



The Impact of Nudge Awareness on Self-Perceptions

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Summary

Though often designed to operate outside of conscious awareness, a Nobel Prize, bestselling books, and popular press discussion have increased peoples' awareness that they may be subject to low-touch, scaled behavioral interventions (nudges) in many parts of their lives (Sunstein 2014; Thaler and Sunstein 2003). What we do not know is what affect this awareness has on the total effect of nudges on consumers or how it may affect their self-perceptions.

Across eight studies, we demonstrate that when people become aware that a nudge has impacted their behavior, they adjust their self-perception away from the nudge. This occurs because people attribute the causality behind nudged behavior externally, reducing its implications for their self understanding.

Basic Study Design

- Participants make a choice or read a scenario about a choice involving a nudge
- Half of participants are informed of the nudge that was used
- Participants indicate their self-perceptions in the choice domain

Studies 1 and 2: Demonstration of Basic Effect

*Participants are assigned to choice

"Positive" Nudges

- 1A:** MTurk, n = 295
- Identifiable victim nudge (increases donations)
 - Nudge aware participants consider themselves less charitable ($p = .03$)
- 1B:** MTurk, n = 307
- Menu calorie nudge (leads to healthier choices)
 - Nudge aware participants consider themselves less health-conscious ($p < .0001$)

"Negative" Nudges

- 2A:** MTurk, n = 298
- Endowed progress nudge (increases caloric food orders)
 - Nudge aware participants consider themselves more health-conscious ($p < .0001$)
- 2B:** MTurk, n = 304
- Minimum payment nudge (increases debt accrual)
 - Nudge aware consider themselves more financially responsible ($p = .03$)

Study 3: Mediation by Personal Causality

Sample: n = 402 from MTurk

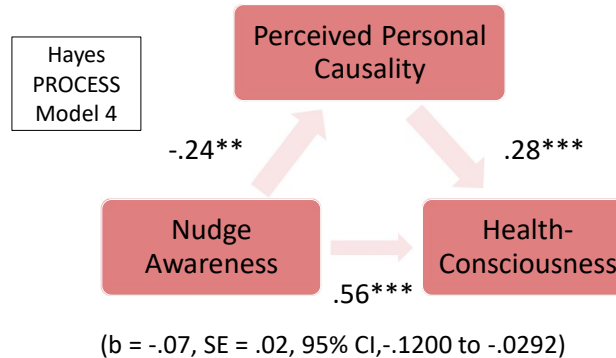
Design: 2 cell between subject. Conditions: aware of nudge vs. control. Menu calorie label context, calorie info is on right side of menu to encourage less healthy choices. Participants are assigned to choice.

Mediator: Two items related to perceived personal causality (Botti and McGill 2011)

I chose what I did because I was influenced

I would have chosen differently if I was not influenced

Results: Aware of nudge condition considers themselves more health conscious ($M_{\text{aware}} = 4.28, M_{\text{control}} = 2.97; t(1, 401) = 82.0, p < .0001$)

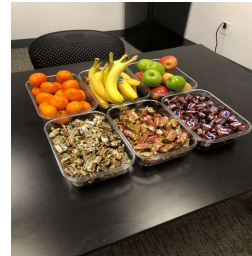


Study 5: Consequential Choice

Sample: n = 338 from university lab

Design: Same as study 4, without reactance measures. Participants actually receive the option they choose (fruit vs. candy bar).

Results: Aware of nudge condition considers themselves more health conscious ($M_{\text{aware}} = 3.64, M_{\text{control}} = 3.29; t(1, 337) = 2.06, p = .04$)



Conclusion

Learning that a nudge may have influenced choice leads consumers to discount the nudged behavior's diagnosticity for the self.

Our findings have implications for nudge disclosure and education – which may in some cases insulate consumers' self-perceptions from effects that might be driven by nudge-consistency.

Study 4: Moderation by Individual Trait Level Reactance

Sample: n = 455 from Mturk. Excludes those who made nudge inconsistent choice

Design: 2 cell between subject. Conditions: aware of nudge vs. control. Menu partition context, menu options are grouped to encourage less healthy choices. Participants actually make choice.

Moderator: 11-item reactance scale (Hong and Faedda 1996)

Results: Aware of nudge condition considers themselves more health conscious ($M_{\text{aware}} = 2.90, M_{\text{control}} = 2.51; t(1, 454) = 3.10, p < .01$)

Condition x Reactance: $t(1, 454) = 2.31, p < .01$. Effect holds for those 3.34 or higher on reactance

