

# TEENS, SMARTPHONES, AND DISTRACTED DRIVING



*In July 2016, the State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company (State Farm®) Strategic Resources Department conducted an online survey with teens ages 16-19 to examine their attitudes and behaviors regarding the use of smartphones while driving. This report highlights findings from this research. Note: A number of changes were made to the survey research in 2016 such that results in this report should not be compared with the results in the 2015 "Teens and Distracted Driving" report also produced by State Farm.*

## Summary

**A substantial percentage of teenage drivers reported using their smartphones while driving.** For example, over half of teens surveyed said they program a navigation app while driving, more than one-third reported reading text messages and talking on a hand-held cellphone, and 15 percent or more said they participate in activities such as reading and updating social media, watching videos, and sending text messages.

**Several factors impacted self-reported smartphone behavior.** Males, older teens, and respondents who have had their driver's license longer were more likely than their respective counterparts to say they participate in many of the smartphone behaviors listed in the chart on page 2. Additionally, respondents were more likely to indicate exhibiting a number of these smartphone behaviors if they had their own car compared to having to share a car and if they drove more than five hours a week on average compared to driving five hours or less. Lastly, teens who indicated that their parents used cellphones while driving were more likely to report participating in many of these distracting activities.

**Using a smartphone while driving, as well as other dangerous driving behaviors, were related to teens' self-reported crash rates.** Teens who reported using their smartphone while driving were much more likely to report being involved in a crash while driving compared to those who "rarely" or "never" participate in these smartphone behaviors. Additionally, respondents who reported participating in these distracting smartphone behaviors were more likely to report exhibiting other dangerous driving behaviors including speeding, failing to wear a seatbelt, and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Participation in these other dangerous behaviors was also strongly related to self-reported crash rates.

**Teens reported using their smartphones while driving despite finding these activities distracting and despite thinking that this behavior increases the likelihood of a**

**crash.** For example, although nearly 90 percent of teens said that searching for music on a smartphone while driving is distracting, 47 percent reported doing it anyway. As another example, among teens who reported sending or reading texts while driving, nearly eight in ten thought the behavior increases the likelihood of a crash.

### **If teens know using a smartphone while driving is dangerous, what are their reasons for doing this anyway?**

Of the teens surveyed who reported using smartphones while driving, teens commonly cited wanting to stay in touch with family and friends as well as "it is a habit" as reasons for exhibiting these behaviors. For teens who reported not participating in these behaviors, they commonly cited that the behaviors were dangerous and that the behaviors were illegal as reasons for not participating in them. Related to the legality of these behaviors, among all teens, some respondents did not know their state laws regarding cellphone use and texting. Importantly, perceptions of state cellphone laws appear to impact driving behavior. Regardless of what respondents' state laws actually say about cellphone use while driving, respondents were significantly more likely to report talking on a hand-held cellphone, as well as texting, if they thought it was legal than if they thought it was against the law.

**The vast majority of teenage drivers reported using smartphones while driving.** When asked about a series of smartphone-related activities, 84 percent of respondents reported doing at least one activity "sometimes" or more often while driving. Additionally, 59 percent of respondents reported doing at least one activity "often," and 27 percent admitted to "almost always" doing one or more of these activities listed on page 2. The most common activities reported were programming and listening to navigation apps, searching for music on a cellphone, and talking on a hands-free cellphone. However, even the least-reported of the 14 listed activities, watching videos (e.g., Netflix or YouTube), saw 15 percent of respondents saying they do this at least sometimes while driving.

## Many factors were related to teens' participation in distracted driving.

Two related factors greatly influenced the reported rate of these behaviors: age and length of time with a driver's license. Respondents ages 18-19 reported significantly higher rates of all 14 activities than respondents ages 16-17. Similarly, the longer a respondent has had a driver's license, the more likely they were to endorse each of these behaviors.

A number of additional factors also influenced the rates of teens participating in distracting behaviors. Respondents who have their own car indicated significantly higher rates than those who share a car with family member(s) for all activities listed at right except for programming a navigation app. Also, teens who reported driving an average of more than five hours per week were more likely than those driving five hours or less per week to talk on a hand-held and hands-free cellphone, to search for music, and to program a navigation app. This influence of car ownership and hours driven per week on the likelihood to participate in these behaviors remained significant even after controlling for respondents' age and the length of time they had a license.

Additionally, male respondents reported significantly higher rates of six of the 14 behaviors than female respondents: taking pictures, recording video, updating social media, watching videos, browsing the internet, and playing a cellphone game. Lastly, teens who indicated that their parents used cellphones while driving were more likely than those who said their parents "rarely" or "never" used their cellphone while driving to report engaging in all of the activities listed except for watching and recording video.

## Activities Teen Drivers Say They Participate in While Driving\*

	All Teen Drivers	Drivers Age 16-17	Drivers Age 18-19	Drivers w/ License < 6 mos.**	Drivers w/ License 6-11 mos.**	Drivers w/ License 1-2 yrs.**	Drivers w/ License 3 or more yrs.**
	n = 997	n = 500	n = 497	n = 214	n = 252	n = 363	n = 156
Listen to a navigation app	70%	66%	75%	60%	69%	75%	78%
Program a navigation app	52%	46%	60%	40%	53%	56%	61%
Search for music	47%	43%	51%	38%	44%	52%	53%
Talk on hand-free cellphone	46%	40%	52%	38%	43%	50%	54%
Read text messages	35%	27%	44%	22%	30%	38%	53%
Talk on hand-held cellphone	35%	26%	43%	21%	30%	38%	51%
Send text messages	27%	20%	34%	14%	25%	29%	42%
Browse the internet	20%	15%	25%	13%	19%	19%	30%
Read social media	20%	15%	24%	13%	20%	19%	28%
Take pictures	20%	17%	24%	15%	19%	20%	30%
Update social media	18%	14%	22%	12%	20%	17%	24%
Record video	17%	15%	20%	14%	17%	15%	26%
Play a game	16%	13%	19%	14%	15%	15%	21%
Watch videos	15%	12%	17%	11%	15%	13%	21%
At least one of the above	84%	79%	88%	74%	81%	89%	89%

All activities were explicitly labeled as being done on a cellphone (e.g., searching for music on your cellphone).

