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Research Paper

Stay away from Social Media While Driving: Social Media Addiction as a Traffic Safety Threat.

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ABSTRACT

Some people addicted to social media can spend time on social media platforms even while driving in traffic, which can cause various traffic accidents. Various organisations create advertising campaigns to raise public awareness regarding the danger caused by social media addiction in traffic. Using various visual and written signs in advertising campaigns, the study intended to encourage people not to use social media while driving. This study also aims to determine which signs are used and what kind of messages are given in the advertisements prepared for not using social media while driving. To this end, a total of nine advertising campaigns from Belgium, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Romania were scrutinised within the context of social media addiction and traffic safety by using the semiotics method. Visual and written signs in the advertisements scrutinised in the study were analysed through Karl Bühler's Organon Model, which consists of expression, representation, and appeal functions. It was found that social media addiction might lead to traffic accidents while driving, and death metaphors regarding traffic accidents were used in advertisements. The study concluded that advertising campaigns scrutinised tried to prevent people from using social media while driving via the fear appeal approach.

Keywords: Social media, social media addiction, advertising campaigns, semiotic analysis, mobile phone use

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1. INTRODUCTION

People frequently use social media platforms for reasons such as communicating, socialising, and being aware of the developments around them. This use can become an addiction over time, and many people focus their attention on social media platforms at home, at school, at work, and on the street. Some people also use social media while driving and may pay attention to social media instead of traffic. Focusing on social media while driving can cause various traffic accidents. Therefore, it is tried to prevent people from using social media while driving in traffic by applying criminal sanctions. Besides, advertisements are prepared by various organisations to raise awareness of the dangers that may be caused by the use of social media while driving in traffic.

The study aims to determine which visual and written signs are used and which messages are given in the advertisements prepared to prevent the use of social media while driving in traffic. Hence, advertisements regarding the matter were scrutinised semiotically within the context of social media and traffic safety. In the light of the findings discussed in the study, an attempt was made to seek answers to the following questions:

RQ1: *Which emotional appeal or emotional appeals was/were used in the advertisements prepared to prevent social media use while driving in traffic?*

RQ2: *Which metaphors are included in the advertisements prepared to prevent the use of social media while driving in traffic?*

The study tried to shed light on the advertising campaigns prepared against social media addiction regarding traffic safety. In this respect, the study is intended to be a resource from which researchers working in the fields of communication, advertising, social media, traffic, and transportation can benefit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile phones have revolutionised global communications, particularly in areas with limited access to traditional fixed-line services, due to their affordability and accessibility. While offering significant social and commercial benefits, their ubiquitous use poses a critical challenge: driver

distraction and its consequent role in road accidents. Addressing this issue requires a multi-pronged approach. This includes legislative measures, innovative enforcement strategies, collaboration with the telecommunications industry, advertising campaigns, and a societal shift in attitudes towards responsible driving (World Health Organization, 2011, pp. 46-47). In the literature review, within the scope of the study, it was disclosed that many academic studies were conducted on the use of mobile phones while driving (Lamble et al., 2002; Gras et al., 2007; White et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2012; Chen, 2013; Márquez et al., 2015; Ige et al., 2016; Choudhary & Velaga, 2017; Papadimitriou et al., 2019; Nguyen-Phuoc et al., 2020; Hollósi et al., 2024). On the one hand, there are some academic studies regarding the matter. Violanti and Marshall (1996), for example, discussed mobile phones and traffic accidents. Lamble et al. (1999) investigated the safety effects of using mobile phones while driving. On the other hand, Woo and Jawkuan (2001) handled the impact of mobile phone use while driving. White et al. (2004) scrutinised risk perceptions of mobile phone use while driving. Pöysti et al. (2005) put forward factors affecting mobile phone use while driving and the dangers that may arise. Bener et al. (2006) discussed the effect of mobile phone use on driving style and driving skills, while Walsh et al. (2008) dealt with the factors affecting the intention of using a mobile phone while driving. Riquelme et al. (2010) discussed the social effects of young drivers talking on mobile phones while driving. Yannis et al. (2010) investigated young drivers' use of mobile phones, whereas Elvik (2011) scrutinised the effect of mobile phone use on accident risk. Mohammadi (2011) addressed the prevalence of seat belts, mobile phone use, and traffic accident injuries, while Horsman and Conniss (2015) addressed the evidence that drivers use mobile phones in traffic accidents. Saifuzzaman et al. (2015) reported the effect of mobile phone use on young drivers' car-following behaviours. Olubiya et al. (2016) noted the relationship between mobile phone use and traffic accidents among drivers. Papadakaki et al. (2016) discussed driving performance while using a mobile phone. On the one hand, Kita and Luria (2018) investigated the relationship between individuals' psychological variables and smartphone use while driving. Alghnam (2019) addressed the relationship between mobile phone use and heavy traffic accidents. Aydoğan (2018) investigated the advertising campaigns on traffic safety, while Büyükbaş et al. (2019) addressed the relationship between mistakes, infringements in traffic and smartphone addiction. Truelove et al. (2019) reported using Snapchat while driving. Kogani et al. (2020) examined the relationship between mobile phone use and the risk of accidents in motor vehicles. Al-Ajlouny and Alzboon (2023) investigated the effects

