

2021

## University Students' Low Participation of the Emergency Text Alert Systems

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Charyl Ramsey

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

University Students' Low Participation of the Emergency Text Alert Systems

By

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MA, Walden University, 2020

MA, Austin Peay State University, 2012

BS, Austin Peay State University, 2011

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice/Emergency Management

Walden University

February 2021

## Abstract

Text alert systems can help save lives by alerting individuals to dangers in the area, allowing them to react appropriately to the threat. For example, text alerts can give an individual the time to either run, hide, or fight during an active shooter incident.

Conversely, when an individual does not receive an alert, they cannot respond to a threat and may be vulnerable to potential risk. Because no research had been completed on why individuals choose not to enroll in text alert programs, this qualitative study explored why students did not enroll in the text alert programs at their higher learning institution to address how enrollment could be increased. The three theoretical frameworks used to structure this study included the routine activity approach, the self-perception theory, and the self-discrepancy theory. Data were collected using purposive sampling with a snowballing method from 12 university students and analyzed using open coding with preset codes created using short phrases from the interviews to develop themes. The results of the study showed that female students are more likely to enroll in an optional program. The reasons for registering included to know what is going on and being alerted to pertinent information such as weather issues. Reasons for not registering included they forgot about it, do not need it, it is not important, and the program was not marketed very well. Implications for a positive social change in improving public policy to make enrollment for emergency text alert programs mandatory to help save lives at colleges and universities. The assumption is that schools with a mandatory subscription will allow for more comprehensive notification and increased safety.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father, who both passed away before starting my education journey. They taught me to reach for my goals and never to let anything get in my way. To my dog Jack Black who passed away during the journey of my dissertation. He was one of my rocks during this time and always kept me going and sat beside me while doing homework. To my sister Kendra, brothers Patrick and Shawn for their continuing support. To my sister Kayla for always giving me the push when I need it and kept me going on my dissertation journey when I wanted to give up. Last but not least, all of my nieces and nephews' thanks for always believing in me.

## Acknowledgments

First, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Greg Koehle; thank you for all of your support, kind words, and encouragement during my dissertation coursework. All of your words gave me the strength and courage to get to the finish line. To my friend Anna Douglas for advising me to go to Walden University and answer any questions, I had during my time there. All of those who gave me support during my education journey listened to me about anything going on and gave me advice when needed. Once again, I acknowledge Kayla; she was always encouraging me and keeping me motivated to do schoolwork when I did not want to but was required to complete items.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The mayhem that follows dangerous events that impact public safety can create potentially more significant problems than the events themselves. Alert systems can be instrumental in advising populations affected by a dangerous threat regarding what they need to know, where they need to be, and what they need to do in the immediate emergency. The importance of emergency preparedness was underscored in recent events such as the wildfire in Fort McMurray, Alberta. On May 2, the mayor of Fort McMurray issued an evacuation order that was mandatory for individuals in Centennial Park, which is located near Fort McMurray. This order was communicated by mass notification systems, social media, and news. However, residents expressed frustration with the disorganization, lack of emergency response personnel, and delay of notifications (Akmin, 2016). Because emergency alert mechanisms are changing, assessing how to alert the public of potential dangers must be conducted.

This study assessed the reasons associated with nonparticipation in emergency alert systems while interviewing students from a university located in Clarksville, Tennessee. This study's findings may support administrators and policymakers in generating ways to increase familiarity, understanding, and participation in emergency preparedness on college and university campuses. With this study, I will enhance programs currently available and help public safety entities alert the community to imminent danger and emergencies. The following sections discuss the background of enrollment of emergency text alert systems, the problem, the purpose, theoretical

foundation of the study, nature of this study, all assumptions, any scope and delimitations, any potential limitations for this study, and along with any signs of this research.

### **Background**

According to the Austin Peay State University website, students are automatically enrolled to receive messages in their email on various alerts. Those enrolled in the text alert system are different because they represent students, faculty, staff, and parents. In 2017, 9,908 individuals received text messages with an enrollment of 10463 students, 675 faculty, and 708 staff. In 2018, 10391 individuals received text messages with 10954 students enrolled, 694 faculty, and 873 staff. In 2019, 2,927 individuals received text messages with an enrollment of 11048 students, 704 faculty members, and 778 staff members at the institution (Austin Peay State University, 2017). Between the years 2018 and 2019, the system was purged to restart because so many individuals have left the university or graduated.

At other universities in the area, like Belmont University, students are automatically enrolled in email alerts, but no other data is publicly available about text alert enrollment numbers. Conversely, at Vanderbilt University, students give a phone number to the university, and they are automatically enrolled in receiving text alert messages and emails. Information gathered from Eastern Kentucky University indicated that in 2017 they had 16,612 individuals receiving text messages that included students, faculty, staff, and parents. During 2018, the numbers went down to 15,815, and again in 2019, they went down to 14,980. In 2017, Eastern Kentucky University had 16,612

students; in 2018, there were 15,816 students, and in 2019, 14,980 students were enrolled (Eastern Kentucky University, n.d.). No data was able to be retrieved on the number of faculty and staff at the institution. The numbers of individuals receiving text alerts numbers indicate a drop in enrollment in the text alert programs, pointing to a potential issue with enrollment in these systems. Text messages are quicker to get information than emails because individuals may not know when an email is received as quickly as when notified about a text message.

### **Problem Statement**

There is a problem with the enrollment participation in optional text alert programs used to tell students of emergencies at colleges and universities. It is not known why students will not voluntarily enroll in these programs. This has resulted in many colleges and universities having a low enrollment in text alert programs (Ada et al., 2016). Currently, several researchers have reported that students at colleges and universities that have a mandatory participation policy reported feeling ready and safer when compared to students who are enrolled on campuses that do not make enrollment mandatory (Hammond, 2017). Some contributing factors of the failure to register voluntarily could include the option not being marketed very well and an individual not thinking it is crucial to enroll or having a ready cellphone. Other contributing factors include believing they will get too many text messages.

The literature reviewed for this study found that others have investigated this problem by focusing on emergency preparedness, enrollment rates at schools with mandatory programs, communication/coordination processes, and students'

training/education (Madden, 2015; Sheldon, 2015). None of the studies examined, from the student's perspective, why they elected not to enroll, and what might improve their decision to participate. My research filled this gap by contributing knowledge that can be used by university leaders to develop policies guiding the requirements for what on-campus emergency preparedness programs must contain. To conduct my research, I interviewed students regarding how the text alerts systems are viewed by both students who do and do not enroll in the systems.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative study aimed to discover the reasons for low enrollment in the emergency text alert systems at colleges and universities. I used semi structured interviews to find the reasons students do and do not participate in optional emergency text alert systems at colleges and universities and develop recommendations of actions that will be made to improve the overall enrollment.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: How do students view the enrollment in the emergency text alert systems at universities?

Research Question 2: Why do students not participate in the text alert system at universities?

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used three theories to inform the collection and analysis of data. First, I used the routine activity approach by Cohen and Felson (1979). This theory asserts that criminal acts require certain aspects such as likely offenders, suitable targets, and an absence of



capable guardians to go against crime (Ungvarsky, 2019). Theorists who use this theory posit that a structural change in a potential criminal's routine activity pattern can reduce crimes according to the theory. This theory fits into the current research because the more students enroll in the emergency text alert systems at colleges and universities, the text alerts can make the general public more capable guardians and less suitable targets regarding the routine activity theory. In other words, an emergency text alert program can alert others of danger that is occurring or specific information that needs to get to a particular group of individuals; without it, students could be a possible target of an active shooter incident or an armed robbery after one has already occurred which is a primary component of the routine activity theory (Robertiello, 2018).

To better understand the potential disconnect between emergency response systems and the end-users, I also framed this study with the theory of self-perception (Bem, 1972) and the theory of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987). The self-perception theory describes an individual's behavior to make an informed decision on any issue based on their attitude (Nguyen, 2016). According to Bem (1972), people should know themselves as they learn by observing others on their behavior. In self-perception theory, our actions are influenced by the actions of others. The current research topic illustrates this approach in the cognitive dissonance of people who think, "It won't happen to me," so they do not participate in a text alert program. Students may tend to rely on preconceived notions regarding the issue, so they perceive that nothing dangerous will affect them until it is a fact. Theorists assert that a better understanding of alert systems' perception would improve the system and participation overall (Elsass et al., 2016).

The self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) identifies three primary domains of a person. Those domains include the actual self, ideal self, and ought self. Actual self transpires expressive qualities that individuals believe about themselves. Ideal self describes the characteristics an individual would like to have in themselves (Falewicz & Bak, 2015; Stanley & Burrow, 2015). Then, the ought self theorized that individuals could be vulnerable to their emotions, causing them to feel threatened when there is any potential danger (Grogan, 2016). This theory is related to the study because I assessed individuals' behaviors and what they may perceive others believe they should be doing.

