A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF UWM STUDENTS' AWARENESS, SATISFACTION, AND TRUST IN CAMPUS SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF UWM STUDENTS' AWARENESS, SATISFACTION, COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES, AND TRUST IN CAMPUS SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS

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Under the Supervision of Professor Mike Allen

The Clery Act mandates that U.S. colleges and universities receiving federal funding maintain transparency for campus safety through crime reporting and communication strategies. Previous empirical studies on campus safety explored topics such as the Clery Act's impact on campus safety and advocates' views, the dynamics of emergency notifications, and students' overall feelings of security and safety concerns. None of these studies tested students' awareness, satisfaction, and trust in campus safety communications. educational environments. This study focuses on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), examining students' awareness, satisfaction, and trust in campus safety communications. Through an online survey and statistical analysis (one-sample test), this research aims to (1) ascertain whether the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications differs significantly from the presumed average awareness level of 3, (2) ascertain whether the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications differs significantly from the presumed average satisfaction level of 3, (3) ascertain whether the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications differs significantly from the presumed average trust level of 3, addressing gaps in existing literature and informing future campus safety policies and practices. Findings serve to better our understanding of campus safety communication and promote future research in the field.

In loving memory of my dad, Mr. Uzodimma Dennis Okeke, who, in all things, taught me to pursue my dreams with confidence as I am grateful for the short time we spent together.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The Clery Act requires colleges and universities receiving federal funding to ensure that students, faculty, and staff are well-informed regarding crimes and safety issues on and within the campus environment (McNeal, 2007). Various strategies are becoming employed to ensure achieving awareness, such as "maintaining a daily log of crime log, issuing Timely Warnings and Emergency Notifications, and distributing annual reports that describe their safety practices and statistics about reported crimes" (Hasinoff & Krueger, 2020, p588). While Timely Warnings, typically sent via email, alert a university community when any crime occurs within the defined Clery Geography and poses a serious or continuing threat to the campus community (Hasinoff & Krueger, 2020), Emergency Notification requires campuses to notify all campus community members about any "significant emergency or dangerous situation occurring on the campus that involves an immediate threat to the health or safety of students or employees" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 6-2) and includes a range of incidents such as armed intruders, fires, natural disasters, bomb threats, and civil unrest.

A campus perceived as unsafe negatively impacts enrolment (Braaten et al., 2022). Moreover, legal actions from a victim or victim's family take a toll on institutions (Bienstock, 2019). Legitimate campus safety concerns exist for current and prospective students, employees, campus law enforcement, and the nearby community (Sartini et al., 2023). Although campus crime existed since Colonial America, not until the 1980s and 1990s did the various campus stakeholders demand changes in the reporting requirements for campus crime statistics (Sartini et al., 2023; Sloan III & Fisher, 2011). The tragic incident involving the rape and murder of Jeanne Clery, a student at Leigh University, in 1986, and the subsequent actions taken by her parents, thrust campus crime and safety into the spotlight of

public attention (Solan III & Fisher, 2011; Fisher, 1995) resulting in the passage of the 1990 Jeanne Clery Act.

In light of the Federal Law requirement for campus safety communication, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), a large public state university in Wisconsin receiving federal funding, continues to publish the Annual Security Report and the Annual Fire Safety Report (ASR/ASFR). The report provides UWM's policies regarding sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, campus disciplinary policies, relevant state laws, and campus safety and security information (e.g., UWM 2022 Annual Security and Fire Safety Report). The report provides information about crimes, arrests, and referrals statistics of crimes on campus, in certain nearby off-campus buildings or properties owned by UWM, and on public property connected to campus.

In a news article on *Spectrum News 1,* Ryan (2023) reported that Milwaukee grapples with high crime rates, ranking among the top three largest cities with the highest violent crime rate in the United States, highlighting the alarming statistics for murder, aggravated assault, and robbery in the city. While some crimes have reduced over the past decade, property crime rates, especially motor vehicle theft, have risen, with Milwaukee topping the list in this category (Ryan, 2023). Likewise, in a Marquette University Law School Faculty Blog, Johnson (2023) revealed that during the pandemic, Milwaukee's North side saw a significant increase in gunfire incidents while criticizing the limitations of traditional crime reporting and ShotSpotter (a technology that independently tracks gunfire). Johnson (2023) noted the disparities between crime reporting in the North and South sides of Milwaukee, claiming that while 911 "shot fired," calls dropped on the North Side of Milwaukee but remained stable in the South side of Milwaukee during the pandemic. Geographical disparities in crime reporting rates, particularly a decline in 911 calls with gunfire on the North side, suggest variations in community trust and socio-economic dynamics of

Milwaukee residents. The use of ShotSpotter technology offers an independent measure of gunfire incidents but raises privacy concerns as Johnson (2023) asserts. Persistent high levels of gunfire incidents call for a comprehensive crime prevention approach beyond traditional methods. Disparities in reporting rates indicate a nuanced relationship between law enforcement and communities, emphasizing the importance of trust-building. Moreover, the gap between reported crime and actual incidents underscores the need to address public perceptions of safety through improved communication and community involvement, which is the major concern the researcher addresses with this study. Overall, a holistic and community-driven approach is crucial for effective crime prevention in Milwaukee.

In an article on "How safe is UWM? The reasons we don't need guns on campus," McBride (2015) of *OnMilwaukee* explained that the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) campus remained a relatively safe campus, despite Milwaukee's crime issues. This was in response to the proposed legislation by Rep. Jesse Kremer and Sen. Devin Lemahieu, which would make it impossible for university authorities to regulate the possession of firearms within campus buildings. McBride (2015) pointed out that the primary concern of this proposed legislation is the potential risks associated with providing access to firearms within campus buildings, especially given the impulsive nature of some undergraduates. Instead of endorsing the idea of allowing guns on campus, McBride (2015) suggests using surplus funds for alternative safety measures. These include increased funding for transportation services such as BOSS vans and requiring students or professors to secure their weapons in lockboxes after walking to campus, presenting a nuanced approach to addressing safety concerns. While advocating against fostering a culture of fear on campus, McBride (2015) suggests that the fear of mass shootings is remote at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She emphasizes the caution against changing laws based on unlikely scenarios, as doing so could potentially heighten safety concerns daily.

More than half a decade after McBride's (2015) publication, Bentley (2023) of *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that a UWM student alerted a library staff member on seeing a 25-year-old man loading a handgun in the library, prompting a swift response from UWM Police who arrived within two minutes of the alert. While the gunman had left the library by the time officers arrived, the university decided against sending an alert or evacuating the building, deeming it not an "active threat situation" (Bentley, 2023). However, the delayed communication to library staff until the following morning raised concerns about the internal communication systems within the university, indicating a potential gap in information flow and responsiveness. This lack of immediate updates has implications for the perceived transparency and urgency in handling such incidents. Following that incident, a UWM employee, as Bentley's (2023) report shows, was concerned about the inadequate training for dealing with shooting situations on campus, highlighting the necessity of continuous improvement in training programs to ensure that both employees and supervisors are well-prepared to respond to potential threats. Additionally, the violation of state law by bringing a firearm into university buildings underscores the importance of reinforcing and enforcing campus security policies.

Furthermore, the decision not to send an alert or evacuate the building based on the assessment of an "active threat situation" prompts questions about the criteria used in evaluating such incidents, indicating a potential need for a review to ensure a more proactive and standardized approach to potential threats, which is unknown to the university community. When the university's communications director eventually released a statement regarding the incident, students and staff affected by the event were encouraged to reach out to the UWM Student Health and Wellness Center, which possibly demonstrates a commitment to providing support and resources for those whom the incident may have emotionally impacted but was not received calmy by the university community. Again, the

promotion of the Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events course and the Rave Guardian mobile app following the incident reflects a proactive approach to public safety education, emphasizing the empowerment of individuals with the knowledge and tools to respond appropriately in emergencies.

Not too long after the gunman incident in the Golda Meir Library at UWM, Van Zest (2023) of *FOX6 Milwaukee* reported that a 36-year-old man was shot and wounded during an argument near the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Cambridge Commons residence hall. The victim, not affiliated with the university, was hospitalized for non-fatal injuries, but UMW campus police issued an alert, assuring no threat to the university community. Students expressed anxiety about safety, questioning the proximity of violence to their living spaces. As in the culture of the university, affected students were encouraged to use counseling services, and employees were directed to seek support through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which helps UWM employees and their households with confidential resources that potentially address personal, financial, legal or work-life balance problems. Again, these incidents heightened concerns about campus safety, emphasizing the need for increased awareness and preventive measures (Van Zest, 2023).

Previous empirical studies on campus safety explored covered topics such as the Clery Act's impact on campus safety and advocates' views (Janosik & Plummer, 2005), the dynamics of emergency notifications (Maddens, 2017), the role of demographics in campus crime alerts (Pelfery et al., 2018), women's perceptions of danger and precautionary behaviors (Wilcox et al., 2007), differing viewpoints on campus safety policies and initiatives among students, faculty, and staff (Kyle et al., 2017; Schafer et al., 2018), students' overall feelings of security and campus safety concerns (Chekwa et al., 2013), and the prevalence of self-reported victimization experiences and gender differences in campus safety concerns among college students (Jennings et al., 2007). These research endeavors collectively offer

valuable insights into campus safety policies, communication strategies, and perceptions, contributing to a broader understanding of creating secure and conducive educational environments. However, there exists a need for a comprehensive assessment of campus safety communications from students' perspectives.

This study contributes to the literature by conducting a more holistic and contextualized examination of students' awareness and trust in campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The study can potentially guide the development of more effective and tailored campus safety communication strategies that enhance the overall safety and well-being of the UWM student community and elsewhere.

Campus safety initiatives: What is the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee doing?

Since the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act was passed, instances of widespread victimization within educational institutions of all types, sizes, and geographical settings have acted as catalysts for colleges and universities to engage in diverse initiatives and endeavors to proactively prevent and mitigate the consequences of violent occurrences and other critical events (Kyle et al., 2017). For example, following the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech University and the 2008 shooting at Northern Illinois University, several state and federal task forces and review bodies were formed. The bodies came up with many recommendations to facilitate campus safety at colleges and universities. Some of the recommendations include: making safety and security information widely available to the campus community; developing all-encompassing incident response plans; training campus public safety personnel and local law enforcement in a comprehensive approach to address critical events by considering a spectrum of potential risks; enhancing the visibility of campus safety personnel and refining their community interactions through multifaceted strategies, including foot patrols; enforcing controlled access protocols for campus spaces and facilities; implementing robust communication

systems to promptly notify faculty, staff, students, and parents during emergencies on campus; and enhancing communication channels between campus faculty/staff, public safety authorities, and mental health professionals concerning students who may exhibit a high risk or susceptibility to engaging in violent or serious criminal behavior (Campus Security Task Force, 2008; Chancellor's Task Force on Critical Incident Management, 2007; Davis, 2008; Gubernatorial Task Force on University Campus Safety, 2007; Leavitt et al., 2007; Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008; Report of the Review Panel, 2007; Schafer et al., 2010).