of cell phone use on driving behaviour and traffic accident risk and found that making calls, sending messages, and browsing social media applications were the most important cell phone use behaviours.

Even though there is extensive literature on mobile phone use while driving, there is a significant lack of literature on preventing social media use while driving. Thanks to this study it is aimed to fill this gap in the literature on the matter to some extent.

2.1. Social media addiction

Addiction emerges as a problem when the addict consumes substances or uses certain rewards (such as smartphones and social media) as a behaviour (Van Meter et al., 2020, p. 72). Addiction might be caused by an action or feeling that has been tried before and has reached a certain satisfaction in the individual or is predicted to cause new satisfactions in the future. On the other hand, media addiction means that societies depend on the media to obtain information based on their social structures. When individuals use social media with a strong desire to do whatever it is, they feel relaxed. However, when they do not use it, they feel emptiness, restlessness, and deprivation (Hazar, 2011, p. 161). Although not all individuals are affected in the same way, the intensity of social media use is also associated with individuals' psychological health (Al-Busaidi et al., 2023, p. 3355). For instance, it is clear that the fear of missing out on the agenda, called FoMO, has become a critical problem, especially for adolescents (Fabris et al., 2020). It has been observed that adolescents who engage in less interpersonal communication are more prone to activities such as short-term video addiction (Zhao et al., 2025, p. 62). In fact, it is apparent that even live broadcasts on social media, for shopping, or for other purposes, can lead to a fear of missing out (Ili, 2025, p. 92).

Though social media addiction is not dependent on a single factor, it can also depend on sex, personality traits, psychological needs, socialisation, and self-esteem (Buran Köse & Doğan, 2019, p. 178). However, since this situation is not understood, especially by young people, it can be assumed that this is an acceptable behaviour and risk-taking behaviours increase (Waheed, 2019, p. 59).

Social media addiction involves being hooked on social media to the point where it's used excessively and compulsively, and it ends up causing problems in different areas of a person's life (Anish et al., 2024). It is evident that social media applications affect individuals in many social,

cultural, economic, and psychological aspects and are exhibited as a behavioural addiction due to the intense use of social media applications in daily life at home, at work, or in traffic.

2.2. Social media addiction as a traffic safety threat

Social media is a powerful platform capable of shaping behaviours (Kamaruddin & Shahrudin, 2023, p. 31). Although the ever-expanding spread of social media is well-documented in many areas, it is limited in the area of traffic. In limited studies, the relative effect of social media has generally been tried to be investigated. Moreover, considering the problem of non-compliance with traffic laws due to the increasing social media addiction today, it is observed that technology can also lead to security problems and individuals' mistakes to engage in high-risk behaviours (Stefanidis et al., 2022, p. 19). Thus, it is necessary to identify specific guidelines and instructions related to the extent to which using social media while driving negatively affects driver performance and attention (Hashash et al., 2019, p. 67).