\*Participate was defined as respondents selecting "Sometimes," "Often," or "Almost always." Other response options included "Rarely" and "Never."

\*\*Another response option was "Don't know/Can't remember." Respondents who chose this response were excluded from the analysis.

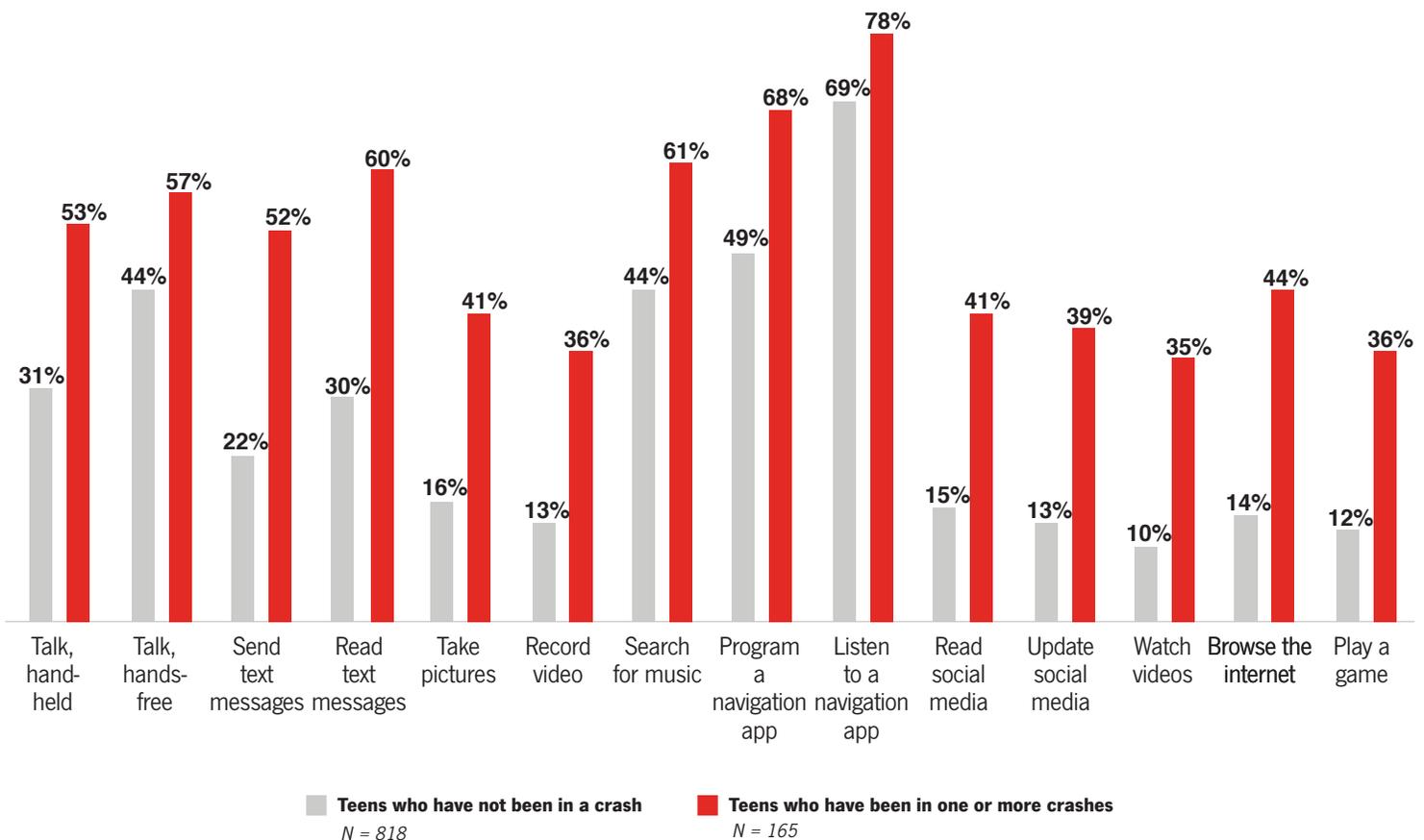
## Using a smartphone while driving can increase the risk of a crash.

Seventeen percent of the teens surveyed said they had been involved in at least one crash as a driver in which they were determined to be at fault or no fault was established. A clear relationship emerged between self-reported rates of smartphone use while driving and self-reported number of crashes. Respondents who indicated participating in these activities were more likely to report being involved in a crash than those who indicated “rarely” or “never” participating in these activities.

The differences between the behavior of teens who have and who have not been in a crash are striking. As shown in the chart below, compared to those who have not been in a

crash, those who have been in a crash were more than three times more likely to report watching videos and browsing the internet while driving and two to three times more likely to send and read texts, take pictures, record video, read and update social media, and play games on their cellphone while driving. These relationships between distracted driving behavior and self-reported crashes remained significant even after accounting for the age of the respondent, length of time they had a license, and the average number of hours they drive per week.

**Smartphone Activities Teens Say They Participate in While Driving\*  
By Whether or Not the Teen Has Been Involved in a Crash\*\***



All activities were explicitly labeled as being done on a cellphone (e.g., searching for music on your cellphone).

\*Participate was defined as respondents selecting “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Almost always.” Other response options included “Rarely” and “Never.”

