



# NHTSA

NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

## DISTRACTED DRIVING MINDSET RESEARCH

10. 18. 2022

# REPORT AGENDA



## DESIGN

A description of why the research is being conducted and what the research entails.



## KEY FINDINGS

An overview of findings looking at key elements built into the research as well as any notable differences that show up by audience.



## DETAILED FINDINGS

A detailed look at all of the data gathered during the research as the backbone of the key findings.

# DESIGN





# PURPOSE

This exploratory, qualitative research was designed to understand the mindset of drivers ages 18- to 34-years-old—specifically how they think about distracted driving, potential law enforcement consequences, what shapes their behavior and how to effectively position law enforcement in advertising related to distracted driving.

Results will stimulate and inform thinking around the development of new creative assets to discourage using cell phones while driving.

**01**

Understand how and why young adults use their cell phones while driving

**02**

Explore language that is most applicable to describe using cell phones while driving

**03**

Uncover perceptions of “distracted driving” laws and the threat of law enforcement

**04**

Discover what role advertising can play in shaping thinking and influencing behavior



# METHODOLOGY



## QUALIFICATION CRITERIA

### *Criteria for All Markets:*

- National audience
- Ages 18- to 34-years-old
  - Ages 18- to 26-year-old (six groups)
  - Ages 27- to 34-year-old (six groups)
- Has a valid driver's license
- Drives regularly (at least 10 miles per week)
- Has used their phone while driving in the past 30 days
- Lives in an urban or suburban area
- Mix of demographics (income, education, employment, census region)

### *Hispanic Market Specific:*

- Hispanic (or of Latino origin)
- Born in U.S. Territory or another country
- Speaks Spanish most of the time at home
- Consumes media in Spanish at least half of the time at home



## MODE

- 12 Online Focus Groups (n=70)
  - 75-minute sessions
    - Eight English Groups (n=47)
    - Four Spanish Groups (n=23)



## DATES

September 12-15, 2022



## GROUP SCHEDULE

9/12	Group 1: General Market; Ages 27-34 (n=6)	
	Group 2: General Market; Ages 27-34 (n=6)	
9/13	Group 3: General Market; Ages 27-34 (n=6)	Group 1: Hispanic Market; Ages 27-34 (n=5)
	Group 4: General Market; Ages 27-34 (n=5)	Group 2: Hispanic Market; Ages 27-34 (n=6)
9/14	Group 5: General Market; Ages 18-26 (n=6)	Group 3: Hispanic Market; Ages 18-26 (n=6)
	Group 6: General Market; Ages 18-26 (n=6)	Group 4: Hispanic Market; Ages 18-26 (n=6)
9/15	Group 7: General Market; Ages 18-26 (n=6)	
	Group 8: General Market; Ages 18-26 (n=6)	

*NOTE: This is qualitative self-reported, perceptual data meant to understand mindset and is not projectable or directly comparable to behavioral data.*



# DISCUSSION FLOW

**01** Warm-Up/Initial Discussion

**02** Cell Phone Usage Behavior

**03** Top-of-Mind Associations  
with Distracted Driving

**04** Consequences of Driving  
While Using Cell Phone

**05** Awareness of Laws

**06** Distracted Driving Ad Recall

**07** Role Advertising Can Play

**08** Wrap-Up and Close

# KEY FINDINGS



# PHONE USAGE HABITS



## More Than a Habit

Virtually all respondents indicate being “addicted” to their smartphones.



## It's a Necessity

Smartphones are used for a wide variety of purposes; there is an app for every moment in one's life.



## Used Everywhere, Including the Vehicle

Because smartphones are so ubiquitous in respondents' lives, phone usage while driving is commonplace and occurs regularly.



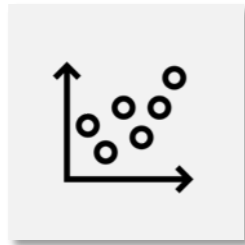
## Consequences Are Short Lived

Even among those that have experienced near tragic incidents or other consequences stemming from distracted driving, behavior changes have a short shelf-life.



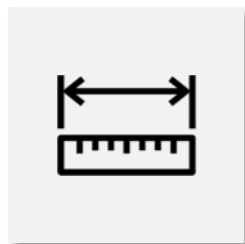


# DISTRACTED DRIVING



## Range of Distraction

Phone usage while driving can be separated into multiple types of distraction: cognitive, emotional, visual and tactile.