The danger dimension between texting, playing music, and using social media accounts on mobile phones while driving differs. Because when a message is sent, or music is played, the use of the phone is partially terminated. In contrast, the continuation of the flow in the use of social media increases the danger even more (Hashash et al., 2019, p. 80). Thus, the use of smartphone applications while driving, particularly social media activities (e.g., videos, news feeds, messages), distracts drivers and increases the frequency of road accidents, ultimately leading to accident-related deaths (Perez et al., 2024).

With the increase in the use of social media on mobile phones while driving in traffic, the need for campaigns to reduce distraction while driving has increased, and it has been aimed to raise awareness regarding traffic safety threats that may arise. In this framework, advertising campaigns prepared for preventing social media addiction of individuals while driving in traffic were discussed in this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the study, advertisements related to social media addiction and traffic safety were accessed from the website called Ads of the World, where many advertisements have been gathered. Among the social media platforms with many users, the words of Facebook, X (Twitter), WhatsApp, and YouTube (Statista, 2024) were searched on the site, and advertisements were tried to be accessed. Seventy-eight advertisements for the word "Facebook", thirty-four advertisements for the search

for “Twitter”, ten advertisements for the search for “WhatsApp”, and twenty-five advertisements for the search for “YouTube” have been accessed (Ads of the World, 2024). Since searches with X, the new name of the Twitter platform, did not yield any meaningful results, search results with the name Twitter were taken as a basis. It has been found that a total of nine advertising campaigns from six different countries, Belgium, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Romania, are related to the use of social media while driving in traffic. In nine advertising campaigns, some used a single image, and some used more. Because of the similar content of the images in the advertising campaigns that use more than a single image, one image from each advertising campaign was analysed in the study. In this respect, nine advertising campaigns were selected as the sample of the study and were examined semiotically via traffic safety and social media addiction.

Semiotics studies signs, which are essentially anything that represents or signifies something beyond itself (Berger, 2014, p. 22). Semiotics, as an interdisciplinary field, encompasses the study of all signs and sign systems, including linguistic signs, while also offering a unique perspective on the study of language itself (Wang, 2020, p. 76). Also, the fusion of text and image is particularly well-suited for analysing the vocabulary, grammar, and organization of visual communication (El-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2016, p. 2278). As sign-oriented disciplines, semiotics and linguistics are related fields. Semiotics and linguistics explain what signs are and how they function within systems, contexts and texts. Therefore, they explain “sign as text” and “text as sign” in complementary semiotic processes (Tobin, 1990).

The nine advertising campaigns determined as the sample of the study were analysed through the German linguist Karl Bühler's Organon Model. Bühler's Organon Model was used in the study because it explains both the interpretation of the signs and the appeal from the sender toward the receiver in the communication process.

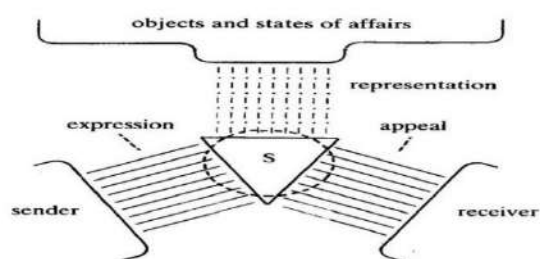


Figure 1. Organon Model (Bühler, 2011, p. 35)

Bühler's Organon Model consists of three functions: expression, representation, and appeal. The use of signs refers to expressive function. The representation function means the message to be given through the signs. The appeal function, on the one hand, includes the effect on the receiver through the message conveyed in the communication dimension (Bühler, 2011, p. 35).

The study analysed visual and written signs in advertisements through the expression, representation, and appeal functions.

4. RESULTS

In this part of the study, nine advertising campaigns prepared against the use of social media while driving in traffic were scrutinised semiotically.

First Advertising Campaign

The first advertising campaign was created by the M&J advertising agency on behalf of Ford and was published in Brazil in 2011. Three images with similar content were included in the advertising campaign. In this advertising campaign, there are written signs such as "texting while driving, checking their social network or simply making a call may limit their attention and cause accidents" and "Be conscious Disconnect" (Figure 2).