\*\*Specifically, respondents were asked “Since you obtained your driver’s license, how many auto accidents have you been involved in as a driver where you were determined to be at fault or where no fault was established?”. Respondents who chose “Don’t know” for the number of auto accidents they have been involved in were excluded from the analysis above.

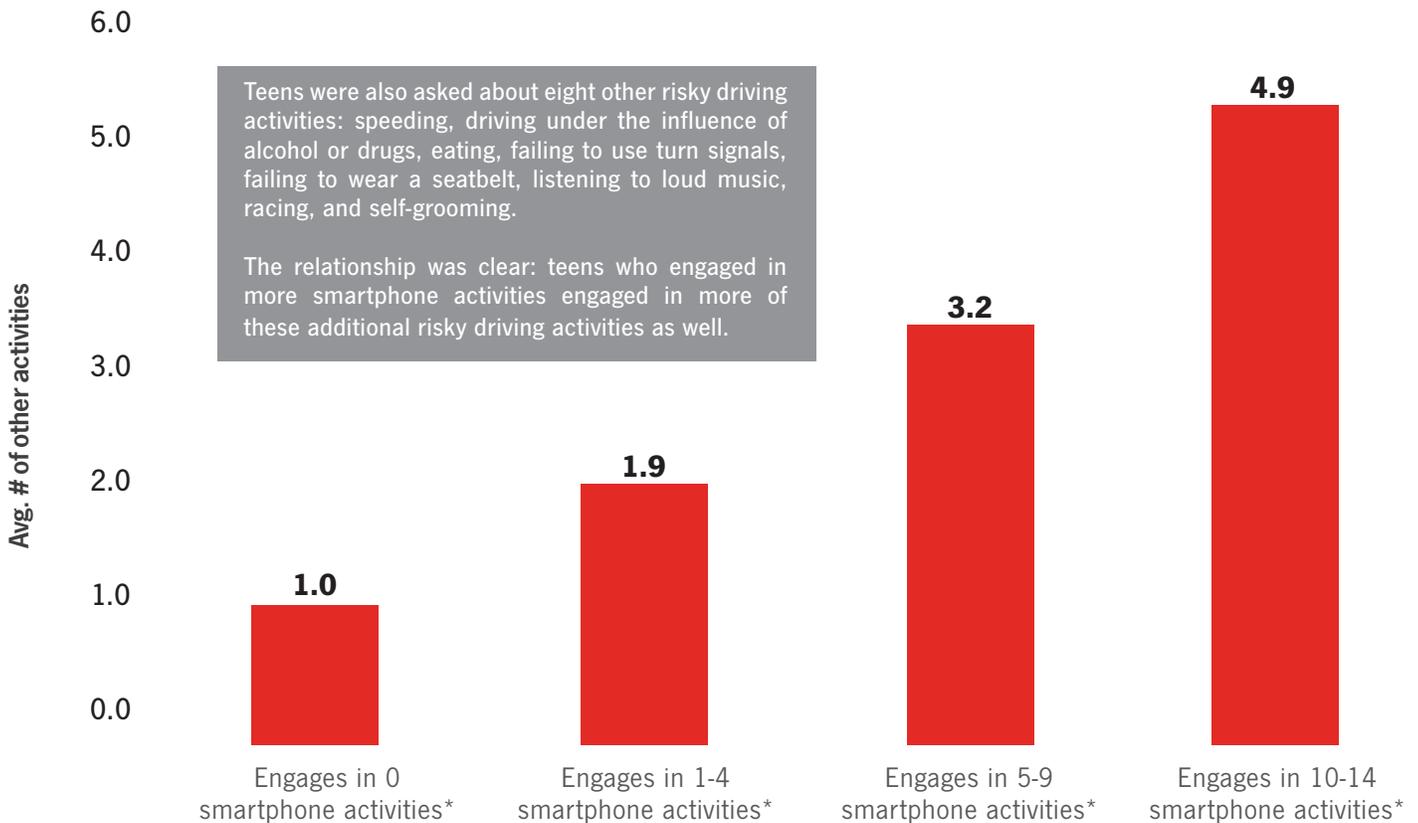
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## Using a smartphone while driving was related to participating in other dangerous driving behaviors.

In addition to the distracting smartphone activities listed on page 3, respondents were also asked about several other dangerous driving behaviors including speeding, failing to wear a seatbelt, and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. A strong relationship emerged between the smartphone activities and these additional behaviors. That is, the higher one's self-reported rate of distracting