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee utilizes various campus safety initiatives to serve students, faculty, staff, parents, and other university community members. According to the 2022 Annual Security and Fire Safety Report of UWM, these campus safety initiatives, in line with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, include but are not limited to: reporting crimes and other emergencies; security and access to UWM facilities; UWM policies governing alcohol and other drugs; sexual assault, domestic violence; dating violence; sexual exploitation and stalking; UWM Fire Safety Policy; health resources substance use resources; and mental health resources (UWM 2022 Annual Security and Fire Safety Report). Van Bavel et al. (2020) have emphasized the importance of identifying a leader within a community who can encourage a shared identity as a priority in effective communication during a crisis.

While the initiatives contribute to the safety and security of the UWM campus community members, the need to understand the students' awareness, satisfaction, and trust in campus safety communications remains understudied.

Purpose of the Current Study

Given the identified gaps in the literature as well as the policy of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to notify the campus community upon confirmation of a significant

emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health or safety of students, employees or visitors on campus[1], the researcher formulates the following research objectives, questions, and hypotheses:

Study objectives:

a. To ascertain whether the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications differs significantly from the presumed average awareness level of 3.
b. To ascertain whether the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications differs significantly from the presumed average satisfaction level of 3.
c. To ascertain whether the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications differs significantly from the presumed average trust level of 3.

To achieve these objectives, the researcher pursed the following questions:

Research Question 1: Is the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications significantly different from the presumed average awareness level of 3?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications compared to the presumed average satisfaction level of 3?

Research Question 3: Is the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications significantly different from the presumed average trust level of 3?

[1] Find out more about UWM Campus Safety policy here - https://uwm.edu/safety-and-assurances/emergency-preparedness/

In addition to pursuing the above research questions, the researcher tests the following hypotheses:

Study Hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference between the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average satisfaction level of 3.
2. There is no significant difference between the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average awareness level of 3.
3. There is no significant difference between the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications and the presumed average trust level of 3.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a foundational understanding of the relevance of campus safety communication. The reader is introduced to the requirement of Clery Act for federally funded colleges and universities in the United States. It outlines strategies such as Timely Warnings and Emergency Notifications to ensure campus stakeholders' awareness and compliance. The chapter highlights the impact of campus safety on enrolment. The researcher's institutional focus is the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, as they detail UWM's annual security reports and responses to safety concerns amid Milwaukee's crime rates. The chapter reveals the gap in the literature and the researcher's objectives: to assess students' awareness, satisfaction, and trust in campus safety communications at UWM. The researcher also formulated three research objectives, research questions, and hypotheses for this study, given the dependent variables the researcher wishes to measure.

In the following chapter, the researcher discusses the relevant literature, focusing on previous empirical studies on campus safety; campus emergency preparedness; campus safety initiatives; campus policing in America; and campus safety communications. Chapter 3 contains the detail of the methodology of the current work. Chapter 4 will be about the study's findings. Finally, Chapter 5 will be the discussion of the researcher's findings and how they can inform our understanding of the topic and what the researcher has achieved. Direction for future research and limitations of the study will be covered as well.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In line with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act and other recommendations emanating from emerging campus safety concerns at U.S. colleges and universities, schools across the country have opted for some campus safety practices stemming from the legislative mandate (Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2008; Schafer et al., 2010; Kyle et al., 2017). However, most of these campus safety recommendations were not thoroughly validated through empirical evidence when initially endorsed, and only a small number have been verified in a campus context over the years. Institutions may rely on the notion that these recommendations represent "best practices" within higher education, are loosely supported by broader empirical research, or provide a presumed level of legal protection (Brady et al., 2007; Miller & Pan, 1987; Peak et al., 2008; Sloan, 1992; Salmi et al., 2004; Winkel, 1986).

Similarly, research on students' perception of campus safety initiatives by Schafer et al. (2018) asserts that campus safety initiatives appear to have intuitive face validity. However, "their rationale is not couched in any empirical grounding" (Schafer et al., 2018, p. 321). Additionally, if students often disagree with campus protocols and practices, such as responding to student use of alcohol (Marshall et al., 2011; Oster-Aaland & Neighbors, 2007), adjudicating academic integrity (Jordan, 2001; Thakkar & Weisfeld-Spolter, 2012), and admission policies (Kealy & Rockel, 1987), taking into account students' awareness, communication preferences, and trust in campus safety communications becomes paramount, knowing that students are crucial members of any campus community. Without an empirical study determining the dynamics of support and perceptions of students of campus safety initiatives, campus leaders might have the right answers for the wrong questions with the plethora of safety initiatives on campuses in the United States. It is also unclear whether

students can be correctly presumed to support dominant campus safety initiatives (Schafer et al., 2018).

Maier and DePrince (2020) explored how personal and university crime prevention measures influence college students' fear of crime and perception of safety. They recognized that fear is not a straightforward emotion as it can be a gut reaction to something scary or a result of thinking and worrying about potential dangers (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Hale, 1996; Jennings et al., 2007; Warr, 2000). Interestingly, the study revealed variations in perceptions of safety based on time and location, as students reported feeling safest on campus when more people were around during the day. At night on campus, their sense of safety decreased, with the lowest feeling of security being on campus at night. Surprisingly, students felt safer off-campus at night, even though the surrounding area had a high crime rate, highlighting that the time of day and location significantly influence how safe students feel.

Furthermore, Maier and DePrince (2020) assert when students thought the university was taking steps to ensure campus safety that perception makes them feel safe. In the same vein, demographic factors such as residential status, race, gender, and year in school did not significantly impact students' perception of safety at the university.

While previous studies provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of safety perceptions among university students, the influence of time and location on perceived safety, and the role of university initiatives in enhancing campus safety (Maier & DePrince, 2020), there exists a gap in the literature on students' awareness, communication preferences, and trust in campus safety communications, especially at a Midwestern university like the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Knowledge of students' awareness, communication preferences, and trust in campus safety communications will potentially assist campus safety stakeholders in making informed decisions on campus safety communications strategies that

are student-oriented, given that the number of individuals pursuing an undergraduate degree is predicted to increase by 14% by 2026 (19.3 million) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Moreover, scholars have uncovered factors influencing students' perception of campus safety (Fisher, 1995; Burd, 1992; Heath, 1984; Baum, 2017). One key factor is the media's role in shaping perceptions of campus safety. Media tend to focus on rare but sensational incidents, fostering exaggerated fears among students regarding the likelihood of such events occurring on campus. Social networking services (SNS) also play a pivotal role, with many students relying on platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Instagram for news and information. Exposure to crime-related content on social media can heighten safety concerns, particularly when it emphasizes negative incidents or sensationalizes crime news, further eroding trust in official campus safety communications (Baum, 2017).

Interestingly, research reveals a disparity between campus crime rates and students' perceptions of safety. Media-induced fear often skews students' views, making them feel more vulnerable than statistical data suggest (Heath, 1984). This disconnect can impact how students interpret campus safety communications. When these communications seem incongruent with external information sources, students may perceive them as inadequate or dismissive of their concerns. In addition, away from crime-related safety concerns, higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United States, as well as globally, were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading a majority of institutions to swift transitions to online-only instruction (Crawford et al., 2020; Mackert et al., 2020; Peter et al., 2020; Zalite & Zvirbule, 2020). This shift, as some scholars found (Baloran, 2020; Huckins et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020) necessitated by the need for remote work and instruction during self-isolation, has brought about various challenges, including negative psychological responses

and adverse effects on college students' mental health. Amid these challenges, communication, particularly health communication emerged as a crucial component in supporting various systems within HEIs during the pandemic (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020).

Given these dynamics, educational institutions must reconsider their campus safety communication strategies. Media influence and exposure to SNS content necessitate accurate, transparent, and responsive communication to students' perceptions and anxieties. Campus safety communications should counteract sensationalism by providing context and highlighting broader safety measures in place. By effectively addressing students' fears and concerns, institutions can cultivate a stronger sense of security and trust within the campus community.

Students' awareness of campus safety communications

Owing to the Clery Act requirements, such as the Timely Warning Policy or Emergency Notification policy, university stakeholders, including students, staff, and faculty, commonly receive campus safety communications to warn and educate them on potentially dangerous situations (Veil & Mitchell, 2010; Hasinoff &Krueger, 2020). While students' awareness of campus safety communications is yet to be ascertained empirically, Veil and Mitchell (2010) assert that strategic communication remains central to campuses and their safety missions. Strategic communication is "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission" (Hallahan et al., 2007, p.3). With a keen understanding of the dynamics of relationships and stakeholders in an organization, message objectives, and appropriate communication strategies, strategic communication plans are usually supported by research and evaluation (Heath & Coombs, 2006).

Furthermore, to implement any communication strategies, well-articulated tactics are essential. These tactics may include social media, emails, websites, brochures, handbooks,

and other communications (Lattimore et al., 2007). Hence, if campus safety communications aim to educate and warn students about potential risks, successful campus safety communications should influence students to recognize danger and protect themselves (Veil & Mitchell, 2010). This would be the case when students are aware of campus safety communications. However, an increased risk of victimization (Jennings et al., 2007) could arise when students lack awareness of available campus safety communications. They may not receive timely information about potential threats, safety protocols, or emergency procedures, which can jeopardize their safety. In addition, a delayed response to emergencies (Veil & Mitchell, 2010) could occur if students are not knowledgeable about how to report such situations or where to seek help. This delay could have serious consequences, especially in life-threatening situations.

Not only does a lack of awareness of campus safety communications affect students and their collegiate experiences but also it has some potential economic and legal implications for higher institutions and colleges in the United States. Declined enrolment, insufficient resource allocation, legal and liability issues, reputational damage, and financial issues (Sartini et al., 2023; Sloan III & Fisher, 2011; McNeal, 2007; Salmi et al., 2004; Brady et al., 2007; Peak et al., 2008) are some of the implications of a lack of awareness of campus safety communications for university dons.

To contribute to the ongoing conversation, this study empirically investigates students' awareness of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Students' satisfaction with campus safety communications

Communication scholars have studied communication satisfaction in various number of contexts (Allen, Witt, & Wheeless, 2006; Chen, 2002; Goodboy & Myers, 2007; Myers, 1998; Plax, Kearney, & Downs, 1986). However, what appears to be understudied is

students' satisfaction with campus safety communications in the United States. Campus safety plays a significant role in students' overall success in higher education institutions (Santos & Farley, 2020). To foster a conducive environment that would engender quality education for faculty and students, it is paramount that higher education institution administrators explore whether or not students as well as faculty and other university workers are satisfied with their campus safety communications. This study fills this gap in the literature.