### **Nature of the Study**

The approach chosen was the social constructivism approach. This approach deals with sociology and social sciences for the disciplinary root. It deals with how people in a setting does construct their reality. The data sources were interviews. The participants did not need to have some direct experience with the phenomenon studied. The analysis was the constructionist or even narrative approach to complete the study. This also included some cognitive constructivism, which deals with the nature of learning. Another aspect was the response to interactions that go along with an environmental stimulus or the interpretation of that stimulus (Berkeley Graduate Division, 2019). This approach allowed for gathering more in-depth responses surrounding the little-known phenomenon of volunteer participation in text-based emergency response systems at colleges and universities.

Data were collected from several levels of students' education levels: sophomores, juniors, and senior students. All students were enrolled in a four-year university with

between 10,000 and 15,000 students that do not have a mandatory emergency alert entered policy. Individuals were selected using a purposive sampling and a snowballing method. Data were coded using hand-coding, and themes developed with each transcript were color-coded with different colors used to highlight the information. The text defined the concepts as well as the categories used. The hand-coding was processed using Microsoft Word. These codes consisted of phrases that were found and color-coded to a specific color for each code. Each code was placed in an Excel spreadsheet to keep the data organized.

### **Definitions**

*Emergency*: an unforeseen combination of circumstances or the resulting state that calls for immediate action Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)

*Opt-in*: to choose to do or be involved in something (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.).

*Opt-out*: to decide not to participate in something —often used with of (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.).

*Alert*: watchful and prompt to meet danger or emergency (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.).

### **Assumptions**

When it comes to qualitative research, four philosophical assumptions, ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, should be attended to (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Researchers' leading frameworks for those assumptions are post-positivism, social constructivism, postmodern perspectives, and pragmatism. The social constructivism approach is about understanding the world in which we live and work and multiple meanings being developed. Researchers are looking for the complexity of

viewpoints using this approach. For this research, the social constructivism approach allowed me to ask broad, open-ended questions. There is a focus on processes when interacting with others. It also allows for the background to shape the interpretation, meaning what the others have to say about the world (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

### **Ontological Assumption**

Ontological assumptions are about what form is and what the nature of reality is to someone. Positivism deals with an object or the actual reality that exists, which can be governed by some unchangeable natural cause-effect law that is known. Positivism also consists of stable preexisting patterns or even order, which can be discovered sometime. Reality does not have time, not having any context bound to it, and is usually generalized. This would also involve the nature of human beings, which deals with being rational. There is the shaping of external factors used when certain conditions are going on, which will engage individuals in doing a specific behavior or action (Aliyu et al., 2015). This research's ontological assumption was the assumption about the nature of the reality involving emergency text alert systems and individuals' need to enroll in colleges and universities' programs to alert pertinent information promptly.

### **Epistemology Assumption**

This one is about the nature of the knowledge of the research being conducted. Knowledge is a systematic way of understanding the social world, and it can consist of a hypothesis that can be verified by the facts or laws presented. Probabilistic forecasting can hold when there are large groups of individuals and occurring in many different situations. Knowledge deals with it being accurate and precise in research (Aliyu et al.,

2015). The epistemological assumption dealing with this research study is the knowledge gained on how important it is to be enrolled in emergency text alert programs and how to program enrollments can be improved.

### **Axiology Assumption/ Methodology Assumption**

Axiology deals with how someone acts in the world, and it will help to reflect and influence how individuals think. This assumption also involves being able to urge some unity between the ontological and epistemological. Axiology has an essential role by putting the standards and requirements acceptable to a research approach, and the research techniques being used. The methodology aspect helps to ask how strong knowledge for research can be gained. The methodological cannot be reduced to a question of methods; however, the method must be fitted to a methodology that is already predetermined (Aliyu et al., 2015). This study's axiology assumption was how the knowledge or lack of knowledge about emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities affects the enrollment numbers. The study's methodology is essential, based on an interview one-on-one with predetermined open-ended questions that allow for follow-up questions, if necessary, to gain trust from the participants, which will be consistent with the purpose of this research study being conducted.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

During this study, I examined the extent of the relationship between individuals and their reason for not enrolling in emergency text alert programs at their colleges and universities and improving enrollment status. The problem was focused on a lack of enrollment numbers at colleges and universities where emergency text alert programs

have an opt-in program. The focus on social constructivism did align with the routine activity theory, self-discrepancies theory, and self-perception theory in the context that appeared to be concerning individuals feeling on if they need to enroll or not in text alert programs.

Validity was based on the true concept and measuring the findings of a research study accurately (Burkholder et al., 2016). The concept of internal validity dealt with one variable's ability to change another variable, and the external validity dealt with being able to reproduce the study's design. The validity came up with similar results being used in other studies. It was known that there could be a lot of threats to both internal and external validity (Burkholder et al., 2016). The best way to mitigate any risks is to ensure one is adhering to the APA Ethics codes and all other ethical guidelines that have been outlined in conducting research studies.

### **Potential Limitations**

To discuss any challenges related to the researcher's biases, an appropriate process was created and used to ensure data validity and credibility. I used memo bracketing to help reduce bias by using a written memorandum while conducting research. A significant limitation to the study was the subjective nature of qualitative research, and results cannot be generalized beyond the opinions of those who participated in the study. Identifying potential students and ensuring confidentiality was a challenge and was addressed through several recruitment methods, including the possibility of anonymous participation where I did not even know the participant's identity to encourage open and candid involvement and responses. Another barrier to the study was

recruiting participants for the study. I went to local off-campus student hangouts to recruit people for the study. The next barrier could include the way a respondent sees the interviewer could be an issue too. I met with the participants before the interview to build trust. A barrier could be with keeping the data secure. All the data stored on a coded flash drive was held in a secured place at my house. All data will be kept for five years from the completion date and then destroyed.

### **Significance**

This research filled a gap in understanding by identifying why students do not voluntarily enroll in the text alert programs. This area has not been researched in higher education. Alert systems can help advise imperiled populations of what they need to know, where they need to go, and what they need to do in volatile emergencies. The study assessed the reasons associated with nonparticipation in emergency alert systems while surveying students from a university in Clarksville, Tennessee. This study's findings supported administrators and policymakers in generating ways to increase familiarity with, understand, and participate in emergency preparedness on college and university campuses. This study may influence criminal justice and public policy and administration through its direct benefit to community people. This study may enhance current alert programs and help public safety entities improve the process of alerting the community to imminent danger and emergencies. Implications for a positive social change include improved public policy to make enrollment mandatory to save lives. For example, an assumption that schools with mandatory alerts will have less loss of lives during an on-campus shooting.

### **Summary**

Though there has been the creation of numerous emergency text alert systems for colleges and universities to use, there is a lack of participation. This lack of involvement and how it can be fixed is unknown. This problem needed to be addressed to help prepare individuals at colleges and universities in case of emergencies. This study looked to answer the following research questions: How do students view enrollment in the emergency text alert systems at universities? Why do they not opt-in to the programs? This study's findings provided social change for all colleges and universities through recommendations for policy changes and created.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

There is a problem with the enrollment of emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities. As stated earlier in Chapter 1, in 2019, 2,927 individuals received text messages with an enrollment of 11,048 students, 704 faculty, and 778 staff at the institution (Austin Peay State University, 2017). However, past violence on U.S. campuses has highlighted emergency response and safety as essential topics of discussion and implementation (Harvey, 2011). For example, the Virginia Tech active shooter incident in 2007, in which 32 students and teachers were shot, brought to light several shortfalls in college campus emergency preparedness, response, and communication (Jackson, 2011; Leiva, 2014). Over two billion individuals subscribe to a cell phone carrier (Tennakoon & Taras, 2012). When a disaster occurs, uninformed citizens in the affected area can create precarious emergency response personnel situations.

When individuals are not notified of an ongoing incident, the problem is that it can result in more issues and even casualties due to individuals unknowingly heading into the area of danger. This potential scenario shows a need for more communication methods and improved connections to communication methods (Cooper, 2007). Victims and responders do not know what was happening, where to go, or what to do. One way this communication breakdown can be alleviated is by using a system.

Emergency preparedness is critical. Emergency preparedness can include helping individuals to make preparations for uncertain future events (Lakoff, 2007). Individuals have information-seeking behavior when an emergency happens to reduce their

uncertainty of a situation (Heighington, 2011). Since emergency preparedness, awareness, or why crisis management has evolved, many more administrators, legislators, and business owners have noticed ways to help keep safe during an emergency. Emergency preparedness often starts in the workplace (Duff, 2007), such as on college campuses. It includes a means of mass notification to communicate pertinent information quickly and efficiently. Emergency preparedness demonstrates a notification system's utility as it enables a community to respond better and faster. These systems allow a community such as a college campus to take precautions quickly and alert numerous individuals at one time (Page et al., 2013). Emergency preparedness is also about preventing or reducing the effects of natural disasters and violent crimes (Connelly, 2011; Hough & Spillan, 2011; Spence et al., 2007).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The current study, literature review started with searches using Google Scholar and a combination of Capella University and Walden University databases using the terms that follow: *emergency communications, emergency management, emergency planning, crisis, text alert, SMS alert, cell, alert, phone, alert, mobile, college, university, higher education, campus, and emergency preparedness*. Article search terms used the time span of 2013-2020. Current dissertations on emergency preparedness and text alert enrollment were reviewed. Their sources were noted and utilized. The search yielded some excellent information for this study; however, I could not identify information on reasons individuals do not enroll and what can be done to improve enrollment numbers. The selected articles listed below relate to the emergency text alert programs; the number

of people who sign up for the program, which can help save lives, is listed below. The articles were in a variety of databases. Some of the terms used to search included *emergency, text alert, college and universities, enrollment* in ProQuest, Community College Week, Link Gale, and Homeland Security Affairs.

