U. of Utah Distracted Driving Study is a fraud:

A key finding of a **distracted driving study** done by a research group at the U. of Utah which was funded by the **AAA Foundation for Safe Driving**, concluded that "hands-free does not mean risk-free" and that "the rush to voice-based interactions in the vehicle may have unintended consequences that adversely affect traffic safety". Incorrect, but not a surprise. The U. of Utah folks have had a pre-cast agenda which is to discredit the use of voice technology communications in the vehicle. This U. of Utah group had reached this same conclusion in 2001 when they first "discovered" that simply using a mobile phone while driving was a distraction and that they felt that it needed to be banned. The U. of Utah study contained a number of flaws:

Not a naturalistic study model:

These forced behavior studies are not very meanigful. You have drivers doing a task for the 1st time and we measure this and conclude that they are not very good at it. It ignores the reality that people can get pretty good at doing complex tasks if they do them often enough. The naturalistic studies that just observe a drivers normal behavior are much more useful since they show what people really do.

Test participant demographics

The test audience was college students who communicate almost exclusively via texting and not voice. The fact that these folks were distracted by voice communications is unlikely to map into a more representative population. Beyond this, the student body makeup at U. of Utah is dominated by LDS Church members. Alcoholic beverages (but not guns) are banned on campus. This is a unique environment and not representative of the general population.

Ignored apps where hands-free provided safety benefits.

The study ignored the reality of how automobile drivers are using their mobile phones when driving, and without a hands/eyes-free capability, this is invariably dangerous. In fact, the study completely avoided all eyes-busy applications. The only direct comparison of hand-held vs hands-free was for talking to another person via the mobile. The call connection was already set up, so all that was being measured was the distraction involved while talking to someone over the mobile. This showed virtually the same distraction level as talking to a passenger in the automobile. The process for making the connection (looking for the phone, locating the number to call, dialing it, detecting a connection) is where the hands-free connection provides benefit.

The study concluded that a hands-free communication was as distracting as one using a hand-held phone. Of course! The test population was all college kids who communicate mostly via texting. Since they rarely make voice calls, it was a challenge for them. A voice call was a distraction – hands-free or hand-held.

The study seemed intent on measuring how well college students (who communicate primarily via texting) handle voice communications via a cellphone (when they are not used to doing it). The researchers at the U. of Utah have a long history of attempting to discredit the use of HF technology. It's disappointing to see a academic team resort to basic dishonesty to further their pre-conceived agenda.

Radio listening task not controlled properly:

Listening to the radio showed a low distraction level. Listening to an audio book had a much higher distraction level. A likely reason for this result is that drivers have been listening to the radio for many decades, while audio books are relatively new development. The distraction level for listening to the radio would seem to vary considerably dependent on what is being listened to. For example, listening to music would seem to be a much lower distraction than listening to a sporting event. In the study, the user selected the station to listen to and from the low distraction score, it would appear that most selected music.

A more appropriate distraction to utilize as a reference control point would have been tuning the radio to the desired station.

When radios were first starting to be installed during the early 1930s, they were opposed by the same types of folks that are opposing cellphone use while driving today. In 1930 the Massachusetts Director of MVs (George A. Parket) proposed legislation that would ban radios in cars because they created a driving safety hazard. The only thing that stopped him from having a law passed was that the consumers rebelled. They liked listening to the radio and wanted it in their cars.

Speech-enabled application was inappropriate:

The study used the term "speech-to-text" as the title of the test meant to test the distraction that is associated with voice-based interactions in the vehicle. In actuality, speech-to-text (STT) was not what was being done. What was described was reading e-mails with a text-to-speech converter. Speech input was simply commands to direct the e-mail reading. A "Wizzard-of-Oz" scheme was used which eliminated the errors associated with speech recognition.

The use of GPS navigators is a far more prevalent voice-based interaction in a vehicle. Many millions of consumers utilize GPS navigators that provide turn-by-turn directions via speech. This provides a far safer delivery of this information than a visual display. In fact, the weakest safety link is the manual entry of destination information which often requires the driver to use their eyes/hands. Improving the robustness of speech recognition would improve the safety associated with using a GPS navigator.

Reading e-mails via speech is a relatively unpopular application. It has been around since the mid-1980s and has never obtained any traction. It is a painful experience, since it requires full concentration to accomplish. It is not a representative voice-based application. If presented with this option while driving, most users would decline and wait to read their e-mail when they are able to do it visually. The U. of Utah study attempted to dishonestly position this rarely used and difficult voice application as a typical voice application.

In summary, the <u>U. of Utah study is invalid for the following reasons:</u>

1. Not a naturalistic study, it was measuring how well students did something that they had never done before.
2. The test audience was college students and not representative of a broad consumer demographic.
3. The speech application selected for testing was one of the least popular of all the speech-enabled apps. Has anyone ever done this more than once?
4. The radio listening task was not controlled properly.
5. The hand-held vs hands-free testing was totally meaningless since it ignored the safety benefits of HF calling.

Why not focus on real safety issues in Utah?

Utah is one of the few states that permit carrying concealed weapons on the campus and does not have a requirement to wear a helmet while riding a motorcycle. Both of these have been **proven** with real data to be severe safety hazards. In addition, Utah does not ban HH phone use while driving.

The U. of Utah researchers would be better off focusing on convincing the State of Utah to provide regulations that address these real safety problems and stop promoting their agenda to ban the use of cellphones while driving.