Introduction to the nudging special issue

Kai J. Jonas & Joseph Cesario

Check for updates

Introduction to the nudging special issue

Kai J. Jonas[a] and Joseph Cesario[b]

[a]Work and Social Psychology Department, Maastricht University, Maastricht, Netherlands; [b]Psychology Department, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

After our last and successful special issue on power poses in 2017 (Jonas et al., 2017), we launched a call for a new Special Issue in 2019: This time the focus was meant to be on nudging research. The choice for this topic was evident. After its initial publication in the context of behavioral economics, nudging has become almost a household term in the context of interventions to improve health and well-being of humans, to combat climate change, or to reduce transportation risks (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Without doubt, the practical relevance of nudging is high, and thus it requires trustworthy, reliable findings – which is the space that CRSP can contribute to.

We received a robust set of submissions but during the editorial process we had to recognize that the field of nudging research has proliferated into many more disciplines and is considerably more diverse than field-specific special issues we had run before (Jonas et al., 2017). Thus, the aim of maintaining a core empirical element that is suitable for a meta-analytic summary comparable to the one on power poses (Gronau et al., 2017) had to be given up. Yet, the benefit of this diversity also became apparent quickly. What we able to collate was a set of very diverse papers that showcase the breadth of the field, but also identify challenges that nudging research is dealing with at the moment, and where registered reports can be a helpful tool to present evidence for. Unfortunately, some initial submissions were significantly delayed by COVID-19 or even rendered impossible, due to research questions that required co-presence of humans in offline choice architectures.

The first four papers in this special issue focus on fundamental questions related to nudges, while the last paper is an example of the use of nudging approaches in the context of group processes. Kicking the special issue off is a paper by Van Gestel et al. (2021), investigating information processing within nudging. When teaching students about nudging, one of the first questions is often about the level of automatic processing within nudging, and the answer of many teachers is anything between "we do not know yet," "can be both" or "it is automatic." While automatic processing is the most prevailing assumption this assumption has received little attention in experimental research. Van Gestel et al. (2021) concluded that nudges are not dependent on elaborate processing in order to be effective, but that active deliberation can impact on choice outcomes. One of the core questions related to nudging is transparency within the choice architecture. This question is addressed in the papers by Michaelsen et al. (2021) and Wachner et al. (2021). Michaelsen et al. (2021) focused on choice architect transparency in a prosocial behavior setting and concluded that lack of transparency can negatively impact on the reputation

---

of the choice architect. Wachner et al. investigated whether variations in nudge transparency impact on autonomy and satisfaction of nudged individuals and concluded that there were no differences obtained based on their manipulations. This paper nicely links to the fourth paper in this Special Issue. The paper by Nilsson et al. (2021) investigated individual determinants for resistance towards nudges. The authors concluded that individualist concerns regarding government interventions was the strongest predictor of opposition to nudges. They interpret their findings as evidence for a conflict that individuals can perceive between the public promotion of social goals and safeguarding the individual's freedom especially from government interventions. The Special Issue is completed by the last paper on group processes by Hough et al. (2021) who investigated in how far counterfactual thoughts can act as nudges in group processes to increase coordination. The authors report weak evidence for counterfactual nudging to increase coordination, but more so for signaling by players.

Taken together, we believe that this Special Issue presents an interesting set of studies that can pave the way for further research in the respective domains, but on the solid basis of registered reports. Post COVID-19, we believe that the findings presented by the papers investigating transparency of and resistance towards nudging are highly relevant to better understand critical appreciation or outright rejection of institutional or government interventions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

Gronau, Q. F., Van Erp, S., Heck, D. W., Cesario, J., Jonas, K. J., & Wagenmakers, E. J. (2017). A Bayesian model-averaged meta-analysis of the power pose effect with informed and default priors: The case of felt power. *Comprehensive Results in Social Psychology*, *2*(1), 123–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743603.2017.1326760

Hough, A. R., O'Neill, K., & Juvina, I. (2021). Counterfactual-based nudging and signaling promote more efficient coordination during group tasks. In *Comprehensive results in social psychology* (pp. 1–27).

Jonas, K. J., Cesario, J., Alger, M., Bailey, A. H., Bombari, D., Carney, D., Dovidio, J. F., Duffy, S., Harder, J. A., van Huistee, D., Jackson, B., Johnson, D. J., Keller, V. N., Klaschinski, L., LaBelle, O., LaFrance, M., M. Latu, I., Morssinkhoff, M., Nault, K., . . . Tybur, J. M. (2017). Power poses–where do we stand? *Comprehensive Results in Social Psychology*, *2*(1), 139–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743603.2017.1342447

Michaelsen, P., Nyström, L., Luke, T. J., & Hedesström, M. (2021). Downstream consequences of disclosing defaults: Influences on perceptions of choice architects and subsequent behavior. In *Comprehensive results in social psychology* (pp. 1–24).

Nilsson, A., Erlandsson, A., Västfjäll, D., & Tinghög, G. (2021). Who are the opponents of nudging? Insights from moral foundations theory. In *Comprehensive results in social psychology* (pp. 1–34).

Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Penguin Books.

Van Gestel, L. C., Adriaanse, M. A., & De Ridder, D. T. D. (2021). Do nudges make use of automatic processing? Unraveling the effects of a default nudge under type 1 and type 2 processing. In *Comprehensive results in social psychology* (pp. 1–21).

Wachner, J., Adriaanse, M., & De Ridder, D. (2021). The influence of nudge transparency on the experience of autonomy. In *Comprehensive results in social psychology* (pp. 1–15).