Leiva (2014) discussed the incident that happened at Virginia Tech when an active shooter helped highlight shortfalls with the preparedness for emergencies at college and universities. Ada et al. (2016) talked about a system not being marketed very well to enroll people in the text alert program. Madden (2015) discussed how the text alert is not just a communication device but also what can be done and what the perception entails about text alert messages. Sheldon (2018) introduced the studies that have been conducted to see how students respond to alerts that are sent. These studies are brought on before launching the literature review because they are vital to the study. They add critical information to show the importance of emergency text alert programs at all colleges and universities.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

This study examined the relationship between an individual's reasons for not enrolling in emergency text alert programs with the intent to identify ways to improve enrollment. The literature presented several theories to help explain why individuals neglect to enroll in emergency text alert programs. However, the most appropriate theories include Cohen & Felson's routine activity theory, Bem's self-perception theory, and Higgin's self-discrepancy theory.

### **Routine Activity Theory**

Routine activity theory is a credible criminological theory capable of serving as a baseline to examine the lack of enrollment of text alert programs and reduce victimization. The routine activity theory was used as a foundation for a theoretical framework because it helped to develop strategies to prevent (Leukfeldt & Yar, 2016) students from becoming a victim in the event of disasters and emergencies on a college campus or university through enrollment in available emergency text alert programs. This theory had some key aspects: potential offender, target, and absence of protection (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The routine activity theory was created before emergency text alert systems and before many mass shootings occurring at numerous locations, especially at educational institutions.

The routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) was initially developed to analyze crimes that happened without offender information. There has not been a precedent of using the routine activity theory regarding enrollment or how students perceive the emergency text alert programs. This theory is flexible enough to be used in many different topics of research. The routine activity theory assisted in the study because individuals, during their daily routines, carry a cellphone used in prevention; this theory wants to develop prevention strategies. This study's prevention strategy included improving enrollment in text alert programs and found the perceptions students have regarding prevention strategies.

## **Self-Perception Theory**

Self-perception theory involves explaining actions and behavior, which will help shape attitudes and behaviors regarding perceptions about varying topics. The original theory of self-perception was developed in 1884 by William James, which took the stance individuals involved would only embrace their attitudes once they had observed only themselves in action. Individuals would allow for their actions as well as behaviors to precede their emotions and attitudes instead. James (1890) disagreed that when feeling sad and then crying, the behavior resulted from the emotion. His theory was that when someone is crying, it is an antecedent, a feeling of sadness. James Bem's (1972) self-perception theory is an arousal-based theory of James (1890).

Bem's (1972) theory states individuals comprehend what their attitudes are and emotions from what they observe personally on their conduct and situations they see during that conduct. According to Fazio (1987), the theory allows for individuals' overt behaviors and situational cues surrounding their behavior. This helps provide the individual with a clear indication of their attitude toward an object currently in question. Another aspect of the theory directly points out the critical role of behavior, suggesting a partial equivalence among both self and interpersonal perceptions. Self-perception theory has no precedent of being used regarding the topic of this research. This theory was used for this research topic because it can focus on students' reasons to not enroll in the emergency text alert programs at their higher education institutions.

### **Self-Discrepancy theory**

The self-discrepancy theory has two dimensions involving self-beliefs: the domains of self and the standpoints of self—self-include actual, ideal, and should selves. Our actual self is the attribute that a person believes they would possess currently. The ideal self is the attributes that are desired or hope a person can possess that. Should self is the characteristics that a person feels should be possessed by them, including any moral obligation and responsibilities. Self-discrepancies can result in emotional vulnerabilities that involve dejection or agitation (Barnett et al., 2017).

The two standpoints involved in the self-discrepancy theory include an individual's standpoint and the standpoint from a significant person, such as their mother or even close friends. This theory also contains motivation and information-processing assumptions. This theory assumes that individuals are motivated to reach the condition that matches their personality self-concept to a relevant self-guide (Higgins, 1989). There is no precedent of the self-discrepancy theory being utilized within researching emergency text alert enrollment. The theory was a good one to use for this research study because the other standpoint, which involves a significant other when a close friend is enrolled in the text alert program, could influence the subject to join the text alert program.

### **Literature Review**

The topic of emergency preparedness encompasses many areas, including resources and processes that give individuals and population's tools and instructions for survival when human-made or natural disasters occur, which includes text alert systems

(National Terrorism Alert Response Center, 2014). Emergency response ranges from being aware of items potentially needed during chaotic and tragic events such as storms, floods, fires, and active shooter incidents and how to react and respond to those events. Understanding some essential terms in emergency preparedness will increase the success of the response to these incidents. Emergencies are defined as "unforeseen circumstances that can result in immediate action, and it could need urgent assistance or relief" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d., p. 407). Due to the open environment on a college campus, there is an increased risk of exposure to unpredictable weather and access by unstable people. In an emergency, alert programs exist to improve persons' safety located on or around college campuses (Karasz et al., 2014).

Most universities and colleges have emergency alert programs in place. Many of the programs are optional, not well understood, and participation rates are commonly low. These types of systems are used to alert individuals to current situations that are imminent. They can help create a plan of evacuation and advice individuals to stay away from the impending incidents. Although these systems exist to increase safety on campuses, people report not knowing about the programs and citing various reasons for their lack of participation in the alert systems (Omnilert, 2014). Additionally, there is a lack of emergency preparedness knowledge among students (Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2011). At the university level, campus preparation is vital as shootings become more common (Benicia, 2017).

Emergency text alerts are important at universities and colleges because of the Jeanne Clery Act and active shooter events at this type of location. Jeanne Clery was a

student at Lehigh University located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. In 1986, Jeanne was in her residence hall room when another student gained access to the building through an unsecured door. Jeanne was 19 years old when she was raped, sodomized, bitten, beaten, and strangled by a fellow student. Lehigh University was sued for negligence for their lapse in security. The family of Jeanne did not stop there; they used the money from the lawsuit plus some of their own to launch Security on Campus, Inc., a nonprofit. They started to lobby the state lawmakers to make it mandatory for colleges to publicize campus crimes (Gross et al., 1990).

The violent murder of Jeanne Clery laid the groundwork for the Jeanne Clery Act, which was signed in 1990. This statute is one that benefits from individuals being enrolled in emergency text alert programs. It is a requirement of the Jeanne Clery Act for timely warnings to be issued to the campus community. The act requires colleges and universities to send out timely notifications of any crime that threatens individuals' safety on the campus. The policies that deal with timely warnings have to be published in the Annual Campus Security Report. Emergency text alert programs allow for timely notifications to be sent out and received by those enrolled in the programs quicker than those who are not registered.

Many institutions have been able to integrate emergency notifications systems as a part of their crisis communication through grants and federal funding to assist with timely warnings of imminent threats or dangers. There is no real definition for "timely" from the Federal government. However, how others perceive the message and their behaviors due to receiving the message affects institutions' warnings' compliance during



any emergencies occurring. Preparedness can accurately and swiftly communicate with individuals on campuses during any emergency or surrounding the institutions (Singer, 2019). Emergency text messaging programs are growing and should be a primary communication tool to reach a mass audience efficiently and with accuracy.

According to Madden (2017), “timely notification” regarding the Clery Act, the constraints of the term "timely" surrounds the vague nature due to the lack of accounting for any uncertainties that can exist in crises. The experience and training can influence emergency notifications, according to Madden (2017), because of an ability to intuit and rely on their expertise when someone interprets the severity and urgency of the incident in question. Public safety personnel is not equally trained when it comes to crisis communication. The Clery Act mandates the importance of having trained personnel and a clear protocol published and everyone's view regarding emergency alert systems (Madden, 2017). Crisis communication is becoming more dependent on using mobile devices to send out emergency notifications.

The age group of college-age adults ranging from 18-29 years of age report cell phone ownership percentage of 95 %, and 97% of them engages in both sending and receiving at least 100 messages every day (Pew Internet Organization, 2014). This group would be considered the high-frequency texting category because they send many messages each day. Individuals in their 20s who own a smartphone have reached extreme saturation levels (Pew Research Center, 2015). The fact is that texting elements are more appealing to the younger generations of people than any other communication method.

Individuals in college prefer texting because it is more affordable, accessible, faster, can multitask while with others, and can keep their text messages confidential.