In communication encounters, competent communicators often report satisfaction (Spitzberg, 1991). When positive expectations are fulfilled in an interaction, communication satisfaction is deemed to have taken place (Hecht, 1978a). Communication satisfaction is largely contextual as it is an affective response to the accomplishment of communication goals and expectations (Hecht, 1978b). Nakra (2006) explains that communication satisfaction originates from "a person's satisfaction with information flow and relationship variables with an organization while providing an operational means of determining managers' and employees' comprehensive perceptions of communication in their organizational contexts" (p. 42). In organizations, employee motivation and identification with their organization are largely dependent on effective and competent communication (Nakra, 2006) that results in communication satisfaction (Goodboy et al., 2009). Hence in higher education institutions, hypothetically speaking, when campus safety personnel engage in competent and effective safety communications, university members should report satisfaction with campus safety communications. According to Thayer (1968), communication satisfaction is personal. It results from communicating with someone successfully or being successfully communicated with, whereas Crino and White (1991) asserted that when individuals are satisfied with the various aspects of the communication occurring in their organizations, communication satisfaction is said to have taken place.

Moreover, while there appears to be a nearly universally acceptable definition of communication satisfaction, the measures of communication satisfaction have been fairly consistent among human communication and psychology scholars. Citing Downs and Hazen (1977) as well as Downs (1990), Nakra (2006, p. 42) identified eight dimensions for measuring organizational communication satisfaction in their "Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire" (CSQ). These dimensions include:

a. **Communication climate**: This dimension encompasses the extent to which communication within the organization motivates and stimulates employees to achieve organizational goals. It also assesses whether people's attitudes toward communication are positive within the organization. Hence, the communication climate dimension in the context of this current study would be the extent to which campus safety communications motivate and stimulate students to achieve UWM's safety goals. It evaluates whether students' attitudes toward campus safety communications are positive within the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
b. **Supervisory communication**: Covering both upward and downward communication with supervisors, this dimension evaluates the openness of superiors to ideas, the degree to which supervisors listen and pay attention, and the extent to which guidance is provided in solving job-related problems. The supervisory communication dimension in the context of this study would be how communication dynamics within the university hierarchy may influence students' perceptions, satisfaction, and trust in the campus safety communication processes. It provides insights into how effectively supervisors engage with students, listen to their concerns, and provide guidance, which can impact students' overall experience and perceptions of safety on campus.
c. **Organizational integration**: Focused on the degree to which individuals receive information about their immediate work environment, this dimension includes both

the information received by employees and their opportunities to participate in the department. Organizational integration dimension in the context of this study would be how effectively information about campus safety is communicated within academic departments and how connected students feel to their respective departments in terms of safety-related communication and involvement.

d. **Media quality**: This dimension measures the helpfulness, clarity, and quantity of information associated with various communication channels such as publications, emails, and meetings. Media quality would mean examining how students perceive the information they receive about campus safety through various channels. It seeks to understand if the information is helpful, easy to understand, and meets the students' needs. This dimension is crucial for evaluating the overall effectiveness of the campus safety communication strategy and identifying areas for improvement.

e. **Organizational perspective**: Assessing satisfaction with information about the organization as a whole, this dimension includes aspects like organizational goals, performance, notification of changes, and financial standing. The organizational perspective dimension would mean looking at how well-informed, satisfied, and trusting UWM students are with the information they receive about campus safety, and how this relates to their perceptions of the university, including its goals and performance.

f. **Personal feedback**: This dimension, according to Naktra (2006), evaluates the degree to which employees feel that their efforts are recognized, their superiors understand their problems, and the criteria by which they are being judged are perceived as fair.

g. **Relationship with subordinates**: Specifically designed for those with supervisory responsibilities, this dimension taps into the receptivity of employees to downward communication and their willingness and capability to provide information upward.

Furthermore, college students are influenced by their shared lifestyle and experiences on campus, which can shape their roles as victims, witnesses, or perpetrators during interactions with law enforcement (Greenwood et al., 2022). The choices students make in their way of life and their communal experiences expose them to potentially unique patterns of deviance and criminal behavior (Jacobsen, 2015). While police departments associated with colleges and universities are common in the United States (Bordner and Petersen, 1983), they are less prevalent in other countries. Given the uniqueness of college life, which may lead to different perceptions and expectations of law enforcement interactions, Greenwood et al. (2022) investigated student satisfaction with university police and its influence on their perceptions of safety and fear on campus, while also examining the impact of procedural justice on student satisfaction with campus policing, which remains relevant given the renewed focus on police conduct on campus (Peak et al., 2008; Solan et al., 2000; Griffith et al., 2024; Lanser et al, 2023). Greenwood et al. (2022) found the significant predictive power of procedural justice measures on student satisfaction with campus policing. They found that students' perceptions of fairness and respect in their interactions with campus police were the most influential factors in determining their overall satisfaction.

In terms of campus policing, Greenwood et al. (2022) defined procedural justice as the overall fairness and respect in interactions with law enforcement. Despite variations in individual-level predictors (including demographic characteristics and prior experiences with campus police) and contextual variables (such as whether the student was a suspect during the contact or an informant), procedural justice (procedural justice measures covered perceptions of how officers conduct themselves during interactions) consistently emerged as the most significant predictor of student satisfaction (Greenwood et al., 2022). Following Greenwood et al. (2022) recommendations, university management should invest in campus police training programs that emphasize procedural justice principles. That way, campus

police can enhance their legitimacy and foster greater trust and cooperation within the student community. Addressing gender disparities in perceptions of safety on campus remains paramount. Also, colleges should invest in diversity and inclusion research that will enable campus policing decision-making process more equitable and in service of the needs and concerns of all student demographics.

Although with its attendant limitations such as lack of diversity in the study sample and the fact that procedural justice did not have significant effect on students' perceptions of safety on campus, Greenwood et al.'s (2022) study has some benefits for this current research. Firstly, it provides an understanding of the importance of fairness and respect in law enforcement interactions, allowing for an assessment of how these perceptions influence trust in safety communications. Positive perceptions of campus police interactions can lead to increased trust in safety communications from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, while shortcomings in procedural justice perceptions can identify trust issues that need addressing. Additionally, considering diversity and inclusion in understanding student perceptions allows for the identification of any disparities in trust and the tailoring of communication strategies to better meet the needs of all students. Ultimately, integrating insights from Greenwood et al.'s study enables the researcher to offer actionable recommendations for enhancing overall campus safety and fostering a more inclusive and trusting environment for UWM students. To contribute to the literature on campus safety communications satisfaction (Kyle et al., 2017; Greenwood et al., 2022; Schildkraut et al., 2017; Elsass et al., 2016; Skurka et al., 2018; Ada et al., 2016), this study empirically investigates students' satisfaction with campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Campus safety communications preferences among students

While not within the scope of the researcher's current study, it is important to review previous studies on campus safety communications preferences among college students.

Studies on university emergency alert systems provide relevant information about the development and implementation of campus safety communications that serve community members (Latimer, 2008; Gow et al., 2009; Wu, 2009; McGee & Gow, 2012). Specifically, Wu (2009) reported the factors behind the limited participation of university students in a short message service (SMS) based emergency alert system. Gow et al. (2009) surveyed campus community members to identify their communication preferences regarding safety issues. They explained that the low preference for text message alerts among campus community members might be as a result of campus community members' perception of "Alerting" as a singular form of communication, disregarding the subsequent steps of confirming and verifying the information (Gow et al., 2009, p. 39). However, in an emergency, who verifies or confirms emergency notifications? Gow et al. (2009) reported strong preferences among campus community members for using emails, sirens, and public address (PA) systems for emergency notifications.

Although text messaging has shortcomings (Gow et al., 2008), including difficulties in locating recipients, managing delays, and potential security vulnerabilities leading to fraudulent alerts, the limited interest in text message alerts might stem from a lack of familiarity with mobile phones as alerting devices. Furthermore, in a doctoral dissertation submitted to Walden University's College of Social and Behavioural Sciences on university students' low participation in the emergency text alert systems in Clarksville and Nashville, Tennessee, Ramsey (2021) found that students received campus safety messages through text alerts, emails, and an application called LiveSafe. While most students "enrolled in the text alert, some preferred emails only, and a couple used the LiveSafe app on campus" (Ramsey, 2021, p. 57). Therefore, despite the drawbacks identified by Gow et al. (2008), students still found value in receiving safety messages through text alerts. Suffice it to say that the effectiveness and preferences for emergency alert systems can vary among different

populations. Institutions need to offer a variety of communication channels to cater to diverse preferences and needs. While text messaging may have limitations, it remains a valuable tool for campus safety communication, as demonstrated by Ramsey's findings among university students in Clarksville and Nashville, Tennessee.

In addition, universities in the United States use social media platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter, to communicate crises, although institutional differences exist in the design, structure, and organizational culture that could promote or limit the effectiveness of social media in campus crisis communication (Patashnick, 2016; Sheldon & Anthony, 2018; Veil & Mitchell, 2010). While Patashnick (2016, p. 115) claims that "constituents, particularly students, look to an institution's social media platforms for timely and relevant crisis communication," the author failed to back this claim with clear data. This study makes it unclear whether students prefer social media for campus safety communications. The researcher recommends that colleges and universities act without hesitation to create social media content in times of crisis so that their posts and engagement stand out, gain momentum quickly, and make a more significant impact. While there is a growing emphasis on training responders in active shooter scenarios on campuses across the United States (Kingshott & McKenzie, 2016), Ford and Frei (2016) explored the impact of active-shooter response video training on participants' safety-related outcomes, including knowledge, self-efficacy, and personal campus safety salience. They found that the message frame and medium did not significantly impact participant's motivation to protect themselves and others. Furthermore, fear-based email messages compared to fear-based tweets, lead to a higher completion rate of the training video. However, relying solely on fear-based messages is insufficient for increasing personal campus safety salience, safety knowledge, or safety self-efficacy (Ford & Frei, 2016). Campus safety agents can draw from Ford and Frei's (2016) study to optimize campus safety communications across various channels.

More than half of the available studies on campus safety communications preferences among students were conducted in Canada; for instance, McGee & Gow (2012) used focus group discussions to examine how undergraduate students living on campus at the University of Alberta, Canada, might respond to an emergency alert. Given the lack of US-centric data on campus safety communications preferences among students, this study seeks to fill that gap. By reviewing the literature on campus safety communications preferences among college students, this study points out a gap that can serve as a basis for improving campus safety communications across the United States of America.

