

Digital Nudges: Contours and Challenges



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Abstract Digital nudges—that is, significantly behavioral interventions that use software and its user-interface design elements—are an increasingly pervasive feature of online environments that shapes behavior both online (e.g., changing online privacy settings) and offline (e.g., taking a flu vaccine due to a text message reminder). Although digital nudges share many characteristics of their offline counterparts, they merit particular attention and analysis for two important reasons: First, the growing ubiquity of digital nudges makes encountering them nearly unavoidable in daily life, thereby bringing into sharper relief the promise and perils of nudges more generally. Second, the potentially greater potency of digital—compared to offline—nudges, the greater opacity of their instruments and behavioral mechanisms, and the typically dominant role of private intermediaries or independent private actors in their implementation all raise unique or qualitatively different challenges from those presented by their better-studied offline predecessors.

Keywords Behavioral regulation · Behavioral insights · Nudge · Costs and benefits · Artificial intelligence · Machine learning · Intermediaries

1 Introduction

For some time now, governments and other organizations have been employing behavioral interventions—also known as nudges—to advance their policy goals, but the rapid advent of digital nudges is relatively recent.¹ Digital nudges are distinct from their offline counterparts in their deployment of software and its user-interface design elements and are an increasingly pervasive feature of online environments.²

¹ Mathis and Tor (2016), Oliver (2017), Tor (2022).

² Weinmann et al. (2016).

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