



## **Department of Political Science**

Behavioural Economics and Psychology

### **Nudge:**

**“A comparison between behavioural economics and social marketing approach”**

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*“A famiglia e amici”*

## **Index**

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS APPROACH TOWARD NUDGE .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. NUDGING FROM A SOCIAL MARKETING APPROACH.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3. BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL MARKETING: NUDGE COMPARISON.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>RIASSUNTO ELABORATO FINALE.....</b>	<b>67</b>

## **Abstract**

In this thesis I will provide for the required arguments to understand the “nudge”, through a comparison between the two main different approaches to it, i.e. behavioural economics and social marketing.

I will try to describe the key aspects of the two theories in a partial and objective way, demonstrating the utility, efficiency and legality of the nudge, especially vis-à-vis its detractors, present above all in the social marketers’ ranks.

This analysis will be carried out through a careful study of the sources and scholars’ writings regarding the subject.

The thesis will be divided in five parts.

First of all the introduction. In the opening I will give an historical and practical overview of the behaviour changing phenomena. However, I will primarily focus on what a nudge is and give some examples of it.

The first chapter will be devoted to the analysis of nudge under a behavioural economics approach. This one is a topic a bit thorny since the nudge, as conceived by Thaler and Sunstein (2006) is inextricably linked to the behavioural economics approach. Therefore, I will try not to repeat in the first chapter what already said in the introduction.

In the second chapter the nudge will be analysed under the social marketing lens, especially analysing scholars’ critiques.

Once that first two chapter have provided for the necessary knowledge on the nudge theory, the third chapter, the most challenging one, will focus on a more specific comparison. The latter will not simply be a summary of the Ch. one and two, reader’s task, but will integrate new topics to give more food for thought.

Finally the last part will have the task of drawing conclusions.

## Introduction

Since the time of recorded history violence has been the main tool to bend others to the will of the most powerful. For thousands of years the strongest were able to change others' behaviour by violence<sup>1</sup>. States got progressively stronger acquiring the monopoly over violence, one of the fundings of the modern state: “*A compulsory political organization with continuous operations will be called a ‘state’ [if and] insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds a claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force (das Monopol legitimen physischen Zwanges) in the enforcement of its order*”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, states were able to impose their law assuring stability and protection. Societies, eventually, became less violent<sup>3</sup>, civilised and peaceful. Nowadays, in modern advanced societies, states don't make use of violence to change its citizens' behaviour, they have left room for more slight types of persuasion. Indeed, governments use a vast assortment of behaviour change techniques to motivate, persuade, inform, or encourage their citizens toward which type of behaviour are desirable and which are not, and, therefore, should be avoided. As a matter of fact, in the last decades, we have been able witness a totally new phenomenon as governments, predominantly in the Western world, have also created *ad hoc* Teams to influence through behaviour change techniques their citizens behaviour.

Ça va sans dire that both behavioural and social marketing approaches, which aim is to change peoples' behaviour in an imperceptible manner without the use of obligations or violence, are a characteristic of the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic) countries. States ruled by authoritarian regimes have no difficulty in changing population behaviours by means of violence.

As afore stated, governments have constantly attempted to influence their citizens' behaviour. However, during the past fifty years, scholars have been able to see a change of direction among policymakers, which placed themselves on a new perspective, i.e. a new concept of influencing behaviour itself as a generic policy challenge<sup>4</sup>. As a matter of fact, in the last half century, governments have increasingly been expanding their influence on the populace addressing new social challenges, which represented, and still represent, a danger for society as a whole, such as obesity or

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<sup>1</sup> Pinker, S. (2011), “*The better angels of our nature*”, London: Allen Lane.

<sup>2</sup> Weber, M. (1968), “*Economy and Society*”, Donzelli 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Elias, N, (1978), “*The civilizing process: The history of manners and state formation and civilization*”, Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>4</sup> Fletcher-Morgan, C., Leyland, K. (2010), “*Making people more responsible: The Blair governments' programme for changing citizens' behaviour*”, *Political studies*, 58(3): 427-49.

drinking and driving<sup>5</sup>. This approach to the new policy problems has encouraged policymakers to deal with issues in a more abstract manner, as promoting or dissuading a certain type of behaviour. If, on the one hand, this abstract approach seemed to work, on the other hand, scholars have suggested that the rise of neoliberal practices and structures have enabled authorities to meddle in the private citizens' lives with unconventional means. According to these scholars, states found new ways of 'governing the soul', such as shaping individual behaviour without them realizing it<sup>6</sup>; this would seem, at least at first glance, a paranoid scenario of deliberate behaviour alteration feeding the spectre of an invisible nanny state, which may recall to the most Orwell's novel "1984". Nevertheless, in recent years, those new approaches within public policies resulted very attractive to the UK government *in primis*. Indeed, London was the first country to experiment and subsidise a team aimed at changing citizens' behaviour through the Behavioural economics approach, i.e. the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), established in 2010. Given the success, achieved by the BIT, other countries promoted new research and consulting group for Public Administration aimed at using insights from cognitive and behavioural sciences to improve the well-being and job performance of Public Administration employees, along the same line of the BIT. Namely, in Italy, the TAC, i.e. *Team per "l'Analisi Comportamentale"*.

With the 20th century rise of economy as the dominant mode of policy analysis, economists emerged as technical experts whose advice was essential to decision-making<sup>7</sup>. Advice concerned predictions about how a policy would affect individuals' behaviour. Predictions found their leitmotiv in a 'standard model' of expected utility theory, according to which individuals collected information on the available options, weighed up costs and benefits and associated it within each option, the optimal choice suggested by this analysis was the selected one<sup>8</sup>. According to the standard model government intervention may be necessary in case of market failures, suggesting ways for the government to act, whether it chooses to do so.

According to the *homo economicus* theory once that the practical and physical parameters for behaviour are set, it is assumed that individuals will act in a certain defined way, i.e. the most logical one. People are seen to behave almost as machines, responding to the environment and to the various

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<sup>5</sup> Duit, A., Galaz, V. (2008), "Governance and complexity: emerging issues for governance theories", *Governance*, 21(3): 311-35.

<sup>6</sup> Rose, N.S. (1990), "Governing the soul", London: Routledge.

<sup>7</sup> Backhouse, R. (2002), "The penguin history of economics", London: Penguin Books.

<sup>8</sup> Becker, G. (1968), "Crime and punishment: an economic approach", *Journal of Political Economy*, 76(2): 169-217.

<sup>8</sup> Della Vigna, S. (2009), "Psychology and economics: evidence from the field", *Journal of Economic Literature*, 47(2):315-72.

input that surrounds them, i.e. choices should be made rationally. However, nobody is a *homo economicus*, so-called *Econ*, with some temporary exceptions, we are primarily *Humans* instead<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, people often use heuristics, ‘rules of thumb’, in their decision-making process. This may lead to a bias which would, inevitably, push people to make non-optimal decisions<sup>10</sup>. As a matter of fact, only few persons make rational decisions while the vast majority are carried out by feelings, i.e. “System 1”.

Here, I shall make a small *excursus* on the human reflective system just mentioned. People make choices by taking actions, implying consequences on the external world and on other people. Our actions, or it might be better to say our responses, are ruled by two reflective systems: the first, System 1, is automatic and produces an instant, subject to feelings, response; the second, System 2, is influenced by the social environment and it is reflective, it evaluates problems making rational judgments<sup>11</sup>. In recent years, sociologists have been particularly interested, in understanding the reach and the influence of human agency in shaping society and its structures<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, human agency produces social structures throughout the creation of a pattern which reproduce itself over time in the society. Patterns end up having a significant impact, or pressure, on people. Therefore, social structures, even though are shaped by human agency, shape in turn human agency. A vicious circle. As people make hundreds of thousands decisions per day, responding to the micro-environments at the same time, they end producing social systems’ patterns, which finally take the name of social structures. Sociologists refer to this pattern creation as social practices<sup>13</sup>. Social

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<sup>9</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*”, London, UK: Yale University Press.

<sup>10</sup> O'Donoghue, T., Rabin, M. (1999), “*Doing it now or later*”, *American Economic Review*, 89(1): 103-24.

<sup>11</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*”, London, UK: Yale University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Giddens, A. (1979). “*Central problems in social theory: Action, structure and contradiction in social analysis*”, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>12</sup> Giddens, A. (1982) “*Profiles and critiques in social theory*”, London: Macmillan.

<sup>13</sup> Blue, S., Shove, E., Carmona, C., Kelly, M.P (2014), “*Theories of practice and public health: understanding (un) healthy practices Critical Public Health*”, DOI: 10.1080/09581596.2014.980396, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2014.980396>.

practices include good and bad habits such as retirement savings, smoking, eating junk food...

Now, the role of public policy, according to behavioural economics, is not to intervene at individual level, but to set the conditions to determine the right behaviour in people. Therefore, the role of government is clear: set the background conditions and prices such that consumers will take decisions which are both in their own and the national interest<sup>14</sup>. As stated, behavioural economics plays an important role in public policies. Indeed, over time, nudging and behavioural insight interventions<sup>15</sup> have been applied, to a vast array of domains, from health to tax compliance. In compliance with the psychology's in-field interventions history, the incorporation of psychological, and economic, insights into the design of decision architectures, policies, and other kind of interventions has shown to be a useful and effective tool<sup>16</sup>. That is the reason why we refer to this subject as Behavioural economics and psychology. However, to better understand the political nature of behaviour change I shall focus on a practical example: public health. A great number of diseases are the result of the way people live their lives, i.e. what they drink or eat, the sport and the frequency they practice.... Those illnesses may seem "self-inflicted diseases", result of individual choices, but their consequences, for what it concerns taxpayer' contributions, are huge. Politicians responsible for the health service, once in charge, usually make the 'discovery' that the solution is pretty simple: change people behaviours and all will be well<sup>17</sup>. That is to say, as diseases generally do reside in our behaviours, an obvious and optimal mean of prevention is to use behaviour change interventions. It is not a coincidence that both politicians and policymakers see behaviour change as an efficient and cheap solution to new problems. Yet, it is no mystery to say that having people, in fairly large number, to change their daily behaviours turns out to be difficult. Education, advertising, social marketing and all sort of behavioural change techniques certainly made some difference and seemed to work, even though only in the short run<sup>18</sup>. However, only a massive state effort, deliberately reducing people's liberties, e.g. ban to smoke in public areas, has the possibility to impact seriously citizens' daily life,

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<sup>14</sup> Guy, S. (2006), "*Designing urban knowledge: competing perspectives on energy and buildings*", Environment and Planning C, 24(5): 645.

<sup>15</sup> Thaler, R. (2018), "*Nudge, not sludge*", Science, 361(6401): 431.

<sup>16</sup> Cialdini, R.B. (2001) "*Influence: Science and practice*" (4<sup>th</sup> edn), Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

<sup>17</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), "*Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions*", Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.



saving many thousands of lives. Therefore, it can be inferred that the behaviour change issue is primarily political, as it is about personal freedom.

It exists a balance between individual liberty and public interest, i.e. common good, this thin red line is usually subject of harsh political debate, where arguments about the harm to others prevail. According to John Stuart Mill<sup>19</sup> we are free to harm ourselves and the state should not interfere. Now, it comes naturally to ask where it is the limit drawn. In the exact moment when our self-harming actions may also harm others, therein, the state has the duty to step in and protect the other person<sup>20</sup>. This is a concept that could be found in the philosopher Macintyre<sup>21</sup>, one person's utility (gain or pleasure) is someone else's disutility, or for the ones more dramatic and with a classic background *mors tua vita mea*. The utility-disutility statement has been fundamental in order to support the ban on smoking in public places or the drink driving campaigns. The former for the sake of the non-smoker protection from carcinogens they were not deciding to have but to which they were subject due to passive smoking, the latter to protect citizens from drivers who were a danger to other road-users. It has been common for politicians to start actions aimed at behaviour change but finding themselves ensnared in arguments about personal freedom, rights of individuals and of the state.

I shall now briefly explain what a nudge is and give an example of it.

Over the last decades, empirical evidence, about how humans, most of the time, misbehave when faced with apparently rational decisions, have been produced by both economists and psychologists. Thus, questioning the existence of a model or behaviour, leading to the already presented assumption that we are mostly *Humans*, not *Econs*. As it has previously been established, people are subject to biases and are not, not always at least, rational. That being said, it seems desirable some degree of government intervention, aimed at increasing the range of possible social welfare. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, in 2008, published: "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*"<sup>22</sup>. Core concept is the 'libertarian paternalism', i.e. that the government should organize the 'choice architecture' presented to its citizens so that they would be led to choose an optimal, according to the government, option in case of bias. Ultimately this approach allows to combine both the paternalist and the libertarian element, the former since the option, not rationally chosen and subject of the bias, should be the one deemed as the most suitable by the

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<sup>19</sup> Mill, J. (1859), "*On liberty*", London: J.W. Parker and Son.

<sup>20</sup> Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2007), "*Public health: Ethical issues*", London: Nuffield Council on Bioethics.

<sup>21</sup> Macintyre, A. (1984), "*After virtue: A study in moral theory*", Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

<sup>22</sup> Thaler, R., Sunstein, C. (2008) "*Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*", Yale University Press.

policymaker, the latter since individuals are still free to choose differently if they desire to, the libertarian element. Therefore nudge is perceived as an inexpensive mean of achieving policy goals, since altering the choice architecture is often cost-free. As thought by Thaler and Sunstein, a nudge ‘influences choices in a way that will make the chooser better off, as judged by the choosers themselves’<sup>23</sup>. However, there's a range of communication that can run from steady to coercive. Thaler and Sunstein<sup>24</sup>, for instance, describe a nudge as “*any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives*”. In the last decade the nudge, which is one of the most efficient BCT (Behavioural Change Technique), has become more and more adopted, as inferred by the various government-created teams (e.g. BIT or TAC), by policymakers. Nudge implementation in daily life has led scholars to raise questions on its lawfulness. The nudge has also been the ‘elephant in the room’ between two of the main behaviour change approaches, namely social marketing and behavioural economics. As it will be further on explained, mostly in Ch. 4, *therein lies the rub*, as far as, social marketing is more focused on the personalization of the intervention while behavioural economics deals with a specific attitude or behaviour and it seeks to reach the biggest impact on the largest group.

Before delving into the nudge analysis I would like to conclude this introduction with two, in my advice, interesting examples of nudge intervention. The first intervention was carried out by Hubbub in 2015 in London, more precisely in Villiers Street, second busiest street in the city. Researchers found out that one third of the public was littering their waste on the street and, even worse, 89% of smokers, predominantly men at night, littered their cigarettes’ butts on the pavement, making it the most littered item. In response to this behaviour Hubbub researchers had the idea to set up some outdoor voting ashtrays. An ashtray itself it is not something new in England, however the Hubbub’s one was particular. Hubbub’s ashtray was composed of two transparent cigarette bin cans next to each other, one was labelled ‘Cristiano Ronaldo’ and the other ‘Lionel Messi’. Smokers were encouraged to throw their cigarette butt in the hole of one bin, voting their favourite player<sup>25</sup>. Once understood their ‘audience’, i.e. young men, researchers found a good way to involve them through an excellent example of gamification for environmental protection, and a fun conversation starter. The second example is the Selective Attention Test by Simons and Chabris<sup>26</sup>, better known as the “Gorilla Video”, which could be an interesting illustration of inattention bias. The video shows how

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<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> Restorick, T. (2015, September12), “*Ronaldo or Messi? When litter goes viral*”, Hubbub.

<sup>26</sup> Simons, D.J., Chabris, C.F. (1999), “*Gorillas in our midst: Sustained inattention blindness for dynamic events*”,...

something so self-evident will not be perceived if our brain is not focused. This video could be an incredible way of exposing the constrained assets our brain has and how this leads to human flops<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Caballero, G., Cáceres, A., Cottone, S., Delgado, C., Espitia, D., Stein, A (2022), “*How to introduce Behavioural Science Into Organisations and Not Perish While Trying*”, Behavioural Economics Guide 2022.

# 1. Behavioural economics approach toward Nudge

*Salus populi suprema lex esto*

Cicero<sup>28</sup>

From a historic point of view, restrictions on personal freedom have been seen as a fast and straightforward way to guarantee changes in conduct, protecting the health and wellbeing of people and communities. Earliest examples were nearly completely concerned with health protection, individual or community wellbeing and security and prevention and control of disease. Probably, restrictions or other forced practices meant to avoid certain behaviours, have roots that can be found within religious rites, e.g. the Babylonian religious rule which forbade the excavation of wells close to burial grounds.

It has been briefly said that a “Nudge” is a recently developed concept aimed at behaviour changing, where behaviour stands for everything people do that can be perceived by others: it is about the social pattern surrounding us, the environment, i.e. what we can see, hear, feel or express<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, behaviour is a way of achieving a certain goal too, in that it functions as a solution to a certain circumstance<sup>30</sup>.

Behaviours that are perceived to be compelling in achieving their objectives are employed more often, leading to patterns of behaviour<sup>31</sup>. The latter are represented by our daily habits, which are carried out in an automatic and unconscious way. Moreover, people, both at individual and aggregate level, often do not even recognise their own behavioural pattern or the ones to which they are subjects to since they are used to it and toward which they naturally comply. These implicit, habitual, and unconscious behavioural patterns might hinder group functioning or even be harmful to

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<sup>28</sup> Cicero, “*De Legibus*”, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2008, IV.

<sup>29</sup> Huczynski, A., Buchanan, D., (2001), “*Organizational behaviour: An introductory text (instructor’s manual)*”, Financial times/Prentice Hall.

<sup>29</sup> Sarafino, E.P. (1996), “*Principles of Behaviour change*”, John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>29</sup> Tiggelaar, B. (2010), “*The core of the matter: Haalbaarheid en effectiviteit van gedragsgerichte dual system-interventies bij verandering in organisaties*”. Amsterdam Business Research Institute.

<sup>30</sup> Schein, E.H. (1969), “*Process consultation: Its role in organization development*”, Addison-Wesley.