Students' trust in the credibility of campus safety communications

Public responses to hazard warnings have attracted considerable interest from hazard researchers (McGee & Gow, 2012). Using an online survey, Sherman-Morris (2010) examined students' and employees' responses following a tornado warning on a university campus in the United States. The study focused on the warning message reception, recipients' understanding of the warning, and their shelter actions. After receiving warning messages, people go through a multi-stage process before they take protective action(s) (McGee & Gow, 2012).

This multi-stage process, as Mileti and Sorensen (1990) distinguish, begins with the reception or awareness of a warning, followed by comprehension of its contents, trust in its credibility and accuracy, the recipient's personalization of their situation, confirmation through discussion with others, and ultimately, the recipient's decision on how to respond and subsequent action. When any of these steps are missing, the suggested course of action might not be followed (McGee & Gow, 2012).

Although studies on recipients' reception and reactions to warning messages provide insights into factors that may influence the warning response process, most of these studies (Dash & Gladwin, 2007; Sorensen, 2000) re-echoed Mileti and Sorensen's (1990) grouping.

The sender factors (aspects of the warnings) and the receiver factors (characteristics of members of the public) affect the warning response process. The warning messages (armed robbery attacks, active shooter on campus, fire outbreak, extreme weather conditions, etc.), communication channels through which the warning messages are communicated (emails, text alerts, public announcement service, social media, etc), the frequency of messages, and the person or organization (the university or college) disseminating the warning make up the sender factors. In addition, Mileti and Sorensen (1990) categorized receiver-related factors into four groups: environmental attributes (including environmental or social cues and proximity to threats), social (networks, resources, role, culture, and activities), psychological (knowledge, cognitions, and experience), and physiological (disabilities).

In their research on how people respond to shelter-in-place orders, Sorensen et al. (2004) found that sheltering in place is less familiar than evacuation, leading to reluctance to believe in its protective value. Lack of trust in authorities and the psychological need for active action can deter sheltering. In another study, university students and staff decided to shelter based on their perception of the threat's seriousness and the availability of safe shelter on campus (Sherman-Morris, 2010). Employees and women were more likely to take shelter.

In terms of believability, McGee and Gow's (2012) study reveals that students would believe an emergency alert warning sent by the university as long as the phone number that appeared on the students' phones was a number associated with the university's emergency system. Students would also confirm a warning message with various sources, including student colleagues, faculty and teaching staff, television and internet sources. However, their study highlights that the content and nature of warning messages, where the student lives (on-campus or off-campus), and the characteristics of universities influence how undergraduate students may respond to an emergency alert sent via text message by their university (McGee & Gow, 2012)

While most of these studies (McGee & Gow, 2012; Sherman-Morris, 2010; Dash & Gladwin, 2007; Sorensen, 2000; Sorensen & Sorensen, 2007; Mileti & Sorensen, 1990) did not account for time (when warning messages are received) as a factor that influences response to warning messages and recipients' believability in them, this study investigates how timing plays a role in students' trust in the credibility of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Furthermore, these studies failed to compare how trust varies across different cultural contexts, how students use various communication channels such as text messages, social media, or emails affect their trust in campus safety messages and the psychological factors that influence students' trust in campus safety communications such as perceived credibility of information sources, emotional reactions to safety messages, and cognitive biases that may affect students' evaluations. Using a reliable questionnaire, this study addresses these perceived gaps in students' trust in the credibility of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Campus safety communications and media dependency theory

Media theory predicts that for individuals to meet their information needs, they rely on mediated information; however, individuals have specific choices as to where they depend for information concerning a particular issue or topic (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Mazer et al. (2015, p. 239) asserts that media dependency theory remains "relevant to the communication that occurs during active school shooter incidents." Moreover, during a crisis, individual levels of dependency on media intensifies. Hence, media dependency theory can help our understanding of how students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee navigate and utilize campus safety communications. The researcher adopts media dependency theory to examine UWM students' level of campus safety communication awareness; UWM students' satisfaction with campus safety communications; UWM students' campus safety

communication preferences; UWM students' trust in the credibility of campus safety communications.

From simple information-seeking to using safety communication channels for coping or tension release, dependencies on media surges during a crisis (Lindstadt et al., 2020). When safety concerns arise on campus, university stakeholders- students, parents, and the larger community- have an immediate need for updated information as the crisis develops and often turn to social media outlets and news media (Lee & Ma, 2012). University stakeholders typically monitor the sources they most frequently depend on for information as the crisis progresses, although initial information might come from a host of sources (Lachlan et al., 2014). In addition to informational characteristics, there is an affect dimension that is prevalent on social media posts during crises as users share their emotions (e.g., anger, fear, etc.) (Lachlan et al., 2014). To reduce crisis-related uncertainties, it is paramount that higher education institutions communicate with their publics rapidly to not only reduce stress (Barret & Posey, 2019), but to establish empathy and reassurance, lay understanding of the crisis, reduce emotional turmoil, designate crisis spokespeople, offer a general, lay understanding of the crisis, and to broadcast specific information from emergency management or medical-related organizations (Jin et al., 2014; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

With media dependency theory, the researcher explores how UWM students rely on and interact with campus safety communications. These insights can inform the development of more effective and tailored campus safety communications that meet the needs and preferences of UWM students, which ultimately contributes to the enhancement of overall safety and well-being on UWM campus.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the relevant literature, focusing on previous empirical studies on campus safety; campus emergency preparedness; campus safety

initiatives; campus policing in America; and campus safety communications. Additionally, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's (1976) media dependency theory was explored. In this chapter, the researcher highlights the significance of campus safety communication in fostering trust and security in institutions of higher learning. The need for additional research on the topic was also stressed in this chapter, highlighting the gap in the literature.

The researcher pursues the following questions:

1. Is the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications significantly different from the presumed average awareness level of 3?
2. Is there a significant difference in the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications compared to the presumed average satisfaction level of 3?
3. Is the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications significantly different from the presumed average trust level of 3?

In addition to pursuing the above research questions, the researcher tests the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference between the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average satisfaction level of 3.
2. There is no significant difference between the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average awareness level of 3.
3. There is no significant difference between the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications and the presumed average trust level of 3.

What follows this chapter is Chapter 3, which will detail the proposed methodology for this study with an emphasis on the researcher's sample selection, the survey document, and the researcher's plan of analysis.

Chapter Three: Methods

The previous chapter provided an overview of previous empirical studies on campus safety, campus emergency preparedness, campus safety initiatives, campus policing in America, and campus safety communications. It also highlights the significance of campus safety communication in fostering trust and security in institutions of higher learning. This chapter will detail the proposed methodology for this study by outlining the sampling strategy, survey instrument, dependent and independent variables, measurements the researcher's plan of analysis.

Data

Sample

The participants for this study were drawn from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, a public urban research university in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In the Milwaukee County, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee prides itself as the largest university. UWM offers 213 degree programs, the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels. It is also home to Wisconsin's largest online education program, with nearly 900 classes and 47 fully online certificates and degree programs. These programs are housed across nine colleges and schools, with UW-Milwaukee has about 23,000 students from 86 countries. A great number of UWM's 208,000 alumni live and work in Wisconsin. UWM has about 7,853 employees, including faculty, staff, and student workers.

To ensure maximum coverage of the student population on campus, the researcher hoped to work with the Dean of Student Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in reaching out to the student population. Otherwise, the researcher hoped to utilize UWM's semester course offerings for Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 as the basis for selecting a random sample of classes held during dominant time slots from Mondays to Fridays. The researcher hoped to obtain the course lists for each semester from the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The researcher planned to contact the selected course instructors via email, seeking their permission to distribute surveys either at

the beginning, middle, or end of the scheduled class session for each semester. In cases where instructors would decline or not respond to the emails, the researcher hoped to replace the class with a different one chosen randomly from the same time slot.

However, to select the sample for the researcher's study, the researcher adopted a nonprobabilistic sampling technique – Convenience Sampling. To Edgar and Manz (2017), when a researcher uses convenience sampling method, the researcher collects samples by taking samples that are conveniently located around a location or Internet service. The researcher recruits respondents who are "convenient" to the researcher. Unlike in random sampling method where the researcher uses random numbers to pick potential respondents or participants from a sampling frame – which more often than not results in a statistically balanced selection of the population – convenience sampling has no systematic pattern whatsoever in recruiting these respondents – they may be recruited merely asking people who are present in the street, in a public building, or in a workplace (Edgar & Manz, 2017). Edgar and Manz (2017) further noted that one of the prominent disadvantages of convenience sampling is its inability to draw statistically significant conclusions from findings obtained; however, convenience sampling is helpful in obtaining a range of attitudes and opinions and in identifying tentative hypotheses that can be tested more rigorously in further research. Edgar and Manz (2017) reasserted that convenience sampling is one of the weakest of all of the non-probability sampling strategies and with an extremely high degree of bias.

In spite of the perceived constraints on reliability and generalizability which come with the convenience sampling technique, the researcher's presents compelling factors that influence the researcher's sampling technique decision. Firstly, the time constraints on the researcher's part played a significant role in the researcher's opting for the convenience sampling technique. When the researcher's thesis proposal was approved in November, 2024, the researcher filed their IRB (Institutional Review Board) application, seeking approval from

UWM IRB to allow the researcher to begin their data collection. The expected and experienced delays and the corrections made to the application and approval documents went beyond the allotted time data collection. In communication with researcher's advisor, the researcher thought it wise to use the convenience sampling technique, given the time constraints the researcher experienced along the way as well as the perceived urgency in the need to understand UWM students' awareness, satisfaction with, preferences for, and trust in campus safety communications. Convenience sampling technique facilitates quick data collection (Edgar & Manz, 2017). Moreover, in terms of cost, as a graduate student researcher, the researcher did not secure a large grant that would cater for the cost of randomized sampling techniques for this project, which would require the recruitment of research assistants. Compared to other sampling methods, the researcher decided on using convenience sampling, given that it is relatively inexpensive. Also, the researcher was attracted to the simplicity of convenience sampling technique. This simplicity not only expedited the research process but also made it easier for the researcher to gather data efficiently with little or no complications.

In the researcher's experience, randomized sampling techniques are not without accessibility issues. With a large and diverse student population, the researcher's respondents for this study were readily available and easily accessible to the researcher. Convenience sampling technique allowed the researcher to eliminate the need for extensive outreach efforts or complex sampling strategies as with randomized sampling methods.

Given the above factors, convenience sampling technique emerged as a suitable choice for this study.