Text messaging to send out various types of information has increased to include reminders about scheduled appointments for multiple reasons, including doctors' appointments and reminders to make payments for bills before their due dates. Using text messages allows for the relay of real-time responses and exchanges. Text messages can be a fast and convenient method to get information out that is needed to be relayed quickly. Electronic communication has continued to evolve during the past decade, which allows for ample opportunities (Ouk, 2019) for locations that utilize text messages, such as emergency text alert programs

Some systems can alert program participants to receive messages during an emergency by sending a message to a cell phone, email, or message board. Some examples include Red Alert, CallFire, and RapidNotify. These alerts and warnings are more than just communicating messages; they inform recipients what action they need to take based on what is happening (Madden, 2015). These can notify individuals about crucial and time-sensitive information. Red Alert (Red Alert, 2015) advises individuals regarding all types of imminent and urgent situations on or around campuses. These notifications are sent directly to individuals and include information on what needs to be done immediately. The systems also alert individuals whether they are in class, in their vehicle, or walking campus. In addition to sending texts to cell phones, PC Alert (Message Net Systems, 2013) also sends the message to digital signs located in the public places on and around campuses (Community College Week, 2007). In a 2008 census,

over 500 campuses were surveyed regarding program participation. It was found that 39 % of potential participants were signed-up in emergency response programs and The University of Missouri's Columbia campus had only 15 % of the students participating in the system (SC Staff, 2008). A recent assessment was organized using participants from different universities and colleges that included Northern Illinois University and the University of Wisconsin. There were various percentages on the notification systems' participation. Participation ranged from 28.5 % to 67%.

Additionally, Linnane (2013) found about 32 % participate (ranging from 25 % to 65 %) among the 13 campuses in the University of Wisconsin University System. This data includes programs that were optional participation, as well as mandatory. Required opt-in programs had a higher participation rate (Harwath, 2013).

There has not been extensive research on why individuals do not participate in emergency response programs or what actions can improve education and text alert systems. For this purpose, a study of text alert participation research can decrease the possible issues and potential casualties by increasing the number of individuals informed during a high-intensity incident. The current study addressed the literature gap by ascertaining what can be done to improve participation in the text alert system. They spoke about how text messaging is reliable when an emergency occurs because students are more likely to quickly access data through cellular service at the University of Connecticut. Students are more likely to see a text message a long time before they see an email. Systems can be consistent and prompt, making text alert systems one of the most efficient systems available to alert students (Castelan, 2018).

It was determined that effective communication concerning the incident and any advice could reduce any of the negative aspects and help save lives when it comes to emergencies. Communication concerning emergencies needs to be disseminated, and the quicker it is done, the better the survival rate for those in the affected area. The use of cellphones in emergencies is becoming more common. The use of mobile phones to communicate emergency information can target a specific area to message. Cellphones are reliable for emergencies because they operate on a separate channel than those for phones and radios. Successful communication also involves how individuals respond to the received message (Wong et al., 2018). Kirkland from UCLA says that text messages are quick when sent out; it can take less than five minutes to reach everyone enrolled in the systems. However, message transmission usually occurs faster than what is predicted as the message is more likely received within a minute from being sent. Students at UCLA also think the alert system is an effective way to keep the community updated during urgent situations (Rashidi, 2018).

A study that was completed on how the messages were received included thirty-three individuals using seven themes. The theme dealing with compliance with researchers found most would comply with the information. Some would not take it seriously when with friends, and others stated it depended on the amount of risk they felt they were in at the time. While the information needs a theme, the participants wanted more information about the situation than initially received. Many wanted more explicit instructions on what they are supposed to do during that situation. The design of the message is also essential to have keywords that would catch an individual's attention. A

lot of the participants reported that they would look at a message that came from "UK Alerts," while some would not read the message at all, and it did not matter who it was from (Wong et al., 2018).

In 2011, the Federal Emergency Management Agency started using wireless mobile alerts throughout the United States. We have been using text messages for several years, but there is still a lack of participation in receiving information. Only recently has there been a scholarly interest involving public warning messages, which has been due to associated communication channels that have been developed. There is a need for additional general information on message programs (Bean et al., 2016).

Based on existing literature, text alert systems have been used to send relevant and timely information to interested parties with instructions on what to do during an emergency (Jackson, 2016) to university communities, including reports and directions regarding imminent danger. Regardless of the benefits, many students are still not participating in available programs. Text alert systems have been used for more than ten years, without adequate research conducted to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the methods of contacting interested parties with pertinent information during a crisis (Madden, 2015). The use of early alert systems has been found to improve student retention and overall success (Asby, 2015). Communication efficiency increases the possibility of positive response as the notification system enables a community to respond better and faster to the incident through increased awareness. These systems allow a community such as a college campus to take precautions quickly and alert numerous individuals at one time (Page et al., 2013). However, despite the potential

benefits associated with timely warnings, there are low participation numbers in optional-participation programs at many schools. Regardless of the availability, individuals still do not participate (Baker & Boland, 2011; Elsass et al., 2016; Schafer et al., 2010).

The research literature on emergency text alert systems indicated that we know they are useful in notifying individuals. We know they help save lives, but we do not understand why students do not participate in a free alerting system offered as optional programs at their college or university. Therefore, this study was completed to assess nonparticipation reasons and improve the text alert participation at colleges and universities.

The use of mobile devices can be penetrated at a high rate among individuals with well-established coverage areas. Using mobile phones can be used before, during, and after emergencies. The use of SMS has been determined to be notable along with an acknowledged way to correspond with others. There is a virtual assurance that the receiving party will get the message that was sent. During a study on how viable text messages are during emergencies, many participants agreed that everyone should receive a warning without an opt-in option on their cellphones (Al-Dalahmeh et al., 2018). It would also be imperative for those associated at a college or university to be automatically enrolled in their institutions' alert programs. The community members also need to be aware of the text alert programs at colleges and universities when looking for an institution to attend.

In 2019, at Ball State University, the Office of Risk Management got with the Student Government Association senators to conduct a vote on changing their emergency

alert systems. Their system was an "opt-in" system, and they wanted to pass a bill that changed it to be an "opt-out" system. The bill passed the Senate with a vote of 37-2 to make it an "opt-out" (UWIRE, 2019). Establishing a common language can provide the context regarding the dynamic, iterative, evolving world in the usage of emergency text alert programs; this literature review is framed around a variety of concepts.

### **Crisis Overview**

Even though there is a consensus on the concept of a crisis, there is no single definition for individuals to refer to knowing. Attempting to understand a crisis is done through the impact of the situations which occur. The fact is that a crisis is an unanticipated event that ends up disrupting and threatening either an organization or individuals at any time of day. These will potentially damage the normal functions of an organization. Those situations usually result in physical or mental injury or property damage. The incidents can harm the reputation and public standing of the institution that was impacted by the crisis. Crises are not always predictable, but they can all be managed. In the academic setting, the crisis management concept would include how the response to the threat of harm is to happen or does happen.

### **Crisis Management**

Crisis management is the practice concerning preparing for, responding to, and recovering from any emergency or event that causes disruptions. It is also defined as a process where organizations minimize any potential and unknown risks (Pearson & Chair, 1998). According to Deverell & Olson (2010), crisis management involves the requirement to "adjust to the changing conditions." A campus crisis response involves

some formal policies, procedures, and guidelines (Patashnick, 2016). This is where the procedure of mandatory participation for emergency text alert programs would be very beneficial. During the middle of a crisis, it is too late to plan for that critical incident. Planning for every possible crisis scenario is impossible for an organization to create and plan for it to happen at their entity (Zdziarski et al., 2007).

Before the 9/11 and Virginia Tech incidents, there was not much crisis management at higher education institutions. They only planned for a crisis if they were located in an area with a high potential impact on natural disasters. On college campuses, crises can be both predictable and unforeseen at times. When an emergency happens, it creates the need for information because there are uncertainty and stress caused by the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Crisis communication is not distinct when it comes to crisis management. Crisis communication is an essential practice to assist with safeguarding and to help mitigate an emergency (Patashnick, 2007).

### **Crisis Communication**

Crisis communication is vital when it comes to emergency preparedness on college campuses. Crisis communication is a part of crisis management, which is the responsibility of senior leadership at universities. Crisis communication is also the specialty of those in Public Relations (PR), which involves choosing the responses during and after incidents to let others know important information. During a crisis, the data sent out is a significant factor in public relations (Singer, 2019).

This type of communication is an essential piece when it comes to crisis management and the communication process. Crisis communication does not involve a



single message only given during a crisis; however, it should involve many messages being sent. The messages need to be sent anytime there has been a change in the crisis to update the audience (Zimmerman, 2013). Crisis communication usually will start at the organizational level. However, crisis communication can also be started at a constituent level (Veil, 2011). Many college campuses have blue phones to assist with crisis preparedness, allowing individuals to call for any assistance they need. The use of emails, webpages, and text messages helps with crisis preparedness, which gives the institutions the capability to notify others about the emergencies or disasters affecting their institutions (Sullivan, 2012). Crisis communication is essential, and there is a need to give foresight to the tone, tenor, content, and timing of all messages sent out (Patashnick, 2016).

Crisis communication is meant to be continuous, and a strategic process that is only effective when it starts before an actual crisis happens. It is concluded when normal activities are resumed in a satisfactory manner (Palttala & Vos, 2012). Since crises are unpredictable, this also includes crisis communication being unpredictable. Crisis communication needs to be organized expediently and accurately conveys information regarding the dynamic environment (Schraagen et al., 2010). These messages are used to lessen the impact, severity, and adverse outcomes of the crisis. Messages of this magnitude are meant to direct or compel those who receive the message to take a specific action because of the particular threat and create awareness of the incident (Spence et al., 2007). The messages need to be clear, state the crisis is happening, and take steps to ensure their safety.

