A Qualitative Study of the Psychological Effects of Motivational Quotes

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Abstract: Motivational quotes wield and obtain a sense of power towards inspiring individuals to strive towards their goals, harnessing both internal and external motivations. The absence of motivational quotes tends to serve as catalysts, igniting the drive to propel one through challenges and pursue excellence. Externally, motivational quotes often encapsulate universal truths or wisdom, offering perspective and guidance from varied sources and figures. This paper explores the effectiveness of motivational quotes in medical and educational contexts, with a focus on their impact on individuals' behavior. While numerous studies have reported a generally positive attitude toward the use of motivational quotes, specific concerns have emerged. This paper has observed that motivational quotes, delivered through various media, have successfully motivated individuals to take positive actions, such as adhering to medication regimens and quitting smoking. However, some studies have highlighted potential limitations, including overexposure leading to reduced effectiveness, the contextual relevance of motivational quotes, and the distinction between external and internal motivation. This paper presents an overview of the existing research, offering insights into the mixed opinions on the use of motivational quotes for motivation. It calls for future studies to consider contextual factors, audience mindset, media selection, and quote suitability in order to enhance their efficacy.

Keywords: Motivational Quotes, Medical Field, Educational Field, External Motivation, Internal Motivation

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the existing journal articles and books from the 2000s to around 2021 concerning the psychological effects of motivational quotes to find out the major arguments regarding the use of motivational quotes to incentivize groups of people to take action. Speaking of motivating action-taking, two major fields have been actively using motivational quotes: they are education and the medical industry for obvious reasons: In the education field, educators need to encourage students to do something, such as assignments, physical activities, and extracurricular programs; in the medical and clinical field, medical practitioners need to persuade patients into doing something or dissuade patients from doing harmful behaviors. Henceforth, this paper collects material from the literature on psychological studies in these two fields. The primary assumption this article posits is that motivational quotes have had positive and productive effects on motivating people to do (or not do, depending on the special context) something. The justification is as follows:

Motivational quotations (quotes) have been utilized for a wide range of clinical purposes, resulting in a notable enhancement in self-assurance, empowerment, and contentment among adults grappling with issues like stress, anxiety, depression, mental health conditions, and substance abuse [1-4]. Motivational quotes, also referred to as inspirational quotes, have been proven applicable, especially within the clinical context. One of the testable outcomes of incorporating motivational quotes into therapy settings is the potential enhancement in self-assurance and self-esteem; these quotes provide a source of external validation, reminding individuals of their inner strength and resilience [1]. They offer solace and guidance, nurturing a positive mindset and reinforcing the idea that even in the darkest times, there is room for growth and transformation. This paper explores whether motivational quotes have productive effects in different contexts. Next, this paper explores the existing results in the psychological studies of motivational quotes.

2. The Benefits of Motivational Quotes:taking educational and clinical fields as examples

The succinct and compelling expressions of wisdom and encouragement in motivational quotes have significantly impacted individuals facing many medical challenges. Scholars who espouse the use of motivational quotes in clinical practice claim that the words of wisdom contained within these quotations have the propensity to empower individuals to face their challenges with greater confidence and determination; the sense of empowerment that motivational quotes instill can enhance patients' self-contentment and their overall motivation to participate in their treatments [1-4].

Multiple studies in different fields within the overarching field of clinical practices have proven the benefit of using motivational quotes to incentivize patients to actively engage in their treatments, even though the channels (media) through which patients receive these quotes are considerably different. Research has demonstrated a positive correlation between exposure to motivational quotes and an increase in physical activity [5-6]. Marcus et al. provide an assessment of the current state of knowledge regarding physical activity intervention studies in which he mentions that compelling evidence was found in favor of personalized motivational programs grounded in behavior change theory, as well as programs that strategically positioned prompts to, for instance, promote the use of stairs [5]. Kim and Glanz examined the use of motivational text messaging to increase walking among older African Americans, with the result that the intervention group saw an increase in step counts and Leisure Time Exercise Questionnaire scores, while the control group showed no improvement [6]. These findings indicate the feasibility of using text messaging to promote walking in this demographic research. While text messaging's potential for behavior change is recognized, especially among groups with lower socioeconomic status, the study emphasizes its cost-effectiveness and ease of use, and it highlights the need for future research grounded in strong behavioral theory for effective health communication interventions, particularly for minority populations [6]. Although they differ in demographics and methodology (Marcus uses the qualitative method while Kim and Glanz use the quantitative method), these two studies both emphasize the promising potentiality of motivational quotes in mobilizing people to participate in physical activities. With or without assistance from electric devices (such as mobile phones, monitors with speakers et al.), motivational quotes show a positive correlation with an increase in the duration and intensity of physical activities among the researched targets.