Following the researcher's IRB amendment approval, the researcher contacted all the course instructors in a department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee via email. These course instructors voluntarily distributed the online survey to their students towards the

end of the Spring semester of 2023/2024 academic year. A convenience sample of 211 students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee was drawn for this study. The researcher ended data collection on the 29th of April 2024. The survey site went live from April 16th 2024 (after a series of modifications following the researcher's IRB approval amendment) to May 9th 2024 – the last day of class at UWM in Spring 2024. Respondents who accessed the link and landed on the Qualtrics server page were provided with an initial screen that discussed informed consent. The goals of the study were discussed, as was how the data is to be utilized. The respondents were reminded that their participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, as they were not obligated to participate. If they decided to take part, they had the freedom to skip questions that they felt uncomfortable to answer. Respondents could withdraw from the survey at any time without facing any negative consequences. Respondents were also instructed that all information gathered was anonymous and would not be tied back to them. Respondents were instructed that the study would take approximately 10-15 minutes of their time. The respondents were reminded that there were no financial benefits associated with their participation in the survey, rather, they would be compensated with Extra Credit for their participation. The value of the Extra Credit was determined by their instructors. Ultimately, 236 completed the survey, but only 211 responses were analysed – this was the number that completed the survey by the April 29th 2024 deadline. In all only 211 sample responses were analyzed by the researcher.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument (please, see Appendix 1 for the complete document) consisted of six separate sections containing items related to the researcher's purpose of the study: 1) demographics, (2) awareness of campus safety communications, (3) satisfaction with campus safety communications, (4) trust in campus safety communications. The demographics section contained questions that aimed to better understand participants characteristics. The

questions (e.g., gender identity, race, age, ethnicity, religious identity, sexual orientation, nationality, and college major) were chosen based on the characteristics assessed in previous research on campus safety (Griffith et al., 2004; Jennings et al., 2007; Lanser et al., 2023; Pukket, 2022; Schafer et al., 2018; Schildkraut et al., 2017). Gender identity, race, age, ethnicity, religious identity, sexual orientation, nationality, and college major represent the independent measures.

The second section of the survey focused on questions related to the respondent's awareness of campus safety communications at UWM. Respondents were provided with instructions about rating their response on a five-point Likert scale, where each point on the scale corresponded to varying levels of agreement or disagreement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." This scale served as the framework for their responses to a series of questions regarding their awareness of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). They were asked to express their level of awareness regarding the existence of campus safety communications ("I am aware of the existence of campus safety communications at UWM."), their reception of such communications from UWM ("I have received campus safety communications from UWM."), their regularity in reading these communications ("I regularly read the campus safety communications provided by UWM."), their sense of being well-informed about safety measures based on received communications ("I feel well-informed about safety and security measures on campus based on the communications I receive."), and their knowledge of how to report safety concerns or incidents on campus ("I know how to report safety concerns or incidents on campus based on the information provided in the communications."). By utilizing a five-point Likert scale, the researcher sought to ensure consistency and reliability in data collection, thereby facilitating robust analysis and interpretation of the findings. This

approach allows respondents to articulate their experiences and preferences effectively (Cobbs, 2009; Joshi et al., 2015; Mirahmadizadeh et al., 2018; Witt et al., 2004).

The third section of the survey focused on questions related to the respondent's satisfaction with campus safety communications at UWM. Respondents were instructed to use a five-point Likert scale to evaluate their satisfaction levels with various aspects of campus safety communications from UWM. They were asked to rate their satisfaction regarding the frequency of safety communications ("I am _____ with the frequency of campus safety communications from UWM."), the clarity and conciseness of the provided information ("I am _____ with the clarity and conciseness of the safety communications provided by UWM."), the timeliness of communication after incidents or potential threats ("I am _____ with the time it takes UWM to send safety communications after an incident or potential threat occurs on campus."), the overall effectiveness of campus safety communications ("I am _____ with the campus safety communications from UWM."), and the overall quality of the provided communications ("I am _____ with the overall quality of campus safety communications provided by UWM."). For each question, respondents were presented with five options, ranging from "Strongly Dissatisfied" (1) to "Strongly Satisfied" (5). They were required to select the option that best reflected their level of satisfaction for each aspect of campus safety communications.

The fourth section of the survey focused on questions related to the respondent's trust in campus safety communications at UWM. Respondents were instructed to utilize a five-point Likert scale to provide their responses to a series of questions regarding their trust and confidence in UWM's campus safety communications. They were asked to rate the accuracy and reliability of campus safety information provided by UWM ("How much do you trust the accuracy of campus safety information provided by UWM?," "How much do you trust the

reliability of campus safety information provided by UWM?"), their confidence in the transparency of UWM's communications ("How confident are you in the transparency of UWM's campus safety communications?"), and their trust in the effectiveness of UWM's safety measures based on the received communications ("On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your level of trust in the effectiveness of UWM's safety measures based on the communications you receive."). Additionally, respondents were prompted to rate their perceptions of how well UWM communicates potential risks and emergency procedures to ensure students' safety on campus ("How much do you believe UWM communicates potential risks and emergency procedures to ensure students' safety on campus?"), as well as their trust in UWM's promptness in informing students about safety issues or emergencies occurring on campus ("To what extent do you trust that UWM promptly informs students about safety issues or emergencies occurring on campus?"). For each question, respondents were presented with five response options, ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the lowest level of trust, confidence, or belief, and 5 indicating the highest level.

Measures

Independent variables

Th independent variables for this study are the participants' demographics. Respondents were asked to provide information regarding various demographic and personal characteristics. The independent variables pursued by the researcher include gender identity, where respondents were prompted to specify their gender identity, choosing from options such as female, male, non-binary, other (with a space provided for specification), and prefer not to say. Respondents were asked to choose their age bracket from options ranging from 18 to 24 to 61 or older. Additionally, respondents were asked to describe their ethnicity, sexual orientation, current academic status at UWM (e.g., freshman, sophomore), nationality, and religious affiliation, with options for yes or no, and a space provided for description if

applicable. Furthermore, respondents were asked about their first-generation college status, area of study or major, if applicable, and enrollment status, indicating whether they are part-time or full-time students. These independent variables reveal respondents' demographic characteristics, personal identities, and academic backgrounds in relation to their perceptions and experiences regarding campus safety communications.

Dependent variables

Various measures were developed by the researcher and the researcher's advisor, a big name in quantitative communication research, to assess the four dependent variables in this study - awareness, satisfaction, preference, and trust.

Measure One: Students' awareness of campus safety communications

For students' awareness of campus safety communications, the measures were based on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicated "Strongly Agree." The researcher intended that these measures would assess the participants' awareness of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The Likert scale responses enabled the researcher to gauge students' perceptions and experiences quantitatively.

Measure Two: Students' satisfaction with campus safety communications

To assess students' satisfaction with campus safety communications, participants were asked to use a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "Strongly Dissatisfied" and 5 indicated "Strongly Satisfied." The researcher hoped that participants expressed their level of satisfaction using the Likert scale, which provided valuable information about the quality and effectiveness of UWM's campus safety communication efforts from the perspective of the students.

Measure Three: Students' Level of trust and confidence in campus safety communications

For the final dependent variable, participants were asked to rate their level of trust and confidence in various aspects of campus safety communications on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated the lowest level, “Not at all” and 5 indicated the highest level, “Completely.” The researcher hoped to assess students’ trust in the UWM’s campus safety communications. The researcher evaluated students’ confidence in the university’s ability to communicate safety concerns promptly.

Plan of analysis

The analysis of this study’s data is in two stages, using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). First, the researcher provided descriptive statistics for the independent variables: Gender identity, race, age, ethnicity, religious identity, sexual orientation, nationality, and college major. Finally, the researcher conducted a one-sample t-test to test whether the sample mean differs significantly from a hypothesized score of 5 for each dependent variable.

Chapter Summary

The current chapter provided an overview of the study's methodology and how it serves to answer the research questions. The chapter began by detailing the study’s population, the proposed sampling strategy, and the survey instrument to be used in data collection. This was followed by a discussion of independent and dependent measures. Finally, the plan of analysis and how it answered the study’s research questions was covered. The next chapter will discuss the results of these analyses.

Chapter Four: Results and Analysis

This chapter covers the results of the statistical analyses that were outlined in the previous chapter. It will begin by providing an overview of the descriptive statistics for the independent measures. This makes for a better understanding of the sample and its characteristics. What follows are the results of the one-sample *t*-test of the dependent variables that shows whether the sample mean differs significantly from a hypothesized score of 5 for each dependent variable.

Descriptive Statistics

To better understand the study's sample characteristics, the researcher calculated the frequencies for the various independent variables: Gender identity, race, age, ethnicity, religious identity, sexual orientation, nationality, and college major.

As shown in Table 1, data revealed that 63.5% of the respondents were female, 34.9% were male, 1% were non-binary, and 0.5% selected other and described themselves as trans masc. queer.

Table 1

What term do you use for your gender identity?

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	122	1.5	63.5	63.5
Male	67	8.53	34.9	98.4
Non-binary	2	9	1.0	99.5
Other (please specify) Trans masc. queer	1	.5	.5	100
Total	192	91.0	100	
Missing system	19	9.0		
Total	211	100		

When asked about their age, 83.9% of the respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 18 and 24, 9.5% were between the ages of 25 and 30, 2.6% were between

the ages of 31 and 40, 3.1% were between the ages of 41 to 50, 0.5% was between the ages of 51 to 60, while another 0.5% of the respondents was 61 or older (See Table 2).

Table 2

What is your age?

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-24	161	76.3	83.9	83.9
25-30	18	8.5	9.4	93.2
31-40	5	2.4	2.6	95.8
41-50	6	2.8	3.1	99.0
51-60	1	.5	.5	99.5
61 or older	1	.5	.5	100
Total	192	91.0	100	
Missing system (Invalid)	19	9.0		
Total	211	100		

The next independent variable that was assessed was the respondents' ethnicity. Respondents were asked to describe their ethnicity. Of the 211 respondents of the survey, 74.9% described themselves as White Americans, 6.2% described themselves as Mexicans, 5.7% described themselves as Black/African Americans, 3.8% described themselves as Asians, 2.4% described themselves as Indigenous peoples, 1.9% described themselves as White Africans, and 0.95% described themselves as Middle Easterners (See Table 3).

Table 3

How would you describe your ethnicity?