The objective of crisis communication is to lessen the uncertainty about the situation at hand, respond to and resolve the problem, and learn from it to make changes (Ulmer et al., 2007). According to Harro-Loit (2012), it is vital for there to be balanced with the message between what the institution wants to share and what the public wants to know; even the individuals who are getting the message forms an opinion of the crisis as being right or wrong, communication must start here. The information needs to be based on what those receiving the message want to know, rather than forming the messages based on the institution's wants. Crisis communication can be significant when the information is understood and retained rightfully and applied in the manner it is meant (Sellnow et al., 2014).

When there is the right communication directed at the correct audience, there can be a positive impact on crisis management at the institutional level. The communication does trigger a proper response and reaction from the individual who received the information. They are more likely to share the information, which allows a more profound impact on the population of the institution (Patashnick, 2016). Those who receive a crisis message respond to the message in a careful process by considering any previous experience they had with the crisis at hand (Veil et al., 2008). The success of situation messaging cannot be linked to the number of those who receive the message, even though it is an important aspect.

The fact is that crisis communication is an influencer on an individual's interpersonal behaviors and actions. Content and the delivery of crisis communication are not solely on the crisis type (Wester, 2009). All content and how it is disseminated can be

conveyed differently, depending on the method used to send the message. Many times, there are conflicts in the duality of crisis communication regarding the need to share critical information and the limitation of the institution's desire to minimize any risks (Xu & Li, 2012). Institutions tend to worry about the additional liability and the criticisms from the public when a crisis has happened, so they will spend a lot of time and energy developing the messages or communication to minimize the risk.

In the higher education setting, crisis communication accounts for many differences in the population and audience targeted. Developing crisis communication, institutions need to consider students, parents, faculty, staff, and many others. It is critical to prioritize the crisis communication messages to the populations based on the crisis's needs and involvement. Those would have the most significant impact on the situation (Lawson, 2007). The crisis communication plan at colleges and universities needs to be compatible and integrated with its overall crisis management plan. An understanding that both the likely and unexpected crises will happen at higher education institutions (Zimmerman, 2013).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Crisis communication is vital to crisis management at colleges and universities to alert those on the campus of a developing crisis. The information needs to be conveyed clearly and gives the necessary directions leading the receiver to decide on their next action. Crisis management does involve crisis communication as they go hand in hand. The crisis communication can be completed in a variety of methods to get the

information out to receivers. However, text messages are one of the most expedient methods to send critical information.

The current study examines the reasons for participating and nonparticipation in involuntary emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities and solutions for increasing enrollment. The literature demonstrates the need for this study because there has not been any research conducted before. Research shows it is important to have text alert programs available at colleges and universities because emergencies happen at an increasing rate. There has been a history of active shooter events at educational sites where individuals need to be informed about the critical information on or around the campuses. Opt-in programs are more successful than opt-out programs regarding text alert programs.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

This qualitative social constructivist study explored the relationship between an individual's reasons for not enrolling in emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities to address how to fix the issue. The knowledge of emergency text alert programs and the lack of enrollment at many colleges and universities helped guide this study. There was a lack of data or research on the registration of text alert programs at colleges and universities. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine if there is a need to make it mandatory for enrollment at colleges and universities to improve enrollment due to emergencies happening every day.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The approach that was chosen to be used is the social constructivism approach. This approach has both sociology and social sciences for the disciplinary root. It is about how people in a setting does handle constructing their reality. The data sources were interviews, data-gathering that were planned to be used since the beginning of the research study. The participants do need to have some direct experience with the phenomenon that is being studied. The analysis was the constructionist or even narrative approach to complete the study. This also included some cognitive constructivism, which dealt with the nature of learning. Another aspect is the response to interactions that go along with an environmental stimulus or the interpretation of that stimulus (Berkeley Graduate Division, 2019).

The rationale for using the social constructivism approach for the research study included identifying individual students' potential cognitive dissonance who do not enroll in the alert system. Social constructivism theory is about what is perceived to be realistic regarding the consequences, and this one would be the best fit to use for this study. Students may believe that emergencies will not happen to them or go to school, so they do not feel they need the alert until something does happen. I previously researched this approach but looked at other ones fitting it too. In addition to looking at opt-in text alert programs' physical properties, this study involves the sociological aspect of why students elect to participate in text alert programs. Once I looked at the individual factors involved in opting into alert programs, the social constructivism approach seemed to be the best fit for research on the most beneficial approach to text alerts on college campuses.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's biases and preconceptions can be set aside by relying only on the data reported, thus enhancing validity and credibility (Stake 2013). In my case, I am a staff member at a University, and I participate in the text alert program as a staff member. Moreover, I am experienced working with students who do not participate in the university's emergency text alert program. My experience supported my credibility though it may also have included biases that could impact the analyses. To mitigate this, I used memo bracketing to help reduce bias by using a written memorandum while conducting research (Newman et al., 2017). The way that a respondent sees the interviewer could be an issue, too (Williams-Jones & Potvin, 2013). The way a

researcher responds to this issue is to visit before conducting the actual interview to build trust in each other (Gubriam, 2012). This study was designed to allow participants to give their perspectives and views, and I used the same interview protocol each time. External checks, including discussions and reviews with my research mentor and committee, and the maintenance of a handwritten journal helped to minimize issues that emerged regarding the study's credibility and validity.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

Participants from different universities in the Clarksville and Nashville Tennessee area do not participate in their institutions' text alert systems to learn more about text alert system nonparticipation and create efforts to improve future participation. Participants included those who do and do not participate in their institutional alert systems to assess the reasons for nonparticipation better and improve participation. The sample was gathered by going to a local college and university hangouts such as restaurants and coffee shops to solicit individuals affiliated with the local universities that use text alert systems, which then emailed me showing their interest in participating in the study. The current study was designed to use a purposive sampling method to recruit individuals who are willing to participate. This process was the best tool for this study due to the willing participants' knowledge and experience with the text alert systems. They express their opinions; this sampling method allowed for selecting individuals based on their specific characteristics to explore the research questions. Considerations of my objectives in conducting this study, the population targeted, and those included in

the study lead me to identify the purposive sampling method as the best way to reach participants for this research.

The logic for the smaller sample size used in this research was based on Waun (2016) studies and Nicolas (2015). They both conducted research involving semi structured interviews that used small sample sizes in qualitative studies. Waun (2016) stated that qualitative studies are designed to gather rich data from small numbers of participants. Kay (2016) also used a small sample in the study conducted while using interviews to collect the data. The current study was designed to recruit college students who qualify to be a part of the study. To be included, volunteers must be enrolled at a university where a text alert system is available and not registered. From this vantage point, they can give insight on how to increase the participation of the systems.

### **Instrumentation**

The basis for developing the interview questions (Appendix B) was based on the theories used for this research. They were also created from personal experience with the emergency text alert systems. The way to ensure validity and credibility was going to be very useful and necessary for the research. The validity of the questions was that every participant was asked the same questions. The credibility of the questions was gauged by ensuring all questions are pertinent to the study. Besides the interview's questions, the other data sources consisted of video recording, taking notes during the meeting, and personal observation during the interview.



## **Procedures for Recruitment**

Following approval, purposeful and snowball sampling (Griffith, 2013) was used to determine participants in the study, including subjects both enrolled and not enrolled in the current text alert program. The recruiting was in person by going to the local college and university hangouts, which included local sidewalks adjacent to campuses to use face-to-face canvassing, and follow-up using word-of-mouth for the study. There was no site permission needed due to the use of public venues. More than ten possible participants were identified for this qualitative study, which gave participants a chance to have a dedicated group of participants (Garner and Scott, 2013).

Individuals contacted me once they had learned about the study. Others were approached and asked about their affiliation with a college or university. Those individuals were then asked if they would like to be a part of the text alert system's research study. If they did not want to participate, they were invited to share the invitation with other university personnel, and I moved on to the next person. If they agree to participate, they were asked to contact me via email and share their preferred contact information. The current study design allowed participants to ask if they know of anyone who would be willing to participate in the study and ask them to communicate by email about their willingness to participate. Once approximately fifteen participants are identified, an email was sent to each participant to set up the interview method to include the time, place, and interview method, such as zoom.

### **Procedures for Data Collection**

The data collection was done by conducting a minimum of ten semi structured interviews. Interviews were continued until there was a saturation of the data, and themes emerged to answer all the research questions. Saturation was reached when each research question was addressed, and no new themes emerged in additional interviews (Malterud et al., 2016). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were reviewed for accuracy. The data was coded by hand using open coding and analyzed. A set of preset codes were created with short phrases to be looked for in the interview transcript. Additionally, member checking was used to check for accuracy in participants' intended meaning.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The current study was designed to gather data from semi structured interviews with the participants. Data were collected using open-ended questions. Interviews were completed face-to-face using zoom communication to establish rapport and ensure the data is correctly received. Each conversation was recorded, then transcribed verbatim. All the transcripts were checked for accuracy.

