

Using Technology to Reach Employees with Crisis & Health Information

Keri K. Stephens & Jay M. Bernhardt
Center for Health Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



Moody College
of Communication





2015

Organizations have to
communicate with
employees differently

Messages are everywhere!

Stakeholders expect immediate responses

On websites

On Facebook, On Twitter

in addition

to traditional media



What else is different?

Communication
Devices Have
Changed!



- ❑ Personal Communication Technologies (PCT)
- ❑ Bring Your Own Device Policies (BYOD)
- ❑ Orgs ask permission to communicate through PCTs

Relevant to us?

Yes! Changes Crisis, Emergency
& Organizational Health
Communication!



Sharing Today



- ❑ Cases around Crisis & Emergency Comm.
 - Employees who have technology
 - Employees without technology access
- ❑ Case of Communicating About Health in Organizations Today
 - 5 tips based on research

Alerts & Technology

September 28, 2010

The University of Texas at Austin

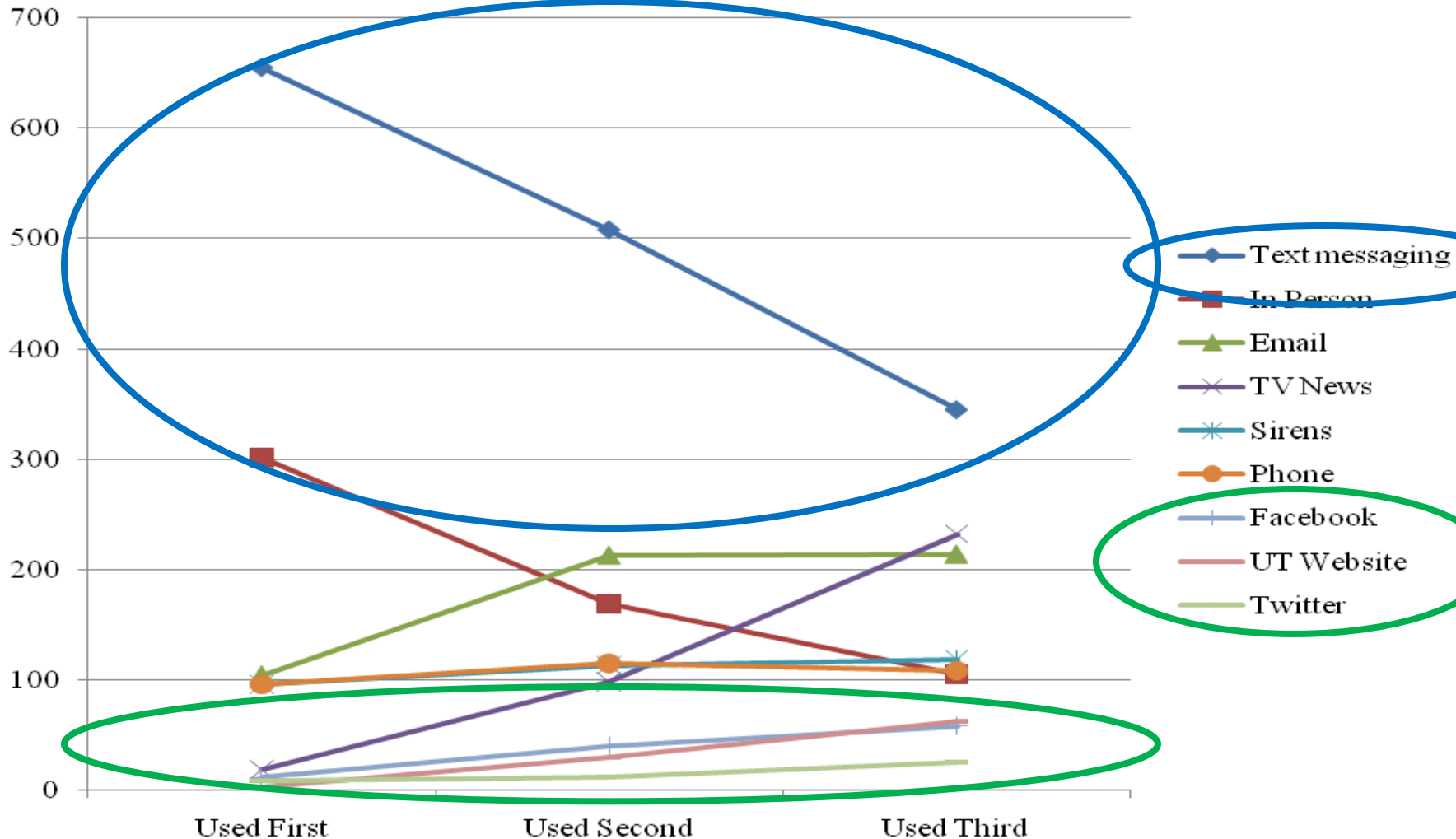
Active Shooter Campus Emergency

UT reached campus stakeholder through their personal mobile devices.



