

How you name it matters: 'Gambling' vs. 'gaming'

October 16 2013, by Ashlee McGandy

(Phys.org) —Is online betting fun entertainment or a seedy fraud? Your opinion likely depends on whether you label it "gambling" or "gaming," reports a new Cornell study that shows how industry labels help shape consumer attitudes.

"Changing an industry label from [gambling](#) to gaming affects what [consumers](#), especially nonusers, think of betting [online](#). 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," write Kathy LaTour, associate professor of services marketing at the Cornell School of Hotel Administration, and Ashlee Humphreys of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.

In the study, which is online and to be published in the December issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, LaTour and Humphreys analyzed media descriptions of online, lottery and casino gambling between 1980 and 2010 in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*. They then analyzed coverage of "Black Friday," April 15, 2011, when the federal government shut down the three largest online betting sites. Newspapers shifted how 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 nonusers.

The authors said that a clear pattern emerged – that lotteries and casinos were associated as legitimate forms of entertainment and business, while [online gambling](#) was associated more with crime and regulation.

To better understand individuals' sometimes-unconscious judgments about gambling, the authors conducted two experiments. They found that "rags-to-riches" narratives prompted favorable associations while "get-rich-quick" narratives prompted unfavorable associations. 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 nonusers to judge online betting as more legitimate.

This is the first study to examine framing from a macro level, analyzing effects in the media over time, and a micro level, showing the impact an industry name has on [consumer perceptions](#).

"We found that how you label an industry really matters. This is especially true for nonusers or individuals who are not as familiar with the industry," explains LaTour.

The research also has important implications beyond online betting.

"There is great promise for using theories and methods from linguistics and rhetoric to understand consumer behavior," the authors conclude, questioning how labeling might subtly affect food choice or brand image. They continue, "Labeling can equally work in the interest of opponents to an industry. Consider the case of fracking. Although industry actors have searched for a replacement term, the practice of extracting energy from below the earth's surface has become known as fracking, which carries with it rhetorical connotations of fracturing naturally existing rock."

The study, "Framing the Game: Assessing the Impact of Cultural Representations on Consumer Perceptions of Legitimacy," was funded by Cornell, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Northwestern University and is available online at www.ejcr.org.

Provided by Cornell University

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