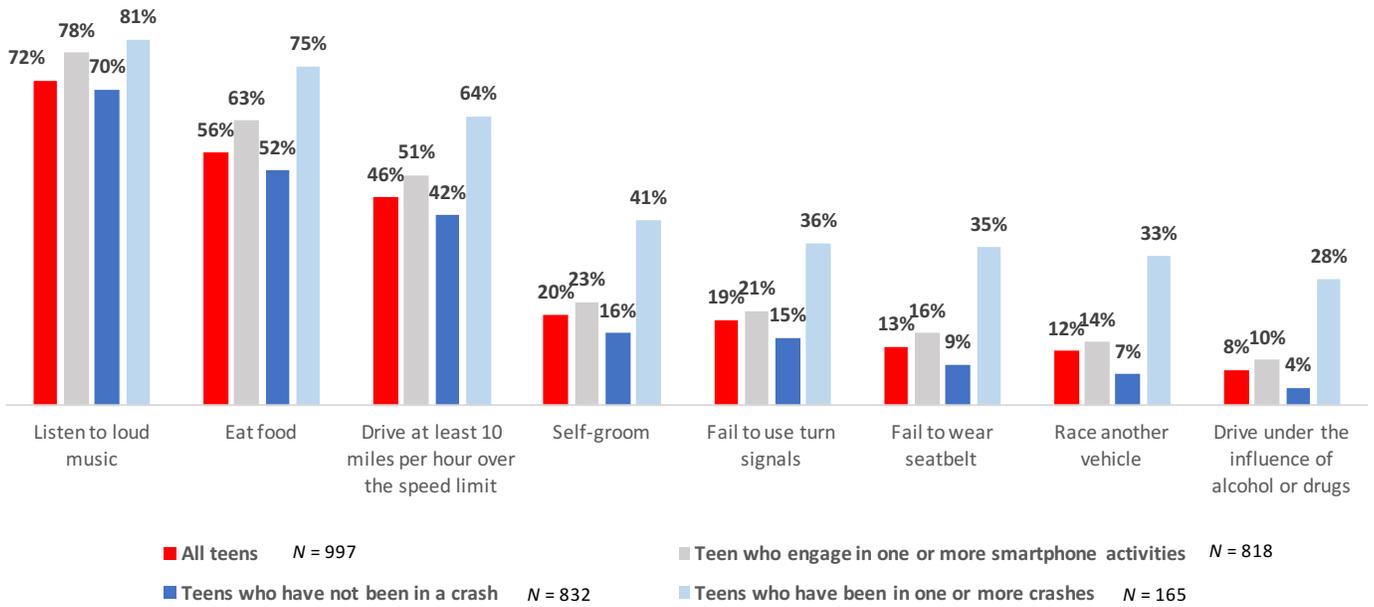
smartphone activities, the more likely a respondent was to report participating in each dangerous behavior listed below. Additionally, similar to the smartphone-related behaviors, these other dangerous driving behaviors were much more likely to be exhibited by teens who have been involved in a crash compared to teens who have not been involved in a crash (see chart on page 5).

### Average Number of Additional Risky Activities Teens Say They Participate in By Number of Smartphone Activities Teens Participate in While Driving



\*Respondents were considered to participate in an activity if they selected "Sometimes," "Often," or "Almost always." Other response options included "Rarely" and "Never."

**Other Activities Teens Say They Participate in While Driving\***  
**By Whether or Not the Teen Uses a Smartphone while Driving\* or Has Been Involved in a Crash\*\***



\*Participate was defined as respondents selecting “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Almost always.” Other response options included “Rarely” and “Never.”

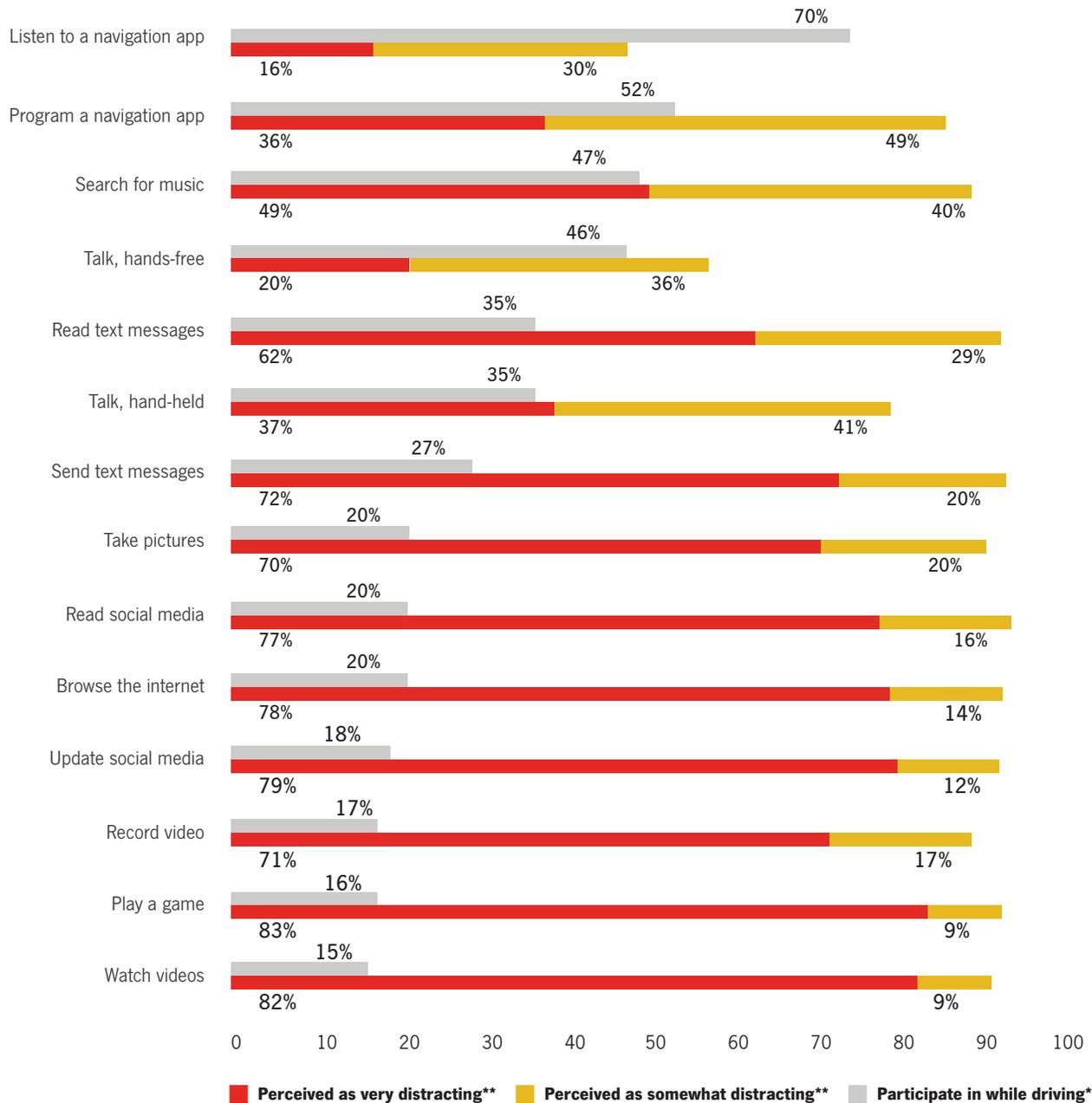
\*\*Specifically, respondents were asked “Since you obtained your driver’s license, how many auto accidents have you been involved in as a driver where you were determined to be at fault or where no fault was established?”. Respondents who chose “Don’t know” for the number of auto accidents they have been involved in were excluded from the analysis above.

