

**“Should I tell you / or should I not?”
The (neutral) effect of Transparency
on Information Disclosure Nudge**

Anne-Katrin Altendorf
University of Cologne
anne-kathrin.al@gmx.de

Tommaso Reggiani *
Masaryk University & IZA-Bonn
tommaso.reggiani@econ.muni.cz

Gari Walkowitz
University of Cologne
gari.walkowitz@uni-koeln.de

Summary

With the increasing popularity and application of the nudging concept, several ethical objections against it have also emerged due to its subtle architecture. In order to contribute to the debate, this paper examines nudging in the light of transparency.

A transparent nudge is when the citizen being nudged knows the intention behind it and the means adopted to pursue the nudging object. A non-transparent nudge works in a way that the citizen cannot reconstruct the object of the intervention and the means by which the behavioral change is pursued.

Wide - philosophical - consent claims how nudging can only be regarded as ethically acceptable when the nudge is transparent (Fischer & Lotz 2014; Sunstein 2015). Hausman & Welch (2010) demand for nudging transparency, even if it potentially undercuts the effectiveness of the nudge. However, empirical research on nudging often shies away from incorporating explicit transparency.

We design a survey-experiment to examine whether transparency has negative impacts on nudging effectiveness in its configuration of *information disclosure* nudge (Loewenstein et al. 2015; Wisdom et al. 2010). In partnership with the German Federal Centre for Health (BZgA), we address the very salient and relevant case of the voluntary participation into the German organ donation initiative. We do not find evidence that transparency inhibits the effectiveness of *information disclosure* nudges. Our finding supports the policy-relevant claim that *information disclosure* nudges can be transparent and yet effective, reconciling at the same time philosophical and practical issues.

This result is in line with recent findings by Bruns et al. (2016): In a lab experiment, focusing on *default* nudge applied to contributions to carbon emission reduction, they do not find evidence that transparency inhibits the effectiveness of a *default* nudging strategy. Similarly, Loewenstein et al. (2015) testing the interaction between transparency and defaults, get to similar conclusions according to results from an online-study focused on medical-care related choices.

Keywords: nudging; transparency; survey-experiment; organ donation.