What ICTs the University Used

- Official notifications during 4 hours
 - Campus sirens every 10 minutes
 - Sent 5 different text messages
 - Police dept. updated Facebook
 - Two official Twitter updates
 - Two official email messages
 - 3 different updates on UT Website main page
- At end – all clear message through all ICTs



Assumptions of Ubiquity



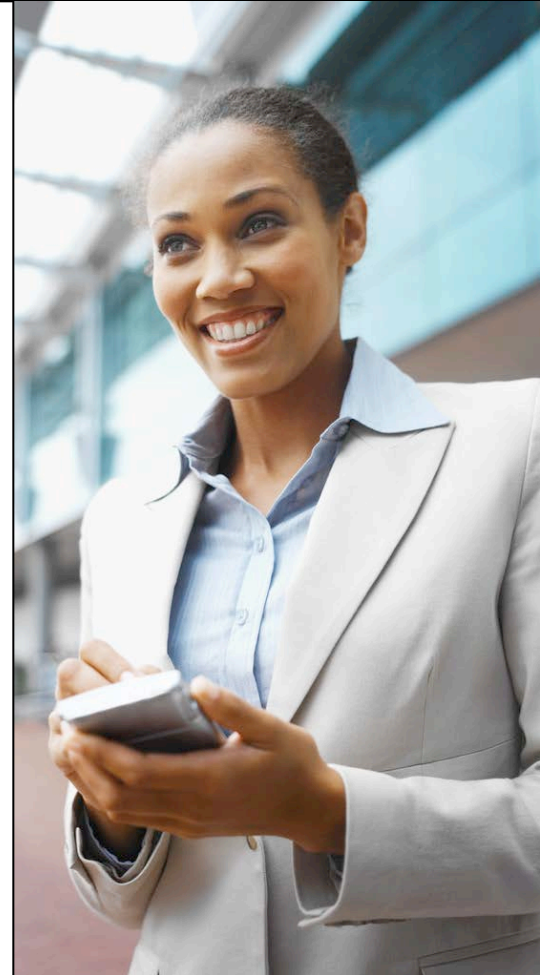
“We have introduced a type of mobile logic into our interactions...there is an emerging norms of connectedness, and assumption that all of us are available via a mobile phone.”

- Ling & Donner, 2013, p. 135

-
- "I signed a paper that said I'm not allowed to use a cellphone."
 - The only way you can communicate is face to face. You can't get on the phone. You can't just text and ask, 'what floor are you on?' You have to go find them."

Individuals manage tensions

- Find work arounds
 - Digital sneaking
 - “I’ve been told that using the phone where I’m working is unsafe. I got caught once using my speaker phone and I left my phone in my pocket, but I still got reported.”
 - Emergencies
 - “It’s a rule [mobile policy]. But, for example, we haven’t been forbidden from using them. If you have an emergency you can grab your cell phone and call the supervisor.”



Organizational Implications

- Supervisor control over information
 - Undesirable - One worker explained that his supervisor, "couldn't get a response from all employees, so she was worried...[during a building evacuation] she was not sure if all the employees got the message."



Concerns in Crisis

- Organizations implement these policies for productivity
- Unintended consequences
 - Supervisors fear they cannot reach workers in a crisis
 - “If you have to call the police, you can use your cell phone.”
(janitorial staff working night shifts are to call the police with any suspicious activities)

But the policy has workers scared so they don't carry their devices on their bodies.

Key Take Aways

- Not everyone has a device when a crisis strikes
 - Need to design crisis response protocol accordingly
- Stop
 - Do you know who has access to mobile devices & computers in your organization?
 - Most people I speak to do not
 - Knowledge vs Labor Workers

Health Messages to Employees



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

 Moody College of Communication

Routine Workplace Health

- ❑ Healthy Heart
- ❑ Flu Vaccines
- ❑ Exercise Programs
- ❑ Stress Reduction
- ❑ Skin Cancer *



What we found

- Connection people have with organization matters
- Participants who felt that connection with their employer who were exposed to a Facebook skin cancer message
 - Had the most positive message attitude
 - Had higher health knowledge
 - Felt less overloaded by the message



Urgent Health Issues - Ebola

- Matt McGlone & Keri Stephens
- Much more than just sharing info.
 - Health literacy, message construction
- Five practices based on sound communication research.

1. Build on organizational identity

- Several studies (published in Health Communication and organizational journals) suggest this matters
- Connection between employer and employee matters – persuasion is easier

2. Use redundant messages

- Yes, redundant messages are good
- Capturing attention of workers is hard
- But, people are less overloaded if the same message is delivered through different tools
 - E.g., email followed by phone call
 - Need to study differences between texts and emails

3. Use active voice to craft messages

- Matt McGlone's work focuses on this concept
- Active voice helps people feel more engaged in the situation and leads to positive outcomes
- Spend time crafting messages



4. Communicate briefly

- ❑ Long messages are skipped
- ❑ Social media is training us to enjoy brevity
- ❑ Early data on text messages and campus alerts

5. Use appropriate technology to deliver health messages

- Know tools provided to employees
- Know tools employees actually use
 - E.g., email is provided, but that is not what they use
- Watch mHealth options
 - Fitbits used by employers
 - Apps linked to health benefits
- Don't forget that people and face-to-face communication still matters!



2015

Organizations have to communicate with employees differently and I shared some ideas today.

If you want sources for the research presented, please ask me.

Thank you, Keri Stephens