**Teens reported using smartphones while driving despite finding them distracting and despite thinking that this behavior increases the likelihood of a crash.**

Twelve of these 14 smartphone activities were reported as at least somewhat distracting by 75 percent or more respondents. The two exceptions were talking on a hands-free cellphone (56 percent) and listening to a navigation app (46 percent). Despite finding these activities distracting, many participated in them anyway. For example, nearly half (47 percent) said they at least sometimes search for music on their cellphone while driving, even though 89 percent find it distracting. Additionally, 18 percent said they update social media while driving even though 91 percent find it distracting. Not surprisingly, teens that reported engaging in each activity were somewhat less likely to say they find it distracting than teens who report refraining from these activities.

Most teens who participate in distracting driving behaviors realize that their behavior increases the likelihood of a crash. For respondents who indicated participating in the activities shown in the graph on page 6, most thought that these behaviors are likely to cause a crash. As an example, among those who reported texting while driving, nearly eight in ten thought texting increased the likelihood of a crash (see chart on page 7).

## Percent of Drivers Who Perceive Activities as Distracting and Percent Who Participate in Them

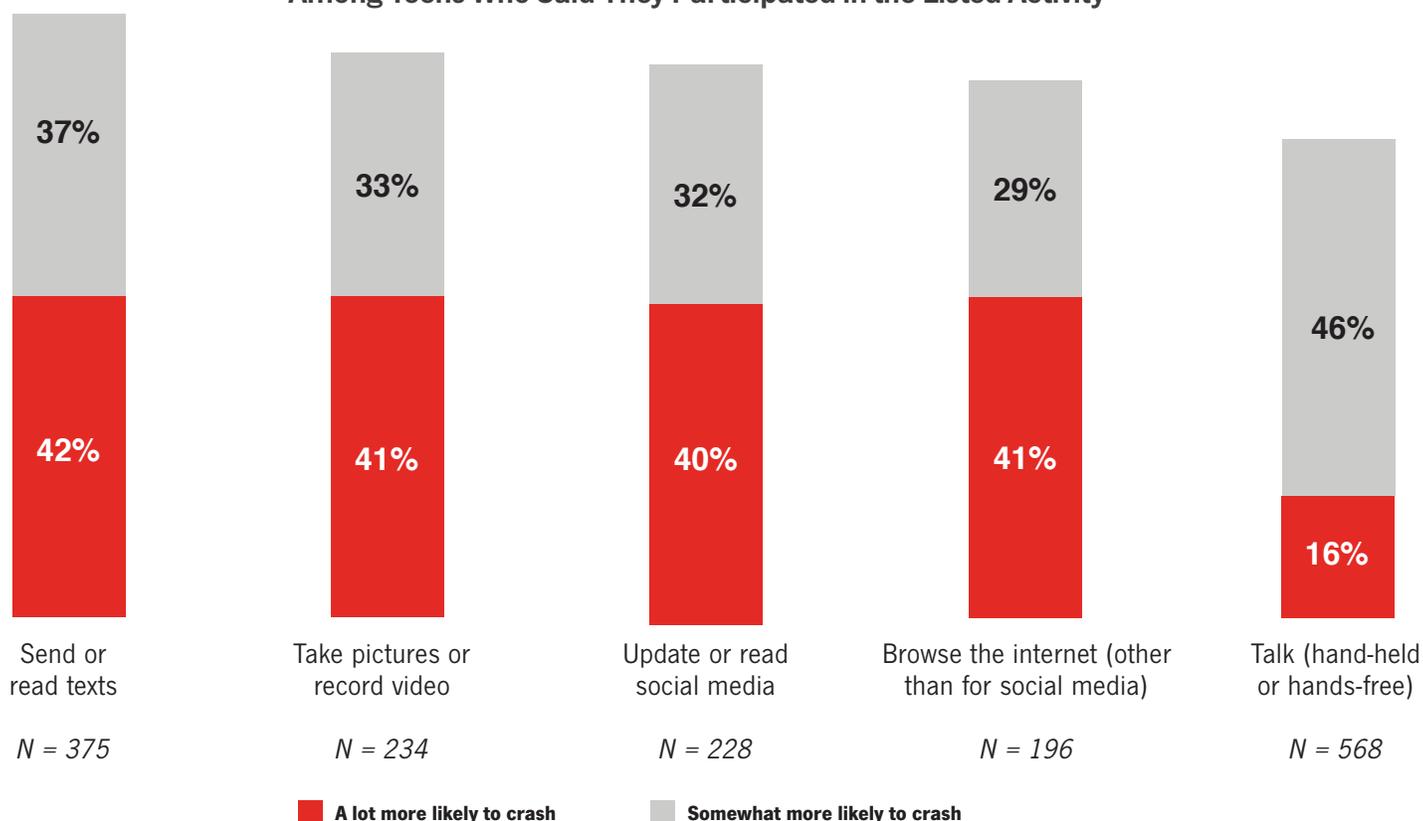


All activities were explicitly labeled as being done on a cellphone (e.g., searching for music on your cellphone).

\*N = 997

\*\*For the survey item asking how distracting these activities are, other response options included "Not at all distracting" and "Don't know." For each activity, those who chose "Don't know" were excluded from the analysis for that particular activity. N ranges from 882 to 957.