Figure 2. First Advertising Campaign¹

¹ <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/mail-2996177f-a15f-4e61-91da-0030b60de707>

In the expressive function, a bird, the symbol of Twitter, has been placed in the sight of the driver giving the impression that the vehicle is on the road at that time. The bird shape in the advertisement significantly hinders the driver's sight of the traffic. In the representation function, the bird shape used in the advertisement represents Twitter. Written signs in the advertisement disclose that the person driving the vehicle concerns himself/herself with Twitter while driving. The fact that the bird, the symbol of Twitter, is in the driver's sight gives the impression that the person might significantly lose his/her sight due to spending time on social media while driving. As for the appeal function, the fear appeal approach is used by giving the message that using social media while driving in the advertisement can negatively affect the driver's sight. Suggesting that a traffic accident might occur in the advertisement, it has also been attempted to encourage people not to be interested in social media while driving in traffic.

Table 1. First Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	The shape of a bird, the symbol of Twitter, in the driver's field sight
Representation Function	The shape of the bird represents Twitter
Appeal Function	Encouraging people not to be interested in social media while driving in traffic

Second Advertising Campaign

The second advertising campaign was undertaken by the Mercury360 advertising agency on behalf of the Bucharest Traffic Police and was published in Romania in 2013. Two images having similar content were included in the advertising campaign. The image in this campaign has the texts "Where browsing starts, the road ends" and "NO social networks while driving" (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Second Advertising Campaign²

In the expressive function, the advertisement includes buildings and roads resembling Facebook's F-shaped logo. On one of the roads resembling the F-shape, there are two crashed vehicles, a police vehicle, and an ambulance. In the representation function, the F shape in the advertisement represents Facebook. It is clear from the written signs in the advertisement that the traffic accident occurred because the driver or drivers spent time on social media while driving. By displaying the roads in an F shape, the message that social media can take control of the road has been given when the person deals with social media while driving. In the appeal function, a traffic accident caused by the driver or drivers using social media while driving in traffic is included in the advertisement, and the fear appeal approach is used in the advertisement. The advertisement tries to prevent some people from spending time on social media while driving in traffic via the fear appeal approach.

Table 2. Second Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	Buildings and Facebook's F-shaped logo
Representation Function	The F shape represents Facebook
Appeal Function	Preventing some people from spending time on social media while driving in traffic

² <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/mail>

Third Advertising Campaign

The third advertising campaign was created by I Latina advertising agency on behalf of Iusacell. This advertising campaign was published in Mexico in 2014. Two images having similar content were present in the advertising campaign. In this advertising campaign, there are texts such as "What is the last thing you want to post?" and "Don't get distracted while driving" (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Third Advertising Campaign³

The advertisement includes Facebook's F-shaped logo on a red background in the expressive function. While the top of the F shape is likened to a lane road in the advertisement, the letter "t" has been foregrounded on a white background at the bottom of the F. In the representation function, the F in the advertisement represents Facebook. In the advertisement, it is mentioned that the person deals with social media in traffic by comparing the top of the letter F to a lane road. By highlighting the letter t at the bottom of the letter F, the letter t is used as a death metaphor. The Facebook logo on a blue background is presented on a red background, which reflects the danger. In this regard, the message given in the advertisement is that a person who deals with social media while driving in traffic might die in a traffic accident. As for the appeal function, it has been tried to prevent some people from spending their time on social media while driving in traffic through the fear appeal approach in the advertisement, which directly highlights death.

³ <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/facebook-e54c5c6e-07f2-4a7b-b89e-fbe9b47b7370>

Table 3. Third Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	Facebook's F-shaped logo on a red background
Representation Function	The letter "t" is used as a death metaphor
Appeal Function	Preventing some people from spending time on social media while driving in traffic

Fourth Advertising Campaign

The fourth advertising campaign was prepared by La Facultad advertising agency on behalf of El Comercio and was published in Ecuador in 2014. Three images with similar content were included in the advertising campaign. This advertising campaign includes the text "Don't read our news and drive" (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Fourth Advertising Campaign⁴

In the expressive function of this advertisement, a blue bird stands in front of the sign "STOP" on a blue background. The fact that the bird in the advertisement stands in front of the "STOP" prevents the text on the sign from being read. As for the representation function, the bluebird in the advertisement symbolizes Twitter. It is apparent from the written signs in the advertisement that the person spends time on social media while driving in traffic. At this stage, with the bluebird standing in front of the "STOP," the impression has been given that social media can prevent the person from noticing traffic laws due to his/her interest in social media while driving. In the appeal

⁴ <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/twitterbird-bike>

function, the fear appeal is used in the advertisement by giving the message that if people spend time on social media while driving in traffic, they may not focus on traffic laws, which may lead to traffic accidents. In this way, it has been tried to encourage people not to be interested in social media while driving in traffic to prevent traffic accidents.