Other research showed that motivational quotes appearing in text messages facilitate patients (or clients who want to lose weight) to participate in weight-losing activities [7-8]. Patrick et al. maintain that in their pilot study, researchers found that a weight loss intervention primarily based on motivational SMS messages effectively promoted weight loss over 4 months among overweight and obese adults [7]. Patrick et al.'s approach, using daily text messages, represented its first randomized controlled trial. The weight loss achieved, though modest (2.88 kg or 3.16%), was significant and could have population-level implications, especially regarding diabetes risk reduction [7]. The study's

positive outcomes, along with the ease and widespread accessibility of text messaging on mobile phones, suggest the potential for broader use of daily text message-based interventions for health behavior prompts and coaching. Gerber et al. conducted a study that allowed participants to have control over when, how often, and what type of messages they received; many requested reminders for physical activity and tips to avoid unhealthy eating [8]. This study conducted by Gerber et al. highlights the early feasibility and acceptance of using text messaging to promote healthy behaviors for weight maintenance [8]. The experience drawn from Patrick et al. and Gerber et al.'s studies in developing and sending messages suggests that sending motivational text messages could be a cost-effective way to initiate and maintain a weight loss intervention. This approach may be particularly beneficial when other face-to-face interactions tend to lose their effect or other on-site interactions tend to be impractical under certain circumstances. Additionally, both studies found that using readily available mobile phones to send reminders and motivate individuals can be seamlessly integrated into their daily lives. Participants could receive messages at different times and locations, allowing daily reminders and encouragement to influence their decisions positively.

Motivational quotes contribute significantly to the efficiency and efficacy of smoking cessation therapies when smokers (who are in their early stages of quitting smoking) receive related text messages from medical practitioners on a regular basis [9]. Rogers et al. state that their text messaging program showed promise as an affordable, personalized, and age-appropriate way to assist young smokers in quitting; it has the advantage of being easily deliverable over broad geographic areas, as mobile phones are ubiquitous and more accessible than computers, especially among lower socioeconomic groups [9]. However, Rogers et al. cautioned us that future research should explore program enhancements, integration with existing cessation methods like Quitlines and nicotine replacement therapy, and the utilization of multimedia phones to provide additional resources and distractions since using motivational text messages in developing countries is particularly important, given the impending tobacco epidemic and the growing prevalence of text message-capable mobile phones, especially in these regions [9].

In one journal article, a scholar explores the role of technology, specifically modern "smart" pillboxes, in improving medication compliance for patients with memory-related issues. The primary focus is on patients who have difficulty remembering to take their medications as prescribed and how these advanced pillboxes leverage technology to provide reminders, timely communication, and monitoring capabilities, thereby enhancing patient adherence to their medication regimens [10]. Naditz highlights some pillboxes' capability of playing recorded family members' motivational quotes to remind patients to take pills, - "there is something about hearing 'Mom, have you taken your medicine yet?' in a son or daughter's voice that makes the device that much more comforting" [10].

Scholars probe the correlation between motivational quotes and patients' willingness to receive treatment for their chronic mental disorders. Czuchry and Dansereau investigated the effectiveness of motivational modules that the authors created with the goal of increasing motivation and confidence for individuals undergoing psychological treatment: a total of 146 probationers were divided into two groups- one group received the standard treatment, while the other group received the standard treatment with the added motivational modules [11]. The findings indicate that those who participated in the motivational activities demonstrated higher motivation levels to engage in treatment and reduce risky behaviors (such as drinking, drug use, and risky sexual behaviors) towards the conclusion of the residential treatment phase [11]. The paper also discusses potential enhancements for the intervention, including the development of brief 10 to 15-minute micromodules to function as booster sessions [11]. In a study involving individuals with treatment-resistant depression, researchers tested the effectiveness of smartphone-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) alongside medication [12]. Mantani et al. also mention that although the combination of