**“In your opinion, how does engaging in this activity affect your likelihood to crash?”  
Among Teens Who Said They Participated in the Listed Activity\***



\*Respondents include those who reported “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Almost always” participating in the listed activity(ies) while driving. Other response options included “Likelihood to crash is not affected,” “Somewhat less likely to crash,” “A lot less likely to crash,” and “Don’t know.” All activities were explicitly labeled as being done on a cellphone.

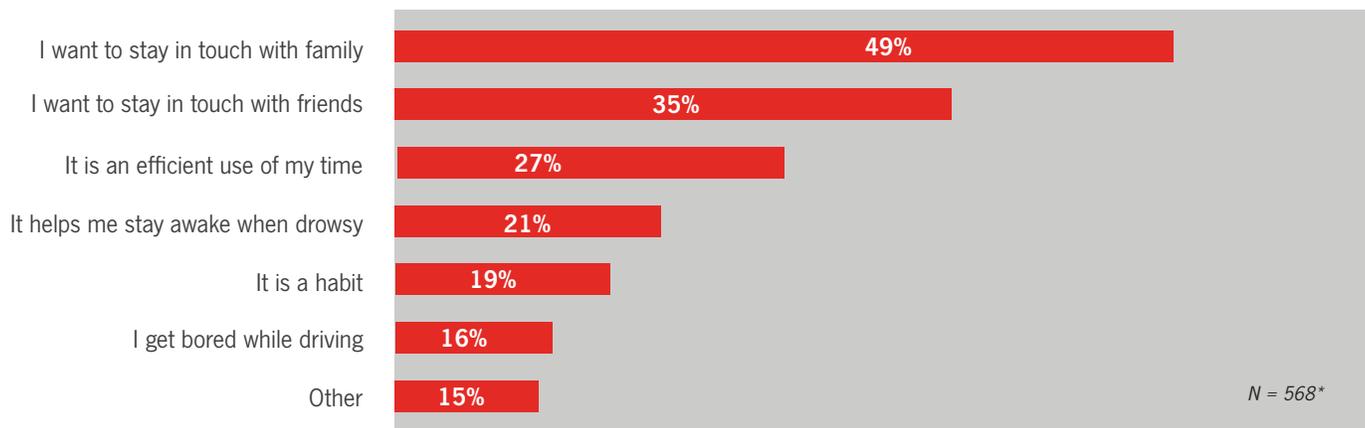
**Teens who use smartphones while driving realize it’s dangerous, yet they still participate in these behaviors. Why are they doing this?**

As indicated in the figures on pages 8-9, teens who reported exhibiting distracted driving behaviors cited a number of reasons for doing so. Teens most commonly cited wanting to stay in touch with family and friends as reasons for talking and texting while driving. “It is a habit” was among the top two reasons for updating/reading social media, taking pictures/recording video, and browsing the internet while driving and was the third most commonly selected reason for text messaging. The top reason for taking pictures/recording video was “I see something I want to share,” while the top reason for browsing the internet was “to search for an answer to a question.”

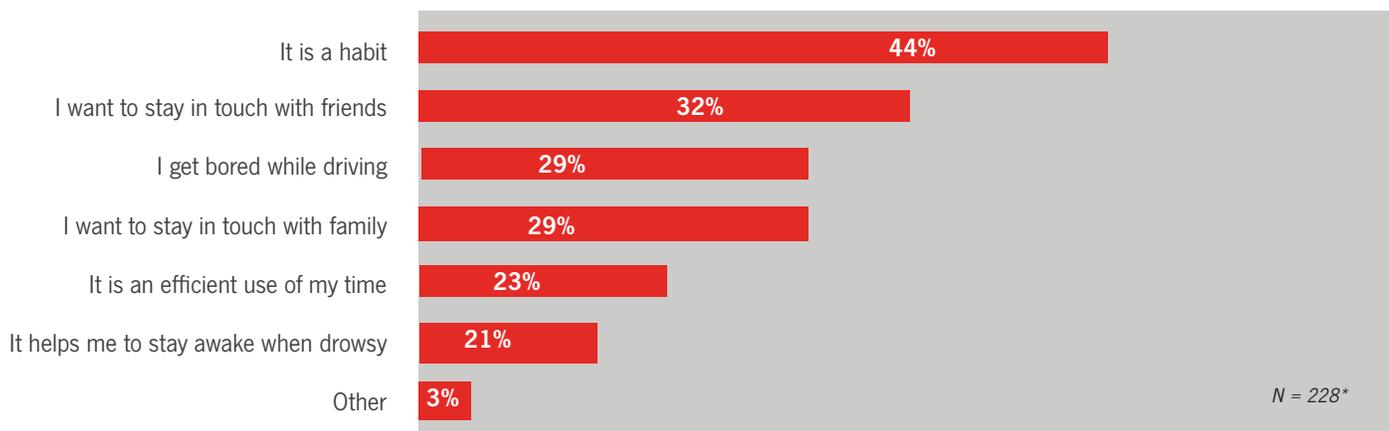
**For teens not exhibiting these distracted driving behaviors, the top reason was safety.**

Among teens who reported “rarely” or “never” participating in talking, texting, social media, pictures/video, or browsing the internet while driving, between 60 and 90 percent indicated that they refrained from this behavior because it is dangerous to themselves, their passengers, and others on the road. Across these same activities, the next most common reasons selected were that it was illegal and there are legal consequences (e.g., fine, losing license), followed by “I rarely have a reason to” and “my parents tell me not to.” The reasons for not participating in each type of behavior listed above were largely the same; it appears that safety is a larger concern to teens than legal consequences. Thus, messages about safety might resonate with teens as a deterrent for using smartphones while driving more so than messages about legal consequences.