<sup>31</sup> Willcoxson, L., Milett, B., (2000), “*The management of organisational culture*”, Australian Journal of Management and Organisational Behaviour, 3(2), 91-99.

<sup>31</sup> Straathof, A.J.M., (2009), “*Zoeken naar de kern van cultuurverandering*”, Eburon Uitgeverij BV.

it. This is a particularly concerning matter as behaviour is strongly driven by the group a person relates and identifies with<sup>32</sup>, for better or for worse. Thus, addressing behavioural risks is not about individuals' evaluation, whether they are or not good citizens, or finding the 'bad apple'. Instead, it is about understanding group's behaviour and where it originates from or if it may lead to undesirable outcomes that need to be changed. To sum up, BCT's goal is to act in order to modify those bad habits that might proliferate, both at an individual or collective level, and which are the consequence of incorrect social patterns, products, in turn, of bad behaviours.

Now, nudge theory is a fundamental concept in behavioural economics, social marketing, and all the related behavioural sciences that propose choice architecture as ways to influence people's behaviour. The nudge was popularized by Thaler and Sunstein<sup>33</sup> with the book "*Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*". Since its publication it has immediately gained enormous fame, not only in economy or psychology academic circles. Indeed, it has influenced politicians, British and American at first, such that several nudge units were created and developed around the world, both at national level and international level. Despite the success achieved in the academic environment and among scholars, many criticisms were raised regarding the actual effectiveness of nudges, e.g. Maier et al.<sup>34</sup> wrote that there is no evidence that nudging would have any effect. However, nudging is a collective noun which refers to a great variety of BCTs, such that even if some scholars may have doubts on a particular nudge may think that other nudges can be both effective and legal.

I shall, now, analyse the core concept of this thesis, the elephant in the room, i.e. the Nudge. Thaler and Sunstein<sup>35</sup> defined their concept as the following:

*"A nudge, as we will use the term, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to*

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<sup>32</sup> Scheepers, D., Ellemers, N. (2019), "*Social Identity theory*. In K. Sassenberg & M.L.W. Vliek (eds.)", Social Psychology in action (pp.129-143), Springer.

<sup>33</sup> Thaler, R., Sunstein, C. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*", Yale University Press.

<sup>34</sup> Maier, M., Bartoš, F., Stanley, T. D., Shanks, D. R., Harris, A. J. L., Wagenmakers, E. J. (2022), "*No evidence for nudging after adjusting for publication bias*", Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

<sup>35</sup> Thaler, R., Sunstein, C. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*", Yale University Press.

*avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not.”*

According to this definition, nudge is generally employed in order to influence, change or eradicate a particular behaviour. As we shall see in the example that I will expose further on, nudge does not require large capitals or means, as a matter of fact is usually about small and apparently insignificant details that can have major impacts on people’s behaviour. A good rule of thumb is to assume that “everything matters”, in fact, generally the small details may be more powerful if they arrive to channel users’ attention focusing on a feature. An interesting example of this principle can be witnessed in the men’s public restrooms at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam. It seems that men usually do not pay attention to where they aim while they're taking ‘nature’s call of a morning’, which can create a bit of a trouble. However, if men see a target are used to focus and put attention, therefore accuracy, in their actions. Those considerations done, airport’s authorities etched the image of a black housefly into each urinal. Needless to say, it worked wonders; according to the man who had the brilliant idea, Aad Kieboom, “it improves the aim”. “If a man sees a fly, he aims at it”. Kieboom’s staff conducted fly-in-urinal trials, finding that etchings reduce possible spillage by 80 percent<sup>36</sup>.

As afore mentioned, Thaler and Sunstein's book “*Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*” brought this new concept theory to notoriety. The authors refer to nudge as to a technique capable of influencing behaviours without coercion throughout what they call libertarian paternalism, which focuses on choice architecture.

I shall now list some key features of nudge, as intended by Thaler and Sunstein<sup>37</sup>, which are at the basis of the Behavioural economics approach of nudging implementations. Nudge aim is to change a behaviour in a predictable way, which is the policy-maker desired direction. However, it is important to understand that the nudge’s purpose is not to change people’s opinions and attitudes, it would not even have the power as it is a minimal contextual or environmental intervention, but to change a particular harmful behaviour for the society. In order to do this, it is necessary for nudging to be tested in an experimental and controlled manner, which, therefore, can assure empirical evidence of its functioning. Moreover, it must be easy to avoid, this is to say that it should not be incompatible with individual freedom or force people to expressly choose an option. As stated in the, first mentioned, definition by Thaler and Sunstein<sup>38</sup> nudges should not provide for economic reward or incentives too. The same can be said for it does not provide for punishment or a ban, otherwise coercive means would be used, therefore, nudge concept would be totally useless. Nudge is not at all

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<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

promoting a purchase either, otherwise it would be a simple promotion, therefore marketing (not to be confused with social marketing, concept that will be more analysed in detail in Ch. two and three), when a nudge intervention is used for the latter purpose it takes the name of sludge. Therefore, nudge aim is to push people, non-rational *Humans*, to choose better, thus safeguarding their health and improving collective wellbeing. That is exactly how the nudge concept was born, with the intention of leveraging on people's cognitive bias, judgment's systematic errors which are the result of heuristic's application, to induce and persuade individuals to change their behaviour without coercion and in a predictably manner. Therefore, we could state that nudging primary objective is using the architecture of choices in an ethical, positive and beneficial way for the society as a whole.

Now that we have analysed nudge's primary features, I would like to give another small example of this concept that happened for sure in our lives: the ATM receipt. It is fair to say, that it happened at least once to everybody to withdraw cash from an ATM machine. At the end of the operation we all have been "victim" of a nudge intervention. Indeed, once the cash is withdrawn, the machine asks us if we want the receipt to be printed. In this moment we are able to see on the display two options: on the one hand, a simple and minimalist "yes", on the other hand, a "no", next to which it appears a stylized representation of an earth or a leaf, bearing the description "environmental friendly choice". As for the Amsterdam airport's housefly, there is a need to reiterate the concept that 'everything matters', especially small details. No need to say that the ATM receipts' nudge has not the same behaviour change purpose of the Schiphol's housefly, but it is an interesting form of intervention aimed at carrying out a small battle against pollution and climate change.

With a nudge intervention it is more expectable that an individual will make a particular default choice, or behave in a particular way, due to the alteration of the environment surrounding him, so that his automatic cognitive processes is triggered in order to favour a desired outcome<sup>39</sup>. As we have seen, individuals' behaviours are not always aligned to their intentions, i.e. their actions are not always in line with their beliefs, this is a discrepancy known as a value-action gap<sup>40</sup>. As stated, it is common knowledge that humans are mostly *Humans*, hardly ever *Econs* fully rational beings. That is to say that people often do something that may seem totally at odds with their own self-interest, even when they are aware that their actions are not in their best interest.

As mentioned in the introduction, Daniel Kahneman, 2002 Economic sciences Nobel prize winner, described humans' actions as based on two distinct systems for processing

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<sup>39</sup> Saghai, Y. (2013), "*Salvaging the concept of nudge*", Journal of Medical Ethics.

<sup>39</sup> Parkinson, J.A., Eccles, K.E.; Goodman, A. (2014), "*Positive impact by design: the Wales centre for behaviour change*", The Journal of Positive Psychology.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

information: fast and automatic System 1, extremely susceptible to environmental factors; slow and reflective System 2, which takes into account objectives, deemed to take our rational actions<sup>41</sup>.

Whenever we face complex or overwhelming, as if there is some kind of time-constraints or other pressures, situations for our cognitive capacity, we automatically answer with our System 1 decision-making process<sup>42</sup>. When this happens, we rely on judgmental heuristics to make decisions, resulting on one hand in faster decisions, but, on the other hand, suboptimal ones.

Whenever the System 1 is employed, right there, nudges are meant to intervene. Those tools are likely to produce a minimal environment alteration so that when heuristic, System 1 decision-making, is employed the resulting choice will be the most positive and useful for the individual, which, otherwise, could harm itself. Another interesting nudge example<sup>43</sup> is to switch junk food location in school canteens, so that fruit and vegetables, as well as other healthy options, are located at eyesight. Junk food as french-fries, instead, is arranged in such a way that boys had to lower themselves, or make some kind of effort, to take it. Therefore, people are free to choose whatever they prefer, libertarian aspect, nevertheless are tempted, for laziness or other reasons, to choose a healthier and 'at hand' alternative.

Nudges, as we have seen in all previous examples, are small environmental changes, easy and inexpensive to implement<sup>44</sup>, that draw people's attention on an option. Whenever people's attention is drawn towards a specific option, that option will become more noticeable to that person, therefore it will be more likely for that option to be chosen. Several different techniques of nudging exist, e.g. defaults, social-proof heuristics, and increasing the salience of the desired option, that, for sake of *brevitas*, I will not in-depth analyse. However, I would like to mention one of the most frequent and effective, i.e. default option. A default option is the alternative that an individual automatically chooses whether he/she does not make a choice. People are very likely to choose a certain option if it is the default one. An example of such a nudge is the one reported by Thaler and Sunstein<sup>45</sup> about the Swedish pension privatization. Swedish authorities, in order to help their citizens with retirement funds, encouraged citizens to invest this social security plan by choosing a social security portfolio

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<sup>41</sup> Kahneman, D. (2012), "*Thinking fast and slow*", London: Penguin Books Ltd.

<sup>42</sup> Parkinson, J.A., Eccles, K.E., Goodman, A. (2014), "*Positive impact by design: the Wales centre for behaviour change*", The Journal of Positive Psychology.

<sup>43</sup> Thaler, R., Sunstein, C. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*", Yale University Press.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.



among different options, summarising a laissez-faire approach. Different portfolios were presented and citizens were able to choose the one they preferred, however, for the one who did not choose had been prepared a default portfolio, designed specifically for those who thought they did not have the right knowledge to decide, planned by sector's experts hired by the government. Almost one third of the ones who participated to the plan ended up in the default option. It is fair to say that “*not only was the default fund designed better at the start, but it has also performed better*”<sup>46</sup>. Finally, the default fund registered among the best funds created, actively helping and wowing retirement for the Swedish citizens who had chosen it.

The Swedish case is an optimal example of *laissez faire* as citizens were not actively pushed to choose a specific plan, instead, they were free to compose their own portfolio. Actors were only subject to a slight default nudge, that is to say that if they decided not to choose, therein, the nudge acted. Swedish government did not actively nudge its citizens to choose a particular portfolio. Ultimately, it can be defined as a good state intervention. However, according to scholars having too many options can overly complicate people's decision-making through a cognitive overload, which would end up in making sub-optimal decisions<sup>47</sup>, which by the way was exactly the case in the above-mentioned example. It is fair to say that the fact that individuals with different financial aptitudes, having a significant number of choices, can be pushed towards choosing the default investment option, is a well-known concept in the academic sector, since indicated also by other scholars, e.g. Agnew and Szykman<sup>48</sup>. The tendency to choose the default option can be explained by another key principle of Behavioural economics, i.e. the status quo bias, which makes people prefer decisions enabling them to avoid any change and/or mental effort<sup>49</sup>. This bias necessitates for less cognitive resources, protecting the person from a potential regret of switching to an option that could end up in a worse outcome.

With the Swedish social security example is introduced a key element of nudging, i.e. the state position. For what it concerns the social security plan, the Scandinavian country intervened in its citizens' everyday life in view of their retirement savings, resulting in a better off condition. Now, one may wonder if humans are really aware of their weaknesses, their bad habits, and, therefore, willing to accept nudges. Individuals are by nature, at least partially, aware of their weaknesses. For this reason, people often seek for an outside help: they write a list to remember things to do or to buy;

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<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> Benartzi, S., Thaler R.H., (2002), “*How much is investor autonomy worth?*”, The journal of behavioural finance.

<sup>48</sup> Agnew, J.R., Szykman L.R. (2005), “*Asset allocation and information overload: The influence of information display, asset choice, and investor experience*”, The journal of behavioural finance.

<sup>49</sup> Samuelson, W., Zeckhauser, R. (1988), “*Status quo bias in decision making*”, Journal of risk and uncertainty.

set an alarm clock to get up and go to work in the morning; ask friends for help to lose weight or to stop gambling. In these cases, the planner that is in us activates itself to lead the performer, changing the incentives to which the latter is subject. Basically, if I know that on the way to the office there is an oven that gives off an excellent smell and that, when I pass, I always want to stop and eat, then, the planner in me will push me to choose another way to go to the office. More generally the state takes the place of the planner inside us trying to modify our behaviour for the common interest, both of the other citizens and of the *res publica*.

I shall present in the following part the trade-off between the state's authority to act for the public good and an individual's right to personal autonomy and liberty. Essentially, the fundamental concept of Thaler and Sunstein<sup>50</sup> libertarian paternalism. According to the authors, the government should organize the 'choice architecture' presented to its citizens which, otherwise, would not take optimal decisions since they are *Humans* subjects to bias and, therefore, non-rational decision-makers. It shall be recalled that golden rule of libertarian paternalism is to:

*"...offer nudges that are most likely to help and least likely to inflict harm. A slightly longer answer is that people will need nudges for decisions that are difficult and rare, for which they do not get prompt feedback, and when they have trouble translating aspects of the situation into terms that they can easily understand"* (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

As a matter of fact, Thaler and Sunstein<sup>51</sup> not only support a possible government's intervention, which should act as a *super partes* organ, indeed they promote it: *"In complex situations, the government might actually be able to provide some useful hints. If the underlying decision is difficult and unfamiliar, and if people do not get prompt feedback when they err, then it's legitimate, even good, to nudge a bit"*<sup>52</sup>. As for the Swedish social security plan, government actions follow the *Humans-Econs* rationale, i.e. if someone is not able to make good, in the sense of rational, decisions by himself in a specific sector, he should be asked someone experienced for advice. However, this concept is still under debate between those who sustain that individual freedom is paramount and those who hold that the government has a responsibility to create those conditions that protect and promote populace's health, especially vulnerable groups<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Thaler, R., Sunstein, C. (2008), *"Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness"*, Yale University Press.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>53</sup> Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2007), *"Public health: Ethical issues"*, London: Nuffield Council on Bioethics.

Since government interventions were mentioned, I deem useful a small paragraph' excursus referring to the government 'armed wing', specialized in nudge application. In the introduction it was pointed out that UK, and other states afterwards, created small *ad hoc* teams to implement nudges in the society. Major example of such a team is the British BIT, Behavioural Insight Team. Despite its small size, the team proved to be effective working across a range of policy areas, including delicate ones on fraud, error, energy; charity and health, supported by the frequent publication of reports then presented in parliament<sup>54</sup>. Team's starting point, whenever facing policy issues, was not 'how to nudge' in this specific case, at least at the beginning, but to consider all the policy options available, using behavioural science. The reason was that policies' implementation could be improved, no matter the policy tool employed, by behavioural insights<sup>55</sup>. Historically, the team has strongly advocated the use of randomised controlled trials in order to assess government interventions effectiveness<sup>56</sup>. This attitude was supported mainly to address a popular criticism according to which many behavioural sciences findings were based on laboratory experiments which did not take into account the real-world settings<sup>57</sup>. This is not an insignificant concern since, as seen in this chapter, the power of contextual factors plays a primary role in behaviour's influence, a power speaking of which has been one of the behavioural science main findings in recent years<sup>58</sup>. The BIT perceived success, namely collecting additional £200 million in tax repayments for Her Majesty' Revenue and

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<sup>54</sup> BIT (Behavioural Insights Team) (2010), "*Applying behavioural insight to health*"

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/60524/403936\\_BehaviouralInsight\\_acc.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60524/403936_BehaviouralInsight_acc.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> BIT (2011), "*Behaviour change and energy use*", [www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/sites/default/files/behaviour-change-and-energy-use.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/sites/default/files/behaviour-change-and-energy-use.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> BIT (2012b), "*Applying behavioural insights to reduce fraud, error and debt*",

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/60539/BIT\\_FraudErrorDebt\\_accessible.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60539/BIT_FraudErrorDebt_accessible.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> BIT (2013), "*Applying behavioural insights to charitable giving*",

[www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/sites/default/files/BIT\\_CharitableGiving\\_Paper%20%281%29.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/sites/default/files/BIT_CharitableGiving_Paper%20%281%29.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), "*Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions*", Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>56</sup> Haynes, L., Service, O., Goldacre, B., Torgerson, D. (2012). "*Test, learn, adapt: developing public policies with randomised controlled trials*", [www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/sites/default/files/TLA-1906126.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/sites/default/files/TLA-1906126.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Levitt, S., List, J. (2007), "*What do laboratory experiments measuring social preferences reveal about the real world?*", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.

<sup>58</sup> Bargh, J.A., Chartrand, T.L. (1999), "*The unbearable automaticity of being*", *American psychologist*, 54(7): 462-79.

Customs (HMRC) through a small modification of the tax letter<sup>59</sup>, has led other governments to the creation of organisations developed along the lines of the British team<sup>60</sup>, e.g. a similar team has been established in Italy and it is called TAC, “Team di Analisi Comportamentale” (TAC).

Nowadays, calls for regulatory approaches as the ones toward health behaviour are tendentially held back by most liberal governments. Indeed, states are unwilling to regulate businesses, even those such as the alcohol and tobacco ones, fearing to interfere with companies’ rights to legally sell their lawful products and the shareholders commitment to maximise their profits. Thus governments tend to be more hesitant to pass laws specifically abridging personal freedoms and behaviours. Nevertheless, states are entitled with the specific duty to provide their citizens with conditions that offer assistance, protect and lead them to live healthy lives. However, a balance has to be struck between respect for individual freedom and personal responsibility and the role of the state as responsible guardian of its citizens’ safety and wellbeing<sup>61</sup>. Exceeding with coercive or meddling interventions, infringing personal liberties, require greater justification in terms of avoiding significant harm to the populace the so-called “harm principle”. Those concerns include the viability and cost-effectiveness of the intervention; intervention’s acceptance of the sample; and the overall risks-benefits balance to the people of implementing or not the intervention. Key legitimization for the more coercive or intrusive interventions is that the wider benefits should outweigh the risks of restricting personal freedom<sup>62</sup>.