The social constructivism method has some of the essential features of qualitative research methods that involve the data collection, including processes to gather responses from the participants to analyze the data collected, and getting an excellent description from the data, which can include observations to get the data (Demirdöğen, (2017). The current study consisted of a review of the codes and looked for any patterns or themes that lead to conclusions regarding the use of the text alert systems (Smith, 2013). Related

data will be clustered together (Percy et al., 2015). The data collected was hand-coded by looking for all concepts and categories that are very distinct. They were then broken down into concepts.

Each transcript was color-coded, with different colors being used to highlight the information. The text was used to define the concepts as well as the categories used. The hand-coding was processed using Microsoft Word documents. These codes consisted of phrases found within the interviews and were color-coded to a specific color for each phrase. Each code was placed in an Excel spreadsheet to keep the data organized. Coding was completed, and data were analyzed for similarities between the participant's interview answers. Themes were organized by the frequency of the same responses by the participants. Once this process was completed, member checking was utilized with willing participants to verify the accuracy of their information from the interview by reading the analyses of their responses (Birt et al., 2016).

### **Issues with Trustworthiness**

My methods of research established credibility. Confidence in the readers was developed through an analysis involving the data being made known and confirmed through interpretation. Credibility was assessed in this study by demonstrating the understanding of the qualitative research method involving semi structured interviews, which consisted of the participant and the subject answering questions in their own words (Watkins, 2012). Credibility deals with absolute truth included in the study's findings, along with the accuracy of the data (Watkins, 2012). Another aspect of credibility is the validity that consists of the research elements' appropriateness involving the data and the

tools used to conduct the study (Leung, 2015). Corbin and Strauss (2014) noted that credibility is essential to confidence and validity in research. This current study design had an understanding and used procedures that were correlated to esteemed researchers that used semi structured interviews. Qualitative research helped to increase the level of my credibility.

Transferability was demonstrated by using students to represent the target population. Transferability is equal to external validity as the findings could relate to another set of factors and receive the same outcome with a different group (Anyanwu et al., 2017). The results can be transferred to a similar study (Houghton et al., 2013). Dependability is like reliability in qualitative research studies regarding the findings since the results will be consistent over time and with other studies doing the same research (Hays et al., 2016). The study's dependability ensured another researcher could repeat the study, and the design was easy to understand and follow. The process was achieved by paying attention to the rules that were in place for conducting research (Watkins, 2012).

Analysis and writing review processes helped to control for bias. Noble and Smith (2015) stated that this could recreate the same research in repetition as if you were looking in a mirror. Researchers need to keep their personal feelings out of the research study and rely only on the data reported regarding validity and credibility (Stake, 2013). It is also imperative to include all the data in the report, not leave any of it out and acknowledge any limitations. The other way to limit bias within the participants was by asking indirect questions that are open-ended while maintaining a neutral stance on their response.

**Ethical Issues**

The current study was designed to maintain all privacy of the research candidates. Volunteers sent an email saying they wanted to be a part of the research study. Participants were notified by email of the time and place of the interview. The current study was designed to discuss any ethical considerations that could impact the study before meeting the information included in the informed consent or letter of information given to each of the participants. The concerns had an issue with the relationship between conducting research and the participant and where the interview was taking place. The ethical considerations protect the participants by understanding the study's possible effects and how their identity was protected.

The first principle of the Belmont Report includes respect for autonomy. Regarding respect, each participant will be treated autonomously. Each subject was able to make a deliberate decision on when to withdraw from the study without any consequences (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979; Fisher, 2011). The second ethical issue would be the confidentiality of the participants. The current study design ensured the participants reviewed and signed an informed consent form that explained the study's purpose and that their privacy is protected (U. S Department of Health and Human Services, 1979; Fisher 2011). Maintaining the anonymity of every participant, code names were used for all participants in the study. All the data stored on a coded flash drive was kept in a secured location at my house. All data will be held five years from the completion date and then destroyed by the thumb drive being smashed with a hammer. The last principle is justice. This principle assesses whether the research

benefits outweigh the risks and costs of participation (Cozby, 2012). Justice was observed by ensuring that everyone who participated had the same treatment and access to the information regardless of their status at the university or college (U. S Department of Health and Human Services, 1979; Fisher, 2011). The risks for participation were considered minimal. The current study design lets the participants know the intent of the research. The outcome of this study was to acquire an enhanced comprehension of the utility of this system.

### **Summary**

In Summary, this study aimed to examine why individuals do and do not enroll in the emergency text alert system and what can be done to improve the nonparticipation. The research questions guided the research design of social constructivism to determine the reasons for the lack of participation in the emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities. It is essential to realize the potential ethical issues which could occur or arise that could affect the study's internal validity. Several steps mitigated the potential ethical issues. All participants knew their participation was voluntary, and they could stop participating during the interview if they wish. The participants felt more comfortable participating in the study, knowing that all information is anonymous and that personal data was not utilized.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this social constructivist design was to examine the relationship between the reasons that students do not participate in the emergency text alert program and what can be done to improve it. I also examined the perceptions of the emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities. With this study, I sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do students view the enrollment in the emergency text alert systems at universities?

Research Question 2: Why do students not participate in the text alert system at universities?

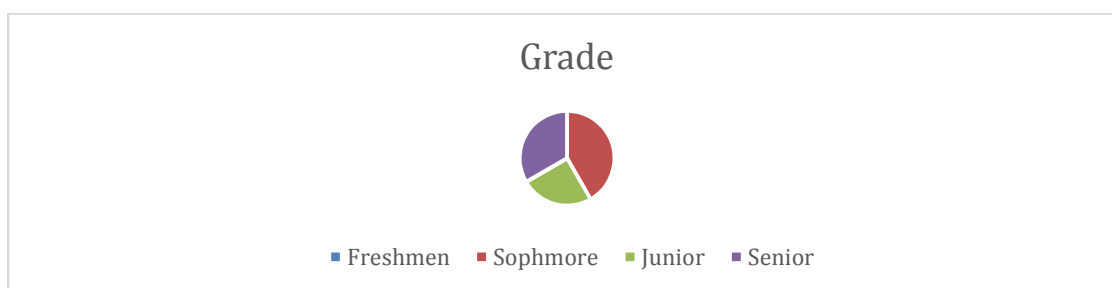
The data collection process and results from the current study are presented in this chapter.

### **Setting of the Study**

The study setting was to initially conduct in-person interviews while recording the interview to conduct zoom interviews. Due to COVID, I decided to conduct all interviews by Zoom. The zoom interviews were set up and performed in a private location to allow for the participants' privacy. The interviews were performed over zoom in my dining room, where no one was present besides myself. The interview was recorded through zoom and transcribed.

## Demographics

The study's demographics consisted of twelve students from a university located in Clarksville, TN, with over 10,000 students. There were eight women and four men as participants. The sample consisted of zero first-year students, five sophomores, three juniors, and four seniors. All participants were White. The age range for the participants was from 19 to 22 years old. Participant #1 stated, "I'm a senior this year." Participant #2 said, "A junior," when asked what year are you enrolled at their institution.



*Figure 1.* Grade breakdown.

## Data Collection

I conducted this study to expand the previous research studies on text alert programs. This study utilized a list of questions that were created for this study by me. The questions consisted of 25 questions for the participants to respond to, and a 26th question was added to find out reasons for nonparticipation. All participants were asked the same questions though some questions were skipped based on their responses to prior questions.

Once IRB approval was obtained (approval number for the study is 08-11-20-0982778), the initiation letters that explained the study were handed out in person to possible participants and the snowball effect they told other people about the study.



Participants then emailed the researcher to express their willingness to participate.

Participants were sent the informed consent form by email; it explained the study was voluntary, and their participation would remain anonymous. Participants were able to answer questions about the study before or during the interview. Purpose sampling technique was utilized along with the snowball method to gain participants. Individuals who did not fit the inclusion were not invited or allowed to participate.

Data collection began on September 3, 2020, and ended on September 15, 2020. Invitation letters were handed out in person on sidewalks adjacent to Tennessee campuses located in Clarksville and Nashville. The letter gave participants an overview of the study and asked them to take part in the study. The sample size for the study was 12 students. The next section will present the analyses conducted for the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted by conducting 12 individual semi structured interviews. Each participant was given an hour time slot to respond to the semi structured questions. Every interview was recorded, then transcribed and sent to the participant for member checking. There were no changes from any of the interviews brought forth by any participant. Every transcript was then looked at to start hand coding for themes and codes. Rapport was gained through the interviews over zoom due to being able to see each other through video.

The use of open-ended questions allowed for data to be gathered, answering the study's research questions. Data gathered then was colored-coded by different themes or codes found between the responses of every participant. An excel sheet was created with

themes and responses to those themes. All of the data gathered resulted in no new themes or codes emerging by the 12th interview. No further interviews were conducted.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Creditability was established with the researcher and participants by allowing everyone to answer the questions asked in their own words. The research study results will only present the data gathered states to add to this study's credibility. All tools utilized for this study were appropriate to be used for this type of research. The invitation letter given out for this research added credibility by explaining the research being conducted and ensuring research was separate from my occupation.