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Black/African American	12	5.7	5.7	
Hispanic and Latino American	9	4.3	10	
White American	158	74.9	84.9	
Indigenous peoples	5	2.4	87.3	
Mexicans	13	6.2	93.5	

Asian	8	3.8	97.3	
White African	4	1.9	99.2	
Middle Easterners	2	0.95	100.15	
	211	100	100	

Following ethnicity, the next independent variable that was assessed was the respondents' sexual orientation. Respondents were asked to describe their sexual orientation. Of the 211 respondents of the survey, 74.97% described themselves as heterosexuals, 9% described themselves as bisexuals, 8.53% described themselves as gays, 2% described themselves as queers, 1.5% described themselves as lesbians, 1.5% described themselves as curious, 1% of the respondents described themselves as pansexual, another 1% of the respondents preferred not disclose their sexual orientation, while the remaining 0.5% described themselves as asexual (See Table 4).

Table 4

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Lesbian	3	1.5	1.5	
Gay	18	8.53	10.03	
Bisexual	19	9	19.03	
Queer	4	2	21.03	
Curious	3	1.5	22.08	
Pansexual	2	1	23.08	
Asexual	1	0.5	23.13	
Heterosexual	157	74.97	99	
Prefer not to say	2	1	100	
	211	100	100	

The next independent variable assessed was the generation of college student respondents were. Out of the valid data, 58.9% indicated that they were not first-generation

college students, 38.5% indicated that they were first generation college students, while 2.6% preferred not to disclose their college generation.

Table 5

Are you a first-generation college student?

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	74	35.1	38.5	38.5
No	113	53.6	58.9	97.4
Prefer not to say	5	2.4	2.6	100.0
Total	192	91.0	100	
Missing system	19	9.0		
Total	211	100		

Following their college generation, respondents were asked to describe their nationality. 91% were Americans, while 9% were non-Americans.

Table 6

How would you describe your nationality?

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
American	192	91	91
Non-American	19	9	100
Total	211	100	100

Following their nationality, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were religious. 46.9% indicated they were religious, while 53.1% indicated they were not religious.

Table 7

Are you religious?

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	90	42.7	46.9	46.9
No	102	48.3	53.1	100
Total	192	91.0	100	
Missing system	19	9.0		
Total	211	100		

Furthermore, 6.67% of the respondents who indicated that they were religious described their belief as Agnostic, 1.11% described their belief as Animistic, 68.89% described their belief as Christianity, 17.78% described their belief as Islamic, 2.22% indicated that they were atheist, another 1.11% indicated that they were Buddhist, while the rest indicated that they were Spiritualists (See Table 7).

Table 8:

If yes, what term do you use to describe your belief(s)?

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Agnostic	6	6.67	6.67
Animism	1	1.11	7.78
Christian	62	68.89	76.67
Muslim	16	17.78	94.45
Atheist	2	2.22	96.67
Buddhist	1	1.11	97.78
Spiritual	2	2.22	100
Total	90	100	100

Following religious beliefs, the next independent variable that was assessed was student status. Respondents were asked if they were full-time students or part-time students. 92.2% indicated that they were full-time students and the rest indicated that they were part-time students (See Table 8).

Table 9

Are you a part-time student or a full-time student?

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Full-time	177	83.9	92.2	92.2
Part-time	15	7.1	7.8	100
Total	192	91.0	100	
Missing system	19	9.0		
Total	211	100		

Testing the Study's Hypotheses and Answering the Research Questions

To test the study's hypotheses and answer the research questions, the researcher conducts a one-sample *t*-test. The one-sample t-test is a statistical test used to determine whether the mean of a study sample differs significantly from a known or hypothesized population mean (Godfrorid, 2015; Smith, 2020; Norris, 2015). When researchers deal with a small sample size and want to make inferences about the population mean (known or hypothesized) based on the sample data, one sample t-test is used (Allen, 1991; Allen et al., 2008; Allen, 2009).

It is important to credit the formulator of the one-sample t-test, William Sealy Gosset. An English statistician, chemist, and brewer, Gosset worked for the Guinness Brewery in Dublin, Irelan, in the early 20th century. He published his work, *The Probable Error of a Mean* (Student, 1908), under the pseudonym "Student," which is why the test is often referred to as "Student's t-test." Gosset was interested in improving the quality control processes at Guinness and needed a way to make reliable inferences from small sample sizes (Ofgang, 2024) because the normal distribution was commonly used for statistical analysis but was not suitable for small samples. With Gosset's t-distribution, additional variability introduced by estimating the population standard deviation from the sample is accounted for (Ofgang, 2024).

The first hypothesis for this study is that:

1. There is no significant difference between the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average awareness level of 3.

To test H1, the researcher uses the formula for the one-sample t-test, which is:

$$t = \bar{x} - \mu / s \div \sqrt{n}$$

Where:

a. $\bar{x}$ is the sample mean.

b. μ is the hypothesized population mean.

c. s is the sample standard deviation

d. n is the sample size.

Table 10 (Communications Awareness Total Statistics) contains the values the researcher will work with to test H1.

To calculate the sample mean, $\bar{x}$, the highest mean of the variable in question – awareness – is divided by the value of K-1 (where K is the list of items – in this case, 5). Furthermore, to calculate the sample standard deviation, the researcher took the variance (refers to the measure of variability within a single group or sample. It represents how much the values in the sample deviate from the sample mean) of the chosen mean (the highest mean) and divided it by k-1 and found the square root.

Therefore:

a. $\bar{x} = 15.35/4$

   $\bar{x} = 3.83$

b. $s = 6.079/4$

   $s = \sqrt{1.52}$

   $s = 1.23$

c. $\mu = 3$

d. $n = 211$

Therefore:

$t = \bar{x} - \mu / s \div \sqrt{n}$

$t = 3.83 - 3 / 1.23 \div 14.58$

$t = 0.83/0.084$

$t = 9.9$

The calculated t-value is 9.9. To test the hypothesis, the researcher uses the calculated t-value of 9.9 to determine whether the difference between the sample mean of 9.9 and the hypothesized mean of 3 is statistically significant, given the degree of freedom (refers to the number of values in the final calculation of a statistic that are free to vary) of 210, where *df* = n-1. To determine significance, α, which is set at 0.05, the researcher compares the calculated *t*-value, which is 9.9 to a critical *t*-value, which is 1.66 from a *t*-distribution table.

With a calculated *t*-value of 9.9 and a critical *t*-value of 1.66 for a significance level of 0.05 and 210 degrees of freedom, there is a significant difference between the sample mean and the hypothesized population mean. Now, since the calculated t-value of 9.9 far exceeds the critical t-value of 1.66, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average awareness level of 3. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average awareness level of 3. The large calculated *t*-value suggests strong evidence against the null hypothesis.

Table 10

Campus Safety Communications Awareness Total Statistics

List of Items/Scale	Sample Mean	Variance	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Please use a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "Strongly Agree" and 5 indicates "Strongly Agree," to the following questions. I am aware of the existence of campus safety communications at UWM.	14.60	8.130	.554	.391
I have received campus safety communications from UWM.	14.39	8.525	.510	.404

I regularly read the campus safety communications provided by UWM.	15.35	6.079	.570	.339
I feel well-informed about safety and security measures on campus based on the communications I receive.	14.98	7.745	.539	.344
I know how to report safety concerns or incidents on campus based on the information provided in the communications.	15.10	7.411	.493	.353

2. There is no significant difference between the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average satisfaction level of 3.

To test H2, likewise, the researcher uses the formula for the one-sample t-test, which is:

$$t = \bar{x} - \mu / s \div \sqrt{n}$$

Where:

a. $\bar{x}$ is the sample mean.
b. μ is the hypothesized population mean.
c. s is the sample standard deviation.
d. n is the sample size.

Table 11 (Communications Satisfaction Total Statistics) contains the values the researcher will use to test H2.

To calculate the sample mean, $\bar{x}$, the highest mean of the variable in question – awareness – is divided by the value of K-1 (where K is the list of items – in this case, 5). Furthermore, to calculate the sample standard deviation, the researcher took the variance (refers to the measure of variability within a single group or sample. It represents how much the values in the sample deviate from the sample mean) of the chosen mean (the highest mean) and divided it by k-1 and found the square root.

Therefore:

a. $\bar{x} = 14.36/4$

   $\bar{x} = 3.59$

b. $s = 6.803/4$

   $s = \sqrt{1.7}$

   $s = 1.3$

c. $\mu = 3$

d. $n = 211$

Therefore:

$t = \bar{x} - \mu / s \div \sqrt{n}$

$t = 3.59 - 3 / 1.3 \div 14.58$

$t = 0.59/0.089$

$t = 6.63$

The calculated t-value is 6.62. To test the hypothesis, the researcher uses the calculated t-value of 6.62 to determine whether the difference between the sample mean of 6.62 and the hypothesized mean of 3 is statistically significant, given the degree of freedom (refers to the number of values in the final calculation of a statistic that are free to vary) of 210, where $df = n-1$. To determine significance, α, which is set at 0.05, the researcher compares the calculated *t*-value, which is 9.9 to a critical *t*-value, which is 1.66 from a *t*-distribution table.

With a calculated *t*-value of 6.62 and a critical *t*-value of 1.66 for a significance level of 0.05 and 210 degrees of freedom, there is a significant difference between the sample mean and the hypothesized population mean. Now, since the calculated t-value of 6.62 far exceeds the critical t-value of 1.66, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the average level of satisfaction among UWM students

regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average satisfaction level of 3. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average satisfaction level of 3. The large calculated *t*-value suggests strong evidence against the null hypothesis.

Table 11

Campus Safety Communications Satisfaction Total Statistics

List of Items/Scale	Sample Mean	Variance	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
Please use a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "Strongly Dissatisfied" and 5 indicates "Strongly Satisfied," to respond to the following questions. I am _____ with the frequency of campus satisfied communications from UWM.	14.18	8.083	.647	.436
I am _____ with the clarity and conciseness of the safety communications provided by UWM.	14.28	7.125	.764	.598
I am _____ with the time it takes UWM to send safety communications after an incident or potential threat occurs on campus.	14.36	6.803	.710	.518
I am _____ with the campus safety communications from UWM.	14.13	7.465	.757	.578
I am _____ with the overall quality of campus safety communications provided by UWM.	14.13	7.440	.776	.621

3. There is no significant difference between the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications and the presumed average trust level of 3.

To test H3, likewise, the researcher uses the formula for the one-sample t-test, which is:

$t = \bar{x} - \mu / s \div \sqrt{n}$

Where:

a. $\bar{x}$ is the sample mean.
b. μ is the hypothesized population mean.
c. s is the sample standard deviation.
d. n is the sample size.

Table 11 (Trust in UWM's Campus Safety Communications Total Statistics) contains the values the researcher will be working with to test H3.

To calculate the sample mean, $\bar{x}$, the highest mean of the variable in question – awareness – is divided by the value of K-1 (where K is the list of items – in this case, 6). Furthermore, to calculate the sample standard deviation, the researcher took the variance (refers to the measure of variability within a single group or sample. It represents how much the values in the sample deviate from the sample mean) of the chosen mean (the highest mean) and divided it by k-1 and found the square root.

