

# Why are consumers more likely to participate in online gaming than gambling?

September 10 2013

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Consumers are more likely to participate in online betting if it's called "gaming" rather than "gambling," according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Changing an industry label from gambling to gaming affects what consumers, especially non-users, think of betting online," write authors Ashlee Humphreys (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University) and Kathryn A. LaTour (Cornell University). "A label like gaming prompts all sorts of implicit associations like entertainment and fun, while a label like gambling can prompt seedier implicit associations like crime."

These largely unconscious associations affect what people think of the industry and even their intention to participate, the authors explain. The process of changing perceptions, called framing, has an impact on whether or not people think the industry is socially acceptable. And framing can occur merely by changing a word.

The authors analyzed newspapers like the New York Times and Wall Street Journal for the language used to describe online betting. They analyzed coverage of "Black Friday," April 15, 2011, when the US government shut down the three largest online betting sites. Newspapers shifted the way they described the online activity, framing it more as a crime, which led to a shift in consumer judgments about the [legitimacy](#) of online casinos, especially among non-users.

The authors conducted two experiments to explore what causes consumers to make different judgments about gambling. They found that "rags-to-riches" or "get-rich-quick" [narratives](#) prompted a set of favorable or unfavorable implicit associations among participants. In a stronger test of their hypothesis, the authors changed only one word in the narratives—gambling or gaming—and found that the "gaming" label caused non-users to judge online betting as more legitimate. "This last experiment shows that a name change to 'gaming' can even prompt non-users to be more inclined to participate in online betting," the authors add.

"Industry labeling has important implications not only for whether or not consumers find an industry acceptable," the authors conclude. "For example, opponents to online gambling may want to be aware of the potential for social media to become a conduit for the expansion of online gambling."

**More information:** Ashlee Humphreys and Kathryn A. LaTour. "Framing the Game: Assessing the Impact of Cultural Representations on Consumer Perceptions of Legitimacy." *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2013.

Provided by University of Chicago

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