One of the principal fields for state’s nudge intervention we have seen to be, for obvious reasons, healthcare. However, healthcare behaviours are a sensitive subject where, aside from moral and ethical reasons to preserve autonomy, motivational science suggests that behaviours freely chosen are more likely to prevail over time<sup>63</sup>. Therefore, as pressing as government actions can be toward attitudes’ changing, the problem is upstream. Particularly in the healthcare sector the keystone does not lie in the behaviour change itself, as in making the population understand why that change is needed. Now, many healthcare behaviours prompted by state’s precision nudge interventions should

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<sup>59</sup> Hallsworth, M., List, J., Metcalfe, R.D., Vlaev, I. (2014), “*The behaviouralist as tax collector: Using natural field experiments to enhance tax compliance*”, Working paper No. w20007, Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>60</sup> Thaler, R.H. (2013), “*Public policies, made to fit people*”, New York Times.

<sup>61</sup> Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2007), “*Public health: Ethical issues*”, London: Nuffield Council on Bioethics.

<sup>62</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), “*Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions*”, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>63</sup> Deci, E. L., Ryan, R. M. (2000), “*The ‘what’ and ‘why’ of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour*”, Psychological inquiry.

be repeated over time (e.g. cancer screenings, or vaccinations). It is clear that nudge can be an extremely useful tool but governments cannot rely only on it. At the same time it is deemed to help people overcome their barriers rather than coerce their participation<sup>64</sup>.

It has to be kept in mind that, despite the proven usefulness of nudges, which allow us to end in a better-off situation, there is another key element in the doctrine of behavioural economics, closely related to nudge, i.e. social compliance.

*“Recall that people like to do what most people think it is right to do; [...] recall too that people like to do what most people actually do”<sup>65</sup>.*

Nudge is undoubtedly useful in changing people’s behaviours but, as said before, it is no secret that, in order to be effective, nudge’s ultimate goal is to change the greatest number of people behaviour. The behavioural insight teams have indeed read Thaler and Sunstein<sup>66</sup>, therefore, they know, to reach their purpose, the importance of affecting as many people as possible. About the influence that others exercise on us, it should be taken as an example the experiment conducted in Minnesota<sup>67</sup> that has had big repercussions in terms of individuals behaviour change. A sample of taxpayers was divided into four groups, each group was given different information: the first group was told that their taxes would finance socially useful activities such as education, safety or firefighting; the second group was threatened with evaders’ consequences; it was explained, to the third group, how to receive information in case of doubts or uncertainties in the tax return compilation; the last group was told that more than 90 percent of Minnesota citizens had already complied with the law by paying their taxes. Of the above-mentioned interventions, only one had a significant effect on tax payment, i.e. the last. According to the Coleman experiment<sup>68</sup> it would seem that citizens are likely to evade taxes if they think that the level of compliance with the tax system is relatively low. Indeed, once they learn that the percentage of citizens fulfilling their duty is high, they are less likely to act as evaders.

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<sup>64</sup> Delaney, S., Bucher, A. (2022), *“If We Build It Right, They Will Come: Driving Health Outcomes With Precision Nudging”*, Behavioural Economics Guide 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), *“Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness”*, London, UK: Yale University Press.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>67</sup> Coleman, S. (1996), *“The Minnesota Income Tax Compliance Experiment State Tax Result”*, Minnesota Department of Revenue.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem.

Despite it has attracted strong political and administrative support, nudge has not been greeted by everyone. Indeed, behavioural science, first and foremost, has received many criticisms. In this last part of the chapter will be analysed the main critiques vis-à-vis the nudging theory. Spotswood<sup>69</sup> identified four main critiques: the first is a political-philosophical one against paternalism, understood in its pejorative form; the second and third one refer to manipulatives' aspects of behavioural sciences; the last critique is a technocratic one. However, there is a fifth source of criticism that I deem important to add, which is a cultural one.

The former critique is the political-philosophic one, which concerns are that applying behavioural sciences is paternalistic, where paternalistic is understood in a negative sense standing for manipulative or disempowering. Throughout this first critique it will be useful to keep in mind the following quotation from Thaler and Sunstein<sup>70</sup>: "*A nudge influences choices in a way that will make the chooser better off, as judged by the choosers themselves*". The critique argues that the government, claiming to correct those language of biases and irrationality harming public interest, arrogate to itself, with a new scientific justification, the right to correct behaviours ensuring that people fulfil the state's 'real' intentions<sup>71</sup>. This criticism is particularly aimed at those policies which are primarily addressing to the individual, both in case of harm or benefit, rather than to the others, intended as the community. For a long time those government actions have been seen as the most controversial actions<sup>72</sup>. The vast array of government initiatives directed at behaviours that negatively impact others, as a complex, have not been addressed. If it fair to say that Policymakers are subject to biases too. However, some scholars use this argument to justify the possibility that policy makers will make errors, and, therefore, should not act<sup>73</sup>. This is an argument in opposition to paternalism in general, it seems especially interesting because it is based on behavioural economics. However, the conclusion drawn from this reasoning is the complete opposite. Behavioural sciences should be used to identify the cognitive and behavioural issues that are common in the policy-making process and to develop solutions, not abandoned. The application of behavioural sciences may indicate that

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<sup>69</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), "*Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions*", Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>70</sup> Thaler, R. H., Sunstein, C. R. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*", New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>71</sup> Jones, R., Pykett J. Whitehead, M. (2013), "*Changing behaviours: on the rise of the psychological state*", Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

<sup>72</sup> Mill, J. (1859), "*On liberty*", London: J.W. Parker and Son.

<sup>73</sup> Waldron, J. (2014), "*It's all for your own good*", The New York Review.

the current policy-making process is too flawed to support any intervention, therefore, this would not necessarily advocate paternalist action. The fundamental argument is that if policymakers are themselves nudged to consider behavioural sciences, rather than just ignoring it, it will likely result in a public welfare extension. Therefore, it would seem that the specific critique is directed at the defence of a paternalistic behaviour<sup>74</sup>.

The second critique claims that behaviourally informed policies are manipulative because they frequently address unconscious, automatic aspects that influence behaviour. These concepts only result in manipulative policies when they are applied in such a way. In the real-world intervention's circumstances it can be quite challenging to practically determine which aspects of government action are manipulative and which are not, e.g. is it manipulative to paraphrase letters adding statements or sentences requesting for late tax payments since it has proven to be an effective (and truthful) intervention<sup>75</sup>? Those letters' intention has always been evident, and who receives such letters can rightly, and with good reasons, presume that the government is attempting to get them to pay their taxes. Indeed people can avoid receiving the letter, and its nudged text, by paying taxes on time<sup>76</sup>.

The third critique argues that applying behavioural sciences is criticized as being a form of disempowerment and infantilization since it is not promoting personal development or education. Behavioural science offers a variety of methods that people, both at aggregate or individual level, can consciously and purposely employ to better reach their objectives. A good example is the extensive amount of research demonstrating the effectiveness of improving goal setting through the use of 'implementation intentions'<sup>77</sup>. Again, Gigerenzer's work<sup>78</sup> provides a useful illustration of how we might proactively employ heuristics toward a better risk-understanding. These methods are strongly based on behavioural research, but they are empowering rather than draining, and have been, for quite long time, employed in policymaking as well<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), *"Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions"*, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>75</sup> Coleman, S. (1996), *"The Minnesota Income Tax Compliance Experiment State Tax Result"*, Minnesota Department of Revenue.

<sup>76</sup> Hallsworth, M., List, J., Metcalfe, R.D., Vlaev, I. (2014), *"The behaviouralist as tax collector: Using natural field experiments to enhance tax compliance"*, Working paper No. w20007, Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>77</sup> Gollwitzer, P.M., Sheeran, P. (2006), *"Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes"*, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*.

<sup>78</sup> Gigerenzer, G. (2014), *"Risk savvy: How to make good decisions"*, London: Allen Lane.

<sup>79</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), *"Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions"*, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

The fourth one is the technocratic critique. This one question whether the evidence supporting the behavioural science interventions within policies is reliable enough to provide for governmental action. Increasing the number of high-quality evaluations, through on the ground RCTs (Randomised Controlled Trials), in order to estimate the real-world side effect otherwise difficult to estimate<sup>80</sup>. However, it is frequently a subject of discussion the ‘when’ and ‘how’ to use those RCTs in order to make more accurate and specific, on a case-by-case basis, the policymaking process<sup>81</sup>.

Needless to say that for what it concerns the accusation vis-à-vis the state, often defined as nanny state, of acting through manipulative and captious interventions does not mean that government is accused of coercive interventions. The government would otherwise fail nudging, and therefore it would be object of rightful critiques. As a matter of fact there is a great spectrum of varieties that can range from supportive to coercive. Quoting, again, Thaler and Sunstein<sup>82</sup> nudge is described as “*any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives*”.

There is a fifth critique, raised by Schimmelpfennig and Muthukrishna<sup>83</sup>, the WEIRD People Problem. This critique is not directed only to the nudging theory but to BCTs as a whole. According to this critique many behavioural insights, biases, or assumptions about human behaviour are based on actual evidence which is, in turn, biased toward WEIRD people who do not represent the majority of people in most situations<sup>84</sup>. In this case, cultural evolutionary insights can help identify which insights are likely to be universal (e.g., defaults, social influence) and which are likely to differ or not

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<sup>80</sup> House of Lords (2011), Science and Technology Select Committee report. 2nd Report of Session 2010-12: “*Behaviour Change*”, London: The Stationery Office Limited.

<sup>81</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), “*Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions*”, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>82</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*”, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>83</sup> Schimmelpfennig, R., Muthukrishna, M. (2022), “*Cultural Evolutionary Behavioural Science in Public Policy*”, SSRN Electronic Journal.

<sup>84</sup> Apicella, C.L., Norenzayan, A., Henrich, J., (2020), “*Beyond WEIRD: A review of the last decade and a look ahead to the global laboratory of the future*”, *Evolution and Human Behavior*, Beyond Weird 41.

<sup>84</sup> Henrich, J., Heine, S.J., Norenzayan, A., (2010b), “*The weirdest people in the world?*”, *Behav Brain Sci* 33, 61–83.

<sup>84</sup> Henrich, J., (2020), “*The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*”, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.



reproduce<sup>85</sup>. An example of the latter is the endowment effect. According to this theory it is mandatory to carry out much more cross-cultural studies. As a matter of fact, public health policies may face opposition and non-compliance whether the nudge or the BCT is applied not taking into account the sample's culture. This is exactly the case suggested by Schimmelpfennig and Muthukrishna<sup>86</sup> of female genital mutilation (FGC). According to universal human rights, FGC is detrimental to women's health and wellbeing, yet legislation or BCT too strong to outlaw it would collide with regional cultural norms, provoking local population oppositions. Local populace, as referred by many scholars of the sector<sup>87</sup>, would see those exogenous initiatives as intrusions that impose ideals from outside the group.

In conclusion, Thaler e Sunstein<sup>88</sup> support two main arguments: The first claim is that small aspects of social situations, even those we don't notice, are all around us and can have a significant impact on how individuals behave (instead of 'even' I would rather say that 'especially' those we don't notice may have a huge impact on everyday life behaviours). Choice architecture is pervasive, inescapable, and has a significant impact on our judgments, for better or for worse. Second claim is the idea that libertarian paternalism is not an oxymoron as it has often been depicted by nudge opponents. Choice architects can safeguard individual autonomy, or freedom of choice, while guiding, or better to say 'nudging', individuals toward making their lives safer and, more generally, better off.

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<sup>85</sup> Apicella, C.L., Azevedo, E.M., Fowler, J.H., Christakis, N.A., (2013), "*Evolutionary Origins of the Endowment Effect: Evidence from Hunter-Gatherers*", American Economic Review 104, 1793–1805.

<sup>86</sup> Schimmelpfennig, R., Muthukrishna, M. (2022), "*Cultural Evolutionary Behavioural Science in Public Policy*", SSRN Electronic Journal.

<sup>87</sup> Camilotti, G., (2016), "*Interventions to Stop Female Genital Cutting and the Evolution of the Custom: Evidence on Age at Cutting in Senegal*", Journal of African Economies 25, 133– 158.

<sup>87</sup> Gruenbaum, E. (2015), "*The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective, The Female Circumcision Controversy*", University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>87</sup> Shell-Duncan, B., Hernlund, Y. (2000), "*Female 'circumcision' in Africa: Culture, Controversy, and Change*", Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO.

<sup>87</sup> Vogt, S., Mohammed Zaid, N.A., El Fadil Ahmed, H., Fehr, E., Efferson, C. (2016), "*Changing cultural attitudes towards female genital cutting*", Nature 538, 506–509.

<sup>88</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*", New Haven: Yale University Press.

## 2. Nudging from a social marketing approach

A significant and valuable contribution to behaviour change can be made by social marketing approach. However, its most effective aspects are frequently disregarded since this approach is generally poorly understood<sup>89</sup>. Although social marketing has been criticised of ‘disciplinary myopia’<sup>90</sup>, it is actually ideally positioned to play a significant and, possibly, even essential role in a new multidisciplinary paradigm<sup>91</sup>.

In order to introduce social marketing, I shall quote Peter Drucker’s <sup>92</sup> marketing definition:

*“Marketing is so basic that it cannot be considered a separate function. It is the whole business seen from the point of view of its final result, that is, from the customers point of view. (...) Business success is not determined by the producer but by the customer.”*

Marketing is not about selling what you make but ask which product customers would deem valuable instead<sup>93</sup>. Marketers are competitive, their aim is to gain market share by beating the competition. This kind of *forma mentis*’ distinguishes social marketing from other behaviour change approaches. According to Hastings<sup>94</sup>, only social marketers can offer ‘unique and meaningful benefits’ to citizens on the assumption that there is the possibility of choice, i.e. whether to accept or reject the offer. Therefore, the onus relies completely on the marketer, who must ensure that the offer is as attractive as possible.

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<sup>89</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), *“Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions”*, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>90</sup> Brug, J., Conner, M., Harre, N. and Kremers, S. (2005), *“The transtheoretical model and stages of change: a critique”*. Observations by five commentators on the paper by Adams, J. and White, M. (2004) *“Why don't stage based activity intervention promotions work?”*, Health Education Research, 20(2): 244-58.

<sup>90</sup> Rayner, G., Lang, T. (2011), *“Is nudge an effective public health strategy to tackle obesity? No”*, BMJ, 342(7803), d2177, 898-899.

<sup>91</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), *“Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions”*, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>92</sup> Drucker, P. (2006), *“Management: Tasks, responsibilities, practices”*, New York, NY: Harper and Row.

<sup>93</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), *“Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions”*, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>94</sup> Hastings, G. (2003), *“Relational paradigms in social marketing”*, Journal of Macromarketing, 23(1): 6-15.

In the 1960s, marketing professor Philip Kotler extended the concept of marketing, beyond the business settings in which it had traditionally been located<sup>95</sup>. Marketing used to be a tactic employed by companies to persuade potential customers to buy their products. From this perspective, marketing has long been seen as a means to influence large audiences, primarily through the use of media<sup>96</sup>. As the National Social Marketing Centre<sup>97</sup> stated, social marketing is an approach in which the same tools and techniques used to sell products are instead used to promote desired behaviours which benefit society as a whole. An essential aspect of marketing is Borden's<sup>98</sup> 4P model: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. Kotler and Zaltman<sup>99</sup> adapted the 4Ps model to social marketing from its original commercial marketing purpose. The aim was, and still is, to create the optimum strategic 'mix', throughout the 'P's manipulation, to help citizens to feel comfortable and able to change their behaviour. Kotler and Levy<sup>100</sup> stressed that it is in the government's best interest to reach out to some customers or clients, not just for sales purposes but to find out what they want and need. This new planned social change approach has been named social marketing. Social marketing re-discovered the behaviour change theory, mainly borrowed from psychology and sociology sciences. However, as already said, the innovation of this approach is to transfer these principles from the business area to the social one<sup>101</sup>, although that, instead of focusing just on purely economic or financial goals, marketing concepts could be successfully extended to the promotion of several social purposes<sup>102</sup>.

The 'social' in social marketing reflects the idea that would be reached if people in targeted populations could be persuaded to adopt desired actions or abstain from behaviours that are thought to be harmful to human health and well-being. That is, if enough people within the targeted group could be found and persuaded to embrace the suggested innovation, a desirable collective goal could

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<sup>95</sup> Kotler, P., Levy, S. J. (1969), "Broadening the Concept of Marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, 33, 10–15.

<sup>96</sup> Lazarsfeld, P. F., & Merton, R. K. (1949), "*Mass Communication, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action*", in W. Schramm (Ed.), Pp. 459-480, Mass Communications. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

<sup>97</sup> NSMC (2011), National Social Marketing Centre, "*Big pocket guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*", National Social Marketing Centre. UK.

<sup>98</sup> Borden, N. H. (1964), "*The Concept of the Marketing Mix*", *Journal of Advertising Research*, 2(Classics), 7–12.

<sup>99</sup> Kotler, P., Zaltman, G. (1971), "*Social marketing: an approach to planned social change*", *The Journal of Marketing*, 35(3), 3–12. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1249783>.

<sup>100</sup> Kotler, P., Levy, S. J. (1969), "*Broadening the Concept of Marketing*", *Journal of Marketing*, 33, 10–15.

<sup>101</sup> Chriss, J. (2015), "*Nudging and Social Marketing*", *Society*, 52(1), 54–61.