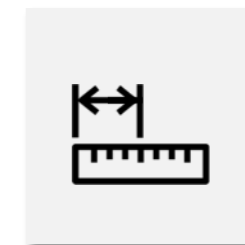
## A Phrase Too Broad

The phrase “distracted driving” is commonly believed to encompass any action or activity that diverts attention away from the road; it’s not specifically related to the phone.



## A Risk Rationalized

There is an understanding among all that phone usage while driving is a distraction, but the contextualized usage, lack of consequences and the fact that phones are so prevalent in their lives justifies continued use of their phone while driving.



## A Phrase Too Narrow

While some respondents associate “texting and driving” with any phone usage, others only believe the phrase is referring to typing on the phone.

# ROLE OF ADVERTISING



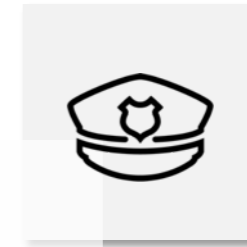
## Voice of Learning

While most are aware, few fully understand the laws related to using a phone while driving, meaning advertising can play a role in helping educate the public.



## This Is No Joke

Respondents agree that the tone of an advertisement related to distracted driving should be serious. Humor is not appropriate.



## Enforced Education

Law enforcement is a credible source to explain the law, risks, consequences and statistics related to distracted driving.



## No Consensus on the Best Language

Current phrases help convey the main idea but can be too broad or too specific when used on their own. It is important to include additional context (visually or in text) to paint a clear picture.



With phones being a constant in all respondents' lives, there are very few differences between markets. **However, one significant difference is the heightened awareness of others within the Hispanic Market.**

When considering consequences and what will impact behavior, **the Hispanic Market is more likely to say affecting others will impact them the most.** There are also mentions of impact on others in the general market, but to a lesser extent and more balanced against consequences that would affect themselves (e.g., jail time, court appearances, etc.).

# DETAILED FINDINGS



# PHONE USAGE



Smartphones are an integral part of respondents' lives and help them fulfill various needs.





# PHONE VS. OTHER ADDICTIONS

Nearly all respondents correlated their cell phone use to having an addiction. Some compare usage to other bad habits and how it provides them with a chemical response in their brain that reinforces the behavior.

“They’re basically the same to me as far as addiction [goes], **but texting while driving, that’s life or death, versus cracking your knuckles or biting your nails.** [You] might get arthritis later on in life, [but] you’re still breathing.”  
 – Tushina, General Market, Female, Age 18- to 26-years-old

“I would compare [cell phone addiction] to gambling in a way, because you’re doing something dangerous, but at the same time, you want that boost of dopamine. I feel **like every time we reach for our phones, we’re getting that boost of dopamine to where it becomes an addiction.**”  
 – Ashley, General Market, Female, Age 18- to 26-years-old

“[Phone addiction] is kind of analogous to other bad habits, but **the better metaphor for texting and driving... would be smoking and then blowing [the smoke] in a kid’s face or something.** Smoking is a bad habit, but you can make the argument that it’s [your] body, [you] can do whatever you want with it, but **[texting and driving] would be endangering other peoples’ bodies with my choice.**”  
 – Jarrett, General Market, Male, Age 18- to 26-years-old

“[Phone use] is just like a habit. I happen to crack my knuckles, some and everything else you said. **[Checking my phone] is just something I do without even thinking about it.** I wake up in the morning, I look at my phone, and then I brush my teeth... **but I look at my phone first.**”  
 – Mercedes, General Market, Female, Age 18- to 26-years-old



# TYPES OF DISTRACTIONS

Through this research, four different kinds of driving distractions—varying in perceived risk and safety—have been identified. Respondents most clearly communicating that three of them are high-risk distractions.

