MK 630 Reading Response

**The Nudge Debate**

Upon reading David Brooks’ New York Times article entitled “The Nudge Debate” I became very interested in the idea of linking this socio-political concept with the Marketing world. In many ways the concept of Libertarian Paternalism is better suited to the ad world than that of lawmakers. In both worlds honesty is important and the audience ought to be treated like a group of intelligent individuals with their own opinions and agency. However, in the political world the practice of “gently bias[ing] the context” surrounding important decisions has the potential for far more harmful side effects. Because advertising is already perceived as a dubious source of information, the nudges employed by marketers are less deleterious and more translucent than those of porky politicos.

In advertising, marketing messages often aim to influence taste makers and sell the concept of cool. This concept can encourage people to engage in destructive behavior or to better themselves and their society. If it is perceived as cool to purchase sustainable clothing that are inherently less harmful to the environment, than the nudge has been well executed. However, if the tactic is used to dissuade over-eating by only offering sought-after (cool) clothing in small sizes, then there may be an unintentional emotional backlash against a concept intended to support health and physical well-being. The debate over ‘Nudge’ tactics will undoubtedly have to continue. Even something as banal as changing the markings on a trash can to ‘Landfill’ in an attempt to casually encourage patrons to recycle, broaches the argument of whether or not recycling programs are effective and if the landfill model is actually sustainable. Points can easily be won on either sides of the issue of Libertarian Paternalism; however the fallout from even the most well-intentioned nudge is unknowable until it is enacted. Therefore, marketers would be well advised to avoid using this tactic unless they intend to be divisive.