The transferability of the research was demonstrated by using the target population of students. The same findings could be used to go into another set of participants from a different group, and the study would render the same results. A similar study could be conducted, and the results of this study could be transferred to it. The dependability of this study does show that another researcher could do a repeat of this study. The design of the study is easy to follow and understand to be reproduced. Any bias was removed from the study by allowing the data gathered to speak for the study results. Any personal feelings about the study were kept to myself, and no input was put forth during interviews or writing up the results. All data gathered was included in the results of the study.

### **Results from Study**

This study sought to answer the reasons for the lack of participation in the emergency text alert program optional at colleges and universities, the programs'

perception, and what can be done to improve the overall participation rate. To ensure this study's internal validity, memo bracketing was utilized to ensure the data was correctly used and analyzed. The study's external validity shows the results can be applied to another setting, and they will come out the same. Participants were asked the same questions. They were allowed to respond in their manner to the questions with no time frame for their answers,

Table 1 shows the results of gender participants, along with participation results for each gender. A percentage of 77.7% of female participants stated they did participate in the emergency text alert programs at their university. 11.1 % of female participants did not participate, and 11.1 % of females who used to participate but do not participate currently. Of the male participants, 33.3 % participate in the text alert program, and 66.6 % do not participate in the study. From table 1, it can be seen that females participate more in the optional text alert programs at universities and colleges. Participant #3 stated, “Yes, I do. Because there are multiple things. You get alerts for tornados and snow and then just to stay on top of what’s going on”. Participants #9 stated, “I am not” when asked if participating in the text alert program.

Table 1

*Gender by Participation in Emergency Text Alert Program*

Gender	Yes	No	Not now
Woman	77.7%	11.1%	11.1%
Man	33.3%	66.6%	0%

Every participant was asked why they either did or did not participate in the university's emergency text alert program. The reasons were because they wanted to be informed about information around campus, and it was for their safety for those who did participate. The reasons for nonparticipation included individuals who did not hear about it, and it was not that important to them to be alerted to pertinent information. Table 2 refers to the breakdown of participants for their reasons regarding participating or nonparticipation in the text alert program. Participants had different feelings on programs being mandated at colleges and universities. Some were in agreeance, some did not care, and a couple did not like that idea.

The types of notifications that the participants stated the institution had were text alerts, emails, and an application called LiveSafe. One hundred percent of participants had cell phones and were capable of receiving text messages. Participant #1 stated, "I did when I first came into college and then after I got a new phone number and it hasn't sent me any messages since then. So, I don't anymore but I probably should, so I forgot to reenroll". Participant #11 stated, "Yes, I do. Because I am scared of all that stuff

happening, so I like to be aware of, you know, in case if anything goes down”. Participant #9 stated, “Um, I do not because I don’t feel that I have a need to, and it’s not important to me.”

Table 2

*Participation Reasons and Nonparticipation Reasons*

To be informed	Safety	Did not hear about the program	Not important to individual	Forgot to reenroll
.666%	.333%	0 %	.1666%	.1666%

The participant’s perceptions of the text alert programs included they were thankful for it, and it was a useful tool, a good thing for students to have, it is handy. They also felt that more information could be used in the text alert programs. The majority of the participants heard about the emergency text alert program in their freshman year during orientation. Some heard about it in a mandatory freshman course called APSU 1000, while others heard about it from a friend or a resident hall assistant during a program. One participant mentioned seeing it in an email once. Participants felt the program was not well marketed since they only heard about it once and never heard more about it. The text alert programs at colleges and universities need to be explained more, and mass emails should be sent out about the program.

The participants who were not currently enrolled in the program felt their friends and hearsay would notify them if something significant happened on campus. All

participants felt that the program would be more beneficial if advertised a lot more than being mentioned in orientation during their freshman year. The methods that were mentioned by the participants included the use of televisions that are around their campus. The student organizations can have someone come to meetings to talk about the emergency text alert program to learn about it. Other methods mentioned in the APSU 1000 classes bring more attention to the program and other platforms to include social media and posters placed around the campus. One participant talked about maybe a reward system for enrolling in the text alert program.

A question was asked to those who did participate in the text alert program at their institution about interpreting the messages they have received in the past. The participants interpreted the messages as easy to read and understand; the university was worried about them. They also interpreted the messages as they needed to stay away from the area the incident was occurring, and the messages created an increased feeling of safety and reassurance. It was also mentioned the message was important to be sent out to notify everyone about what is happening and what they should do at that time. Those who did not participate in the program were left out of this question because they did not receive any messages to interpret.

The messages that were received by participants made them feel scared and happy to be aware of situations. They felt reassured and cared about at their university. Another feeling was that all higher institutions need to have a text alert program. Table 3 is a breakdown of the participants' responses by percentage. Participants' consensus was they knew they got a text message from someone they do not know, and the program is widely

available. Many participants did not know a lot about the text messages programs overall regarding how it works. Participant #2 states, “Yeah, um, I guess I kind of felt cared about that Austin Peay would send that out and kind of let everyone know I thought that was very kind of them.” Participant #7 stated, “And made me feel safe that I knew that they cared enough to tell us.” Participant #1 said, “I am sure that it was definitely scary for me, but as much as I was scared, I was much happier that I was aware of the situation, and it did make me feel safer. The fact that they were alerting us, and they weren’t trying to keep it closed doors”.

Table 3

*Feelings about Messages Received*

Scared	Cared about	Reassured	Happy
.125%	.875%	.25%	.125%

The participants agreed that text alerts could be a positive tool to help reduce victimization on campuses. One participant stated that they knew about some studies showing that text message programs have helped reduce crimes and victimization on college campuses. When it comes to others' perceptions about text message programs, the participants felt that perception affects our decisions to enroll in emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities. Participants were asked about the reasons for individuals not to participate in alert programs. The reasons included that individuals were lazy, or they would feel they would be overloaded with messages from the program. They also mentioned that individuals would not want it, forgot about it, or lacked

knowledge of the system. It also included that the way to enroll was too complicated to find to sign up and that individuals felt the program was unnecessary. Table 4 shows participants' responses by a percentage on their feelings why individuals do not participate in the emergency text alert program. One hundred percent of participants stated they agreed and thought it was a great idea to make it mandatory to enroll in the emergency text alert program upon registering for their classes. Participant #12 stated, "Many people don't know about them, and the system is not user-intuitive." Participant #8 said, "They're just not aware of it. They don't care. They don't think it's important, but most importantly, I don't think they're really fully aware of how it could benefit them". Participant #5 stated, "Probably because of you were saying maybe they just feel like it's just going too overwhelmed with so much messages."

Table 4

*Reasons for Nonenrollment in Text Alert Programs*

Laziness or forgot about it	Feeling of overwhelmed	Lack of knowledge	Not important/ doesn't want it	Can't find the way to sign up
.416%	.166%	.333%	.166%	.083%

### Summary

Overall, the results of this study did answer the research questions. The results did show there are a variety of reasons why individuals both do and do not participate in the emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities. Results also showed a need for change with the emergency text alert programs to improve their enrollment. This



study was an original study based on the registration of the emergency text alert programs; however, the study added previous literature about the programs. The interpretations of the results of this study are discussed in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

This qualitative social constructivist study aimed to determine the reasons for nonparticipation in the emergency text alert program. Understanding student perception of the text alert program was another reason for the study and what needed to be done to improve the overall participation rate in text alert programs. This study evaluated the participation level of an individual's perceptions of emergency text programs at colleges and universities. The study results were significant in understanding the text alert programs' perceptions, importance, reasons for participating, and nonparticipation. The findings present how students' perceptions of the emergency text alert programs will affect their participation or nonparticipation in the program.

This study's findings were consistent with existing literature regarding text alert programs are essential to alert others about pertinent information. Students who participated and did not participate in the text alert programs could add insight to this study. Furthermore, some impressive results of the study highlighted why some participants did not participate in an emergency text alert program. This chapter discusses the results, their implications for enacting positive social change, any limitations, and concludes with any recommendations for future research that could be conducted.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

This study's sample population consisted of 12 participants who ranged from the age of 18 years and older. All participants were full-time enrolled at their higher learning institution located in Clarksville, Tn. The participants consisted of 100% White; 25%

were men, 75% were women; 42% were sophomores, 25% were juniors, 33% were seniors, 50% lived off-campus, and 50% lived on campus.

With this study, I sought to understand student perceptions of the emergency text alert programs, reasons individuals do not enroll in the emergency text alert programs, and why individuals participate and recommend improvements to the programs' overall participation. The current literature presented a gap that suggested research regarding the enrollment in the emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities. The registration was always low, and no study had been completed on reasons individuals do not participate and how to improve the overall participation rate. The data collected from the interviews included valuable information for conducting this research study using a small sample size. The results were impressive because the research questions were answered, leading to a positive social change suggestion.

Every participant who participated in this study had a cellphone readily available to participate in the emergency text alert programs at their higher education institution. Knowledge about the emergency text alert program at the participants' university resulted in 91.7% knowing about the program, 8.3% not learning about it. The results show that many individuals know about the alert program, while a small amount did not know about the program. Participants gained knowledge about the emergency text alert program in various manners, including receiving information during their freshman orientation, their resident advisors at their resident halls, police officers on campus or friends, or during a mandatory freshman course.