<sup>102</sup> Kotler, P., Zaltman, G. (1971), "*Social marketing: an approach to planned social change*", *The Journal of Marketing*, 35(3), 3–12. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1249783>.

be achieved<sup>103</sup>. Keeping in mind, though, that social marketing key principle is the development of mutually beneficial exchanges for citizens<sup>104</sup>, even though an exchange can be difficult to achieve when what is desired is to decrease or erase a pre-existing behaviour. For instance, Hastings<sup>105</sup> mentions that more than 50 % of premature deaths are due to nutrition choices and behaviours. Thus, if persons could be informed about the better options available, e.g. nudging themselves into eating more fruits and vegetables<sup>106</sup>, there would be a significant reduction in premature mortality.

Social marketers, among their techniques, make use of nudging, the behavioural economics originated tool<sup>107</sup>. As seen in the previous chapter, nudging is a concept which argues that decisions made by individuals can be influenced by exploiting human behaviour psychological insights rather than applying violence or legislation. Yet, nudging and social marketing have long been two concepts far apart from each other. Social marketing was primarily concerned with beliefs and attitudes, rather than behaviour. As a matter of fact it was initially defined as “program calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas”<sup>108</sup>. Only in more recent times, and with the nowadays adopted definitions<sup>109</sup>, the behaviour change aspect became a cornerstone<sup>110</sup>.

For several decades, social marketers have been doing, more or less silently, behavioural economics job. The problem lies on the techniques used to change behaviour and specifically on

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<sup>103</sup> Chriss, J. (2015), “Nudging and Social Marketing”, *Society*, 52(1), 54–61.

<sup>104</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), “*Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions*”, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>105</sup> Hastings, G. (2003) “*Relational paradigms in social marketing*”, *Journal of Macromarketing*, 23(1): 6-15.

<sup>106</sup> Pollard, J., Kirk, S. F. L., Cade, J. E. (2002), “*Factors Affecting Food Choice in Relation to Fruit and Vegetable Intake: A Review*”, *Nutrition Research Reviews*, 15, 373–387.

<sup>107</sup> Tapp, A., Spotswood, F. (2013), “*From the 4Ps to COM-SM: reconfiguring the social marketing mix*”, *Journal of Social Marketing*, 3(3), 206–222. <http://doi.org/10.1108/JSOCM-01-2013-0011>.

<sup>107</sup> NSMC (2011), “*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*”, National Social Marketing Centre. Retrieved from [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pdf).

<sup>108</sup> Kotler, P., Zaltman, G. (1971), “*Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change*”, *Journal of Marketing*, 35, 3–12.

<sup>109</sup> Kotler, P., & Lee, N. (2008), “*Social Marketing: Influencing Behaviors for Good*”, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

<sup>109</sup> NSMC (2011), “*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*”, National Social Marketing Centre. Retrieved from [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pdf).

<sup>110</sup> Andreasen, A.R. (1995), “*Marketing social change: Changing behaviour to promote health, social development, and the environment*”, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

nudge enforceability. On the tools used for the interventions, Soraghan et al.<sup>111</sup> claim that social marketers should be reflexive in their own practices rather than relying on Thaler and Sunstein's<sup>112</sup> justifications for its use. Social marketers do not have a preferential theory to use in their interventions or their search for insights. In order to 'ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness in the use of scarce resources', marketers examine case-by-case problems from a theoretical base, applying a careful and mandatory segmentation of the sample, i.e. subdivision of the target audience, and of the environment to better achieve their purpose<sup>113</sup>. It should be recalled, how Andreasen<sup>114</sup> himself clarifies, that segmentation, i.e. dividing the population according to different characteristics, and targeting, i.e. focusing on one or more sub-groups to the detriment of others, are two different key concepts, equally important for social marketing interventions. Differently from other approaches, social marketers operate in a specific period of time, on a specific behaviour within a specific group<sup>115</sup>.

Nowadays social marketing purpose is firmly rooted in social change and it is applied in three areas: downstream, midstream or upstream. The three expressions stem from an experiment in which the best approach to prevent people from drowning is considered<sup>116</sup>. The new, fostered, behaviour should be adopted by citizens on a voluntarily basis, the targeted audience should be able to see the benefit resulting from adopting the new behaviour and, therefore, choosing to engage in the process rather than being forced to. An example of this threefold approach to behaviour change is the obesity problem. It is assumed that people will make their decisions on food or exercise by being fully informed about the health benefits they would gain with such behaviours. Once made the implicit assumption that motivation is strong and the reason why the behaviour is not adopted lies within the lack of comprehensible information, there are the three options to achieve behaviour change.

According to the downstream area, a marketer create an attractive offer that invites people to join a specific plan. According to this social marketing technique, the existing levels of motivation

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<sup>111</sup> Soraghan, C., Thomson, E., Ensor, J. (2016), "*Using food labels to evaluate the practice of nudging in a social marketing context*", Social Business, Edinburgh Napier University.

<sup>112</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*", New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>113</sup> Andreasen, A.R. (2002), "*Marketing social marketing in the social change marketplace*", Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, 3-13.

<sup>114</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>115</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>116</sup> Soraghan, C. (2019), "*An analysis of nudging as a social marketing technique using Front of Pack nutrition labels: A study of women's perceptions of food labels*", Edinburgh Napier University.

and knowledge are insufficient to generate changes without some extent of external help. Therefore, the effective existence of an alternative, bundle of benefits, is mandatory in order to achieve the desired behaviour change.

The upstream social marketing is concerned with influencing public policy to better address the causal agents and determinants of social problems. This option focus on the change creation within policy to make targets' environment more prone to integrate the desired behaviour. Many scholars advocate that social marketers should consider implementing upstream and downstream methods simultaneously to increase their campaigns' effectiveness<sup>117</sup>.

Finally, it becomes mandatory for scholars to use a law-based approach when the targeted group cannot be overcome with additional incentives through exchange<sup>118</sup>. Therefore, education and marketing offer free choices, accepting that if people fail to adopt pro-social behaviour, the society will cover these choices' costs.

On the other hand there is the regulatory option, i.e. to use coercion to achieve a purpose, typically chosen whenever the costs that would weigh on society are too high to allow free choice. According to Rothschild's<sup>119</sup> model there are three types of behaviour change: educating people, offering an exchange, and forcing change through law. This means that any intervention including an offer of some sort is a '*de iure*' social marketing intervention. Usually government's obesity reduction strategies involve both social marketing and nudge techniques<sup>120</sup>

According to Lefebvre<sup>121</sup> social market does not rely on theory but combine science with audiences' perspective. The author describe social marketers as follows:

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<sup>117</sup> Hoek, J., Jones, S. C. (2011), "*Regulation, public health and social marketing: a behaviour change trinity*", Journal of Social Marketing 1(1): 32-44.

<sup>117</sup> Wymer, W. (2011), "*Developing more effective social marketing strategies*", Journal of Social Marketing, 1(1): 17-31.

<sup>118</sup> Rothschild, M.L. (1999), "*Carrots, sticks, and promises: a conceptual framework for the management of public health and social issue behaviours*", Journal of Marketing, 63(4): 24-37.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>120</sup> Herrick, C. (2007), "*Risky bodies: Public health, social marketing and the governance of obesity*", Geoforum, 38(1), 90-102. doi: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.06.003.

<sup>121</sup> Lefebvre, R. C. (2009), "*Getting Social Marketing Wrong in Health Behaviour and Health Education, News and Views on Social Marketing and Social Change*", Retrieved May 9, 2018, from [http://socialmarketing.blogs.com/r\\_craig\\_lefebvres\\_social/2009/11/getting-social-marketing-wrong-in-health-behavior-and-health-education.html](http://socialmarketing.blogs.com/r_craig_lefebvres_social/2009/11/getting-social-marketing-wrong-in-health-behavior-and-health-education.html).

*“One principle that distinguishes the best social marketers, is an unrelenting understanding, empathy and advocacy of the perspective of our community that is not slanted by what the theory or research evidence does or does not tell us”.*<sup>122</sup>

Social marketing, tackling public issues, brings a unique offering, which is the integration of consumers’ voice. According to this point of view, social marketing acts as a *‘trait d’union’* between how *Humans* theoretical ‘ought’ to behave and how they actually behave. As added value to behaviour change techniques, social marketing can offer a market orientation, i.e. the marketing mindset. A considerable amount of literature<sup>123</sup> demonstrates the power of this concept. Social marketers are behaviour change designers, therefore, can work alongside other businesses to design more effective interventions.

Social marketing is centrally placed to offer a wide variety of possible solutions to behaviour change. However, despite being an effective and helpful approach, social marketers suffer from a series of myths and misunderstandings<sup>124</sup>.

It is often made the assumption that social *marketing* equals *social media*. However, there is no factual link between the two<sup>125</sup>. It is common perception that social marketing means advertising, this arose from many programs’ tendency to be erroneously labelled as ‘social marketing’<sup>126</sup>. Often

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<sup>122</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>123</sup> Kohli, A.K., Jaworski, B.J. (1990), *“Market orientation: the construct, research propositions, and managerial implications”*, Journal of Marketing, 54(2): 1-18.

<sup>123</sup> Narver, J.C., Slater, S. F. (1990), *“The effect of a market orientation on business profitability”*, Journal of Marketing, 54(4): 20-35.

<sup>124</sup> Donovan, R. (2011), *“Social marketing’s mythunderstandings”*, Journal of Social Marketing, 1(1): 8-16.

<sup>125</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), *“Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions”*, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>126</sup> Peterson, M., Abraham, A., Waterfield, A. (2005), *“Marketing physical activity: lessons learned from a state wide media campaign”*, Health Promotion Practice, 6(4): 437-46.

<sup>126</sup> Henao, J.C., Rodriguez, J., Wilbum, S.T. (2006), *“Salsa y Salud: increasing healthy lifestyle awareness through a radio-based initiative”*, Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 38(4): 267-8.

<sup>126</sup> Maddock, J.E., Silbanuz, A., Reger-Nash, B. (2008), *“Formative research to develop a mass media campaign to increase physical activity and nutrition in a multiethnic state”*, Journal of Health Communication, 13(3): 208-15.

<sup>126</sup> Peterson, M., Chandlee, M., Abraham, A. (2008), *“Cost-effectiveness an analysis of a statewide media campaign to promote adolescent physical activity”*, Health Promotion Practice, 9(4): 426-33.

<sup>126</sup> Reger-Nash, B., Bauman, A., Cooper, L., Chey, T., Simon, K.J., Brann, M., Leyden, K.M. (2008), *“WV walks: replication with expanded reach”*, Journal of Physical Activity and Health, 5(1): 19-27.

<sup>126</sup> Gebel, K., Bauman, A.E., Reger-Nash, B., Leyden, K.M. (2011), *“Does the environment moderate the impact of a mass media campaign to promote walking?”*, American Journal of Health Promotion, 26(1): 45-8.

social marketing labelled campaigns fail to extend beyond communication, a concerning matter when they subsequently proceed to label themselves as having a full marketing mix.

It is partially true that social marketing interventions too often take a short-term approach to behavioural change<sup>127</sup>, but it must be recalled that behaviour change is difficult when budgets are short term and do not amount to the resources that competitive forces have at their disposal. According to UK statistics reported in Hastings and Angus<sup>128</sup>, the efforts to promote safer drinking (\$ 104 million) were significantly overcome by alcohol advertising (\$ 4.9 billion). It resulted that people were 239 times more likely to see an alcohol advertisement than a safe drinking one<sup>129</sup>. However, social marketing is not the only behaviour change field receiving this criticism.

Another critique states that marketing is expensive and difficult to justify. This is a purely UK-focused criticism since social marketing budget was reduced in favour of BIT 'Nudge Unit' funding. The criticism is based in so far as social marketers fail to provide adequate return on investment since they rely on costly research and mass advertising, whose value is difficult to measure, unlike nudge technique. The latter are typically small in scale, cost-free and can be tested in controlled trials over short time periods, allowing rapid judgments on its cost-effectiveness. However, marketing has a long tradition of using matched controls to assess the effectiveness of campaigns. Additionally, while social media advertising may cost, it has a large audience. The UK Department for Transport, which provided funding for the 'Think' campaign to promote road safety, said the effort was effective despite needing a £10 million annual budget. It is true that market research is costly, but, when marketers are working on new large-scale programmes, they need insights to assist them avoid significant cost penalties, therefore market research is necessary. However, this is no more a controversial argument since nudge was recently adopted by the National Social Marketing Centre as a technique to be used by social marketers too.

Another common critique is that marketing is part of the problem since it is used by the very firms who cause the most problems, e.g. Coca-Cola or McDonalds. To answer those critiques, Hastings brought up these techniques success asking: "*Why should the Devil have all the best tunes?*"<sup>130</sup>. Linked to this critique is the one condemning social marketing of amorality. Rewarding

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<sup>127</sup> Grier, S., Bryant, C.A. (2005), "*Social marketing in public health*", Annual Review of Public Health, 26: 319-39.

<sup>128</sup> Hastings, G., Angus, K. (2011), "*When is social marketing not social marketing?*", Journal of Social Marketing, 1(1): 45-53.

<sup>129</sup> Rundle-Thiele, S.R., Russell-Bennett, R., Leo, C., Dietrich, T. (2013b), "*Moderating teen drinking: combining social marketing and education*", Health Education, 113(5): 2.

<sup>130</sup> Hastings, G. (2007), "*Social marketing: Why should the devil have all the best tunes?*", Oxford: Elsevier.



a child with money for reading is an example with which Sandel<sup>131</sup> points out that the child's response will be simple and powerful, even though damaging since the value of reading the book for higher reasoning is lost. Sandel<sup>132</sup> says that “*the shallows affect the deep*”, that is to say that our everyday small decisions affect our values and beliefs.

One last critique toward social marketing is to constantly challenge or question the beliefs and norms held within the discipline. Key aspect, here, is the status quo concept, the idea that social marketing initiatives can have no negative effects, which may end in power disparities creation. This idea is used to highlight the function of and potential harm produced by the status quo. Tadjewski<sup>133</sup> draws attention to the power disparity that results from consumers' lack of control over whether they are the target of social marketing initiatives. “Social marketing tries to modify the behaviour of individuals acting in ways that are perceived as problematic by a range of interest groups; not always seen as such by the individuals targeted for intervention. This creates the possibility of manipulation, particularly if the consumer is someone who social marketing efforts are made to, rather than someone who was thoroughly consulted throughout the development of a programme”. Thus, there is a power imbalance which needs to be addressed. In addition, nudging use makes this power imbalance even greater since consumers may never know that they were targeted.

Now, it has been stated that social marketers, traditionally, pursued behaviour change by the creation of offers among which individuals, valuing benefits and disadvantages, voluntarily decided to choose one<sup>134</sup>. As a result, this behaviour change approach entailed some sort of mental activity. On the other hand, nudge campaigns leverage on behaviour's ‘mindless choosing’ aspect<sup>135</sup>. Decisions can be influenced by minute changes in the environment since decisions are taken by our System 1. Although in a more pragmatic sense, the topic of whether or not nudging falls under the umbrella of social marketing has been brought up. French and Gordon<sup>136</sup> argue that, even though persuading people to passively engage in a certain way may help develop a desired behaviour, this is

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<sup>131</sup> Sandel, M. (2012), “*What money can't buy: The moral limits of markets*”, Penguin: Allen Lane.

<sup>132</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>133</sup> Varey, R., Pirson, M. (2014), “*Humanistic Marketing*”, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

<sup>134</sup> Andreasen, A.R. (1995), “*Marketing social change: Changing behaviour to promote health, social development, and the environment*”, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>134</sup> Bagozzi, R.P. (1975), “*Social exchange in marketing*”, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 3(3-4), 314-327. doi: 10.1007/BF02729292

<sup>135</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*”, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>136</sup> French, J., & Gordon, R. (2015), “*Strategic Social Marketing*”, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

not the main goal of a social marketer. Instead, “the heart of the contribution of social marketing procedures” is identifying which particular messages would resonate with a given target audience<sup>137</sup>. In other words, their purpose is to collect an in-depth insight vision of the sample behaviour being targeted. However, behavioural economics provides the insight rather than an understanding of a target group, therefore, nudges are less targeted. Thus, the debate on nudge applicability focuses on what nudging lacks in terms of reaching social marketers’ primary goals.

Tapp and Spotswood<sup>138</sup> do not completely exclude nudges, instead group it into those social marketing activities involving persuasion. Here, nudge is placed as a secondary concept, while the core concept is covered by consumer’s behaviour insight<sup>139</sup>. More and more scholars<sup>140</sup> demand a social marketing expansion following up the change of the times, whether that be with nudge incorporation and non-voluntary behaviour change if deemed necessary. Other scholars<sup>141</sup> find it difficult to accept social marketers’ use of nudging, asking for more caution vis-à-vis a government-citizen manipulation, regardless of the outcomes. Nudges, due to their particular nature, attract far less hostility or doubts than a legislative approach. Nudges are simply seen as more acceptable than oppressive policies which may result in a nanny state. It is fair to say that someone will accept nudging whilst others will be repelled, nevertheless, the National Social Marketing Centre approved the use of nudging<sup>142</sup>. It deemed it a satisfactory technique, making it an available option to social marketers.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>138</sup> Tapp, A., Spotswood, F. (2013), “*From the 4Ps to COM-SM: reconfiguring the social marketing mix*”, *Journal of Social Marketing*, 3(3), 206–222. <http://doi.org/10.1108/JSOCM-01-2013-0011>.

<sup>139</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>140</sup> Dibb, S. (2014), “*Up, up and away: social marketing breaks free*”, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30(11), 1159–1185. <http://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.943264>.

<sup>140</sup> Donovan, R. (2011), “*Social marketing’s mythunderstandings*”, *Journal of Social Marketing*, 1(1), 8–16. <http://doi.org/10.1108/20426761111104392>.

<sup>140</sup> Lefebvre, R. C. (2011), “*An integrative model for social marketing*”, *Journal of Social Marketing*, 1(1), 54–72. <http://doi.org/10.1108/20426761111104437>.

<sup>141</sup> Chriss J.J. (2015), “*Nudging and Social Marketing*”, Springer Science+Business Media New York 2015, published online.