Table 4. Fourth Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	A blue bird in front of the STOP sign
Representation Function	The shape of the bluebird represents Twitter
Appeal Function	Encouraging people not to be interested in social media while driving in traffic

Fifth Advertising Campaign

The fifth advertising campaign was prepared by ESA Saint Luc Tournai on behalf of Responsible Young Drivers and was published in Belgium in 2015. Three images with similar content were included in the advertising campaign. This advertising campaign includes the texts "Twitter has no place on the road" and "Using the phone while driving is responsible of 1 accident in 10" (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Fifth Advertising Campaign⁵

⁵ <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/snapchat-cfba5a7f-9c99-4d06-8164-c8244b0f61f4>

In the expressive function, there is a white cover and two legs under this white cover in the advertisement. On the thumb of one of the feet in the advertisement is a paper with the bird, the logo of Twitter. The paper in this advertisement in the representation function symbolizes Twitter. The white cover is used as a metaphor for death. As seen from the written signs in the advertisement, the person with a paper attached to his toe represents the person who lost his life in a traffic accident since he spent time on social media while driving. In the advertisement, the message is that a person who deals with social media while driving may die in a traffic accident. In the appeal function, the fear appeal approach is used in the advertisement by giving the message that the person spending time on social media may lose his/her life while driving in traffic. Via the emphasis on death in the advertisement, it has been attempted to prevent some people from dealing with social media while driving in traffic.

Table 5. Fifth Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	Two legs under the white cover
Representation Function	The white cover is used as a death metaphor
Appeal Function	Preventing some people from dealing with social media while driving in traffic

Sixth Advertising Campaign

The sixth advertising campaign was created by an advertising school on behalf of Claro and was published in Peru in 2016. Two images having similar content were present in the advertising campaign. This advertising campaign contains the text "Don't tweet and drive" (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Sixth Advertising Campaign⁶

In the expressive function, there is a post sending box at the bottom right, and are hashtags such as #FullTank #SouthRide #120km/h #Cyclists #CHRASHHH. As for the representation function, on the other hand, it is stated that a person going to the party with his/her new car crashed into a streetlamp at a speed of 120 kilometres, based on the hashtags in the advertisement. The written signs in the advertisement show that a traffic accident may occur if the person deals with social media while driving. In this way, the message is that a traffic accident may occur if the driver pays his/her attention to social media while driving. In the appeal function, the fear appeal approach is used in the advertisement by foregrounding the traffic accident provided that a person spends time on social media while driving in traffic via hashtags in the advertisement. In the advertisement, it has been tried to be encouraged not to post on social media while driving in traffic to prevent traffic accidents.

Table 6. Sixth Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	Hashtags such as #FullTank #SouthRide #120km/h #Cyclists #CHRASHHH
Representation Function	A person who was going to the party with his/her new car crashed into a streetlamp at a speed of 120 kilometres
Appeal Function	Encouraging people not to post on social media while driving in traffic

⁶ <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/don-t-text-and-drive-facebook>

Seventh Advertising Campaign

The seventh advertising campaign was prepared by the Executiva Propaganda advertising agency on behalf of Detran-RN and was published in Brazil in 2019. A single image was included in this advertising campaign. This advertising campaign includes the text "Don't drive and like" (Figure 8).

