

Texting distracted driving behaviour among European drivers: influence of social norms and risk perception

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Texting is becoming the most frequent way of non-personal communication, mainly among young people. (Newport, 2014). Following this social increasing trend, the number of people who text while driving is increasing, creating a new and growing problem in road safety (NHTSA, 2015). While driving, texting involves cognitive distraction, as well as long periods of both manual and visual distraction, which increase the risk of being involved in road traffic accidents (Olson *et al*, 2009).

The theory of normative social behaviour (Rimal & Real, 2005) provides a framework for understanding how risk taking combines with perceived acceptable behaviours (social norms) to shape driving distraction behaviours. The level of risk perception interacts with perceived social (descriptive norms) and personal (injunctive norms) acceptability influencing distraction driver behaviours such as texting (Carter *et al*, 2014).

This study examines how the risk perception of texting while driving, its personal and perceived social acceptability interact and affect this risky behaviour. In addition, the association of the self-declared behaviour with socio-demographic characteristics and with other traffic risk behaviours – like speeding or driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs – are also explored. The data are part of the ESRA survey (European Survey of Road users' safety Attitudes) (Torfs *et al*, 2016) and include representative samples of the national adult populations in 17 European countries. The ESRA survey was conducted online simultaneously in all countries in June/July 2015. In total, data from more than 17,000 road users (of which 11,000 frequent car drivers) were collected. The subjects covered in the survey are, amongst others, the self-declared unsafe traffic behaviours, its acceptability, the risk perception, and attitudes towards those behaviours. Different road safety topics are assessed: speeding, driving under influence of alcohol or drugs/medication, distraction, fatigue, and seat belt use.

First results show that 36% of the European drivers declare reading text messages or emails, and 27% declare sending text messages or emails while driving. These percentages are particularly high among drivers until 34 years old (56% and 48%, respectively). Logistic regression models show that men, young drivers, drivers with higher educational level, and drivers who drive more frequently are more likely to text while driving. Furthermore, both personal and perceived social acceptability increase the chances of the self-declared behaviour. On the other hand, the higher the risk perception, the lower the likelihood of texting while driving. In further analysis the aim is to explore the relationship among personal acceptability, perceived social acceptability, perception of risks and the actual behaviour in traffic. The connection between texting while driving and other traffic risk behaviours will also be explored. These results will also be presented in this paper.

This study found that texting while driving is more prevalent among young adult drivers and is strongly influenced by social norms and risk perception. The association with other risky driving behaviours suggests that there is a subgroup of drivers who are susceptible to engage in all types of risk behaviours in traffic.

The authors would like to give a paper-presentation.

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