= high risk distractions

*“When I drive, I want to be **distracted**... I want to focus and be safe on the road, but I sometimes drive for hours on end... so sometimes we find road games or things to distract ourselves on a long drive.”*

– Allana, General Market, Female, Age 27- to 34-years-old

*“If you’re crying or just [had] a panic attack or are drinking or [experiencing] any kind of [emotional event], emotions can be a distraction.”*

– Melodie, General Market, Female, Age 27- to 34-years-old

<p><b>1. Cognitive Distraction</b></p> <p>These distractions happen when one’s thoughts are not fully on the road. An example of this is talking with a passenger.</p>	<p><b>3. Visual Distraction</b></p> <p>These distractions happen when one’s eyes are taken from the road. An example of this is looking at a text on your phone.</p>
<p><b>2. Emotional Distraction</b></p> <p>These distractions happen when an incident in one’s life causes an extreme emotional reaction. An example of this is being fired from your job that day.</p>	<p><b>4. Tactile Distraction</b></p> <p>These distractions happen when one removes their hand(s) from the steering wheel to do something. An example of this is typing and sending a message.</p>

*“In TikTok, you see videos and with [Snapchat], you see videos and photographs. It **grabs your vision and [takes it off the road]**. And then [text messages] I can read in 10 seconds, so the visual apps are more **visually [distracting] and unsafe to use.**”*

– Litzzy, Hispanic Market, Female, Age 18- to 26-years-old

*“Anything that’s not focusing on the road is [distracted driving]. If I drop some food while I’m driving, that could be distracted driving, or if I’m trying to fiddle with something in the passenger seat, just anything that’s not having your sole focus on the road [is distracted driving].”*

– Jamison, General Market, Male, Age 18- to 26-years-old

# WHAT IS THE CORRECT LANGUAGE



Respondents are split in their view of what “texting and driving” means, but universally all agree that “distracted driving” is any distraction including but not limited to phone use.

## “Texting and driving”

*“When I was first introduced to the term texting and driving, it just meant texting and sending messages on your phone, but now we see how much phones have evolved and developed. I think it [means] just touching your phone in general.”*

– Jamison, General Market, Male, Age 18- to 26-years-old

*“Honestly, [texting and driving] means just texting for me. And [the phrase used] should by like common sense be anything of using your phone. That's what I think. But when you say that phrase, I just think texting and driving.”*

– Alana, General Market, Female, Age 18- to 26-years-old

## “Distracted driving”

*“[Distracted driving] is anything that takes away your focus from driving. The way I think about it is anything that [makes] you not focused on the driving. It could be someone next to you, like if I have my kids and both are crying. It's hard... kids, other passengers [can be distracting].”*

– Danielle, General Market, Female, Age 27- to 34-years-old

*“[Distracted driving] is anything that looks like you're not fully looking at the road, so distracted in the sense that you're just not concentrating on what you're doing. If you're not concentrating and looking ahead of you or next to you, or just paying attention to the road and drivers around you, is distracted driving.”*

– Khuzaima, General Market, Male, Age 18- to 26-years-old



# PHONE USAGE WHILE DRIVING



Respondents indicate that their phone use while driving is habitual. Context of usage varies, and some behaviors are considered riskier than others.

Less risky behavior

More risky behavior

*“I’m using music apps like Spotify when I’m commuting and the video apps usually while I’m out and about... I don’t usually scroll through [Spotify while driving]. Before I start the car, I usually will just pick a playlist or an album or something and play it.”*

– Amanda, General Market, Female, Age 27- to 34-years-old

*“The first thing that comes to mind is TikTok and Instagram... **When I get off [work] I’m just kind of just scrolling around while in traffic... I feel like you just want to be distracted by something else and so that kind of helps the time pass by, just scrolling through social media.***

– Marquis, General Market, Male, Age 27- to 34-years-old

*“I’m pretty addicted to my [phone], so when I’m driving, I’ll reach for it and check an e-mail or make sure no one’s needing me for something or whatever... I’m familiar with the roads I’m taking, so I’m not going to do it in the middle of a four lane [highway] going 50 miles and hour, **but if I’m on a side street, sure.***

– Sam, General Market, Female, Age 27- to 34-years-old

*“I use WhatsApp and TikTok [while driving]. [I use] WhatsApp to answer messages, sometimes voice messages and sometimes texts. [I use] TikTok just to see what people are up to, [and sometimes] I’m listening to music and listening to videos.”*

– Dorian, Hispanic Market, Female, Age 18- to 26-years-old

# WHAT IS THE LAW?



While most respondents assume there are laws, they are unsure of the details, how they get enforced, and what the penalties are. **This is primarily due to the laws varying by state and by usage.** Additionally, there were some mentions that **the laws can be at the discretion of the officer and are more often treated as a secondary offense** on top of another reason one was pulled over.



# WHY TAKE THE RISK?

Though most respondents indicate awareness of laws against cell phone use while driving, understanding is limited, and the threat of enforcement consequences is not very credible. Additionally, some justify usage as they feel they need to be reachable at any time in case of an emergency related to work and/or dependents.

