The DRAM, Vol. 21(4) – Popping up: Alcohol's influence on the recognition and recall of responsible gambling messages

April 22, 2025

For many casino patrons, gambling is synonymous with alcohol use. While research indicates that alcohol has little effect on risk-taking behavior while gambling, some evidence suggests that alcohol may influence other variables like gambling persistence. These findings underscore the importance of responsible gambling messaging. These short, informative statements encourage safe gambling behavior to reduce gambling-related harm. But, are these messages accurately interpreted and remembered by patrons while under the influence of alcohol? This week, The DRAM reviews a study by Tori L. Horn and colleagues that explored how alcohol influences the recall and recognition of responsible gambling messages.

What was the research question?

Does alcohol consumption influence the recall and recognition of responsible gambling messages?

What did the researchers do?

The research team recruited 79 undergraduate students, aged 21 years and older, from a U.S. university. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: (1) an alcohol group, where they drank alcoholic beverages until reaching a BAC between 0.06%–0.08%, or (2) a no-alcohol control group, where they drank juice. They then participated in a simulated gambling task on a modified casino slot machine. The machines were pre-programmed so that all participants experienced the same win/loss outcomes. During the task, four different responsible gambling pop-up messages appeared on the screen. Following the task, participants were asked what they remembered about the messages. The research team analyzed their responses to determine whether participants in each group had recognized the messages and were able to accurately recall their main idea (i.e., gist).

What did they find?

The majority of participants in each group accurately recalled the gist of the responsible gambling messages (79.5% of the alcohol group versus 82.5% of the no-alcohol group). Both groups underestimated the number of pop-up messages they had seen (i.e., recognition), though this underestimation was significantly greater among those who drank alcohol compared to juice. Furthermore, participants who drank alcohol had significantly more difficulty recalling the message that encouraged self-appraisal (i.e., "Are you having fun? Or are you just losing your money?"). Recall of the other messages did not differ significantly between the two groups (see Figure).

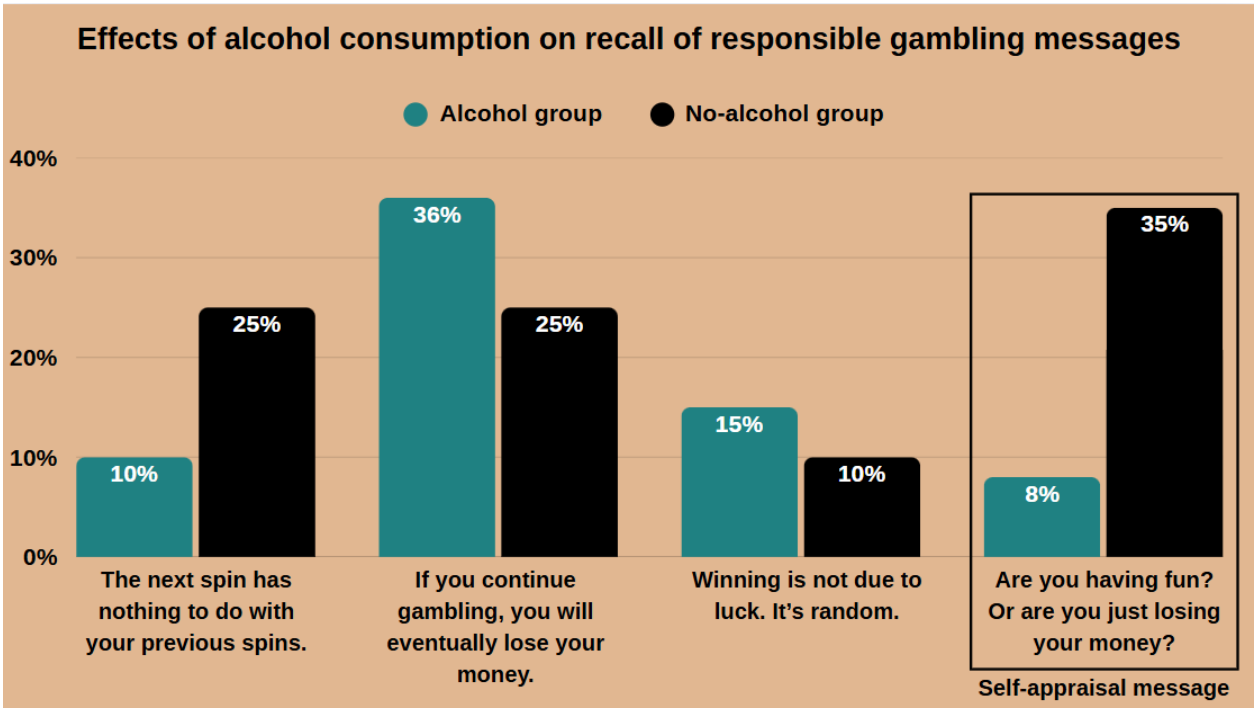


Figure. Percentage of participants in each group (alcohol and no-alcohol) that accurately recalled each responsible gambling message. The only significant difference between groups was the recall of the self-appraisal message (far right). Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

These findings underscore the need for increased responsible gambling message proliferation throughout casinos. Because alcohol may weaken the effects of these messages, it is important to convey this information before consumption begins. Increasing the presence of these messages around drinking locations in the casino and near casino entrances may be especially beneficial in decreasing gambling-related harms by providing responsible gambling information to patrons before they consume alcohol.

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations in this study?
This study was limited to college students who screened negative for gambling problems. Therefore, these results may not be generalizable to the general population or, in particular, individuals experiencing gambling problems. Additionally, this study was conducted in a lab. Previous research suggests that lab gambling differs from naturalistic environments. Finally, storyworthy events (e.g., a big win) might reduce players' ability to remember anything else from a session (including responsible gambling messages), and alcohol might play a role in how many or what things someone remembers from a session.

For more information:
Individuals who are concerned about their gambling may benefit from visiting the 1-800-GAMBLER webpage. Others who want to learn more about the relationship between gambling and alcohol use should visit Gamblinghelponling.org.au. For additional gambling and alcohol resources and tools, visit our Addiction Resources page.

— John Slabczynski

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