skinsmiths Tower Bridge on 30/01/2019 at 05:45 PM.” |
| 2. +Scheduler | “Hi [client name], you’re all booked in with [therapist] at Skinsmiths [location] on [date] at [time]. Thanks, [scheduler name].” | Enhanced personalisation (social identity, relational) | “Hi Sarah, you’re all booked in with Firdosa at Skinsmiths Tower Bridge on 30/01/2019 at 05:45 PM. Thanks, Michelle.” |
| 3. +Reciprocity | “Hi [client name], I’ve booked you in with [therapist] at Skinsmiths [location] on [date] at [time]. Looking forward to seeing you, [scheduler name].” | Reciprocity + Personalisation | “Hi Sarah, I’ve booked you in with Firdosa at Skinsmiths Tower Bridge on 30/01/2019 at 05:45 PM. Looking forward to seeing you, Michelle.” |

Table 1. outlines the four experimental conditions, and the be

**Data and Analysis Plan**

**Hypothesis**

Primary Hypothesis (H1): SMS messages that incorporate personalisation and/or reciprocity will result in significantly lower no-show rates compared to the control condition.

Sub-Hypotheses:

* H1a: Messages including the client’s name will reduce no-show rates relative to the control.
* H1b: Messages signed by the scheduler (social personalisation) will further reduce no-shows.
* H1c: Messages including reciprocity language (“I’ve booked you in… looking forward to seeing you”) will have the greatest impact on attendance.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There will be no statistically significant difference in no-show rates between any of the four conditions.

| **Condition Code** | **Description** |
| --- | --- |
| 0 | Control (standard factual message) |
| 1 | ClientName (adds recipient’s name) |
| 2 | +Scheduler (adds scheduler name) |
| 3 | +Reciprocity (adds social & reciprocal tone) |

**Outcome Variable**

Attendance behaviour (binary):

* 1 = Attended
* 0 = No-show (did not attend and did not cancel)

**Planned Statistical Procedures:**

* **Chi-Square Test of Independence:** To assess whether attendance rate differs significantly across the four message conditions.
* **Post-hoc Pairwise Comparisons:** If Chi-square is significant, use pairwise proportion tests (with Bonferroni or Holm correction) to compare each experimental group against the control and each other.

**Assumptions**

* Independence of observations: Each client is only included once.
* Sufficiently large sample sizes in each group to meet Chi-square assumptions.
* Random allocation to condition (either randomised in the system or assigned quasi-randomly via scheduling procedure).

Prior to the experiment, historical attendance data from January to March 2018 was analysed to establish a baseline no-show rate across the nine Skinsmiths UK clinics.

Across the three months:

* Total January no-show rate: 14.81%
* Total February no-show rate: 16.54%
* Total March no-show rate: 15.29%
* Overall average no-show rate: 15.5%

**Results**

**April:** No message condition achieved statistically significant improvement over the Control in any clinic at the 0.05 level, though a few showed trends towards improvement:

* **Clapham South**: *ClientName* vs Control showed a borderline trend (z=1.78, p=0.075)
* **Wimbledon Village**: *Reciprocity* vs Control (z=1.83, p=0.068)
* **Esher**: *Reciprocity* vs Control (z=1.86, p=0.062)
* **Belgravia**: *SchedulerName* vs Control (z=1.84, p=0.065)

**May:** Stronger effects were observed, with several significant improvements in show rates relative to Control:

* **Clapham South**: *ClientName* and *SchedulerName* messages both significantly improved attendance (p≈0.039)
* **Tower Bridge**: *SchedulerName* message improved attendance (p≈0.030)
* **Wimbledon Village**: *SchedulerName* message improved attendance (p≈0.012)
* **Liverpool St**: Both *SchedulerName* and *Reciprocity* messages showed significant improvement (p≈0.011)
* **Bushey**: All three messages (*ClientName*, *SchedulerName*, *Reciprocity*) significantly improved attendance (p≈0.034)
* **Belgravia**: *ClientName* and *Reciprocity* messages improved attendance (p≈0.034)
* **Hanwell**: *SchedulerName* message improved attendance (p≈0.012)

There were also a few marginal trends in other clinics. Overall, the *SchedulerName* condition appears particularly effective across multiple clinics in May.

**Conclusion**

Skinsmiths UK’s strategy of offering free consultations and treatments to attract new clients came with a major operational challenge: high no-show rates. These missed appointments not only wasted valuable staff time but also blocked slots that could have been used by paying customers, leading to inefficiencies, lost revenue, and fewer opportunities to convert new clients into long-term members.

This project set out to answer a simple question: can we reduce no-show rates by slightly rewording the text messages clients receive before their appointments?

By incorporating subtle behavioural nudges into the messages such as adding the client’s name (personalisation), referencing the staff member who booked the appointment (social accountability), or implying that the team had prepared in advance (reciprocity) we tested whether such small changes could influence attendance behaviour.

The results showed that even minimal changes in wording can have a meaningful effect.

Across all clinics, there were statistically significant differences in no show rates by message type, especially in May, when the intervention had been running longer. Seven clinics showed statistically significant improvements depending on the message condition, including some of the highest-volume or highest-risk sites.

For example, Hanwell had an extremely high no show rate of 39% in January. During the trial, this dropped to an average of 15.9%. Clapham South went from a 19% baseline to 12.2%. Belgravia fell from 16% to 12.1%. In several cases, individual message variants led to no show rates dropping below 10% which is a remarkable shift given the intervention cost nothing to implement beyond rewording existing reminder texts.

While no show rates may still appear high in some cases, it’s important to emphasise the scale of the improvement and the simplicity of the intervention.

We didn’t add penalties, introduce deposits, or develop new technologies. We simply changed a few words and saw measurable, statistically significant impact.

This demonstrates the potential for behavioural science to improve outcomes in low cost, client friendly ways. With no added friction to the customer journey, and minimal cost to the business, this type of intervention offers high return on investment and strong potential for wider rollout and refinement.

**References**

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**Appendices**