*“I think [using your phone while driving] is just part of its habits or addictiveness. I’ve even **thought to myself [that] I’m a good enough multitasker that I’m not going to be the one to cause a [crash].**”*

– Alex, General Market, Male, Age 27- to 34-years-old

*“I think that... **if I can see a straight road, I should be good to text and stuff like that.** I just think I could multitask while doing multiple things, [or that I’m a] real great driver so I could never get into a [crash].”*

– Marquis, General Market, Male, Age 27- to 34-years-old

*“I feel like your phone is a priority because like it or not, if we’re going anywhere outside of our home, **we won’t leave our phone because in case of an emergency, you need to call 911. If you get in a [crash] in your car... it’s like your phone is a priority.**”*

– Alana, General Market, Female, Age 18- to 26-years-old

*“If I’m driving home from work and it’s **after rush hour, I can either take the risk of taking my phone out at the red light,** so I get to talk to one of my parents or one of my friends on the way home or drive home in silence. I’m probably going to take that risk at the red light and hope for the best.”*

– Jared, General Market, Male, Age 27- to 34-years-old

**NOTEWORTHY CALLOUT:** It is not uncommon that people will hide the behavior when they see law enforcement; some will even drop or purposefully hide their phone, suggesting there is some concern about being caught/consequences.

# SHAPING BEHAVIOR



Given the confusion over the laws regarding phone use while driving and their enforcement, an effective ad would need to communicate enforcement consequences while being serious, engaging, and relatable. There may be an opportunity to position usage as digital impairment.

***“I don't think distracted driving is something that should be put in a humorous light... law enforcement hasn't been in the best light in the past couple of years, but a lot of them are very good people and a lot of them do want to help, so I was thinking that diving deep into their experience and [using] a heartfelt explanation of what they've seen [would be effective].”***

*– Sam, General Market, Male, Age 18- to 26-years-old*

***“One thing I did notice is that we all were unsure about what was legal. I think if law enforcement was portrayed giving quick facts [explaining] whatever obscure things about the law that we were unsure about... Highlighting the [consequences] of the offenses may resonate with people.”***

*– Mark, General Market, Male, Age 27- to 34-years-old*

***“I'm thinking of a parallel with a drunk driving ad I've seen... it seems like you're [driving] fine, and then look at all the bad things that happened to me because of a stupid decision I made. There could be a parallel like that where [law enforcement] says that because you were stopped for texting while driving, here's what happened.”***

*– Jared, General Market, Male, Age 27- to 34-years-old*

# MEANINGFUL CONSEQUENCES



Research indicates there will be challenges to changing this established behavior and moving the needle on phone usage while driving.



## Short Shelf-Life on Consequences

All who report any change in behavior note that it does not last. The importance of the phone in their lives leads them to fall back on risky behavior.

**There may be some opportunities to tie in messaging using a similar approach to impaired driving.**

**There will need to be a certain degree of repetitiveness/stickiness to truly impact behavior.**



## A False Sense of Safety

Very few have had any negative consequences despite a high level of phone usage while driving. Close calls don't permanently change behavior.

**Instead, extending to how they could hurt or injure others is more impactful. Additionally, some mention calling out that they are modeling bad behavior for their children would make them reconsider their behavior.**



## Mix of Enforcement Required

Respondents feel enforcement will need to use both the carrot and the stick.

**A mix of positive reinforcement and punishment would be most effective. For positive reinforcement, partnerships with insurance companies and their safe driver features in their apps is suggested. Also, for punishments, fines don't have to be large to be significant; a \$100–\$500 range will suffice.**

# THREE ASPECTS OF ADVERTISING



There is a need for advertising to be educational, realistic and relatable.