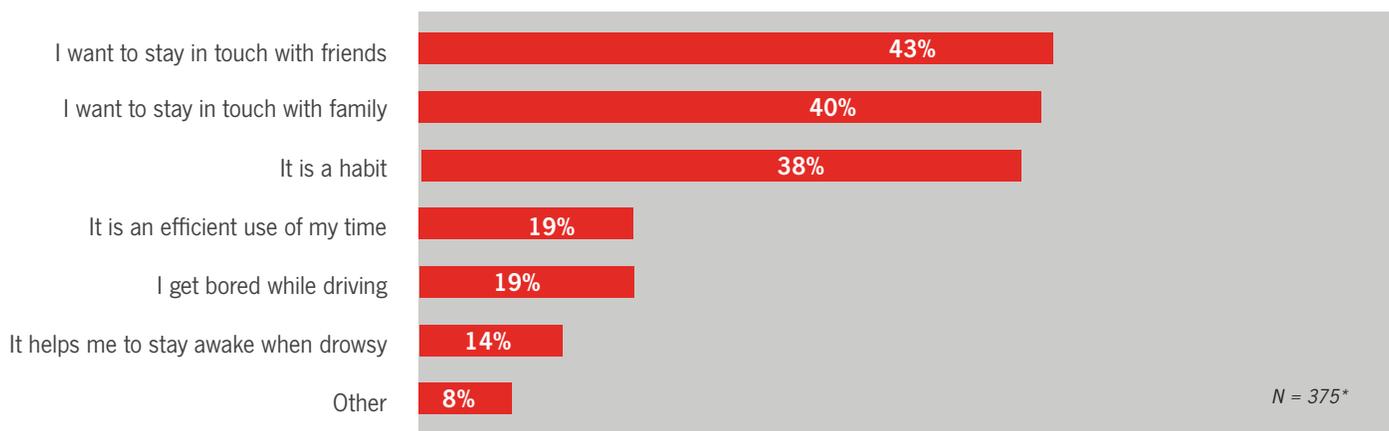
### Reasons for Talking on a Cellphone (Hand-Held or Hands-Free) While Driving



### Reasons for Updating or Reading Social Media While Driving

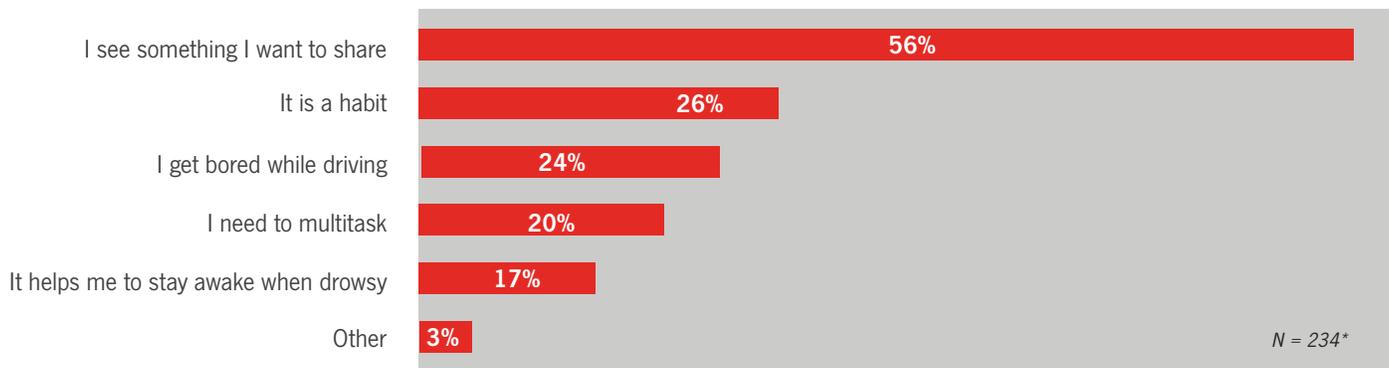


### Reasons for Sending or Reading Text Messages While Driving

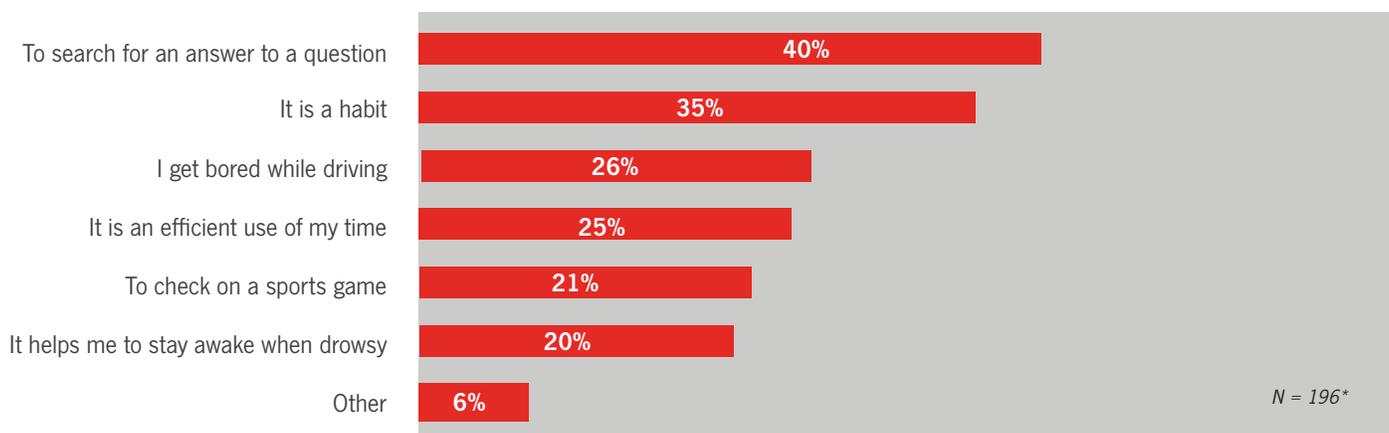


\*Respondents include those who reported "Sometimes," "Often," or "Almost always" participating in the listed activity(ies) while driving. Respondents were allowed to select multiple response options.

