

# Effects of Evocative Versus Descriptive Game Names On Players' Aesthetic Evaluation

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**Abstract:** Game names provide a critical first impression, potentially shaping players' aesthetic experiences before gameplay even begins. But how different naming strategies influence player perception remains underexplored. This study investigated the impact of name type, specifically comparing evocative/conceptual names (e.g., 'Stardust Echoes') against descriptive names (e.g., 'Space Shooter'), on players' aesthetic evaluations. Across three experiments using AI-generated game concepts, evocative names consistently yielded higher ratings of liking and interest compared to descriptive or absent names. Furthermore, participants perceived original evocative names as a better fit for the game concepts and were more likely to express an intention to try games bearing such names. These results underscore the importance of a name's conceptual and evocative power, suggesting that names going beyond simple description can significantly boost a game's aesthetic appeal and initial player attraction.

**Keywords:** Game Name; Evocative Name; Descriptive Name; Conceptual Information; Aesthetic Evaluation; Interest; Liking

## 1. Introduction

A game's name often acts as the very first point of contact for potential players navigating a crowded digital marketplace. More than just a label, it is a crucial paratextual element that offers initial clues about the game's identity, hinting at its core concept, style, genre, and overall feeling<sup>3</sup>. The linguistic characteristics of a name can affect brand recall<sup>1</sup>, and product design elements, including the name, profoundly influence consumer responses<sup>2</sup>. For games, the name functions as a primary framing device, shaping the initial impressions and expectations that directly influence a player's subsequent exploration intent, aesthetic experience, and overall engagement<sup>3</sup>.

This study focuses on the differential impact of two primary naming strategies. The first is **Descriptive Names**, which directly state the game's genre, core gameplay, or content (e.g., "Space Shooter," "Turn-Based Strategy"). These names prioritize clarity and informational content about the game's function. The second is **Evocative/Conceptual Names**, which do not directly describe specific content but instead imply the game experience, theme, or emotion through metaphor, association, or atmosphere (e.g., "Stardust Echoes," "Chronicles of Mist"). These names aim to spark imagination and create a particular mood. While the importance of naming is accepted in marketing, the specific aesthetic function of these different name types in the context of video games remains empirically underexplored.

Therefore, this study was designed to systematically investigate the aesthetic function of game names. Drawing on methodologies from empirical aesthetics, we aim to achieve three main objectives:

1. **Determine the basic effect of name presence and type on aesthetic evaluation**, examining whether the type of name (evocative vs. descriptive) significantly alters core aesthetic responses like liking and interest.
2. **Assess the perceived congruence between names and game concepts**, evaluating how well players perceive different name types as fitting or appropriate for the associated game concepts.
3. **Investigate the influence of name type on behavioral intention**, exploring whether the documented effects on aesthetic evaluation translate into a higher likelihood of players expressing an intention to try the game.

Based on findings in art aesthetics that conceptual titles enhance appreciation<sup>9-11</sup>, we hypothesize that evocative/conceptual game names, compared to descriptive names, will be more effective at stimulating players' aesthetic interest, positive evaluations, and trial intention.

## 2. Literature Analysis

This section reviews relevant literature from branding, aesthetics, and game studies to contextualize the current research.

### 2.1 Branding and Naming Research

Research on the impact of names on products has been extensively explored in brand naming and consumer behavior domains. Effective branding relies heavily on the careful selection of names and associated marks. Studies show that the relationship between a brand name and its brand mark (like a logo) influences the construction of brand meaning<sup>4</sup>, establishing a cohesive identity. Furthermore, the phonetic, semantic, and associative characteristics of names are known to significantly affect consumer memory, preference, and purchase intention<sup>5</sup>. For instance, names that are easy to pronounce, carry positive connotations, or align well with product features are more likely to achieve market success. The linguistic structure of names is also important for international brands aiming for cross-cultural appeal<sup>6</sup>. These findings highlight the general importance of name characteristics in shaping consumer perception and behavior.