Therefore:

a. $\bar{x} = 17.32/5$

   $\bar{x} = 3.46$

b. $s = 12.67/5$

   $s = \sqrt{2.53}$

   $s = 1.6$

c. $\mu = 3$

d. n= 211

Therefore:

$t = \bar{x} - \mu / s \div \sqrt{n}$

$t = 3.46 - 3 / 1.6 \div 14.58$

$t = 0.46/0.11$

$t = 4.2$

The calculated t-value is 4.2. To test the hypothesis, the researcher uses the calculated t-value of 4.2 to determine whether the difference between the sample mean of 4.2 and the hypothesized mean of 3 is statistically significant, given the degree of freedom (refers to the number of values in the final calculation of a statistic that are free to vary) of 210, where *df* = n-1. To determine significance, α, which is set at 0.05, the researcher compares the calculated *t*-value, which is 4.2 to a critical *t*-value, which is 1.66 from a *t*-distribution table.

With a calculated *t*-value of 4.2 and a critical *t*-value of 1.66 for a significance level of 0.05 and 210 degrees of freedom, there is a significant difference between the sample mean and the hypothesized population mean. Now, since the calculated *t*-value of 4.2 far exceeds the critical t-value of 1.66, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications and the presumed average trust level of 3. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications and the presumed average trust level of 3. The calculated *t*-value suggests strong evidence against the null hypothesis.

Table 12

Trust in UWM's Campus Safety Communications Total Statistics

List of Items/Scale	Sample Mean	Variance	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation
How much do you trust the accuracy of campus safety information provided by UWM?	17.26	13.053	.742	.630
How much do you trust the reliability of campus safety information provided by UWM	17.32	13.194	.708	.599
How confident are you in the transparency of UWM's communications?	17.53	12.504	.669	.474
How would you rate your level of trust in the effectiveness of UWM's safety measures based on the communications you receive?	17.38	12.295	.782	.615
How much do you believe UWM communicates potential risks and emergency procedures to ensure students' safety on campus?	17.42	12.295	.681	.473
To what extent do you trust that UWM promptly informs students about safety issues or emergencies occurring on campus?	17.34	12.757	.708	.533

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the results of the multiple statistical analyses conducted for the study. The researcher began with descriptive statistics and frequencies to explain the characteristics of the sample. What followed was the one-sample t-test to test the study's hypotheses. The final chapter will further examine these results and discuss the importance of the findings, as well as address the limitations of this study and directions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study examined whether the average level of awareness, satisfaction, credibility or trust among UWM students regarding campus safety communications differs significantly from the presumed average awareness level of 3. The results of the statistical test that was used to explore the research questions of the current study and the study's hypotheses. This chapter elaborates on those results and discusses the relevance and meaning of the available body of literature on the topic. This will be informed by a discussion of the findings, the study's limitations, implications for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee that utilizes various campus safety initiatives to serve students, faculty, staff, parents, and other university community members, and potential directions for future research.

Tests for the first hypothesis find a significant difference between the average level of awareness among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average awareness level of 3. The study on students' awareness of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee remains significant for higher education institutions' safety strategies. In addition to previous research (Veil & Mitchell, 2010; Hasinoff & Krueger, 2020), this study aimed to empirically measure and understand students' awareness of safety communications within a specific institutional context. This approach not only addressed the practical implications of improving communication channels such as social media, emails, and websites (Lattimore et al., 2007) but also aimed to mitigate risks associated with delayed emergency responses and potential victimization due to insufficient awareness (Jennings et al., 2007; Veil & Mitchell, 2010).

Respondents used a five-point Likert scale to rated awareness of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). These questions covered their awareness of campus safety communications, reception of these communications from UWM, regularity in reading them, feeling well-informed about safety

measures based on received communications, and knowledge of how to report safety concerns or incidents on campus. This scale was chosen to maintain consistency and reliability in data collection, ensuring thorough analysis and interpretation of the findings. Therefore, the one-sample t-test result showed that UWM students demonstrated a statistically significant level of awareness regarding campus safety communications, significantly different from the neutral position of 3 on the Likert scale. This finding suggests that students at UWM are generally more aware of campus safety communications than originally hypothesized.

The second hypothesis for this study states that there is no significant difference between the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average satisfaction level of 3. Testing students' satisfaction with campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) addresses a significant gap in existing literature concerning communication satisfaction in higher education institutions. While communication scholars have extensively studied satisfaction in various organizational contexts (Allen et al., 2006; Chen, 2002; Goodboy & Myers, 2007; Myers, 1998; Plax et al., 1986), there remains a gap in the literature, specifically focusing on students' satisfaction with campus safety communications in the United States. This gap is critical given campus safety's pivotal role in students' overall educational experience and success (Santos & Farley, 2020). By testing students' satisfaction with campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, this study aimed to provide valuable knowledge that should enhance the effectiveness of safety communication strategies at UWM.

Unlike studies that broadly examine communication satisfaction in organizational contexts (Hecht, 1978a; Nakra, 2006), this research draws from established communication satisfaction frameworks such as Downs and Hazen's (1977) Communication Satisfaction

Questionnaire, which encompasses dimensions like communication climate, supervisory communication, and media quality, in evaluating the effectiveness of UWM's safety communications as the university continues to motivate and inform students about safety goals. The contribution of various communication channels (e.g., emails and publications) to students' perceived clarity and utility of safety information was reviewed by the researcher. Furthermore, this study builds on the findings of Greenwood et al. (2022), who explored student satisfaction with university police and found that perceptions of procedural justice significantly influenced satisfaction levels. This research informs the current study's approach by underscoring the significance of fairness and respect in interactions related to campus safety, which can similarly impact students' trust and satisfaction with safety communications at UWM.

As with the awareness variable, respondents' satisfaction with various aspects of campus safety communications from UWM were measured using a five-point Likert scale that assessed the frequency, clarity, timeliness, effectiveness, and overall quality of these communications, selecting responses ranging from "Strongly Dissatisfied" to "Strongly Satisfied" for each category. This aimed to assess how well UWM's safety communications met students' expectations and needs regarding information dissemination and emergency preparedness on campus. The results provide statistical evidence of a significant difference between students' actual satisfaction levels and the hypothesized average satisfaction level of 3. Hence, the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the average level of satisfaction among UWM students regarding campus safety communications and the presumed average satisfaction level of 3 was accepted. The findings imply that UWM students generally demonstrate a statistically higher level of satisfaction with campus safety communications than the presumed average satisfaction level. These findings underscore the

crucial role of effective communication strategies in enhancing students' satisfaction and perception of safety on campus.

The third, and the last hypothesis for this study states that there is no significant difference between the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications and the presumed average trust level of 3. Testing students' trust in the credibility of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) addresses a significant gap in existing literature concerning trust in the credibility of safety communications in higher education institutions. Unlike previous studies that focused on factors like message reception, comprehension, and personalization (McGee & Gow, 2012; Sherman-Morris, 2010), this study tests the significant difference between the average level of trust among UWM students in the credibility of campus safety communications and the presumed average trust level of 3. Understanding trust dynamics within this institutional setting allows for more targeted recommendations and interventions to improve safety communications effectiveness. Using a reliable questionnaire ensures that findings are based on empirical data collection and analysis methods, enhancing the credibility and applicability of the study findings (McGee & Gow, 2012; Sherman-Morris, 2010).

Moving on, as with the first two dependent variables, awareness, and satisfaction, respondents were asked to rate their trust in campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee using a five-point Likert scale. The assessed items included the accuracy, reliability, transparency, and effectiveness of safety information provided by UWM. Additionally, respondents assessed how well UWM communicates risks and emergencies and their confidence in the university's promptness in informing them about safety issues. The finding indicates that UWM students generally demonstrate a higher-than-expected level of trust in the credibility of campus safety communications. Such high trust

levels means that students perceive the safety communications as effective and reliable in providing crucial information regarding campus safety measures and alerts.

The demographic data underscored diverse representations across gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, college generation, nationality, religious affiliation, and student status, helping the reader understand the study's findings and overall data analysis.

Implications

The findings of this study on students' awareness, satisfaction, and trust in campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) have several implications for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, higher education in the United States, and the literature on effective campus safety communication.

For the UWM, the study's significant result suggests that students exhibit a notably higher level of awareness regarding campus safety communications than previously assumed. This implies that UWM has effectively implemented communication strategies that inform and engage students about campus safety. Such effective communication is crucial for enhancing campus safety and mitigating risks associated with delayed emergency responses or potential victimization due to inadequate awareness. Furthermore, the significant finding that students demonstrate a higher level of satisfaction with campus safety communications than previously assumed also suggests that the university's communication channels are effective in meeting students' expectations and needs. This underscores the importance of continued investment in clear, timely, and effective safety communication channels, such as emails, publications, and other media platforms. By maintaining high levels of satisfaction in safety communications, UWM can enhance students' sense of security and trust in the institution's commitment to their well-being. With respect to students' trust in the credibility of campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the study's findings showed that students demonstrated a higher level of trust in the credibility of campus

safety communications than previously assumed. This remains a testament to the university's efforts in transparency, reliability, and effectiveness with regards to campus safety communications. This finding underscores the importance of maintaining and further enhancing trust through consistent and clear communication about safety measures and emergencies. By fostering high levels of trust, UWM can strengthen its overall campus safety infrastructure and build a resilient community that feels secure and well-informed.

The implications of this study extend beyond UWM to inform best practices and policies in crisis communication across diverse higher education institutions. By emphasizing transparency, reliability, and effectiveness in safety communications, universities can build resilient communities equipped to respond to challenges and emergencies effectively. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of ongoing evaluation and adaptation of communication strategies based on empirical data and stakeholder feedback.

This study underscores the importance of effective and trustworthy campus safety communications for higher education institutions in the United States. Institutions in the Midwest and beyond can draw insights from UWM's approach to communicate safety information to students effectively. Implementing similar strategies, which may include utilizing various communication channels such as social media, emails, and safety apps, can create a safer campus environment and foster a sense of security among students, faculty, and staff. In addition, institutions can learn from UWM's approach to systematically assess and improve safety communication channels based on established frameworks like the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire. By incorporating dimensions such as communication climate and media quality, institutions can tailor their communication strategies to better meet students' expectations and enhance overall campus safety. Moreover, institutions can learn from UWM's approach to systematically assess and improve trust levels in safety communications, incorporating dimensions such as accuracy, reliability,

transparency, and timeliness of information. By prioritizing trust-building strategies, universities can better prepare their communities for potential risks and emergencies, fostering a safer and more secure learning and personal development environment.