Regarding the participation by gender for the emergency text alert program, 77.7% of female participants currently participated in the program while 11.1% did not participate, and 11.1% participated but not currently at the time of interview. Thirty-three percent of the male participants participated in the program, while 66.6% of male participants did not participate. The male participants who did not currently participate stated they would be relying on friends or word of mouth to be alerted to pertinent information. The interpretation of these results is that women are more likely to participate in emergency text alert programs optional at colleges and universities. Men are sometimes less likely to utilize programs that are optional to alert them about pertinent information. Women may take their safety a little more seriously than men do on a college campus because they want to have all of the information they need to help keep themselves from becoming a victim. The men who did not participate stated they did not know about the program, and one used to participate but was not sure if he still did since he had not received any text messages that had recently been sent out.

All participants mentioned there was a lack of advertising for the emergency text alert program at their institution. There were numerous ways mentioned to marketing the program to increase the awareness of the text alert program, which included placing flyers up around the campus either in the buildings or on the information boards outside around campus. The televisions located in the university center or even in other academic buildings have speakers come to the organization's meetings, an increased awareness presented in the mandatory freshman course, social media, and a reward system being utilized. The results show a need for the program to be increasingly marketed around the

campuses to increase enrollment. Many avenues can be used to advise individuals about emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities.

The importance of being alerted to an emergency was a concern for the majority of the participants. Participants thought it was imperative to know what is going on around their campus and understand what they should do during the emergency. One male participant stated it must not be too important for him because he did not participate in the emergency text alert program. This shows that being alerted to emergencies promptly is vital to students attending a college or university. The participants mentioned text messages as one of the best methods to give pertinent information to students, and some stated emails or even an existing application used by the university. This question shows the text message is the most viable option to reach students, and they would prefer a text over an email. The majority of the participants did not know a lot of information about the text alert program except that messages are received from someone at the university. They did not know anything more about the text alert system. This shows there is a need to explain the program more to the students in colleges and universities.

The participants mentioned various methods to alert students, including text messages, emails, and an application. The majority of the participants were enrolled in the text messages, some emails only, and a couple used the LiveSafe application on campus. In the text alert, program participants were asked about messages they received in the past and about those messages. Participants mentioned the messages would include describing the situation, such as expressing an individual who just committed a crime and being aware of that individual and staying away from them. Another participant

mentioned shooting in the campus vicinity that advised students to stay away from the incident area. A weather alert was also mentioned by a participant who had information about the current weather, what is happening, and an alert that included staying inside. The interpretation of these results shows the text alert programs can be used for various alerts to individuals. The participants mentioned the messages were interpreted as being cared for, scared, reassured, and happy to be alerted about the situation. An interpretation of the data shows that most participants feel the messages received are essential and have positive feelings about the participants' messages.

The text alert program's perception was that it is an essential tool for individuals to be alerted. All colleges and universities have to have alert programs for students. Some participants thought it would be a good idea for the program to be mandated at colleges and universities. In contrast, other participants felt they did not like it to be a mandatory program. The text alert program can be used for crimes and reducing individuals' victimization; many thought it does help. One participant stated there had been some studies completed to confirm that alerts do help to reduce victimization. These results show the participants believed the text alert program is critical to reducing victimization.

The results show our perceptions affect our behavior to utilize the text alert program. The participants stated that our perceptions affect our actions to enroll in a text alert program when the perception involves being overwhelmed with messages that would stop an individual from participating. Our perceptions play a significant role in participating in programs and can prevent individuals from participating, even if the perception is not entirely correct. All participants mentioned various reasons for not

participating in the program, such as laziness, not being aware of the program, not wanting the program, and being overwhelmed with text messages. An interpretation of this data is individuals have many reasons for nonparticipation that can all be overcome with knowledge about the program or program mandates at all colleges and universities. The majority of the participants felt it was good to make it mandatory upon registering for classes. Making it compulsory upon registering for courses every semester would improve the program's overall enrollment and increase student awareness.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations to this current study. The first limitation was that all participants were gained from one university; this limitation impacted the results as there were not many participants from more than one entity. One hundred percent of the participants were from the same four-year institution. The second limitation is that many participants did participate in the emergency text alert program at the university. The lack of participants who did not participate impacted the analyses to a degree. The third limitation was a lack of male participants compared to female participants, which could affect the overall study involving the emergency text alert programs' perceptions. Lastly, this study only focused on students and left out faculty and staff who could add to the study's data and outcome.

### **Future Research**

The data collected from this study showed there is further research warranted on the emergency text alert program enrollment. Future research needs to gather data from more males to get more of their perspective of the program. The current study focused on

students only. Further research could be warranted involving faculty and staff because they are in charge of a class when an emergency arises. This current study only had the perspective of students at only one university. In the future, more institutions could be added to the subject population.

There could also be further research on the enrollment at institutions, possibly by regions, to see how the registration compares by region. The research could also be conducted at universities with the emergency text alert program as a mandatory program at their institutions. They could get the perspectives of their students on the program being mandated for them to enroll. Additional research might include the reasons for universities not having the emergency text alert programs, a mandatory program for everyone at their institutions. Any future research conducted on the participation and mandating of emergency text alert programs would be beneficial and add to the literature.

### **Social Change Implications**

The implications that occurred from this study can provide empirical data to legislatures for changing the laws on emergency text alert programs along with administrators at colleges and universities. By understanding the results of this study, the lawmakers and administrators at colleges and universities will be able to make a more informed decision in revising the policies about making the enrollment of the emergency text alert program mandatory at all colleges and universities. The results would also implicate that lawmakers could make it compulsory for colleges and universities to utilize text alert programs. Thus, disseminating this study's results to the public can show the importance of emergency text alert programs and the programs' perceptions. The results



could make a positive social change to help make more individuals aware of the programs and how they can help save lives and keep students and staff informed of ongoing situations.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of this study, there are a mass amount of recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is to open up the study to more colleges and universities, allowing more participants to gain more responses to add to the data. Using another group will allow for more participants and a wider variety of age range of participants. The second recommendation is to develop more semi-structured questions that could lead to more pertinent data. Lastly, the additional data obtained during this study does lay a foundation for future research. This study did employ a considerable effect based on research. There is a positive assumption between our perceptions of the emergency text alert program, which can affect enrolling or not-enrolling in the emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to examine the reasons for participation and nonparticipation in the emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities with optional programs. It also sought perceptions of the programs and what can be done to improve the overall participation. The study results proved that one's perceptions of the emergency text alert program could affect our ability to participate in the programs. There is a lack of knowledge about the emergency text alert program besides the participants who have

received a message. All colleges and universities do need to have an alert system available at their institutions.

Results showed it was important for those participating in the emergency text alert program to be alerted for their safety. Hence, they knew what was happening around the campus and what should happen during an emergency. Colleges and universities need to do a better job of notifying students about the institution's text alert program. The methods to alert others about the program include more flyers around campus, social media, televisions around campus, and mentioned more in classes and at organizational meetings. A mandatory program is the right way for colleges and universities to utilize the alert system. Whether enrolling for courses each semester or applying for enrollment to the university will help keep individuals informed of pertinent information. The finding from this study calls forth colleges and universities to make their emergency text alert programs mandatory, legislatures to mandate colleges and universities to have a mandatory program, and educate the general public on the importance of text alert programs.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is your sex?
2. What year are you enrolled at the higher institution of education?
3. Are you part-time or full-time enrolled in classes?
4. Do you have a cellphone?
5. What college or university are you enrolled in?
6. At many colleges and universities, there is an alert system that shares information via signage, text messages, or other methods – alerting those on or around campus to potential danger. Are you aware of the system at your institution?
7. How did you hear about the text alert system at your school?
8. Do you participate in the text alert system at your university? Why or Why not?
9. What can your institution do to increase participation in the emergency alert system?
10. If you are not participating in the text alert system, how do you plan on being notified of an emergency?
11. How important is it to be alerted to an emergency to you?
12. What is a way to communicate with students about important information that everyone would prefer that is used for notifications?
13. What all do you know about text alert systems that are utilized at colleges and universities to alert?
14. What can universities do to notify students about the text alert programs at their institutions?

15. What are all of the methods that your institution has available to alert students in case of an emergency or disaster?
16. Which ones are you enrolled in, if any of them?
17. Have you ever experienced any active shooter, emergencies, or natural disasters that you had to receive a text alert message if you are participating in the text alert system? If so, what did the message say in it?
18. How did you interpret the message that was sent?
19. How did the message make you feel?
20. What is your perception of emergency text alert programs at colleges and universities?
21. What are your feelings on the programs being mandated at colleges and universities?
22. How do you feel that text alert programs can be used better on campuses regarding crimes and reducing victimization of individuals?
23. How do you think our perceptions of text alert notifications affect our behavior to use messages for safety and timely notification?
24. Do you think it is better to make the text alert programs a mandated item to be signed up for upon registering for classes?
25. Is there anything else you would like to add about the research to assist with this study?
26. What are reasons for individuals not participating in emergency text alert programs?