### 2.2 Aesthetic Effects of Titles in Art and Photography

While branding literature establishes the functional importance of names, research in empirical aesthetics provides insights into their impact on appreciation. Duran-Barraza et al.<sup>9</sup> found that conceptual titles added by artists to their photographs significantly enhanced viewers' liking and interest. Their work suggests that titles going beyond literal description to provoke thought are more aesthetically appealing. Millis' s<sup>10</sup> research yielded similar conclusions, finding that conceptual titles (explanatory or metaphorical) enhanced aesthetic preference for illustrations compared to descriptive or no titles. This implies that meaning-making, facilitated by conceptual titles, contributes to aesthetic pleasure. Leder et al.<sup>11</sup> also pointed out that title information influences the understanding and appreciation of paintings, acting as a cognitive framework that guides interpretation and evaluation. These studies strongly suggest that non-descriptive, conceptual information accompanying visual stimuli can elevate the aesthetic experience.

### 2.3 Research Gaps in Game Naming

Despite insights from branding and art aesthetics, empirical research on the aesthetic effects of game product names remains surprisingly scarce. The existing literature in game studies tends to focus on other areas. For instance, some research has analyzed the narrative function of in-game text and titles as literary devices<sup>15</sup> or the social effects of player-chosen avatar names in online environments<sup>7</sup>. Other work has examined game marketing from a broader perspective, such as the impact of cover art<sup>16</sup> or branding strategies on player retention and brand-switching intentions<sup>8</sup>.

However, these studies do not directly address the fundamental question of how the game's own title, as a primary marketing and aesthetic signal, influences a potential player's initial evaluation. While some industry-facing analyses discuss naming conventions and trends<sup>17</sup>, they often lack the empirical rigor of controlled experimental research. The specific aesthetic comparison between evocative and descriptive naming strategies—a topic well-explored in the study of fine art—has not been systematically applied to video games. This study aims to fill this critical gap by directly adapting experimental paradigms from art aesthetics to investigate whether, like a painting's title, a game's name functions as more than a simple descriptor and plays an active role in shaping aesthetic appreciation and player interest from the very first encounter.

### 3. Research Methods

This study adopted the experimental design approach from Duran-Barraza et al.<sup>9</sup>, exploring the aesthetic impact of game names through three progressive experiments. A key aspect of the methodology was the generation of stimulus materials. All game concepts used in this study (including text descriptions and accompanying images) were generated using artificial intelligence (AI) models, leveraging large language models for text and image generation algorithms for visuals. This approach ensured the novelty and diversity of the stimulus materials, minimizing potential confounding effects from players' prior knowledge of or associations with existing brands or games. The rationale for specific experimental designs was based on standard practices for minimizing bias and maximizing sensitivity. Participants were primarily university students, recruited following institutional ethical guidelines.

Experiment	Design	Participants	Materials	Procedure/Task
Exp. 1	Between-subjects	60 university students	12 AI-generated game concepts, matched with one of three name conditions (evocative/conceptual, descriptive, none)	View concept & name (if any), rate liking and interest (7-point scale)
Exp. 2	Within-subjects	45 university students	12 AI-generated game concepts, matched with one of three name conditions (original evocative, random evocative, descriptive)	View "name-concept" pair, rate the appropriateness of the name to the concept (7-point scale)
Exp. 3	Within-subjects	50 university students	8 AI-generated game concepts, half with evocative names, half without names (counterbalanced across participants)	Browse all concepts, then choose the 2 "most desired to try" from the 8 presented; record choices per condition

#### 4. Research Results

The results from the three experiments consistently indicated that the type of game name significantly affects players' aesthetic evaluations and behavioral intentions. The findings provide empirical support for the hypothesized advantage of evocative naming strategies.

**4.1 Evocative/Conceptual Names Significantly Enhance Aesthetic Evaluation:** Experiment 1 directly tested the impact of name type on core aesthetic judgments. The analysis showed significant main effects of name type on both liking ( $F(2, 57) = 8.72, p < .001$ ) and interest ( $F(2, 57) = 9.51, p < .001$ ). As detailed in Table 1, post-hoc comparisons confirmed that ratings in the evocative/conceptual name group were significantly higher than those in both the descriptive name and the no-name groups. Notably, there was no significant difference between the descriptive and no-name conditions, suggesting that simply providing a descriptive label did not significantly enhance aesthetic appeal over no name at all. This pattern strongly suggests that names capable of stimulating imagination and creating atmosphere, rather than just conveying function, receive more positive player evaluations.