## RELATABLE

## REALISTIC

## EDUCATIONAL

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ They want to see situations where they would typically be more likely to use their phone (red light, stop sign, two-lane road near home)</li> <li>▪ Respondents would like someone like them to be portrayed, since it tends to be the younger drivers that are most closely affixed to their phones while driving.</li> <li>▪ Respondents indicate wanting a “humanistic” element of law enforcement, suggesting that having law enforcement show emotion over consequences of the situation to gain sympathy from viewers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The ability for law enforcement to determine when a driver is distracted from their cell phone needs to be perceived as a credible threat</li> <li>▪ Needs to communicate that you can be caught</li> <li>▪ There needs to be a clear distinction that cell phone distractions while driving can result in enforcement and norming consequences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respondents want the consequences of the behavior to be clearly communicated</li> <li>▪ Participants want to hear about potential legal consequences such as fines, jail time, etc.</li> <li>▪ They also want to hear stats on how many crashes are caused by drivers being distracted, specifically from their cell phones</li> </ul>
<p><i>“A commercial [depicting] a tech savvy guy or somebody our age that was just moving a mile a minute and they had some type of [fatal crash] would be effective. Seeing a little fender bender [wouldn't be as effective], but if it was something that hit home or struck an emotional nerve, you might reconsider [using your phone while driving].”</i></p> <p>– Jamison, General Market, Male, Age 18- to 26-years-old</p>	<p><i>“I [would] want some sort of acknowledgement that [law enforcement] notices when [drivers] are on their phones. Do they actually know? So maybe in whatever campaign, the [ad communicates] that [law enforcement] sees you and knows what you're doing.”</i></p> <p>– Joann, General Market, Female, Age 27- to 34-years-old</p>	<p><i>“[The ad] needs to communicate the risk that you're taking by choosing to be distracted by your phone [while driving]. You could hit someone, maybe [speeding] through a school [zone], or you would veer off the road and crash into another car. You could damage your car. You could crash and possibly take your life, maybe your passengers'.”</i></p> <p>– William, General Market, Male, Age 27- to 34-years-old</p>

# CONCLUSIONS + RECOMMENDATIONS



# USE OF PHONES IS PREVALENT

While driving, all respondents use their phones in some manner or another. The behavior is conditioned, as many have not had to deal with any negative consequences related to using the phone while driving. They find it hard to put away something that is so ubiquitous with their lives.



## **RECOMMENDATION:**

Because changing behavior will be a challenge, we should start the change by building stronger awareness of the risks and consequences related to using a phone while driving, especially those risks that come after a crash.



# VERNACULAR CONNECTION

When it comes to language, it is important to make a clear and distinct connection to using the phone while driving as a distraction.



## RECOMMENDATION:

Instead of relying on exclusively on language, use supporting visuals to show the range of ways using a phone can be distracting, including how the risks increase as the driver becomes more engaged with their phone and less focused on driving.

# INCONSISTENT UNDERSTANDING

While most are aware that there are laws related to using the phone and driving, few have a clear and consistent understanding. Additionally, laws vary by state, which may add to the challenge when making a nationwide campaign.