<sup>141</sup> Rayner, G., & Lang, T. (2011), “*Is nudge an effective public health strategy to tackle obesity? No*”, *BMJ*, 342(7803), d2177, 898-899. doi: 10.1136/bmj.d2177.

<sup>141</sup> Rebonato, R. (2014), “*A Critical Assessment of Libertarian Paternalism*”, *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 37(3), 357-396. doi: 10.1007/s10603-014-9265-1.

<sup>142</sup> NSMC (2011), “*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*”, National Social Marketing Centre. Retrieved from [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pdf)

Marketers, in seeking to change a specific behaviour, also recognise the need to change policymaking behaviour, that is why it is said that social marketers are, to a certain degree, politicians too. In their review, Stead et al.<sup>143</sup> found evidence that social marketing-based interventions could be successful in influencing policy and professional practice as well as people's attitude across a vast range of behaviours, targeting groups in a variety of situations, e.g. according to Carins<sup>144</sup>, social marketing has the potential to promote healthy behaviour when used to its full degree. At the same time, some social marketing strategies can be seen as a form nudging, aiming to change a behaviour while not forbidding an undesirable one. From the standpoint of social marketing, we should all take responsibility for public' health and wellbeing, as ensuring that people make wise dietary and beverage decisions. This means that the public must approve those interventions for them to be effective, while more subtle approaches of nudging should be used on a resistant public to reach the intended outcomes. The idea that government is trying to influence people to make healthier decisions, a 'Big Brother', should leave more space to considerations as "...we, as communities, need to work together to solve our problems, including public health challenges"<sup>145</sup>.

Strategies based on nudging and social marketing are successful in encouraging healthier choices and work to maintain their effectiveness over time. The use of nudging and social marketing techniques in the food environment, more than the others, seems to perfectly adapt to the examination of the change in purchasing and eating behaviour. However, beside targeting individuals willing to change their behaviour, another interesting approach is to work and shape the environment in a way that it encourages individuals to instinctively make healthier choices. The latter approach could have a more durable impact, since it acts on System 1 decisions, therefore, does not require cognitive capacity<sup>146</sup>. Individuals seem to have freedom of choice, as there is no set alternative, but the products offered, mixed with the impulsive human choice behaviour, are determinant for customers' decisions

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<sup>143</sup> Stead, M., Gordon, R., Angus, K., McDermott, L.A. (2007), "*Systematic review of social marketing effectiveness*", Health Education, 107(2):126–191.

<sup>144</sup> Carins, J.E., Rundle-Thiele, S.R. (2014), "*Eating for the better: a social marketing review (2000–2012)*", Public Health Nutr. 17(7):1628–1639.

<sup>145</sup> Wiley, L. F., Berman, M. L., & Blanke, D. (2013), "*Who's Your Nanny? Choice, Paternalism and Public Health in the Age of Personal Responsibility*", Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics, 41(s1), 88–91.

<sup>146</sup> Marteau, T.M., Ogilvie, D., Roland, M., Suhrcrke, M., Kelly, M.P. (2011), "*Judging nudging: can nudging improve population health?*", Brit Med J. 342:d228.

since, as Bucher<sup>147</sup> and Kahneman<sup>148</sup> uphold, decisions are mostly based on automatic heuristic rather than on prolonged deliberation.

Shaping an environment can be described as choice architecture or nudging. Its purpose is to produce a desired behaviour by making it easier and more desirable. For instance, by placing at eye-sight healthier snack rather than the unhealthy ones<sup>149</sup>. According to Arno<sup>150</sup>, nudging strategies, on average, result in a 15.3% increase in healthy nutritional choices. However, key element to develop an effective intervention is knowing the target audience, as sustained by social marketing.

I deem important to end this chapter on nudging from a social marketing approach by providing an example. Based on nudging and social marketing techniques Velema<sup>151</sup> conducted an intervention on Dutch cafeterias, namely “worksite cafeteria 2.0”. The experiment was aimed at improving both food purchase and eating behaviour in a healthier way.

The starting point of this intervention were the theories of nudging and social marketing. Where, for nudge it was used Thaler<sup>152</sup> definition: “*Any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people’s behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives*”; while for social marketing French<sup>153</sup> one: “*Social marketing is the systematic application of marketing alongside other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioural goals for a social good*”.

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<sup>147</sup> Bucher, T., Collins, C., Rollo, M.E., McCaffrey, T.A., De Vlieger, N., Van der Bend, D., Truby, H., Perez-Cueto, F.J. (2016), “*Nudging consumers towards healthier choices: a systematic review of positional influences on food choice*”, Br J Nutr;115:2252–63.

<sup>148</sup> Kahneman, D. (2012), “*Thinking fast and slow*”, London: Penguin Books Ltd.

<sup>149</sup> Bucher, T., Collins, C., Rollo, M.E., McCaffrey, T.A., De Vlieger, N., Van der Bend, D., Truby, H., Perez-Cueto, F.J. (2016), “*Nudging consumers towards healthier choices: a systematic review of positional influences on food choice*”, Br J Nutr;115:2252–63.

<sup>149</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*”, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>150</sup> Arno, A., Thomas, S., (2016), “*The efficacy of nudge theory strategies in influencing adult dietary behaviour: a systematic review and meta-analysis*”, BMC Public Health, 16:676.

<sup>151</sup> Velema, E., Vyth, E.L., Steenhuis, I.H.M. (2017) “*Using nudging and social marketing techniques to create healthy worksite cafeterias in the Netherlands: intervention development and study design*”, BMC Public Health.

<sup>152</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*”, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>153</sup> French, J., Blair-Stevens, C. (2006), “*Social marketing national benchmark criteria*”, London: UK National Social Marketing Centre.

Many nudging strategies, as the default option, were used in WC 2.0<sup>154</sup>. However, Velema et al.<sup>155</sup>, since they were adopting social marketing techniques as well, were able to use changing price strategies too. As a matter of fact, price strategies do not respect nudging conditions since a price increase does violate freedom of choice by removing an option<sup>156</sup>. Throughout the intervention resulted that a higher number of ‘healthier choice’ were sold in the intervention cafeterias, in accordance with the WC 2.0 intervention purpose. Social marketing strategies and fourteen nudges were carried out throughout the intervention, proving the simultaneous applicability and effectiveness of the two, despite the critiques.

Notwithstanding the growing consensus that nudging strategies obtained and its promising intervention results in increasing healthy food purchases<sup>157</sup>, studies of this kind of interventions are rare, moreover, the methodologic quality and reporting mediocre<sup>158</sup>.

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- <sup>154</sup> Blumenthal-Barby, J.S., Burroughs, H. (2012), “*Seeking better health care outcomes: the ethics of using the ‘nudge’*”, Am J Bioethics; 12:1–10.
- <sup>155</sup> Velema, E., Vyth, E.L., Steenhuis, I.H.M. (2017), “*Using nudging and social marketing techniques to create healthy worksite cafeterias in the Netherlands: intervention development and study design*”, BMC Public Health.
- <sup>156</sup> Patsch, A.J., Smith, J.H., Liebert, M.L., Behrens, T.K., Charles, T. (2016), “*Improving healthy eating and the bottom line: impact of a price incentive program in 2 hospital cafeterias*”, Am J Health Promot 30:425–32.
- <sup>156</sup> Block, J.P., Chandra, A., McManus, K.D., Willett, W.C. (2010), “*Point-of-purchase price and education intervention to reduce consumption of sugary soft drinks*”, Am J Public Health, 100:1427–33
- <sup>157</sup> Bucher, T., Collins, C., Rollo, M.E., McCaffrey, T.A., De Vlieger, N., Van der Bend, D., Truby, H., Perez-Cueto, F.J. (2016), “*Nudging consumers towards healthier choices: a systematic review of positional influences on food choice*”, Br J Nutr;115:2252–63.
- <sup>157</sup> Arno, A., Thomas, S., (2016), “*The efficacy of nudge theory strategies in influencing adult dietary behaviour: a systematic review and meta-analysis*”, BMC Public Health, 16:676.
- <sup>157</sup> Gardner, C.D., Whitsel, L.P., Thorndike, A.N., Marrow, M.W., Otten, J.J., Foster, G.D., Carson, J.A., Johnson, R.K. (2014), “*Food-and-beverage environment and procurement policies for healthier work environments*”, Nutr Rev, 72:390–410.
- <sup>157</sup> Broers, V.J.V., De Breucker, C., Van den Broucke, S., Luminet O. (2017), “*A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effectiveness of nudging to increase fruit and vegetable choice*”, Eur J Public Health, 27:912– 20.
- <sup>158</sup> Broers, V.J.V., De Breucker, C., Van den Broucke, S., Luminet O. (2017), “*A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effectiveness of nudging to increase fruit and vegetable choice*”, Eur J Public Health, 27:912– 20.
- <sup>158</sup> Thorndike, A.N., Riis, J., Sonnenberg L.M., Levy D.E. (2014), “*Traffic-light labels and choice architecture: promoting healthy food choices*”, Am J Prev Med, 46:143–9.

### 3. Behavioural economics and social marketing: nudge comparison

For what it concerns nudge from the behavioural economics approach there is not much else left to say. As explained in the first chapter, nudge was conceived in behavioural' womb by Thaler and Sunstein<sup>159</sup>. Nudging technique was adopted relatively fast and without particular problems by most behavioural scholars. The trouble stands within social marketing acceptance of nudge. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous chapter, *therein lies the rub*. Nevertheless, in this chapter I will analyse the main critical points of nudging by both approaches point of view providing a comparison between the two.

There are some important differences between behavioural economics and social marketing which have been source of debate. From governments' point of view, social marketing was perceived to be a less attractive option mainly for three reasons<sup>160</sup>.

Primarily, since social marketing overly focused on persuasive methods to produce behaviour changes, even before nudge use. Thus, this was seen to reflect a 'nannying' approach. Behavioural economics' nudges, instead, simply rearrange choices' presentation, therefore, are seen as less intrusive options. It should be recalled that, as Andrew Lansley<sup>161</sup> claims, government's priority is to nudge its citizens in the right direction, to support positive choices, not nannying. This attitude leads back to a specific critique addressed to nudging, i.e. manipulation. Often referred to as disempowerment or infantilization, it is strongly opposed by nudges' sceptics and social marketers too. Indeed, behavioural economics' scholars defend themselves mentioning the 'libertarian paternalism'<sup>162</sup> concept, that is to say that first of all interventions are in favour of *Humans*, who otherwise would take non-optimal choices, and that are easy to avoid, even though nudges act on the automatic and subconscious part of individuals. This critique is nowadays directed to the social marketing' scholars using nudges too. However, marketers' employment of nudge distinguish itself from the behavioural economics' approach as long as social marketing carries out an in-depth study

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<sup>159</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*", New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>160</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), "*Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions*", Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>161</sup> Lansley, A. (2010), "*A new approach to public health*", Speech by the secretary of state for Health to the UK Faculty of Public Health Conference.

<sup>162</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*", New Haven: Yale University Press.

of environment and people, trying to involve the latter so that they, by themselves, rationally choose to adopt a different behaviour.

Second reason is that social marketing is criticized for demanding significantly higher resources. Indeed, marketing generally requires in-depth qualitative research, as well as media time and coverage, which are both burdensome for the government's finances. Moreover, marketing actions were perceived as additional to the ones already exerted by the government. On the contrary, behavioural economics were seen to work with and within the structure of the policy itself, therefore not imposing additional costs. The costs problem, which is primarily a UK-based matter, is a very sensitive issue since it has gone to exacerbate the differences between the two approaches. It is not a mystery that to remove cigarettes from a street is easier and cost-less to place an ashtray, which enables cigarettes' butts voting, rather than to carry out an in-depth study on the social issues which push white men between 21 and 45 years old to throw their cigarettes' butts on the street at night, and then nudge them to change behaviour. However, by adopting the former approach it would only be temporarily solved a problem which is much vaster and deep-rooted in certain layers of the society.

Third and final reason is a non-negligible amount of scepticism toward social marketing effectiveness in changing behaviour. General opinion was that social marketing generated interventions from qualitative evidence which did not predict actual behaviour, assessing it through self-reports which were not able to well capture behaviour. On the other hand, more reliable evidence of its interventions' impact on behaviour seemed to be provided by behavioural sciences. In UK it resulted in a position by the Department of Health's 2011 publication<sup>163</sup>, namely "Changing behaviour, improving outcomes: A new social marketing strategy for public health":

*"In the past, we have generally tried to change attitudes as a precursor or accompaniment to changing behaviours. While this feels intuitively right, it is troubling that, in health, people's behaviours so often conflict with their stated attitudes. By changing the choice architecture, for example by changing default options or changing perceptions of social norms, it may be possible to change what people do without necessarily changing their attitudes... We will commit public money only where there is evidence that social marketing can change those behaviours that lead to improved health outcomes. In consequence, this (social marketing) strategy will be delivered with substantially less than the spend committed in previous years."*<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Department of Health (2011), "Changing behaviour, improving outcomes: A new social marketing strategy for public health", London, DH.

<sup>164</sup> Ibidem.

In the second chapter it was stated that social marketing is the process which applies marketing theory and practice to provoke a behaviour change aimed at social prosperity. An approach that seeks to find the best way to allow people to choose for themselves the desirable behaviours to be adopted, rather than coercing people into a pre-established one<sup>165</sup>. Social marketers recently adopted a new technique, namely nudging. However, the recently adopted, and controversial, technique has not been greeted by all marketers, on the contrary it was welcomed with some doubts<sup>166</sup>. Indeed, it raised issues on nudge adaptability toward social marketers *modus operandi*. The question was recently solved with the current nudge adoption into marketers' toolkit<sup>167</sup>. It was primarily adopted since nudging proved to be a powerful tool by tapping into people's judgement fallibilities and irrationality, predominantly based on heuristics.

French<sup>168</sup> defined social marketing as an approach “*to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good*”. Over the past decades, governments have

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- <sup>165</sup> NSMC (2011), “*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*”, National Social Marketing Centre, [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pdf).
- <sup>165</sup> Lefebvre, R. C. (2011), “*An integrative model for social marketing*”, *Journal of Social Marketing*, 1(1), 54–72. <http://doi.org/10.1108/20426761111104437>.
- <sup>166</sup> Chriss J.J. (2015), “*Nudging and Social Marketing*”, Springer Science+Business Media New York 2015, published online.
- <sup>166</sup> Chriss, J. (2016), “*Influence, Nudging, and Beyond*”, *Society*, 53(1), 89–96”, <http://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-015-9975-2>.
- <sup>166</sup> Gigerenzer, G. (2015), “*On the Supposed Evidence for Libertarian Paternalism*”, *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 6(3), 361–383. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-015-0248-1>.
- <sup>166</sup> Hastings, G., Domegan, C. (2017), “*Social marketing: rebels with a cause*”, New York: Routledge.
- <sup>166</sup> Mullane, M., Sheffrin, S. (2012), “*White Paper: Regulatory Nudges in Practice*”, Prepared for Conference on Responsible Regulation. Department of Economics and the Murphy Institute Tulane University, Louisiana, US. Retrieved from [http://murphy.tulane.edu/files/events/Regulatory\\_Nudges\\_feb\\_24.pdf](http://murphy.tulane.edu/files/events/Regulatory_Nudges_feb_24.pdf).
- <sup>166</sup> Roberto, C. A., Kawachi, I. (2014), “*Use of Psychology and Behavioral Economics to Promote Healthy Eating*”, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 47(6), 832–837, <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2014.08.002>.
- <sup>167</sup> NSMC (2011), “*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*”, National Social Marketing Centre. Retrieved from [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pdf).
- <sup>167</sup> Tapp, A., & Spotswood, F. (2013), “*From the 4Ps to COM-SM: reconfiguring the social marketing mix*”, *Journal of Social Marketing*, 3(3), 206–222. doi: 10.1108/JSOCM-01-2013-0011.
- <sup>168</sup> French, J. (2013), “*Consensus Definition of Social Marketing*”, International Social Marketing Association, Retrieved from [https://www.i-socialmarketing.org/assets/social\\_marketing\\_definition.pdf](https://www.i-socialmarketing.org/assets/social_marketing_definition.pdf).



increasingly turned to social marketers in order to tackle delicate public issue such as obesity<sup>169</sup>. It is fair to say that social marketers' approach to behaviour change has slightly changed with nudge adoption. Nudges, typically cheap and far-reaching, act upon unaware consumers<sup>170</sup>. Despite nudging proved its effectiveness there is a dichotomy between the technique and social marketing founding principles. Indeed, social marketing primary aim is to change behaviours in order to improve people' lives. The strong emphasis on the behaviour change aspect remains evident throughout the latest agreed definition by the International Social Marketing Association (ISMA), the European Social Marketing Association (ESMA) and the Australian Association of Social Marketing (AASM):

*“Social marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good.”<sup>171</sup>*

Therefore, behaviour change continues to be a core concept within social marketing. Many scholars of the field referred to this aspect as ‘the bottom line’, the mandatory element required to apply social marketing<sup>172</sup>, even, and especially, when nudging.

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<sup>169</sup> Andreasen, A. R. (2002), “*Marketing Social Marketing in the Social Change Marketplace*”, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 21(1), 3–13, <http://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jppm.21.1.3.17602>.

<sup>169</sup> Herrick, C. (2007), “*Risky bodies: Public health, social marketing and the governance of obesity*”, *Geoforum*, 38(1), 90–102, <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.06.003>.

<sup>170</sup> Sunstein, C.R. (2014), “*Nudging: A Very Short Guide*”, *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 37(4), 583- 588, doi: 10.1007/s10603-014-9273-1.

<sup>171</sup> French, J. (2013), “*Consensus Definition of Social Marketing*”, International Social Marketing Association, [https://www.i-socialmarketing.org/assets/social\\_marketing\\_definition.pdf](https://www.i-socialmarketing.org/assets/social_marketing_definition.pdf).