## Reasons for Taking Pictures or Recording Video While Driving



## Reasons for Browsing the Internet (Other Than for Social Media) While Driving



### Many respondents did not know their state laws regarding cellphone use and texting.

More than a dozen states have banned the use of hand-held cellphones while driving for all aged drivers. While the majority of respondents from these states reportedly knew this, six percent thought the law only applied to teen drivers, ten percent did not think hand-held cellphone use was banned at all, and 19 percent reported they did not know what the law said regarding hand-held cellphone use (see chart on page 10).

Most states, plus the District of Columbia, have banned texting while driving for all drivers. Again, most respondents in these states knew their state laws, but many did not. Four percent thought the law only applied to teen drivers, seven percent did not think texting while driving was banned at all, and 12 percent did not know what their state law said regarding texting while driving.

### Perceptions of state cellphone laws appear to impact driving behavior.

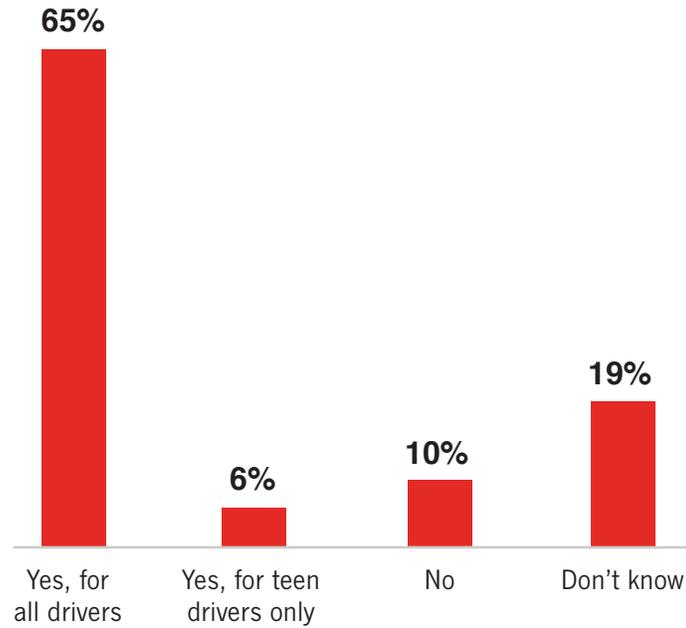
Regardless of what respondents' state laws actually say about cellphone use while driving, respondents were significantly more likely to report talking on a hand-held cellphone while driving if they thought it was legal (53 percent)\*\* than if they thought it was illegal (28 percent)\*\*. Similarly, respondents were significantly more likely to report sending text messages while driving if they thought it was legal (43 percent)\*\* than if they thought it was illegal (26 percent)\*\*. For both activities, those who reportedly did not know their state laws responded more similarly to those who thought it was illegal than those who didn't, presumably thinking it's better to be safe than sorry.

\*Respondents include those who reported "Sometimes," "Often," or "Almost always" participating in the listed activity(ies) while driving. Respondents were allowed to select multiple response options.

\*\*Percent of respondents who reported doing these activities at least "sometimes."

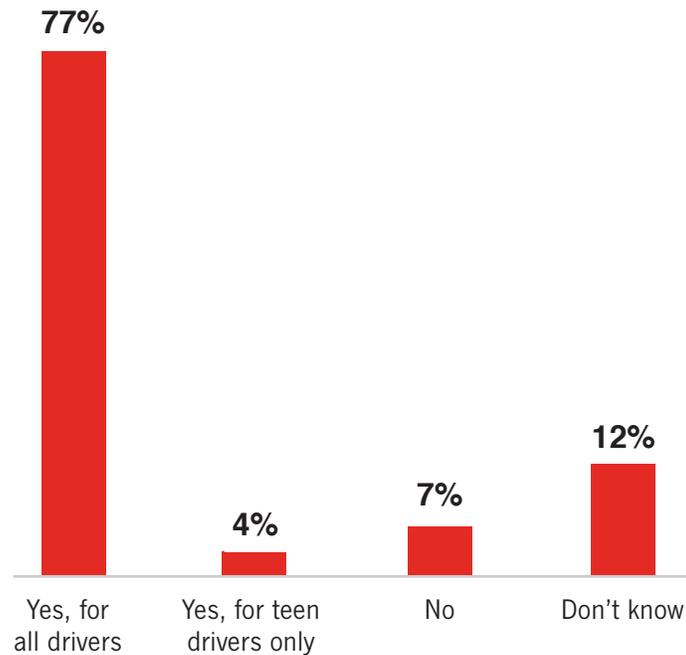
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**“To your knowledge, is hand-held cellphone use while driving banned in your state?”\***



\*Only includes respondents from states in which hand-held cellphone use while driving is banned for all drivers (California, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin). N=324

**“To your knowledge, is texting while driving banned in your state?”\*\***



\*\*Only includes respondents from states in which texting while driving is banned for all drivers (All states except for Arizona, Missouri, Montana, and Texas). N=900

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## **Methodology**

In July 2016, the State Farm Strategic Resources Department used an outside panel vendor to conduct an online survey of U.S. consumers ages 16-19. Survey responses were received from approximately 1,000 consumers who reported having a valid driver's license, driving at least one hour per week, and owning a smartphone. A number of changes were made to the survey research in 2016 such that results in this report should not be compared with the results in the 2015 "Teens and Distracted Driving" report also produced by State Farm.