smartphone CBT and medication substantially reduced depression severity in this refractory population, approximately 70% to 80% of participants still did not achieve remission after 2 months of treatment [12]. Another study addressed the challenge of coordinating mental health services from the user's perspective, as poor coordination can lead to further mental crises and reduced quality of life [13]. Marchinko and Clarke tested the effectiveness of a wellness intervention, the Wellness Planner, which is a booklet containing components like crisis planning, goal setting, and resource planning [13]. The results, based on 42 participants who completed the study, showed significant improvements in empowerment, continuity of care, and satisfaction with services and qualitative data (the way participants talked about their lives) also indicated positive acceptance of the booklet [13]. The three studies shown above in this paragraph utilized motivational quotes via in-person game activities, smartphones, and print-based pamphlets. Although these scholars used motivational quotes in combination with other treatment methods such as medicine, in-person or virtual communication, and other entertainments for boosting mood, motivational quotes were purposely tested and positively proven to be valid.

3. The Limitation of Motivational Quotes

It is noteworthy that other studies and some of the above-mentioned studies explicitly or implicitly problematize the use of motivational quotes in some context and raise crucial questions about how and when to use motivational quotes and in what ways motivational quotes would lose their valence of activating certain behaviors.

Although two studies have not explicitly pointed out the feasibility of using motivational quotes, they all pointed out the instability of using mobile phones to distribute motivational quotes [6, 11]. Czuchry and Dansereau mention that a small portion of elders have not received the quotes because of their phones' disconnection and their full message boxes, indicating that whatever productive message researchers were using failed at their effect from the very onset [11]. Kim and Glanz articulate the same problem regarding the media in a different way that the reliability of the use of mobile devices needs future studies since motivational quotes are intrinsically designed to establish a personal emotional connectedness with their audiences, while the researchers found it hard to probe into the conductivity of the media in a quantitative manner [6]. These studies endeavor to problematize the media we use to deliver quotes. If motivational quotes stay dormant and untapped for their audiences, what is the purpose of using them in the first place? Next, this article will further articulate the potential unexciting, inattentive nature of motivational quotes if our targeted audiences become nonchalant after getting too much of them or some of our audiences are too focused on their internal struggles to pay heed to the external stimulus, in this case, motivational quotes.

In a study conducted by Collins and over five weeks with 25 fourth-grade students, the display of inspirational quotes on education did not lead to an increase in students' intrinsic motivation, autonomy, or competence. Collins finds that the students' responses on Likert scale questionnaires indicated that for those who showed high grades on the questionnaires, they already felt autonomous, competent, and intrinsically motivated before the introduction of the quotes; for those who already displayed low self-esteem on the questionnaires, the introduction of motivational quotes could not boost their confidence and self-esteem [14]. In Collins' study, the incorporation of inspirational language within the classroom was observed as a less direct approach to impacting student autonomy and competence. Collins alludes that the indirectness of using motivational quotes might not have raised students' emotional responses due to their age and their limited understanding of the world. Bowman also points out that to test if external motivational quotes could enhance students' self-esteem is a misplaced question because Bowman distinguishes two types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations: extrinsic motivations could potentially and theoretically increase incentivize someone to do something,- but once they are gone, that person could immediately lose his or her

interest in doing something; while a person with intrinsic motivation could persist in doing something even without any extrinsic stimulus [15]. Hence, Bowman cautions us (educators) against overwhelmingly using extrinsic motivational quotes before educators establish students' intrinsic motivational mechanisms [15]. In other words, he believes that the effect of motivational quotes is a misplaced hypothesis since there is some theoretical psychological working ahead of the functioning of motivational quotes that predetermines the results.