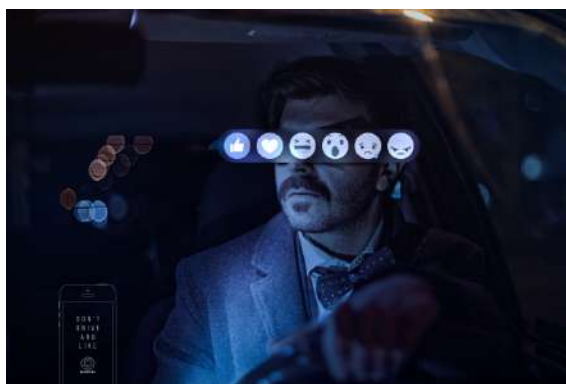


Figure 8. Seventh Advertising Campaign⁷

In the expressive function, the advertisement includes a man in the driver's seat of the vehicle and emojis on Facebook like button at the driver's eye level, preventing his sight. In the representation function, the emojis in the advertisement symbolize Facebook. In the advertisement, the message is that with the emojis at the eye level of the person in the vehicle, the person may lose his sight significantly because of being interested in social media while driving. As for the appeal function, the fear appeal approach is used in the advertisement by giving the impression that while driving in traffic, the person spending time on social media may lose his sight and lead to a traffic accident. Therefore, it has been tried to prevent some people from using the like button on social media while driving in traffic.

Table 7. Seventh Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	Emojis on Facebook like button at the driver's eye level
Representation Function	Emojis symbolize Facebook
Appeal Function	Preventing some people from making likes on social media while driving in traffic

⁷ <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/don-t-drive-and-like>

Eighth Advertising Campaign

The eighth advertising campaign was created by The LCT advertising agency on behalf of Ford. The campaign was published in Brazil in 2019. A single image was included in this advertising campaign. In the advertising campaign, there is a text "In traffic and every audio may be goodbye. Don't use your phone while driving" (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Eighth Advertising Campaign⁸

In the expression function, the advertisement features a person in a body bag with closed eyes. On the body bag in the advertisement, there are recorded voice signs in WhatsApp and the time expression 00:16. In the representation function, the corpse included in the advertisement represents a person who lost his life as a result of being interested in social media while driving in traffic as can also be seen from the written signs in the advertisement. The body bag in the advertisement is used as a death metaphor. In the advertisement, the message that people can lose their lives in a traffic accident when they spend time on social media while driving in traffic is given via the recorded voice signs and 00:16 time expression on WhatsApp. In the appeal function, the fear appeal approach is used by giving the message that being interested in social media while driving in traffic may result in death. Within this context, it is attempted to prevent some people from sending audio recordings from social media while driving in traffic.

⁸ <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/in-traffic-every-audio-may-be-goodbye>

Table 8. Eighth Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	A person in a body bag with closed eyes
Representation Function	Body bag used as death metaphor
Appeal Function	Preventing some people from sending audio recordings from social media while driving in traffic

Ninth Advertising Campaign

The ninth advertising campaign was prepared by The LCT advertising agency on behalf of Ford, and the campaign was published in Brazil in 2019. Two images having similar content were available in this advertising campaign. In this advertisement, there is a text "Don't let your phone confuse you. Stop texting while driving" (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Ninth Advertising Campaign⁹

In the expressive function, the advertisement includes a child with a backpack crossing the sidewalk. Next to the child, there is a WhatsApp speech bubble of "Ur late, speed up! As clear from the written signs in the advertisement in the representation function, the advertisement attempts to explain that the person driving might not pay his/her attention to the child crossing the sidewalk because he/she focuses on social media at that time. In this respect, it is given the impression that a person who deals with social media while driving in traffic can endanger other people's lives. In the appeal function, the fear appeal approach is implemented by giving the

⁹ <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/confusion>

message that the person interested in social media can threaten the lives of others while driving in traffic. In this context, it has been tried to prevent sending messages from social media while driving in traffic.

Table 9. Ninth Advertising Campaign

Expressive Function	A child with a backpack crossing the sidewalk
Representation Function	A person who is interested in social media while driving in traffic may endanger the lives of other people
Appeal Function	Preventing sending messages from social media while driving in traffic

5. DISCUSSION

It has been determined that the advertising campaigns handled in this study benefit from the fear appeal approach to prevent the use of social media while driving in traffic. In some advertisements, it is mentioned that focusing on social media while driving in traffic may lead to traffic accidents, whereas in others, the consequences of traffic accidents that may occur directly are reflected. In advertisements, it is seen that the use of social media while driving in traffic can endanger both the life of the driver and the lives of other people in traffic. In some of the advertisements, it has been attempted to reflect that deaths may occur due to being interested in social media while driving in traffic through death metaphors.