<sup>172</sup> Andreasen, A. R. (2002), “*Marketing Social Marketing in the Social Change Marketplace*”, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 21(1), 3–13, <http://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jppm.21.1.3.17602>.

<sup>172</sup> Lefebvre, R. C. (2011), “*An integrative model for social marketing*”, *Journal of Social Marketing*, 1(1), 54–72, <http://doi.org/10.1108/20426761111104437>.

Thus, as well as government teams, as BIT or TAC, nudge is now employed by social marketers too<sup>173</sup>. Thaler and Sunstein<sup>174</sup> emphasize a key characteristic of nudging, i.e. that individuals' freedom of choice is preserved, and it should be therefore easy for individuals to accept or ignore the nudge, the so-called 'libertarian paternalism'. Behavioural economics and social marketing nudging clearly share some common goals, namely the wish to improve social welfare by changing behaviour. Yet, even though nudging is deeply rooted in behavioural approach interventions, social marketing's use of nudge is a controversial issue primarily because it challenges some of its theoretical underpinnings.

According to French and Gordon<sup>175</sup>, there are two main reasons why marketers should reject nudging. *In primis*, they suggest that since nudging is not enough for social marketing, stronger targeted actions should be undertaken. Dibb<sup>176</sup> claims that social marketing is about empowering individuals such that they are able to make choices of their own; moreover, he agrees that marketers should tend to 'show the way' rather than nudging individuals toward a remedy. Hastings and Domegan<sup>177</sup> encapsulate this concept when saying: "*social marketing risks falling into the trap of copying this infantilising approach when it resorts to [...] nudging*". That is to say that social marketers would not have gains from nudge use to change behaviours because they would decrease individuals' rational involvement. Social marketing's aim, instead, is to engage individuals in the changing behaviour process, unlike behavioural economics approach.

The second reason stands in social marketers' intention. As a matter of fact, French and Gordon<sup>178</sup> claim that passive nudges would not encourage citizens thinking and understanding the intervention and the behaviour at stake. Social marketers' purpose is exactly to collect citizens' in-depth insights. On the contrary, nudge does not have a specific target audience, moreover, behavioural

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<sup>173</sup> French, J. (2011), "*Why nudging is not enough*", *Journal of Social Marketing*, 1(2), 154– 162, <http://doi.org/10.1108/20426761111141896>.

<sup>173</sup> NSMC, National Social Marketing Centre (2011), "*Big pocket guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*", National Social Marketing Centre, UK, [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pdf).

<sup>173</sup> Tapp, A., Spotswood, F. (2013), "*From the 4Ps to COM-SM: reconfiguring the social marketing mix*", *Journal of Social Marketing*, 3(3), 206-222. doi: 10.1108/JSOCM-01-2013-0011.

<sup>174</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*", New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>175</sup> French, J., Gordon, R. (2015), "*Strategic Social Marketing*", London: Sage Publications Ltd.

<sup>176</sup> Dibb, S. (2014), "*Up, up and away: social marketing breaks free*", *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30(11), 1159– 1185. <http://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.943264>.

<sup>177</sup> Hastings, G., Domegan, C. (2017), "*Social marketing: rebels with a cause*", New York: Routledge.

<sup>178</sup> French, J., Gordon, R. (2015), "*Strategic Social Marketing*", London: Sage Publications Ltd.

economics' insights are used to act passively on consumers, they are not deemed to learn something from the intervention. Yet nudging is endorsed by Wymer<sup>179</sup> as a good instrument for social marketing's interventions by indicating the possible benefits of the technique over the possible disadvantages. At the same time, Tapp and Spotswood<sup>180</sup> too are not completely negative on nudge adoption by social marketers. Instead, they classify nudges into a group of social marketing activities involving persuasion techniques. In light of the debate over nudging adoption possibility, the National Social Marketing Centre<sup>181</sup> approved of the use of nudging, stating that:

*“Social marketing encompasses the insights of behavioural economics. It is among the methods open to us when planning behavioural programmes and campaigns. It can help us to think about how we can alter the design of the environment, services or materials to make change easier.”*

Similarly, Dibb<sup>182</sup> recommended that nudges should be part of the cluster of tools available to social marketers. However, the debate is still far from the end. Spotswood et al.<sup>183</sup> conclude that *“Sometimes the role of social marketing [...] is to work with citizens to help them ‘save them from themselves’ [...]. Part of this approach is to sometimes work slightly ‘invisibly’ in order to do what is best for both individuals and society”*. Nudging is, therefore, seen, by someone, as an appropriate means for social marketing in situations where at stake is the social good. However, deciding what is good for the society is another sensitive issue in which social marketers' positions mix with politicians' ones. Indeed, Dibb and Carrigan<sup>184</sup> assert: *“if you are in social marketing, you are in politics”*.

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<sup>179</sup> Wymer, W. (2015), *“Innovations in Social Marketing and Public Health Communication: Improving the Quality of Life for Individuals and Communities”*, London: Springer International Publishing.

<sup>180</sup> Tapp, A., Spotswood, F. (2013), *“From the 4Ps to COM-SM: reconfiguring the social marketing mix”*, Journal of Social Marketing, 3(3), 206-222. doi: 10.1108/JSOCM-01-2013-0011.

<sup>181</sup> NSMC (2011), *“Big pocket guide to using social marketing for behaviour change”*, National Social Marketing Centre, UK, [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pd](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pd).

<sup>182</sup> Dibb, S. (2014), *“Up, up and away: social marketing breaks free”*, Journal of Marketing Management, 30(11), 1159–1185, <http://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.943264>.

<sup>183</sup> Spotswood, F., French, J., Tapp, A., & Stead, M. (2012), *“Some reasonable but uncomfortable questions about social marketing”*, Journal of Social Marketing, 2(3), 163–175, <http://doi.org/10.1108/20426761211265168>.

<sup>184</sup> Dibb, S., Carrigan, M. (2013), *“Social marketing transformed”*, European Journal of Marketing, 47(9), 1376–1398, <http://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-05-2013-0248>.

According to Thaler and Sunstein<sup>185</sup> nudges are designed to leverage onto human fallibility and irrationality. Therefore, behavioural economics is the ground on which nudging interventions are designed, rather than social marketing, indeed the latter has the consumer insight at its core<sup>186</sup>. Thus, even though social marketing and behavioural sciences seek both behaviour change, nudge has a completely different starting point according to which approach is taken in consideration.

Nudge finds itself at the core of another difference between behavioural science and social marketing, i.e. the approach. Indeed, social marketers are enabled, throughout consumer insight, to carry out interventions under multipronged approaches, operating down, mid and up-stream, whereas nudges can only work at downstream, individual, level. Even though a marketer as Gigerenzer<sup>187</sup> supports this downstream approach as he claims that there could be the risk of misleading and flawed interventions if campaigns were only to be designed around the understanding of human behaviour, as social marketing usually does. However, the nudging tendency to reduce behaviours to unconscious fallacies, implies that the guilt and the onus of ‘bad behaviours’ firmly fall on individuals. Therefore, behavioural sciences’ use of nudges may hinder this attitude, directing attention back towards the individual level<sup>188</sup>. Thus, if social marketers were to adopt nudges and neglect consumer insight, they could be pushed to ignore the reasons that have given rise to a certain behaviour in the first place. As afore said, scholars have begun to question the effectiveness of spending resources into nudging techniques which are, in turn, counterbalanced by marketing strategies<sup>189</sup>. For instance, a small intervention aimed at nudging people towards preferring vegetables

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<sup>185</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), *“Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness”*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>186</sup> Lefebvre, R. C. (2009), *“Getting Social Marketing Wrong in Health Behavior and Health Education”*, News and Views on Social Marketing and Social Change.

<sup>187</sup> Gigerenzer, G. (2015), *“On the Supposed Evidence for Libertarian Paternalism”*, Review of Philosophy and Psychology, 6(3), 361–383. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-015-0248-1>.

<sup>188</sup> Soraghan, C., Thomson, E., Ensor, J. (2016), *“Using food labels to evaluate the practice of nudging in a social marketing context”*, Social Business, Edinburgh Napier University.

<sup>189</sup> Goodwin, T. (2012), *“Why We Should Reject “Nudge”.*”, Politics, 32(2), 85–92.

<sup>189</sup> Marteau, T.M., Ogilvie, D., Roland, M., Suhreke, M., Kelly, M.P. (2011), *“Judging nudging: can nudging improve population health?”*, Brit Med J, 342:263–265.

<sup>189</sup> Mullane, M., Sheffrin, S. (2012), *“White Paper: Regulatory Nudges in Practice”*, Prepared for Conference on Responsible Regulation. Department of Economics and the Murphy Institute Tulane University, Louisiana, US.

<sup>189</sup> Junghans, A.F., Cheung, T.T.L., De Ridder, D.D.T. (2015), *“Under consumers’ scrutiny - An investigation into consumers’ attitudes and concerns about nudging in the realm of health behaviour”*, BMC Public Health, 15(1), 1-13.

over chips will be deeply outgunned by food industry's disproportionate push towards selecting chips in the first place. Therefore, social marketers should adopt a narrow focus in their interventions, rather than using tools with limited behaviour change impact<sup>190</sup>.

It has already been stated several times that social marketing is not about coercing people into adopting a new behaviour, whether enabling individuals to choose themselves the right behaviour<sup>191</sup>. In contrast, nudges are subtle and automatic. They are regarded as acting upon customers rather than being chosen by them. Consumers can no more actively decide to participate in the process or campaigns due to nudging. Therefore, when behavioural sciences' nudges are used, freedom of choice and voluntariness of social marketing disappear<sup>192</sup>. One of the most frequently questioned issue surrounding nudge use is whether individuals have the option to 'opt out' of a nudge and whether their free will is harmed<sup>193</sup>. If social marketers were to adopt nudges, losing important aspects of their approach, such as the idea that individuals should have the freedom to participate in a campaign or not, people would no longer have a say in how policies aimed at behaviour changing are designed. Although social marketing is performed in plain sight of its targeted audience, it is nonetheless criticized, as behavioural sciences' nudging, for asserting superiority within society<sup>194</sup>. Nudges might appear approved with no public discussion, making it difficult to understand why one behaviour is being encouraged over another<sup>195</sup>. If engaging in a reflexive process, according to Tadjewski et al.<sup>196</sup>, social marketers may realize that their objectives are frequently related to governments rather than serving the general interest. Moreover, nudging use brings social marketers and government's objectives even closer together. Often, rather than listening to the people, governments implement broad-brush tactics under the guise of 'doing their part'.

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<sup>190</sup> Soraghan, C., Thomson, E., Ensor, J. (2016), "*Using food labels to evaluate the practice of nudging in a social marketing context*", Social Business, Edinburgh Napier University.

<sup>191</sup> NSMC (2011), "*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*", National Social Marketing Centre, retrieved from [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pdf).

<sup>191</sup> Lefebvre, R.C. (2011), "*An integrative model for social marketing*", Journal of Social Marketing, 1(1), 54-72.

<sup>192</sup> Rebonato, R. (2014), "*A Critical Assessment of Libertarian Paternalism*", Journal of Consumer Policy, 37(3), 357–396. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-014-9265-1>.

<sup>193</sup> Whitehead, M. (2014), "*Nudge: The Real Ethical Debate?*", Psychology Today UK. Retrieved July 20, 2018.

<sup>194</sup> Mullane, M., & Sheffrin, S. (2012), "*White Paper: Regulatory Nudges in Practice*", Prepared for Conference on Responsible Regulation. Department of Economics and the Murphy Institute Tulane University, Louisiana, US.

<sup>195</sup> Baldwin, R. (2014), "*From Regulation to Behaviour Change: Giving Nudge the Third Degree*", The Modern Law Review, 77(6), 831–857. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2230.12094>.

<sup>196</sup> Tadjewski, M., Maclaran, P., Parsons, E., & Parker, E. (2011), "*Critical Marketing Studies*", Key Concepts in Critical Management Studies (pp. 83–87). London: Sage.

In order to give customers some control over which behaviours are chosen and how these behaviours are modified, French and Gordon<sup>197</sup> advocated that social marketing campaigns should incorporate the consumer's opinion into the design process. However, nudges influence human behaviour without requiring opinions' involvement. In this regard, French and Gordon's recent calls suggest that nudging is counterproductive<sup>198</sup>. Therefore, there is the concern that some of social marketers' primary ideals would be compromised as a result of their adoption of the nudging strategy.

According to Andreasen<sup>199</sup>, behaviours targeted by social marketing should be measurable. Social marketers' purpose is to minimize unintended consequences by measuring changes<sup>200</sup>. Yet, since there are many possible ways for individuals to answer to nudges, and their reactions are difficult to forecast, it is unclear the precise effect nudges would have<sup>201</sup>. That is to say that it could be hazardous to invest in it since some people will naturally embrace nudges while others will repel it. Therefore, nudges have a wide range of outcomes, including unintended consequences. Whereas a potential outcome may be that a combination of social marketing and nudging may result in two main effects. On the one hand, individuals could feel stifled by government's insistent messaging on how to behave<sup>202</sup>. On the other hand, it could result in a stigmatisation effect where those who are able to act in accordance with nudges are viewed as good citizens while those who are unable to do so may feel inadequate or bad citizens<sup>203</sup>. Therefore, it is likely that the use of nudging may unintentionally increase consumers' scepticism about government institutions and the messages they convey.

Even though nudging technique was approved by the NSMC<sup>204</sup>, some concerns endured on its usage. Essentially, nudging finds itself at stake with some important social marketing's founding

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<sup>197</sup> French, J., Gordon, R. (2015), "*Strategic Social Marketing*", London: Sage Publications Ltd.

<sup>198</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>199</sup> Andreasen, A. R. (2002), "*Marketing Social Marketing in the Social Change Marketplace*", *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 21(1), 3–13.

<sup>200</sup> Hastings, G., MacFadyen, L., Anderson, S. (2000), "*Whose Behaviour is it Anyway?*", *The Broader Potential of Social Marketing. Social Marketing Quarterly*, 6(2), 46–58.

<sup>201</sup> Mullane, M., Sheffrin, S. (2012), "*White Paper: Regulatory Nudges in Practice*", Prepared for Conference on Responsible Regulation, Department of Economics and the Murphy Institute Tulane University, Louisiana, US.

<sup>202</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>203</sup> Puhl, R., Peterson, J. L., Luedicke, J. (2013), "*Fighting obesity or obese persons? Public perceptions of obesity-related health messages*", *International Journal of Obesity*, 37(6), 774–82.

<sup>204</sup> NSMC (2011), "*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*", National Social Marketing Centre, retrieved from [http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big\\_pocket\\_guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thensmc.com/sites/default/files/Big_pocket_guide_2011.pdf).

principles. Huang and Baum<sup>205</sup> have given rise to a current of thought in opposition to nudge, originating from the lack of clearness while assessing behaviour impacts. As Azad<sup>206</sup> clarifies, David Cameron, former British PM, openly encouraged nudge use to reduce energy consumption by showing individuals the energy spent by their neighbours. Yet, economists have shown that the most effective way to cut on energy consumption is to increase its cost. That is the reason why Loewenstein and Ubel<sup>207</sup> argue that nudges “are used as a political expedient, allowing policymakers to avoid painful but more effective solutions rooted in traditional economics”. That is to say, governments, thanks to nudges, are able to tackle important social issues without restricting freedom of choice and by discharging personal responsibility on individuals<sup>208</sup>. Thus, nudge, at least how behavioural economy sees it, would inevitably clash with social marketing fundamental principles. Moreover, the FoP (front of pack) labels experiment performed by Soraghan<sup>209</sup> suggested that if campaigns were not designed with a specific group in mind, i.e. the usual social marketing modus operandi, then those most likely to benefit or to be affected would be those least in need, resulting completely in conflict with social marketing’s underlining principles. This aspect would be perfectly in line with the behavioural science idea of nudge which aims to influence the larger number of persons regardless of their status, class, position... Nevertheless, according to marketers’ scholars openly against nudge implementation as Soraghan<sup>210</sup>, using nudges as behaviour sciences do, may result in widening social inequalities. Indeed, social marketing can employ more targeted techniques, shaped around individuals’ insights, preventing unintended consequences, while nudges cannot offer such things.

As it should be clear by now, not all BCTs are always equally efficient on all people. There is no such thing as a universal intervention, everyone’s background is unique and shifts over time. That is why social marketing lists among its fundamental beliefs personalization since a personalized intervention is more likely to engage a person in changing its behaviour. However this approach is

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<sup>205</sup> Huang, C., Baum, M. (2012), “*Nudge ethics: just a game of billiards?*”, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 12(2), 22–4. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2011.634955>.

<sup>206</sup> Azad, T. (2019), “*To Nudge or Not to Nudge: Competition in Retail Financial Services*”, *Alvarez & Marsal*, 9–11.

<sup>207</sup> Loewenstein, G., Ubel, P. (2010), “*Economics Behaving Badly*”, *The New York Times*.

<sup>208</sup> Shove, E. (2014), “*Putting practice into policy: reconfiguring questions of consumption and climate change*”, *Contemporary Social Science*, 9(4), 415–429.

<sup>208</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*”, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>209</sup> Soraghan, C. (2019) “*An analysis of nudging as a social marketing technique using Front of Pack nutrition labels: A study of women's perceptions of food labels*”, Edinburgh Napier University.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibidem*.

not possible with Thaler and Sunstein<sup>211</sup> idea of nudge, which must be equally applicable to all at the same time.

There are other critical points on which social marketing and behavioural sciences differ in nudge use. For instance, Macfadyen, Stead, and Hastings<sup>212</sup> healthcare intervention could be taken as an example. Nudges may lead to a limited study in terms of determining which groups the nudge has had an impact on and which groups failed to interpret the nudge ‘properly’. This viewpoint strongly differs from the traditional social marketing perspective, which holds that a failed intervention was the result of the designer’s inadequate understanding of the target population. On the other hand, a behavioural science nudge intervention would attribute a negative result, or at least a non-optimal one, to the nudge’s lack of adequacy in that specific area, trying to modify the population’s behaviour throughout another, perhaps more effective, nudge. According to many social marketers, nudging shouldn’t be seen as a ‘silver bullet’, it should rather be used in conjunction with other strategies. As a matter of fact, just using nudges may have some negative effects over time, a concept of which both behavioural sciences and marketers should be aware of. Moreover, a behaviour change inquiry carried out by the House of Lords<sup>213</sup> too warned that the long and repeated adoption of nudges may lead to irresolution or draw the attention from more effective solutions.

