

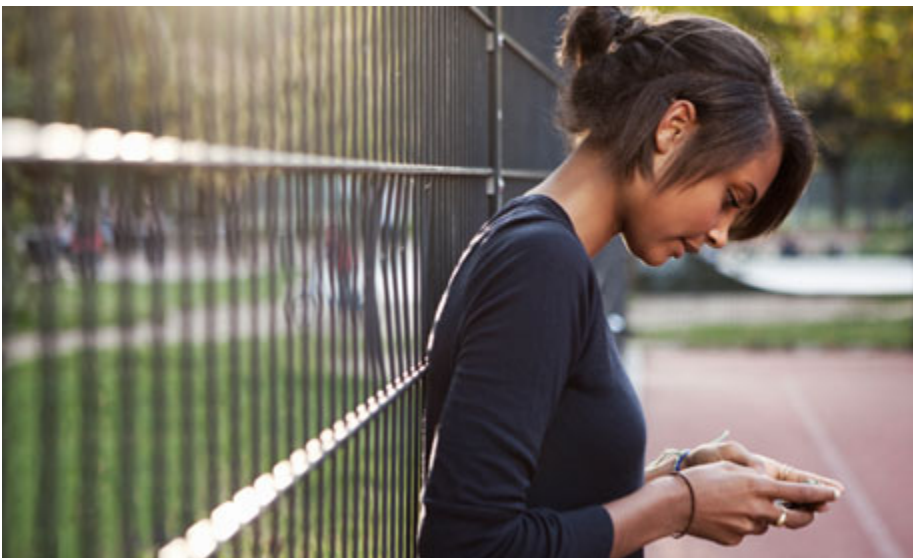
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Daily inspiring text messages fail to inspire US students to perform better

Organisers gave high school pupils free mobile phones if they agreed to receive missives – some motivating, some prosaic

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The groundbreaking experiment bombarded American high school pupils with daily text messages.
Photograph: Sebastian Pfuetze/Getty Images

A groundbreaking experiment that bombarded US high school students with inspiring text messages was found to be a success on all counts except one: it made no difference to how the students performed in school.

Roland Fryer, an economist at [Harvard University](#), helped establish the experiment involving nearly 2,000 pupils at state [schools](#) in Oklahoma City.

The students were given free [mobile phones](#) in return for receiving daily texts written by a trend-setting advertising agency, encouraging them to stay in school and study for [exams](#).

Many of the students correctly answered quiz questions showing they had paid attention to the messages – but the nine-month-long randomised field study failed to find any improvement in the students' academic results or attendance.

Fryer concluded that while the daily diet of texts changed pupils' views about the value of education and caused them to say they were working harder in school, "there was no measurable increase in educational attainment or achievement".

The aim of the study was "to assess whether students better understood the link between human capital and outcomes", Fryer wrote in a [working paper just published by the National Bureau of Economic Research](#).

The texts were sent at 6pm each day, including weekends – calculated as the best time to reach the sixth and seventh grade students, aged 12-13.

Some pupils could earn additional airtime credits by reading books and responding to questions.

The messages were crafted with the aid of [Droga5](#) – an award-winning New York agency that handles the US account of Newcastle Brown Ale – and veered between the motivating and the prosaic.

"People don't look down on someone for being too educated," stated one text, while another warned: "High school dropouts are more than three times as likely to be unemployed as college graduates."

As to why the study failed to improve academic outcomes, Fryer suggested it could be because the students only had a vague idea how to increase their achievement once they had been motivated.

"In this scenario ... students put in more effort, but the effort was not effective at producing test scores given their lack of knowledge of how to translate effort into output," Fryer said.