

Driver Distraction: There's an App for That



Introduction

In today's society people are used to always being connected, in the office, home or even in an aeroplane, people can access the internet and be reached by phone. This expectation of being connected often now extends to when driving as well. Furthermore with people becoming gradually more impatient, seeing every second as an opportunity to close that business deal or catch up with a friend, there is perceived to be no time to waste. Consequently multi-tasking has become a widespread habit, possibly as a result of an increased concern for 'productivity', the technology allowing multitasking to take place or a combination of the two.

This holds true for in the car as well, where an hour spent driving is time that could be used doing work. Modern technology makes conducting the two tasks simultaneously a possibility, even if the consequences of doing so may be less than desirable.

When the car was first invented there were no non-task related distractions fitted to the vehicle. Until recently the possibility to listen to music while driving, use car phones to talk on the move, have touch screens for adjusting the car's setup or use satellite navigation devices to help direct the way would have been science fiction but now they are very real possibilities.

The Prevalence of Distraction

These recent advances in technology have led to great concern among driver behaviour researchers as these capabilities can be brought inside the vehicle and therefore be used whilst driving. This can then lead to driver distraction.

Driver distraction has been found to be the cause in around 13% of crashes, of these around 64% were caused by visual distractions from inside the vehicle¹. Mobile phones can be a source of distraction while driving and it has been found the risk of a collision while using the phone is quadrupled compared to when not in use².

There have been many studies conducted relating to the effects of phone use (both hand held and hands free) on cognitive and visual distraction. However there are limited studies addressing the effects of the most recent phones, known as smartphones, on driver distraction.

Smartphones

Smartphones, such as the iPhone, have the ability to download 'applications'. A recent report found there were 7 billion applications downloaded in 2009!³ Applications can do just about anything from social networking to checking the stock market.

As these applications are on the phone, which is taken into the car, it seems reasonable to suggest people may try using these applications while driving. Consequently the author's area of study is the effect that smartphone applications have on driver distraction.



References

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Graham Hancox (ESRI)
g.hancox@lboro.ac.uk

Tutors
John Richardson
Dr Andrew Morris

 Loughborough
University