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 Cell Phone Usage

Cell phones have made a huge impact on users’ lives by allowing them to make calls, send text messages, use social apps, and search for information on the Internet ( Rocco and Sampaio 854). Cellular devices today also gives drivers the advantage of using their cellular devices for things like the Global Positioning System (Gupta et al. 88). However, cell phones have been proven to be the biggest known distraction for drivers (James J. Bernstein and Joseph Bernstein 1). Drivers today are facing more electronic devices competing for their attention while they are driving more than ever before (Gupta et al. 88). Drivers who use their devices while behind the wheel are four times more likely to get into accidents serious enough to injure themselves than those who do not (Gupta et al. 88). Therefore, drivers should realize and fully understand the dangers of using an electronic device, whether it is at the red light or while driving.

According to Is the Snapchat speed filter encouraging reckless driving, the app Snapchat did not only encourage drivers to use their cell phone while driving but encouraged drivers to drive recklessly (CBSNews.com). For example, a Snapchat video shows a driver accelerating, first to 82.6 miles per hour and then to 115.6 miles per hour (“Is the Snapchat Speed Filter Encouraging Reckless Driving?”). Exactly nine minutes after the video was posted to the social app, five people lives were taken due to a 22-year-old driver losing control of his car while using his cellular device (“Is the Snapchat Speed Filter Encouraging Reckless Driving?”). This heartbreaking tragedy was not the first time Snapchat was linked to reckless driving (“Is the Snapchat Speed Filter Encouraging Reckless Driving?”). Without situational awareness, the drivers’ eyes could be on the roadway and their hands on the steering wheel, but they may not be focused on the information important for safe driving (James J. Bernstein and Joseph Bernstein 2).

Driving a car is a challenging task that requires drivers to use many cognitive and physical abilities and skills (Bendak 387). A study done by the Center for Cognitive Brain Imaging reported that driving while talking on a cell phone reduces the amount of brain activity related to driving by 37% (Gupta et al. 88). This shows that the driver's attention is taken away from the road while talking on their phone (Gupta et al. 88). People may assume that talking to a passenger in the car is as much as distracting as talking on a cellular device while driving is (Gupta et al. 88). Researchers noted that the distraction given by talking on cell phones is different from the distraction from talking to others in the car (Gupta et al. 88). They stated that drivers’ attention is redirected only when they are talking on a cell phone and not for conversations with others in the vehicle (Gupta et al. 88). Conversations that involve important cognitive effort, such as collecting information to memorize, will have a higher impact on a driver’s concentration level than a normal conversation would (Thapa et al. 466).

Interacting with a device while behind the wheel may inflict risks on drivers (James J. Bernstein and Joseph Bernstein 2). The driver may be in a position where they are not able to respond fast enough to sudden changes in road conditions (James J. Bernstein and Joseph Bernstein 2). For example, a young man reported checking a text message while sitting at the light. After looking up and noticing that the light had turned green, he quickly drove off and rear-ended the car in front of him, which had been slower to take off (James J. Bernstein and Joseph Bernstein 2). Researchers suggest that those who text while driving are twenty-three times more likely to have an accident than those who do not (Gupta et al. 89). Interacting with a device with the vehicle temporarily at rest may represent a form of the driver being distracted (James J. Bernstein and Joseph Bernstein 2). Researchers tend to believe that drivers may need a recovery period, no matter how long or short it may be, to return to normal driving tasks (Thapa et al. 462).

It has been observed that texting is the most dangerous activity for individuals to do while driving (Gupta et al. 89). Texting while driving is actually more dangerous than driving while intoxicated (Gupta et al. 89). Drivers are twenty times more likely to be involved in an accident while texting and driving than when driving while intoxicated (Gupta et al. 89). Researchers estimated that texting while driving results in several thousand traffic deaths yearly just in the United States alone (Gupta et al. 89). Hallet stated that text messaging weakens a drivers’ driving performance and that this impairment is worse than talking on a mobile phone while driving (qtd. in Bendak 387). They also stated that even though drivers are well aware of the dangers of using their mobile device while driving and that it is illegal drivers still engage in the dangerous action (Bendak 387). Since texting involves both cognitive demand and motor involvement, texting has the ability to be more distracting than simply just talking on a cell phone (Gupta et al. 89). Researchers observed that texting while driving is the cell phone activity associated with the greatest probability of an accident occurring (Gupta et al. 89).

Researchers evaluated several forms of distracted driving, including drivers changing their radio stations and CDs, reading a GPS or map, looking for things inside the car, and texting while driving (Gupta et al. 89). They then discovered that texting is obviously the most dangerous of the activities listed for individuals to do while driving (Gupta et al. 89). Underestimating the dangerous risks that texting while driving can cause may be one of the reasons drivers continue to participate in this hazardous activity (Gupta et al. 89). They may assume that they cannot cause an accident just by sending a quick text (Gupta et al. 89). Many drivers, particularly young drivers, believe that they successfully use their cellular device while driving (Gupta et al. 89).

In conclusion, although lawmakers enforced a law to prevent drivers from participating in texting and driving, drivers continue to engage in the dangerous activity (Ferdinand et al. 1370). Studies found that drivers hide and lower their phone while holding it to avoid getting caught by police and getting fined, therefore, causing more accidents than before the ban (Ferdinand et al. 1370). Some studies found weak or no sufficient evidence that using cellular devices while driving bans are effective in reducing cell phone use and the probability of being involved in an accident (Rocco and Sampaio 854). Cellular device related traffic deaths remain one of the leading causes of death in the United States (Ferdinand et al. 1370).

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