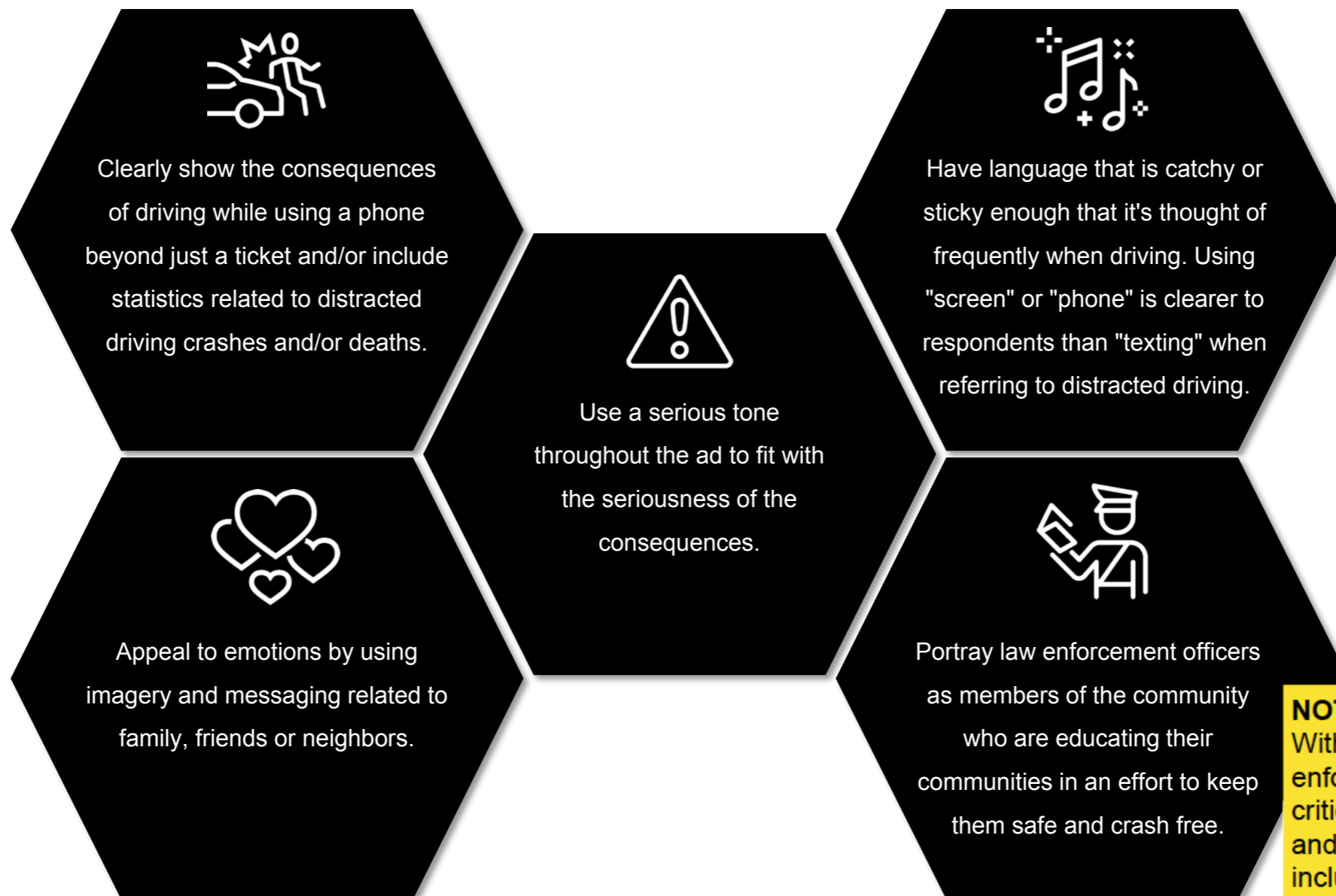
## RECOMMENDATION:

Create an ad that communicates how distracted driving impairs driving behavior and can lead to a variety of negative consequences, including enforcement consequences. Building in statistics will help dispel the conditioned behavior many have related to using their phone and driving.

# ROLE ADVERTISING CAN PLAY

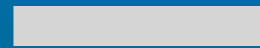
All respondents admit to driving while distracted, which is due to phone usage being an addictive behavior that occurs all the time, even while driving. And while most have seen ads related to distracted driving, none were effective at influencing their behavior. To influence behavior, an ad would need to include the following five items.

## RECOMMENDATION:



**NOTEWORTHY CALLOUT:** With this being an enforcement ad, it will be critical to balance relatability and education when including law enforcement.

# APPENDIX



General Market (n=47)

# DEMOGRAPHICS

		TOTAL			TOTAL
Age	18- to 26-years-old	49%	4 Point Census Region	Northeast	21%
	27- to 34-years-old	51%		Midwest	23%
				South	34%
				West	21%
Gender	Male	51%			
	Female	49%			
Ethnicity	White	36%	Employment	Full-time	72%
	Black	21%		Part-time	9%
	Hispanic	25%		Unemployed	4%
	Asian	15%		Student	11%
	Other/Mixed Race	2%		Homemaker	2%
				Retired	-
				Other	2%
Education	HS or less	11%			
	Some college/vocational/tech	32%			
	College graduate	49%			
	Postgraduate	9%			
Household Income			Less than \$50K	25%	
			\$50K-\$99K	51%	
			\$100K+	23%	

Spanish Market (n=23)

# DEMOGRAPHICS

		TOTAL			TOTAL
Age	18- to 26-years-old	52%	4 Point Census Region	Northeast	4%
	27- to 34-years-old	48%		Midwest	26%
Gender	Male	43%		South	48%
	Female	57%		West	22%
Birthplace	Mexico	43%	Employment	Full-time	48%
	Puerto Rico	9%		Part-time	9%
	Cuba	-		Unemployed	-
	Central America	17%		Student	26%
	South America	26%		Homemaker	17%
	Europe	-		Retired	-
	Someplace else	4%		Other	-
Education	HS or less	26%	Household Income	Less than \$50K	30%
	Some college/vocational/tech	61%		\$50K-\$99K	70%
	College graduate	9%		\$100K+	-
	Postgraduate	4%			