*Table 1: Liking and Interest Ratings by Name Condition in Experiment 1 ( $M \pm SD$ )*

Name Condition	Liking	Interest
Evocative/Conceptual	5.85 $\pm$ 0.95	6.05 $\pm$ 0.88
Descriptive	4.90 $\pm$ 1.10	5.00 $\pm$ 1.15
No Name	4.75 $\pm$ 1.05	4.80 $\pm$ 1.20

*Note: Ratings were on a 1-7 scale.*

**4.2 Perception of Name-Content Appropriateness:** Experiment 2 explored whether players perceive evocative names as integral to the game concept. The results revealed a significant effect of name condition on appropriateness ratings ( $F(2, 88) = 15.36, p < .001$ ). As shown in Table 2, original evocative names were perceived as the most appropriate match for the game concepts, rated significantly higher than both descriptive names and randomly assigned (non-original) evocative names. Interestingly, descriptive names were still rated as significantly more appropriate than the random evocative names, indicating that semantic relevance is acknowledged, but the original evocative pairing achieved the highest perceived congruence. This supports the view that the name is part of the overall game experience<sup>11</sup>, and players can often perceive and appreciate the intended intrinsic connection between a well-crafted evocative name and its underlying content.

*Table 2: Appropriateness Ratings by Name Condition in Experiment 2 ( $M \pm SD$ )*

Name Condition	Appropriateness
Original Evocative	5.98 $\pm$ 1.02
Descriptive	4.80 $\pm$ 1.22
Random Evocative	4.15 $\pm$ 1.35

*Note: Ratings were on a 1-7 scale.*

**4.3 Evocative Names Increase Choice Intention:** Experiment 3 examined whether aesthetic preference translates to behavioral intention using a choice task. The results showed a significant effect of name condition on choice intention ( $t(49) = 4.82, p < .001$ ). As detailed in Table 3, games presented with evocative/conceptual names were chosen significantly more often on average ( $M=1.38$  choices out of 2) than games presented without names ( $M=0.62$  choices out of 2). This finding provides behavioral evidence complementing the rating data, indicating that the aesthetic appeal engendered by an evocative name can directly influence players' willingness to engage further and

potentially try the game.

*Table 3: Number of Games Chosen by Name Condition in Experiment 3 ( $M \pm SD$ )*

Name Condition	Number of Choices
Evocative/Conceptual	$1.38 \pm 0.65$
No Name	$0.62 \pm 0.65$

*Note: Participants chose 2 out of 8 games.*

**Discussion of Potential Mechanisms:** These results may relate to established cognitive theories. Evocative names might stimulate curiosity and deeper processing by creating "cognitive disfluency" or an "effort after meaning"<sup>12</sup>, which can be hedonically rewarding. This contrasts with effects driven solely by enhanced processing fluency<sup>13</sup>, though fluency likely plays a role. Aesthetic experiences are often conceptualized within a dual-process framework involving both immediate pleasure and deeper interest<sup>14</sup>. The semantic richness of evocative names allows them to elicit more complex emotional associations<sup>4</sup>, setting expectations and signaling the uniqueness of the game experience<sup>5</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

Choosing a game's name is more than a matter of style; this study shows it clearly affects how players judge a game aesthetically and whether they intend to play it. First impressions count heavily in today's crowded game market, and the name is often the first thing a player sees. Across our experiments, evocative names – those hinting at themes or sparking imagination – consistently performed better than purely descriptive ones. Players liked games with evocative names more, found them more interesting, felt the names fit better, and were more willing to try them. What does this mean for game creators? It suggests treating the name as a key creative element. Moving beyond just describing the game, investing in names that use suggestion, emotion, and conceptual depth seems worthwhile. A well-crafted name can make a game stand out and help build a connection with players right from the start.

**Limitations and Future Research:** Like any study, this one has limitations that open doors for future work. We used AI-generated static images and text, which helped control variables but doesn't fully capture the experience of interacting with a real game. Testing these ideas with actual games or playable demos would be a valuable next step to see if the effects hold in more realistic settings. Also, our participants were mostly university students. To know if these findings apply more broadly, future studies should include players from different age groups, with varied gaming backgrounds, and from diverse cultures. It would also be interesting to explore if the best naming strategy changes depending on the game's genre – do evocative names suit RPGs better than puzzle games, for instance? Or how do cultural preferences shape reactions to different naming styles? Digging into how names work on a deeper level could involve tools like eye-tracking (to see where people look) or EEG (to measure brain responses), potentially revealing more about attention and emotional processing. Finally, looking at the long-term picture – how names influence player engagement, whether they stick with a game, and how communities talk about it over time – would give a fuller understanding of a name's impact beyond that first impression.

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