The findings of the study show that using a cell phone while driving, and specially making a habit of browsing social media, is very dangerous. Sari and Özkan (2023, p. 642) found that phone use while driving was positively associated with perceptual-motor skills and negatively associated with safety skills. A study by Turel and Bechara (2016, p. 3) found that, on average, 40% of participants used social media platforms while driving to some extent, and 5.5% frequently engaged in this behaviour. Another study found that 33.9% of drivers checked their social media accounts while driving, and 9.8% narrowly avoided an accident while using social media (Düzgün et al., 2025). These findings suggest that the media plays a particularly significant role in influencing road traffic safety (Žunac et al., 2024, p. 847).

Even a brief glance at a smartphone while driving can cause the vehicle to travel significant distances without the driver looking at the road. For example, at 50 km/h, just two seconds of distraction means the driver travels 28 meters without looking at the road. For this reason, most countries prohibit holding a phone while driving (Wirsch, 2025, p. 26). A study examining trends

in traffic accidents involving young drivers in the US also shows that distracted driving is a significant factor in road safety. According to this study, 59% of drivers were engaged in something else in the seconds before the accident, and mobile phone use was among the most common causes (Guillaume, 2025, p. 28). One of the United Nations' Global Road Safety Performance Targets for 2030 requires all countries to have national laws that restrict or prohibit the use of mobile phones while driving and to strictly enforce these laws (World Health Organization, 2023, p. 70). According to the World Health Organization (2023, p. 32), data from 162 countries show that laws aimed at preventing distracted driving exist, and most of these are directly related to cell phone use. While 144 of these countries prohibit handheld phone use, 35 also prohibit hands-free systems.

6. CONCLUSION

This study uses a semiotic framework to examine advertising campaigns designed to raise public awareness of the dangers of social media addiction while driving. Nine campaigns, selected from Belgium, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Romania, were analysed using Karl Bühler's Organon Model. The main findings show that advertisers depict social media platform symbols as dangerous distractions for drivers. The analyses revealed that all of the examined advertisements conveyed the message that social media addiction can lead to fatal accidents, using death metaphors such as body bags and white sheets to create fear appeal and target behavioural change. Fear appeal, a fear-focused persuasion approach included in emotional appeals such as sadness, anger, and humour, might be used in advertisements to keep people away from a specific behaviour or to direct them to a specific behaviour. Besides, the fear appeal approach can raise awareness on a specific issue. The fear appeal can also be used frequently in health advertisements to prevent people from doing certain practices that can harm themselves and the people around them. In the advertisements in this study, it can be asserted that the fear appeal approach is effectively implemented to prevent the use of social media while driving in traffic. It can be suggested that by addressing people's fear through death metaphors in advertisements, focusing on social media while driving in traffic can be prevented. It is also recommended to use sad emotional appeals in addition to fear appeals in the advertising campaigns related to the matter. In advertising campaigns on traffic safety and social media addiction, the pain of the relatives of the people losing their lives as a result of traffic accidents that may occur due to dealing with social media while

driving in traffic can be highlighted via the sad emotional appeal approach. Through advertisements prepared in this way, it can be enabled people to stop dealing with social media while driving in traffic.

When evaluating this study, there are some limitations to consider. Firstly, it only includes advertising campaigns accessed via the Ads of the World platform and covering specific social networks. The study also determined that statistical data are given minimal space in these advertising campaigns. In this respect, it can be said that including statistical information on traffic accidents as a result of focusing on social media while driving in traffic in such advertising campaigns can contribute to raising awareness regarding the importance of the matter.

In this study, the role of advertisements in preventing social media attention while driving in traffic was foregrounded. On the one hand, the findings of the study are not able to reveal what kind of effects such advertisements have on people to stop dealing with social media while driving in traffic. In this regard, further studies should concentrate on fieldwork investigating the impact of advertisements on people's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours to stop social media addiction while driving in traffic.

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