Critiques from both sides were not over even after the NSMC<sup>214</sup> showed its clear stance on nudging. For instance, scholars<sup>215</sup> criticized nudge’s dual nature and incompatibility. Indeed, if on the one hand Thaler and Sunstein<sup>216</sup> stated that nudges were to be transparent rather than coercive, “*The*

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<sup>211</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*”, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>212</sup> MacFadyen, L., Stead, M., Hastings, G.B. (2002), “*Social marketing*”, in M.J. Baker (Ed.), *The Marketing Book*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

<sup>213</sup> House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee (2011), “*Behaviour change*”, HL paper 179, London: The Stationery Office.

<sup>214</sup> NSMC (2011), “*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*”, National Social Marketing Centre.

<sup>215</sup> Rebonato, R. (2014), “*A Critical Assessment of Libertarian Paternalism*”, *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 37(3), 357–396. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-014-9265-1>.

<sup>215</sup> Mullane, M., & Sheffrin, S. (2012), “*White Paper: Regulatory Nudges in Practice*”, prepared for Conference on Responsible Regulation, Department of Economics and the Murphy Institute Tulane University, Louisiana, US.

<sup>216</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*”, New Haven: Yale University Press.



*public should be able to review and scrutinize nudges*”, on the other hand, Sunstein<sup>217</sup> claimed that nudges should operate on individuals’ System 1, behaviour’s automatic and irrational part. Thus, Rebonato<sup>218</sup> argues that in order to design an effective nudge it would be made unremarkable and discreet, however, this way the transparency element would be lost since acting on the unconscious aspect of human behaviour. As nudges insist on individuals’ mindless choosing, hardly any form of personal scrutiny would follow. This reasoning could justify Mullane and Sheffrin<sup>219</sup> concerns on nudges’ lack of transparency. This is why Soraghan<sup>220</sup> believes that social marketers before interventions, and above all if using nudges, should think to their personal biases which could influence the study. Moreover, she calls for a completely new set of criteria to employ nudges. The latter is a concept which took the name of co-creation and which may be successful in including, during the process of nudge formation, the opinion of the targeted audience too, element missing in the behavioural economic approach. Furthermore, Soraghan<sup>221</sup> claims that social marketers should deeply examine its interventions’ campaigns assuming a more relevant role since nowadays they are seen as relying on behavioural economists’ justifications.

Nevertheless, whether or not nudge is accepted by the NSMC, marketers’ position is that social marketing approach should never abandon its most distinctive aspect, i.e. understanding the targeted audience is paramount. At the core of this approach is the idea that Thaler and Sunstein<sup>222</sup> start their analysis and theory from a different approach, the behavioural sciences’ one, therefore, it should be mandatory for social marketers to contextualise this behaviour which otherwise would limit how the behaviour, and therefore the intervention, is construed.

At the same time, before the intervention’s implementation, social marketers are deemed to pay more attention to nudges’ unintended consequences, an aspect which did not play a primary role

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<sup>217</sup> Sunstein, C.R. (2014), “*Nudging: A Very Short Guide*”, *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 37(4), 583- 588.

<sup>218</sup> Rebonato, R. (2014), “*A Critical Assessment of Libertarian Paternalism*”, *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 37(3), 357-396.

<sup>219</sup> Mullane, M., Sheffrin, S. (2012), “*White Paper: Regulatory Nudges in Practice*”, prepared for Conference on Responsible Regulation, Department of Economics and the Murphy Institute Tulane University, Louisiana, US.

<sup>220</sup> Soraghan, C., Thomson, E., Ensor, J. (2016), “*Using food labels to evaluate the practice of nudging in a social marketing context*”, *Social Business*, Edinburgh Napier University.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>222</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), “*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*”, New Haven: Yale University Press.

in the behavioural economic approach. To achieve this result, as afore stated, Soraghan<sup>223</sup> suggested the co-creation of nudges with the target audience.

A final comparison between the two approaches focuses on the environment. Traditionally, social marketers assigned primary importance to environment in their campaigns, unlike behavioural sciences. Interventions, according to the former, were designed in compliance with environment and individuals living there. Indeed, social marketing has been described as a holistic approach to behaviour change<sup>224</sup>. Social marketers, employing nudges run the risk of ignoring or reducing the environmental roots of a specific behaviour, a risk not completely taken into account by behavioural science, even though nowadays behavioural insight's teams are progressively more aware of this approach. Furthermore, it is well known that nudges' impact is difficult to measure. No doubt that this is a problem regarding both approaches, however, marketers are far more concerned of the 'who' nudging is having impact on, while the behavioural approach is more focused on the 'how many'.

If social marketers want to place nudging within their tools, and the NSMC did in 2011<sup>225</sup>, it should be examined how the knowledge of social marketers can be entwined with that of behavioural economists. This would combine the consumer-centric insight of social marketing with a knowledge of the unconscious processes that influence our decision-making. Nowadays it is common idea that social marketers simply adopt nudging as a method rather than changing it.

Last but not least, research on evaluating the unintended effects of nudges or simply the variable impact they can have on various subsets of the population is woefully absent.

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<sup>223</sup> Soraghan, C., Thomson, E., Ensor, J. (2016), *"Using food labels to evaluate the practice of nudging in a social marketing context"*, Social Business, Edinburgh Napier University.

<sup>224</sup> Hastings, G. (2007), *"Social marketing: Why should the devil have all the best tunes?"*, Oxford: Elsevier.

<sup>225</sup> NSMC (2011), *"Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change"*, National Social Marketing Centre.

## Conclusion

This thesis has highlighted the main nudge's characteristics from the behavioural economics' approach and the social marketing one. In last decades nudge has enjoyed such a huge success to be promptly adopted by social marketers too within their toolbox. However, despite the NSMC approval of nudge's use in 2011<sup>226</sup>, nudging still is a technique seen with suspicion by many scholars. It is worth underlying that the increased success behavioural sciences and nudging enjoyed since 2010 coincided with the relative fall in support suffered, in the same period, by social marketing<sup>227</sup>.

It is now common knowledge that individuals value differently affects, attitudes, and behaviours. Therefore, decision-making can be very tough, especially when important or intellectually demanding, and may affect subsequent decisions. It is commonly suggested to have a break from decision-making, even if just for a short period of time; this can help counteract some of the harmful consequences of decision fatigue and improve self-control<sup>228</sup>. From the 'choice architecture' point of view, is well known that individuals tend to select the less effort-demanding options, may be it intellectual or manual. Automatic enrolment plans in programs such as 'Save More Tomorrow'<sup>229</sup>, or the Swedish pension privatization fund<sup>230</sup>, have successfully improved retirement savings by using 'status quo bias' and default options to overcome *Humans'* self-control failures. Default or opt-out interventions have been employed in the healthcare sector, e.g. to increase cancer screening rates<sup>231</sup> and vaccines campaign<sup>232</sup> (Chapman et al., 2010), but also in the food sector to encourage healthy food and beverage consumption. In the Walt Disney theme park restaurants'

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<sup>226</sup> NSMC (2011), "*Social Marketing Big Pocket Guide to using social marketing for behaviour change*", National Social Marketing Centre.

<sup>227</sup> Spotswood, F. (2016), "*Beyond behaviour change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions*", Policy Press, University of Bristol.

<sup>228</sup> Vohs, K., Shah, A. (2022), "*A review of Emerging Trends in Self-Control and Goals: Introducing the FRESH Framework*", Behavioural Economics Guide 2022.

<sup>229</sup> Thaler, R.H., Benartzi, S. (2004), "*Save more tomorrow: Using behavioural economics to increase employee saving*", Journal of Political Economy, 112(S1), S164-S187.

<sup>230</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*", New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>231</sup> Huf, S.W., Asch, D.A., Volpp, K.G., Reitz, C., Mehta, S.J. (2021), "*Text messaging and opt-out mailed outreach in colorectal cancer screening: A randomized clinical trial*", Journal of General Internal Medicine, 36(7), 1958-1964.

<sup>232</sup> Chapman, G. B., Li, M., Colby, H., Yoon, H. (2010). "*Opting in vs opting out of influenza vaccination*", JAMA, 304(1), 43-44.

analysis, Peters and colleagues<sup>233</sup>, found that providing healthy meal sides and beverages choices as default (e.g., carrots or low-fat milk vs French fries or soft drinks) were associated with an increase in demand for healthy food and beverage ordering.

It is clear evidence, when planning behaviour change interventions, that policymakers may, or at least should, rely on available evidence. Research findings need to draw conclusions about the *causa prima* of a certain behaviour in order to be useful for policymakers. However, few research are able to demonstrate such real-world cause and effect since it is challenging to establish causality relation. It results that researchers are responsible to be transparent with regard to their findings and evidence; there are huge expectations on policymakers too to make quick and informed judgments. According to this point of view, behavioural economics' nudging is usually preferred vis-à-vis social marketing; latter interventions, indeed, are more expensive, long-term and require an in-depth study, unlike behavioural interventions.

In this regard, nudging, being a rather new and somewhat marginal aspect of social marketing, requires a unique set of ethical guidelines such that the best social marketing' aspects are combined with behavioural ones. Perhaps nudges require their own brand-new criteria, such as the co-creation mentioned in chapter three<sup>234</sup>.

For instance, Wiley and colleagues<sup>235</sup> support the more successful of libertarian or soft paternalism reflected in the recommendations for nudging made by behavioural economists. It is assumed that, even though nudges are frequently subject to criticisms of manipulation or infantilization, a cognitive class that wants to change how people behave will continue to fight against the public. Often seen as a reluctant populace growing weary of government's intrusion into more and more areas of their lives. This opposition will endure even in the face of more contemporary soft paternalism, such as Thaler and Sunstein's<sup>236</sup> notion of nudging<sup>237</sup>.

As it has been stated, once some small paternalistic measure has been accepted in the social security or healthcare sector, more intrusive interventions in daily life aspects may follow up. The

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<sup>233</sup> Peters, J., Beck, J., Lande, J., Pan, Z., Cardel, M., Ayoob, K., Hill, J.O. (2016), "Using healthy defaults in Walt Disney World restaurants to improve nutritional choices", *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 1(1), 92-103.

<sup>234</sup> Soraghan, C., Thomson, E., Ensor, J. (2016), "Using food labels to evaluate the practice of nudging in a social marketing context", *Social Business*, Edinburgh Napier University.

<sup>235</sup> Wiley, L. F., Berman, M. L., Blanke, D. (2013), "Who's Your Nanny? Choice, Paternalism and Public Health in the Age of Personal Responsibility", *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics*, 41(s1), 88-91.

<sup>236</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), "Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness", New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>237</sup> Turner, S. P. (2003), "Liberal Democracy 3.0", Thousand Oaks: Sage.

same goes for government's information campaigns that could quickly change from education to manipulation or prohibition. According to critics, governments, under the guise of supporting and influencing certain behaviours, could end up imposing fines or something worse. Cigarettes are an ideal example of governments intervention linked to health sector, e.g. Italian government went from tiny warning messages on cigarettes' packs to a much more aggressive information campaign, supported by an increase in tobacco taxation. In most Scandinavian countries and in New Zealand, government's purpose is to completely cancel cigarettes' consumption. Governments clearly try to remove harmful behaviour such as smoking. However, it is not clear how far state's intervention can go on.

According to Thaler and Sunstein<sup>238</sup>, there is a threefold answer to this question. *In primis*, the criticism is aimed at a possible 'slippery slope' but not at the proposed measures' merits, or demerits, if any; second answer highlights nudge's libertarian condition, intrinsic and inseparable, established by the authors themselves, which involve the right to withdraw or reject any nudge; finally, some forms of nudge do exist in individuals' daily life, regardless governments' intervention, it is therefore useless and against citizens' interest to request State's ouster. Those endorsing the latter assume that it is possible for Government to be completely absent of citizens' everyday life and that optimal default options does exist in nature. This is a relevant mistake. The so-called 'Sludge' is a danger, faced by both Behavioural Economics and Social Marketing, with most scholars of the latter fearing nudge's drift.

*"Sunstein and I stressed that the goal of a conscientious choice architect is to help people make better choices 'as judged by themselves'. But what about activities that are essentially nudging for evil? This 'sludge' just mucks things up and makes wise decision-making and prosocial activity more difficult."*<sup>239</sup>

Nudges, according to Ip et al.<sup>240</sup>, should "*nudge us into making better choices without removing our right to choose*", while "*the goal [of sludge] is different. Instead of helping us make better choices, sludge aim is to unnecessarily increase [costs]*". Nobel<sup>241</sup> too claims that "*Sludge [is] a behavioural intervention that does not have the individual's best interest in mind. It uses the same*

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<sup>238</sup> Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008), "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*", New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>239</sup> Thaler, R. (2018), "*Nudge, not sludge*" *Science*, 361(6401): 431.

<sup>240</sup> Ip, E., Saeri, A., Tear, M. (2018), "*Sludge: how corporations 'nudge' us into spending more*", *The Conversation*.

<sup>241</sup> Nobel, N. (2018), "*Nudge vs. sludge – the ethics of behavioural interventions*", *Impactually*.

*tools based on cognitive biases and choice architecture, to nudge people towards choices that will not necessarily increase their welfare*". Sludge arises whenever a nudge is applied. As a matter of fact, whenever decision-makers are nudged towards a healthy choice, they are simultaneously facing a sludge aimed at unhealthy choice<sup>242</sup>. To be identified as sludge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid as nudges are, sludges are not penalties<sup>243</sup>. Thaler<sup>244</sup> claims that sludge equals 'nudging for evil' since it makes pro-social behaviours more difficult to achieve. According to Nobel<sup>245</sup>, sludge is a nudge that does not have the decision-maker's best interests in mind.

Although a separate chapter should be devoted to technological impact on nudge, it seems appropriate to look at behavioural change in future research, at least in the conclusion.

Technology's influence on social behaviour is not just a straightforward case of cause and effect<sup>246</sup>. Some technological changes are primarily amplifier, enabling people to perform what they have always done in a more precise, fast, and cheap way. However, in other situations, technology enables a total transformation. Through its design, nudge technology can encourage particular sorts of action, which is one way we can think about it in relation to social behaviour. Technology's influence on behaviour changing can be linked to three primary aspects: tracking with feedback, personalization, and simplicity<sup>247</sup>.

Social media amplification can be particularly useful to encourage behaviour change through 'pledging' power and large audiences. There is abundant evidence that people are motivated to preserve consistency between their attitudes and behaviours; such influence is particularly strong when in presence of a large audience<sup>248</sup>.

For instance, according to Williams et al.<sup>249</sup>, an experimental group that signed a contract promising a daily exercise improvement did so much more than a group receiving only an exercise plan without a contract. Failure to uphold a public commitment runs the danger of internal

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<sup>242</sup> Sunstein, C. (2019), "*Sludge Ordeals*", Duke Law Journal, 68: 1843–1883.

<sup>243</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>244</sup> Thaler, R. (2018), "*Nudge, not sludge*", Science, 361(6401): 431.

<sup>245</sup> Nobel, N. (2018), "*Nudge vs. sludge – the ethics of behavioural interventions*", Impactually.

<sup>246</sup> Kiesler, S. (1997), 'Preface', in S. Kiesler (ed) "*Culture of the internet*", Nahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

<sup>247</sup> Kluger, A.N., DeNisi, A. (1996), "*The effects of feedback interventions on performance: A historical review, a meta-analysis and a preliminary feedback intervention theory*", *Psychological Bulletin*, 119(2):254-84.

<sup>248</sup> Cialdini, R.B. (2001), "*Influence: Science and practice*" (4<sup>th</sup> edn), Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

<sup>249</sup> Williams, B., Bezner, J., Chesbro, S. and Leavitt, R. (2005), "*The effect of a behavioural contract on adherence to a walking program in postmenopausal African American women*", *Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy*, 21: 332-42.

contradiction as well as reputational harm<sup>250</sup>. A key tool for behaviour change is results' sharing, especially someone who is popular or to whom one is accountable. Technology has made it easier for peers to participate in the monitoring process, enabling to self-monitor and self-track a variety of behaviours too.

As stated in Ch.3, nudge success depends on greatest number of people it is able to reach, such that they eventually change, even though unintentionally, their behaviour. Due to social media technological impact, it would be possible to reach an adequate number of individuals, hence, change their behaviours. If able to exploit this impact, social media would represent a steppingstone to governments' use of nudge.

In this thesis have been listed the main differences and similarities between the social marketing approach and behavioural economics' one toward nudge. Throughout the thesis it has not been provided a personal opinion, in order to be as impartial and objective as possible, such that the reader might be able to autonomously develop an idea on nudge and its approaches.

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<sup>250</sup> Bicchieri, C. (2006), *"The grammar of society: The nature and dynamics of social norms"*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

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## Riassunto elaborato finale

La tesi esamina la tecnica del *nudge* dal punto di vista della *behavioural economy* e del *social marketing*. Il primo capitolo descrive il nudge dal punto di vista della *behavioural economy*, il secondo del *social marketing* mentre il terzo capitolo propone un dettagliato confronto tra le due teorie.

