

How well do safer gambling messages work? Comparing recommendation and corrective messages

What this research is about

Safer gambling (SG) messages can encourage safer gambling. Recommendation messages give practical guidance, like setting limits or taking breaks. Corrective messages challenge inaccurate beliefs about gambling, such as beliefs about skill or having control over gambling outcomes determined by random chance. Past studies suggested that both types of SG messages might be useful. However, studies often combined different message types into a single message, which blurred their unique effects, or focused only on short-term effects.

In this study, the researchers compared recommendation and corrective messages. Specifically, they looked at the extent to which each type of message captured attention and was seen as persuasive in the short term. They also looked at the extent to which each type of message influenced inaccurate beliefs about gambling and gambling self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in one's ability to control gambling behaviour) in the longer term.

What the researchers did

The researchers carried out their study in 3 phases. First, they recruited 50 adults between 18 and 45 years old who were living in Spain, had gambled in the past month, and had a score of at least 3 on the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). In this phase of the study, participants completed an online screening survey asking about their sociodemographic characteristics, medical history, and gambling behaviour. The survey also included

What you need to know

Safer gambling (SG) messages can encourage safer gambling. Recommendation messages give practical guidance on gambling behaviour, while corrective messages challenge inaccurate beliefs about gambling. In this study, the researchers compared the short- and long-term effects of both types of SG messages. They recruited 50 Spanish adults who had gambled in the past month and whose gambling ranged from low- to high-risk. Participants completed an experimental task where they viewed gambling-related images that were paired with both types of SG messages while their eye movement was tracked. Then, they were randomly assigned to receive either recommendation or corrective messages from an instant messaging application for 20 days.

Regarding short-term effects, corrective messages attracted more visual attention, but recommendation messages were remembered better and rated as more persuasive. In the long term, corrective messages led to greater improvements in inaccurate beliefs about gambling and confidence in one's ability to control gambling behaviour. These findings can inform the strategic use of both types of SG messages based on short- and long-term goals.

the PGSI, the Gambling-Related Cognitions Scale, the Gambling Self-efficacy Questionnaire, and measures of depression and stress.

In the second phase of the study, participants took part in an experimental task. This involved viewing 28 gambling-related images that were each paired with an RG message. Half of the messages were recommendation messages, and the other half were corrective messages. The messages had the same word length (11 to 19 words), character count (50 to 93 characters), and visual format. An eye-tracking device measured how often and for how long participants looked at each message. Participants were also asked to rate how much each message persuaded them to reduce their gambling. After viewing the images, participants completed a surprise memory test with 20 SG messages. They were asked to rate whether these messages had been shown to them during the image task.

In the third phase of the study, participants were randomly assigned to receive either recommendation or corrective messages through an instant messaging application for 20 days. They received the messages twice per day along with additional information (e.g., educational articles, news). Participants were asked to give feedback about each message they saw. After the 20 days, they again answered questions about inaccurate beliefs about gambling and gambling self-efficacy.

What the researchers found

On average, participants were about 22 years old. There were 32 men, 17 women, and 1 person who identified as non-binary. In terms of PGSI scores, 19 had low risk (scores of 1–4), 11 had moderate risk (scores of 5–7), and 20 had high risk of problem gambling (score of 8 or higher).

In terms of short-term effects, participants spent more time looking at corrective messages than at recommendation messages. This suggests that they paid more attention to the content of corrective messages. But recommendation messages were more likely to be remembered and were rated as more persuasive than corrective messages.

Regarding long-term effects, participants who saw corrective messages for 20 days reported fewer inaccurate beliefs about gambling compared to those who saw recommendation messages. There

was some evidence that this effect was stronger for participants with more depression symptoms.

Participants who saw corrective messages also showed improved gambling self-efficacy compared to those who saw recommendation messages. There was also some evidence that this effect was stronger for participants with higher stress levels.

How you can use this research

The findings can inform the strategic use of tailored SG messages depending on an intervention's short- and long-term goals.

About the researchers

Francisco-Luis Sánchez-Fernández, Myriam Martínez-Fiestas, José-Ángel Ibáñez-Zapata, Francisco-Javier Montoro-Ríos, and Luis-Alberto Casado-Aranda are affiliated with the Department of Marketing and Market Research at the University of Granada in Granada, Spain. For more information about this study, please contact Luis-Alberto Casado-Aranda at lcasado@ugr.es.

Citation

Sánchez-Fernández, F. L., Martínez-Fiestas, M., Ibáñez-Zapata, J. Á., Montoro-Ríos, F. J., & Casado-Aranda, L. A. (2026). Which responsible gambling messages work? Comparing recommendation and corrective strategies. *International Journal of Advertising*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2026.2697623>

Study Funding

This study received funding from the Spanish Ministry of Consumption.

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