Scholars also question the alleged usefulness of motivational quotes in the so-called self-help literature. An article written by Gokhale critically examines the trend of oversimplification in contemporary popular inspirational literature and highlights how these works package interpretations of reality into simple, easily digestible wisdom. Gokhale discusses the pedagogical and psychological implications of oversimplification in motivational literature, as readers are presented with trimmed versions of complex concepts through generalized and one-dimensional rhetoric [16]. Gokhale points out the potential dangers of oversimplification, emphasizing that it may lead to a shallow understanding of complex subjects and a distorted perception of spirituality and the self [16]. The article also discusses the repetitive and one-toned rhetoric used in self-help literature, often lacking irony or ambiguity that quickly leads readers to lose patience and attention to motivational quotes. Justman traces the genealogy of rhetoric in motivational quotes and references M. M. Bakhtin's perspective, highlighting the evolution of modern languages from their historical use in "high, proclamatory genres" associated with figures like priests, prophets, and leaders [17]. Justman suggests that contemporary self-help literature employs a similarly proclamatory and repetitive language style, and self-help books aim for a simplified, idealized vision of personal transformation and happiness [17]. This simplicity and repetition in language serve to inspire and guide readers but may also lack the complexity, irony, and multifaceted nature found in more nuanced literature. Gokhale and Justman both analyze motivational quotes from a qualitative and epistemological perspective and probe into the mechanism of inspirational quotes and why and when this mechanism would stop functioning as people expect it to.

Czuchry and Dansereau, in the first part of this essay we have discussed, pointed out the limitation of their experiment of using motivational quotes distributed by different practitioners, such as counselors, medical practitioners, and researchers, to try to engage patients in accepting treatments: patients were constantly exposed to different people's motivational quotes, and researchers could not ascertain whether it was the motivational quotes that were in effect or other cognitive modules stimulated by practitioners that played a crucial role in incentivizing patients [11]. In other words, patients' acceptance of getting treatment might have been rendered by repetitive persuasion, social pressure from an authority, or their feeling of being paid particular attention to by multiple professionals. Furthermore, one potential question they failed to answer is whether hearing motivational quotes from various people is therapeutically better than hearing them from a particular person, such as a doctor the patient is familiar with or a family member. Czuchry and Dansereau, in their cautionary tone, emphasize the importance of not oversimplifying the results by ascribing them solely to the use of motivational quotes [11]. They draw our attention to the myriad motivational activities that were concurrently taking place throughout their experiment, creating a highly intricate motivational environment. In such a multifaceted setting, it became nearly impossible to isolate the precise effects of motivational quotes alone and subject them to thorough analysis. Consequently, their research challenges us to consider the multifarious dimensions of motivation and the intricate web of influences that shape patients' decisions regarding treatment acceptance.

More importantly, two studies found that there is no positive connection between the application of motivational quotes and the behavioral changes in their targeted audiences [18-19]. Conner et al. highlight the significance of affective attitudes in influencing health behaviors compared to deliberately designed and received motivational quotes [18]. This study demonstrates that messages

targeting emotional responses are more effective in promoting exercise than predesigned motivational messages or no messages. Moreover, even though researchers used motivational quotes in this experiment, they found that affective attitudes were found to mediate the impact of these messages on behavior [18]. This research supports the idea that affective and cognitive attitudes (in this case, the intentional attitudes researchers intended to stimulate via motivational quotes) are distinct, and affective attitudes play a more crucial role in influencing people's decisions.

4.   Conclusion

This paper posits that the existing research would show a generally positive attitude concerning the use of motivational quotes in medical and educational fields. Multiple research projects have found that motivational quotes do fruitfully influence people to take action. These researchers used different media, such as mobile phones, practitioners, and pamphlets, to display motivational quotes with positive results that a large portion of patients became more active in taking medicines, stopping smoking, et al.

However, some research projects have raised crucial questions regarding it. The media may have lost its function of exposing motivational quotes to patients due to various reasons. The overexposure to motivational quotes had led to counterproductive results in persuasion. In other words, people grew weary of accepting the repetitive message. Furthermore, the abstract information in motivational quotes, at specific times and towards certain groups of people, may have lost its valence at all. Last but not least, some scholars have made a distinction between external motivation and internal motivation: for someone who has lost their internal motivation, it is utterly challenging, if not impossible, to accept external motivation as motivational quotes. To sum up, there is voluminous research on the psychological effects of motivational quotes, yet there are mixed and disparate opinions on their use to motivate people. Future studies need to pay more attention to the specificity of certain contextual situations, such as the mindset of targeted audiences, the selection of media, and the suitability of the chosen motivational quotes.

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