L'introduzione descrive il nudge e la sua origine analizzando brevemente in una retrospettiva storica il tema del cambiamento comportamentale da parte di un'autorità vis-à-vis gli individui. Nell'antichità si faceva ricorso alla forza per cambiare un atteggiamento; le società si sono poi gradualmente evolute, ricorrendo, a seconda dei tempi, al *soft* o *hard power* per indirizzare o eliminare quei comportamenti dannosi per la società nel suo insieme. Per riuscirvi, i governi occidentali hanno costituito *Team* appositi di analisi per l'economia comportamentale; ne sono un esempio il BIT (Behavioural Insight Team) a Londra e il Team per l'Analisi Comportamentale (TAC) a Roma. Questi organi governativi, facendo uso delle tecniche di cambiamento comportamentali come il nudge, hanno attirato su di sé non poche critiche, evocando addirittura lo spettro del 'Grande fratello'.

L'introduzione evidenzia come tutti gli individui ragionino secondo due schemi logici, detti rispettivamente 'System 1' e 'System 2'; il primo è il sistema di risposte automatico e impulsivo che risponde ai sentimenti, motivo che spiega l'irrazionalità, il secondo è il sistema riflessivo, da cui originano i momenti di razionalità. L'individuo non è un essere perfettamente razionale, che potremmo anche definire come *Homo Economicus* o *Econe*, bensì irrazionale, un *Umano*. Fatta eccezione per brevi intervalli di razionalità, gli individui, in quanto Umani, prendono prevalentemente decisioni illogiche guidate dai loro sentimenti, per questo motivo devono essere "spinti" a modificare alcune loro decisioni in maniera del tutto impercettibile e senza alterazioni economiche. In questo quadro si inseriscono le politiche pubbliche. Lo Stato non ha il compito di intervenire a livello individuale bensì di creare le condizioni per determinare il comportamento desiderato.

Fra le tecniche di cambiamento comportamentale più innovative ed efficaci vi è il nudge, concetto introdotto per la prima volta da Thaler e Sunstein nel libro: "*Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*" (2008). L'idea centrale introdotta dagli autori è quella di paternalismo libertario, cioè la nozione secondo la quale il governo ha il compito di organizzare l'architettura delle scelte presentata ai cittadini in modo che quest'ultimi siano portati a scegliere l'opzione ottimale, che altrimenti non avrebbero scelto. Un approccio sia paternalista, in quanto l'opzione che l'individuo non sceglierebbe razionalmente è quella ritenuta ottimale dal *policymaker*, che libertario, in quanto

gli individui sono liberi di scegliere anche un'opzione diversa qualora lo desiderassero. Il nudge è percepito dai governi come un mezzo poco costoso per raggiungere i propri obiettivi politici; alterare l'architettura delle scelte è, infatti, facile e spesso privo di costi. Il nudge è un *“qualsiasi aspetto dell'architettura di scelta che altera il comportamento delle persone in modo prevedibile senza vietare alcuna opzione o modificare significativamente i loro incentivi economici”*. Un'interessante applicazione pratica è quella realizzata da *Hubbub* a Londra nel 2015. La *Villiers street* era classificata come una delle strade più sporche di Londra a causa dell'enorme quantità di mozziconi di sigarette gettati di sera per strada e non negli appositi posacenere. Per combattere il fenomeno, *Hubbub* ha ideato un posacenere che potesse catturare l'attenzione del pubblico, composto da due cestini trasparenti: il primo riportava la scritta 'Cristiano Ronaldo', il secondo quella di 'Lionel Messi'. Si invitavano quindi le persone a votare il giocatore preferito inserendo i mozziconi di sigarette nel cestino prescelto. Questo esempio di nudge, che rientra nella categoria di *gamification*, dimostra come lo Stato, o in questo caso una start-up, può modellare comportamenti sbagliati o addirittura dannosi delle persone senza che queste se ne rendano conto.

Il Capitolo 1 è incentrato sul nudge e sul suo utilizzo dal punto di vista della *behavioural economy*. Lo si può definire come l'approccio 'classico' al cambiamento comportamentale. La teoria del nudge è stata resa popolare da Thaler e Sunstein (*“Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness”*, 2008). Il nudge è un sostantivo collettivo che si riferisce a una grande varietà di tecniche di cambiamento comportamentale o BCTs (*Behavioural Change Techniques*). Caratteristica principale è quella di essere un qualsiasi aspetto dell'architettura delle scelte che mira a modificare il comportamento delle persone in modo prevedibile, senza vietare alcuna opzione o modificare gli incentivi economici. Per essere considerato come nudge, l'intervento deve essere facile da riconoscere ed economico, non deve rappresentare un obbligo. Ad esempio, mettere in una mensa la frutta ad altezza degli occhi è una forma di nudge, vietare il cibo spazzatura non lo è. I nudge, come specificato in precedenza, non richiedono grandi risorse economiche, al contrario, solitamente sono dettagli piccoli ed apparentemente insignificanti che possono avere un grande impatto sul comportamento delle persone. È importante capire che lo scopo del nudge non è quello di cambiare del tutto opinioni o comportamenti, non ne avrebbe nemmeno il potere in quanto si tratta di un intervento ambientale minimo; lo scopo è piuttosto di modificare un particolare comportamento dannoso per la società nella direzione, individuata a monte, dal legislatore. Le persone vengono “spinte” a scegliere in maniera più adeguata, salvaguardando la loro salute e migliorando il benessere collettivo. È proprio così che nasce il concetto di nudge, con l'intento di far leva sui *bias* cognitivi delle persone, errori sistematici di giudizio. Si può pertanto affermare che l'obiettivo primario del

nudge per l'economia comportamentale è utilizzare l'architettura delle scelte in modo etico, positivo e vantaggioso per la società nella sua interezza.

Il nudge, nonostante abbia ottenuto un forte sostegno politico e amministrativo, non è stato accolto con favore da tutti. La scienza comportamentale ed i *Team* creati dai governi, *in primis*, hanno infatti ricevuto molte critiche. Il Capitolo 1 si conclude con l'individuazione delle quattro principali critiche vis-à-vis l'uso che le scienze comportamentali fanno del nudge. La prima critica è politico-filosofica; riguarda l'applicazione paternalistica delle scienze comportamentali, dove paternalistico è inteso in senso dispregiativo. In quest'ottica, il governo si "arroga" il diritto di correggere quei comportamenti dannosi per l'interesse pubblico, frutto dei *bias* e dell'irrazionalità, in favore delle intenzioni del legislatore. Il legislatore, però, sarebbe a sua volta vittima di analoghi *bias*, ignari, di conseguenza, dei 'giusti comportamenti'. Viene però omesso che se i responsabili delle politiche pubbliche fossero spinti a prendere in considerazione le scienze comportamentali, invece di ignorarle, probabilmente ne deriverebbe un aumento del benessere pubblico. La seconda critica sostiene che i nudge siano manipolativi perché rivolti a promuovere atteggiamenti inconsci ed automatici che influenzano il comportamento. Può risultare però piuttosto impegnativo determinare praticamente quali aspetti dell'azione governativa sono manipolativi e quali no. La terza critica sostiene che i nudge siano una forma di *disempowerment* poiché non promuovono lo sviluppo personale o l'educazione. Infine, la quarta critica si chiede se le prove a sostegno degli interventi siano sufficientemente affidabili da giustificare un'azione governativa.

Il Capitolo 2 analizza il nudge dal punto di vista del *social marketing*. Un contributo significativo alle BCTs può essere fornito dal *social marketing*. Tuttavia, gli aspetti più significativi ed efficaci di quest'approccio sono spesso trascurati per incomprensione. Il marketing non consiste nel vendere ciò che si produce, bensì nel chiedersi quale prodotto i clienti riterrebbero migliore. I marketers, gli accademici che mettono in atto questo approccio, sono competitivi poiché hanno come obiettivo quello di guadagnare quote di mercato a scapito della concorrenza. Questo tipo di *forma mentis* distingue il *social marketing* dagli altri approcci.

Inizialmente, il marketing era una tecnica utilizzata esclusivamente dalle aziende per scopi promozionali legati all'incremento delle vendite; è stato il professore Philip Kotler ad estendere il concetto oltre il tradizionale contesto aziendale. Oggi, come indicato dal 'National Social Marketing Centre', il *social marketing* è un approccio in cui gli stessi strumenti e le stesse tecniche utilizzati in ambito aziendale vengono impiegati per promuovere comportamenti a beneficio dell'intera società. Nel *social marketing*, la parola 'sociale' sta ad indicare che l'obiettivo prefissato è raggiungibile solo se le persone sono invogliate ad adottare in totale autonomia il comportamento desiderato dal

legislatore. In altre parole, se si riuscisse a trovare un numero sufficiente di persone all'interno del campione e convincerlo ad adottare il comportamento suggerito, si raggiungerebbe l'obiettivo collettivo auspicabile.

I 'marketers' fanno anch'essi uso del nudge. Nudge e *social marketing*, però, sono stati a lungo due concetti molto distanti tra loro. I 'marketers' hanno nutrito dubbi sull'applicabilità dei nudge al *social marketing*. Il *social marketing* tende ad analizzare le situazioni caso per caso, partendo sempre da una base teorica e applicando, in seguito, un'attenta segmentazione del campione analizzato e dell'ambiente per raggiungere al meglio l'obiettivo prefissato. A differenza degli altri approcci, e dell'economia comportamentale in particolare, i 'marketers' operano in un periodo di tempo specifico, all'interno di un gruppo specifico e su un comportamento specifico. Nell'implementare i propri interventi, il *social marketing* ha la possibilità di apportare un contributo speciale di cui non dispongono gli altri approcci, l'integrazione dell'opinione dei consumatori. Si può, infatti, dire che il *social marketing* opera da *trait d'union* tra come gli *Economi* dovrebbero comportarsi e come si comportano effettivamente gli *Umani*. Il valore aggiunto che può offrire il *social marketing* è un 'orientamento di mercato', cioè la mentalità dei 'marketers' richiamata nel capitolo.

Il marketing sociale si trova pertanto in una posizione cruciale, essendo capace di offrire un'ampia gamma di possibili soluzioni di modifica dei comportamenti. Nonostante sia un approccio utile ed efficace, il *social marketing* soffre, tuttavia, di una serie di miti e malintesi. Esistono infatti diversi luoghi comuni, ad esempio il pregiudizio che il *social marketing* sia sinonimo di social media, sebbene non esista nessun legame effettivo tra i due, o la percezione che il *social marketing* sia sinonimo di pubblicità. Viene inoltre criticato l'approccio di breve termine dei suoi interventi; al riguardo, va ricordato che il cambiamento comportamentale è difficile da realizzare quando i budget hanno un orizzonte temporale di breve termine e le risorse a disposizione sono inferiori a quelle delle altre tecniche di cambiamento comportamentale. Legato alla tematica dei budget è la critica sul costo elevato del *social marketing* e la difficoltà nel giustificare le spese; quest'ultime, infatti, si basano su ricerche e campagne pubblicitarie molto costose il cui valore è difficile da stabilire in anticipo, a differenza delle tecniche di nudge. Un'altra critica frequente è che il marketing è parte integrante del problema; sarebbe infatti utilizzato dalle stesse aziende che sono la causa dei comportamenti nocivi. Allo stesso tempo il *social marketing*, così come le altre BCTs, è spesso criticato per la sua amoralità dal momento che cerca di modificare il comportamento degli individui. L'utilizzo del nudge aggraverebbe la situazione poiché gli individui potrebbero non essere al corrente di essere soggetti a un nudge. Il *social marketing*, al contrario, implica un'attività mentale, il pieno coinvolgimento

dell'individuo, a differenza delle campagne di nudge che fanno leva sulla scelta in maniera automatica dell'individuo.

Il Capitolo 3 è dedicato al confronto dei due approcci relativamente alla tecnica del nudge.

Dal punto di vista dei governi, il *social marketing* è percepito come un'opzione meno attraente principalmente per tre motivi. In primo luogo, perché il *social marketing* si concentra sui metodi 'persuasivi' per produrre cambiamenti di comportamento, tanto da essere stato definito come un "approccio assistenzialista". L'economia comportamentale, invece, si limita a riorganizzare, attraverso i nudge, la presentazione delle scelte, questi ultimi sono quindi percepiti come opzioni meno invasive. L'uso dei nudge da parte dei 'marketers' si distingue da quello dell'economia comportamentale nella misura in cui il *social marketing* effettua uno studio approfondito dell'ambiente e delle persone, cercando di coinvolgere queste ultime affinché siano esse stesse a scegliere razionalmente di adottare un comportamento diverso. Secondo motivo per cui i *behavioural economics*' nudge sono preferiti è perché il *social marketing* richiede risorse significativamente più elevate. In effetti, il *social marketing* necessita di una ricerca qualitativa approfondita, oltre a tempi più lunghi e a una copertura mediatica, entrambi onerosi per le finanze pubbliche. Al contrario, l'economia comportamentale non impone costi particolarmente elevati. Terza ed ultima ragione è il non trascurabile scetticismo nei confronti dell'efficacia del *social marketing* nel modificare i comportamenti. È opinione generale che questo approccio abbia generato interventi a partire da evidenze qualitative che non prevedevano il comportamento effettivo, valutandolo attraverso auto-segnalazioni che non erano in grado di comprendere appieno il comportamento.

Nonostante esista una dicotomia tra il nudge e i principi fondanti del *social marketing*, la questione è stata recentemente risolta con l'adozione dei nudge da parte dei 'marketers' (NSMC, 2011). Il nudge dell'economia comportamentale e quello del *social marketing* condividono chiaramente alcuni obiettivi comuni, come il desiderio di migliorare il benessere sociale modificando il comportamento dei singoli, ma l'uso del nudge da parte dei 'marketers' è una questione controversa, soprattutto perché mette in discussione alcuni dei suoi fondamenti teorici. Ad esempio, Dibb (2014) sostiene che il *social marketing* consiste nel responsabilizzare gli individui in modo che essi siano in grado di fare scelte autonome; in quest'ottica, i 'marketers' dovrebbero indicare un percorso da adottare piuttosto che spingere attivamente gli individui, caratteristica questa delle *behavioural sciences*. Se lo scopo del *social marketing* è quello di creare un intervento *ad hoc* relativo ad uno specifico gruppo, raccogliendo opinioni e convinzioni dei cittadini, al contrario, il nudge dell'economia comportamentale non ha un target specifico. I consumatori, in questo caso, sono così "aggirati" in maniera passiva e non vengono invogliati a capire perché sarebbe meglio adottare un

determinato comportamento al posto di un altro. In realtà, se gli interventi non dovessero essere progettati con un gruppo specifico in mente, il consueto *modus operandi* del *social marketing*, coloro che hanno maggiori probabilità di trarre beneficio o di essere soggetti dei nudge saranno invece coloro che meno ne hanno bisogno, come dimostrato da Soraghan (2016). Se questo aspetto è completamente in contrasto con i principi del *social marketing*, è invece perfettamente in linea con l'idea di nudge delle scienze comportamentali, che mira a influenzare il maggior numero di persone indipendentemente dal loro status, classe e posizione. Se ne deduce che, sebbene l'obiettivo dell'economia comportamentale e del *social marketing* sia il medesimo, il nudge ha un punto di partenza completamente diverso a seconda dell'approccio preso in considerazione.

Un altro elemento di confronto tra i due approcci riguarda l'ambiente. Tradizionalmente, il *social marketing* ha sempre assegnato un'importanza primaria all'*environment* nei suoi interventi. Per questo motivo c'è il timore, da parte di alcuni 'marketers', che, impiegando i nudge, si possano ignorare le ragioni di fondo legate all'ambiente di uno specifico comportamento. Rischio non preso in considerazione dalla *behavioural economics*. Oggi, i team quali TAC o BIT, sono, tuttavia, più consapevoli dell'importanza dell'ambiente e prestano maggiore attenzione al tema.

Nella tesi sono state evidenziate le caratteristiche principali del nudge dal punto di vista di entrambi gli approcci qui esaminati. In conclusione, sembra utile sottolineare che la maggiore notorietà che le scienze comportamentali ed il nudge godono dal 2010, coincidono con il relativo calo di sostegno subito dal social marketing nello stesso periodo.

Poiché il nudge è un aspetto nuovo e piuttosto marginale del *social marketing*, questo richiede un insieme nuovo ed unico di linee guida etiche in modo che i migliori aspetti del *social marketing* siano combinati con quelli dell'economia comportamentale. I nudge necessiterebbero di criteri *ex novo*, con strumenti specifici per aiutare il loro design, come la co-creazione, (Soraghan 2016). In tal modo si potrebbe riuscire ad adattare al meglio i nudge al *social marketing* con le tecniche di quest'ultima.

Una critica comune a tutte le BCTs è il limite ultimo fin dove il governo può spingersi nel regolare la vita quotidiana degli individui. È infatti diffuso il timore che lo Stato possa evolversi in un 'grande fratello' troppo presente nelle vite dei cittadini. Secondo Thaler e Sunstein (2008) esiste, però, una triplice risposta a questa domanda. In primo luogo, la critica è rivolta ad una possibile '*slippery slope*' (la cosiddetta 'brutta china' dei nudge), non alle misure proposte in sé. La seconda risposta evidenzia la condizione libertaria dei nudge stabilita dagli stessi autori, che comporta la possibilità di rifiutare qualsiasi pungolo esterno. Infine, in molti casi ci sono forme di pungoli che



sono indipendenti dall'intervento dei governi, è quindi inutile e contro lo stesso interesse dei cittadini richiedere l'esclusione dello Stato.

Per ultimo, la tesi tratta dell'impatto che la tecnologia ha avuto sui BCTs e, più in particolare, sul nudge. L'effetto di amplificazione dei social media, in particolar modo, può essere utile per incoraggiare un cambiamento di comportamento negli individui. È ben noto, infatti, che le persone sono motivate a rispettare un impegno o adottare uno specifico comportamento qualora questo fosse preso in pubblico o davanti a testimoni, come sui social. Attraverso l'impatto tecnologico dei social media, sarebbe quindi possibile raggiungere un numero adeguato di individui e quindi modificare i loro comportamenti. In virtù di tale impatto, e attraverso un uso attento del nudge, i social media possono rappresentare strumenti di particolare importanza a disposizione dei governi per cambiare gli atteggiamenti dannosi della società.