Moreover, this study also contributes to the existing literature by empirically testing three specific variables – awareness, satisfaction, and trust in campus safety communications in a specific institutional context. Previous research has highlighted the importance of effective crisis communication in enhancing public and campus safety (Veil & Mitchell, 2010; Hasinoff & Krueger, 2020). By utilizing a structured approach with validated scales and statistical analysis, this study provides a methodological framework that can be replicated or adapted by other researchers examining similar topics in other higher education institutions. The one-sample *t*-test used to compare the sample mean awareness level to a hypothesized average further strengthens the validity and reliability of the findings. The substantial difference between the calculated *t*-value and the critical t-value indicates significant evidence against the null hypothesis and supports the conclusion that UWM students exhibit a statistically significant level of awareness, satisfaction, and trust in the credibility of campus safety communications. Additionally, while existing studies have explored communication satisfaction in various organizational contexts, there has been limited focus on safety communications within universities (Allen et al., 2006; Chen, 2002; Goodboy & Myers, 2007; Myers, 1998; Plax et al., 1986). By conducting a one-sample t-test to compare satisfaction levels against a neutral average, this study provides empirical evidence of students' satisfaction levels at UWM.

Moreover, the methodology used in this study also aligns with established frameworks in communication research, contributing to theoretical advancements in understanding satisfaction dynamics in organizations, especially educational institutions. By emphasizing dimensions like clarity, timeliness, and effectiveness of safety communications,

the study reveals the importance of these factors in shaping students' perceptions of safety and institutional trust.

Limitations

As with every other study, this study on campus safety communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) holds numerous promises for the institution, higher education in the United States, and academic research, yet it also presents several limitations that need careful consideration. Its main limitation, among other things, is the use of convenience sampling, driven by practical constraints such as time limitations and budgetary constraints. While convenient for data collection ((Edgar & Manz, 2017), this method introduces biases by sampling participants who are readily accessible rather than ensuring a representative cross-section of the entire student body. This approach might have skewed results if participants who volunteered have different attitudes or experiences than those who do not participate, thereby limiting the generalizability of findings beyond the specific demographics and characteristics of UWM.

Additionally, the timing of data collection during a specific academic semester and the criteria for selecting and analyzing responses may impact the study's representativeness. With only 211 responses analyzed out of 236 completed surveys, there is potential for sample bias and limitations in the statistical power of the findings. Stakeholders, therefore, should interpret the study results within the context of the specific timeframe and sample characteristics while avoiding broad generalizations to other institutions.

It is important to note that while the researchers made efforts to maintain objectivity in data collection and analysis, the researcher's and their advisor's involvement in developing the survey instrument and interpreting results might have introduced unintentional biases. However, their commitment to objectivity and the empiricism should reassure the reader about the study's credibility and the validity of its findings.

Directions for Future Research

Moving forward, future researchers should build on the findings of this study to advance knowledge and practices in campus safety communications in the United States and elsewhere. One of those ways would be the adoption of longitudinal studies (Cosco et al., 2017), which track students' perceptions and experiences over extended periods, could provide insights into the dynamics of campus safety communication effectiveness. This research could uncover temporal trends and factors influencing students' trust, satisfaction, and awareness, thereby significantly enhancing our understanding of how perceptions evolve across different academic years or during specific events (e.g., emergencies and policy changes).

Additionally, integrating mixed methods approaches could enrich understanding by combining quantitative surveys with qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups. Qualitative data can offer nuanced perspectives on students' interpretations of safety messages, their preferences for communication channels, and the impact of communication strategies on their sense of security (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Morse, 2015; Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014; Tracy, 2010).

Another promising area for future research is exploring the role of digital and social media platforms in enhancing safety and communication effectiveness. Given the prevalence of digital media use among college students (Quan-Haase, 2008; Walsh et al., 2013; Zachos et al., 2018), investigating how UWM and similar institutions can leverage social media, mobile apps, and digital platforms to disseminate timely and relevant safety information is crucial. This research could lead to the optimization of communication strategies to effectively reach diverse student populations and evaluate digital platforms' impact on students' awareness, satisfaction, and trust in campus safety communications.

Furthermore, future research should delve into the intersectionality of demographic factors (e.g., gender identity, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status) and their influence on perceptions of campus safety communications. Understanding how different student demographics interpret and respond to safety messages is not just important, it's essential. It can inform tailored communication strategies that resonate with diverse student needs and preferences. This approach contributes to inclusive safety communication practices that promote equity and accessibility across the university community.

Collaborative research efforts involving multidisciplinary teams and partnerships with campus stakeholders (e.g., student affairs, public safety departments) are not just beneficial, but essential for advancing knowledge and implementing evidence-based practices. By fostering interdisciplinary conversations and engaging with practitioners, policymakers, and community members, future studies can bridge theory with practical applications, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of campus safety communication strategies.

Lastly, comparative studies across multiple universities can offer not just valuable benchmarks, but also the potential for discovering innovative approaches in campus safety communications. By examining variations in communication strategies, policies, and student perceptions across diverse institutional contexts, researchers can identify transferable lessons and innovative approaches that promote safety, resilience, and community well-being in higher education environments. This could open new horizons in our understanding and practices in campus safety communications.

To summarize, researchers should prioritize longitudinal studies, mixed methods, digital media, intersectional analyses of demographic factors, interdisciplinary collaborations, and comparative studies to advance understanding and practices in campus safety communications at UWM and beyond. These efforts will create safer, more inclusive, and responsive campus communities that support student success and well-being.

Conclusion

This study at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) examined students' awareness, satisfaction, and trust in campus safety communications, revealing significant knowledge crucial for enhancing safety strategies and communication practices. Firstly, UWM students demonstrated a high level of awareness about campus safety communications, surpassing initial expectations. Secondly, students expressed higher satisfaction with campus safety communications than presumed, emphasizing the importance of clear, timely, and transparent information in meeting their needs and enhancing overall satisfaction. Lastly, the study found strong student trust in the credibility of campus safety communications, particularly in accuracy, reliability, transparency, and effectiveness during emergencies and routine updates.

These findings contribute empirical evidence specific to UWM, offering practical recommendations for improving safety communication strategies. Addressing study limitations, such as demographic biases and survey scope, can refine future research efforts. Exploring digital media usage, demographic influences, and comparative institutional studies will enhance a broader understanding and implementation of effective campus safety communications.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF UWM STUDENTS' AWARENESS, SATISFACTION, AND TRUST IN CAMPUS SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS

Instruction: *Please read each question carefully and select the response that best represents your thoughts and experiences*.

Section 1: Demographic questions

1. What term do you use for your gender identity?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Non-binary
    d. Other (please specify)
    e. Prefer not to say
2. What is your age?
    a. 18-24
    b. 25-30
    c. 31-40
    d. 41-50
    e. 51-60
    f. 61 or older
3. How would you describe your ethnicity? _____
4. How would you describe your sexual orientation? _____
5. What is your current academic status at UWM?
    a. Freshman
    b. Sophomore

c. Junior

d. Senior

e. Graduate

6. What nationality do you ascribe to? _____

7. Are you religious?

   a. Yes

   b. No

8. If yes, what term do you use in describing your beliefs? _____

9. Are you a first-generation college student?

   a. Yes

   b. No

   c. Prefer not to say

10. What is your current area of study or major (if applicable)?

11. Are you a part-time or full-time student?

    a. Part-time

    b. Full-time

Section 2: Awareness of campus safety communications

Please, use a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicates "Strongly Agree," to respond to the following questions.

1. I am aware of the existence of campus safety communications at UWM.

   1. Strongly Disagree

   2. Disagree

   3. Neutral

   4. Agree

   5. Strongly Agree

2. I have received campus safety communications from UWM.
    1. Strongly Disagree
    2. Disagree
    3. Neutral
    4. Agree
    5. Strongly Agree
3. I regularly read the campus safety communications provided by UWM.
    1. Strongly Disagree
    2. Disagree
    3. Neutral
    4. Agree
    5. Strongly Agree
4. I feel well-informed about safety and security measures on campus based on the communications I receive.
    1. Strongly Disagree
    2. Disagree
    3. Neutral
    4. Agree
    5. Strongly Agree
5. I know how to report safety concerns or incidents on campus based on the information provided in the communications.
    1. Strongly Disagree
    2. Disagree
    3. Neutral
    4. Agree

5. Strongly Agree

Section 3: Satisfaction with campus safety communications

Please, use a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates “Strongly Dissatisfied,” and 5 indicates "Strongly Satisfied,” to respond to the following questions.

6. I am _____ with the frequency of campus safety communications from UWM.
    1. Strongly Dissatisfied
    2. Dissatisfied
    3. Neutral
    4. Satisfied
    5. Strongly Satisfied

7. I am _____ with the clarity and conciseness of the safety communications provided by UWM.
    1. Strongly Dissatisfied
    2. Dissatisfied
    3. Neutral
    4. Satisfied
    5. Strongly Satisfied
8. I am _____ with the time it takes UWM to send safety communications after an incident or potential threat occurs on campus.
    1. Strongly Dissatisfied
    2. Dissatisfied
    3. Neutral
    4. Satisfied

5. Strongly Satisfied

9. I am _____ with the campus safety communications from UWM.
    1. Strongly Dissatisfied
    2. Dissatisfied
    3. Neutral
    4. Satisfied
    5. Strongly Satisfied
10. I am _____ with the overall quality of campus safety communications provided by UWM.
    1. Strongly Dissatisfied
    2. Dissatisfied
    3. Neutral
    4. Satisfied
    5. Strongly Satisfied

Section 4: Trust in campus safety communications

Please, use a five-point Likert scale to respond to the following questions.

11. How much do you trust the accuracy of campus safety information provided by UWM?
    1. Not at all
    2. Slightly
    3. Moderately
    4. Very much
    5. Completely
12. How much do you trust the reliability of campus safety information provided by UWM?

1. Not at all
2. Slightly
3. Moderately
4. Very much
5. Completely

13. How confident are you in the transparency of UWM's campus safety communications?
    1. Not confident at All
    2. Slightly Confident
    3. Neutral
    4. Confident
    5. Very Confident
14. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your level of trust in the effectiveness of UWM's safety measures based on the communications you receive.
    1. No Trust
    2. Little Trust
    3. Neutral Trust
    4. Trust
    5. High Trust
15. How much do you believe UWM communicates potential risks and emergency procedures to ensure students' safety on campus?
    1. Very Little
    2. Little
    3. Neutral
    4. Very highly

5. Highly

16. To what extent do you trust that UWM promptly informs students about safety issues or emergencies occurring on campus?

    1. No Trust
    2. Little Trust
    3. Neutral
    4. Trust
    5. High Trust