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Keywords: Steam; Online reviews; Perceived value; Game trust; Purchase intention.

Steam Review Characteristics and Chinese Users' Purchase Intention The Roles of Perceived Value and Trust in the Game

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how perceived Steam review valence, volume, and credibility are associated with Chinese users' purchase intention through perceived value and trust in the focal game. Guided by the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, a cross-sectional questionnaire survey produced 417 submissions, of which 412 were retained after eligibility and response-quality screening. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the six-construct measurement model. The structural model showed good fit and explained 42.5% of the variance in purchase intention. All eight hypothesized direct associations were positive and statistically significant. Game trust had a larger standardized association with purchase intention than perceived value, although the difference between coefficients was not formally tested. A reproducible bootstrap analysis supported five of six specific indirect associations; the credibility–trust–purchase intention pathway was unsupported. Sensitivity analysis of 89 responses containing game titles did not support three weaker stimulus paths. The findings suggest that review characteristics relate to purchase intention through distinguishable value and trust evaluations. Platforms and publishers may support informed decisions by contextualizing review summaries and communicating product performance and expected benefits clearly. Cross-sectional self-report data, non-probability sampling, and substantial unavailable game-title information limit causal

inference and generalizability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Purchasing a digital game involves evaluating an experience that may be difficult to judge fully before playing. Prospective buyers must assess whether a game will be enjoyable, function reliably, and justify its price and time requirements. Other players' reviews provide one source of evidence for these judgments. Research connects online reviews with purchase intention and sales, while showing that their importance depends on information characteristics and the decision context (Park et al., 2007; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Understanding how prospective buyers interpret reviews is therefore relevant to both digital distribution platforms and game publishers.

Review information contains several distinguishable cues. Valence concerns whether the overall evaluation is favorable or unfavorable; volume concerns the perceived amount of available feedback; credibility concerns whether that information appears believable. These cues need not perform the same function. A favorable review environment may communicate expected enjoyment, a large review base may suggest breadth of experience, and credible descriptions may help a buyer evaluate specific claims. Research on information diagnosticity and review trustworthiness provides a basis for examining these differences (Filieri, 2015, 2016). Their connections with internal product evaluations remain an empirical question in the particular population and setting studied here.

Two evaluations are especially relevant: whether the game is worth the required resources and whether it can be trusted to deliver the expected experience. The first concerns perceived value; the second concerns trust in the focal game. Value research emphasizes the relationship between benefits and sacrifices, while electronic-commerce research identifies trust as relevant to online purchase decisions (Gefen et al., 2003; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Zeithaml, 1988). However, trust in a game is conceptually different from trust in an online vendor. Likewise, confidence in review information should not be equated with confidence in the product described by that information.

The present study applies the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework to these distinctions. It examines three perceived review characteristics as stimuli, perceived value and game trust as parallel organism variables, and purchase intention as the response. The research asks how each review characteristic relates to the two internal evaluations, how those evaluations

relate to purchase intention, and which specific indirect associations are supported. The setting is adult Steam users residing in mainland China who recently read reviews of a paid game they had not purchased.

The contribution is a focused assessment of differentiated review cues and two product evaluations within one model. It does not depend on claiming that review effects or trust mechanisms are previously unknown. Instead, it clarifies the targets of credibility and trust, compares the pattern of value-related and trust-related associations, and translates the findings into platform and publisher decisions. The observational design supports theoretically informed associations rather than causal claims about how changing reviews would change purchases.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 The stimulus organism response framework

The S–O–R framework provides a way to connect external information with internal evaluations and behavioral responses. In online retailing, Eroglu et al. (2001) conceptualized environmental cues as antecedents of cognitive and affective states associated with approach or avoidance responses. Applying this reasoning to review information, the present study treats users' perceptions of review valence, volume, and credibility as stimuli. Perceived value and trust in the focal game represent distinct internal judgments, while purchase intention represents the proposed response.

This application emphasizes cognitive product evaluations. It does not assume that trust must precede value, or that value must precede trust. Users may judge a game dependable yet unattractive at its current price, or apparently good value while remaining uncertain about whether its performance will match expectations. Accordingly, the model specifies parallel paths through perceived value and game trust. The direction of these paths expresses the theoretical ordering to be examined, not an observed sequence over time.

2.2 Review characteristics and perceived value

Perceived value concerns an overall assessment of expected benefits relative to what a consumer gives up (Zeithaml, 1988). Sweeney and Soutar (2001) further demonstrate that value can involve emotional, social, quality, and price-related dimensions. The present study uses a narrower overall evaluation of a focal game's expected benefits relative to price, time, and effort; it does not reproduce the full multidimensional PERVAL scale.

Favorable review valence may support expectations that the game offers rewarding experiences. This provides a reason to expect a positive association with value, although positive reviews do

not establish that a particular game suits every buyer. Review volume may also matter because a broader perceived evidence base gives users more information with which to assess likely benefits. Park et al. (2007) show that review quality and quantity relate to purchase intention, with differences by involvement. Extending this reasoning to the intervening value judgment, the present model proposes separate associations for valence and volume.

Credibility concerns whether the information can reasonably be used in evaluating the product. Filieri (2015) links perceived information diagnosticity with information adoption, while Filieri (2016) examines how consumers judge review trustworthiness. Credible information may make expected benefits easier to assess. The proposed positive association is conditional on the other review characteristics in the model: credible negative information could also reduce value judgments, and credibility should not be interpreted as favorable content by definition.

H1: Perceived review valence is positively associated with perceived value.

H2: Perceived review volume is positively associated with perceived value.

H3: Perceived review credibility is positively associated with perceived value.

2.3 Review characteristics and trust in the game

Game trust is defined here as confidence that the focal game can provide the quality and experience users expect. Favorable reviews may offer reassurance about those expectations. A substantial perceived review base may make an evaluation appear less dependent on isolated experiences. These are proposed consumer interpretations; neither a high count nor favorable sentiment independently guarantees product quality. Prior evidence from video-game sales also shows that the relationship between reviews and market outcomes varies with product and consumer characteristics (Zhu & Zhang, 2010).

Credibility may support confidence that the reviewed experience provides a reasonable basis for expectations about the game. However, the targets remain different: review credibility concerns the information, whereas game trust concerns the product. Work distinguishing review helpfulness, information properties, and purchase intention supports examining how information evaluations connect with downstream judgments without treating them as interchangeable constructs (Filieri et al., 2018).

H4: Perceived review valence is positively associated with trust in the focal game.

H5: Perceived review volume is positively associated with trust in the focal game.

H6: Perceived review credibility is positively associated with trust in the focal game.

2.4 Game trust perceived value and purchase intention

Gefen et al. (2003) connect trust in the online vendor with intended online-shopping behavior. That evidence motivates the broader relevance of confidence under uncertainty, but it does not directly validate a game-specific trust measure. The present study therefore tests the product-focused relationship explicitly. Confidence that a game will deliver the expected experience may be associated with greater willingness to purchase, even after accounting for perceived value.

Value represents a separate evaluation. A prospective buyer may require the expected experience to justify not only a monetary payment but also the time and effort devoted to playing. Consequently, favorable value judgments are expected to contribute to purchase intention alongside trust (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Zeithaml, 1988).

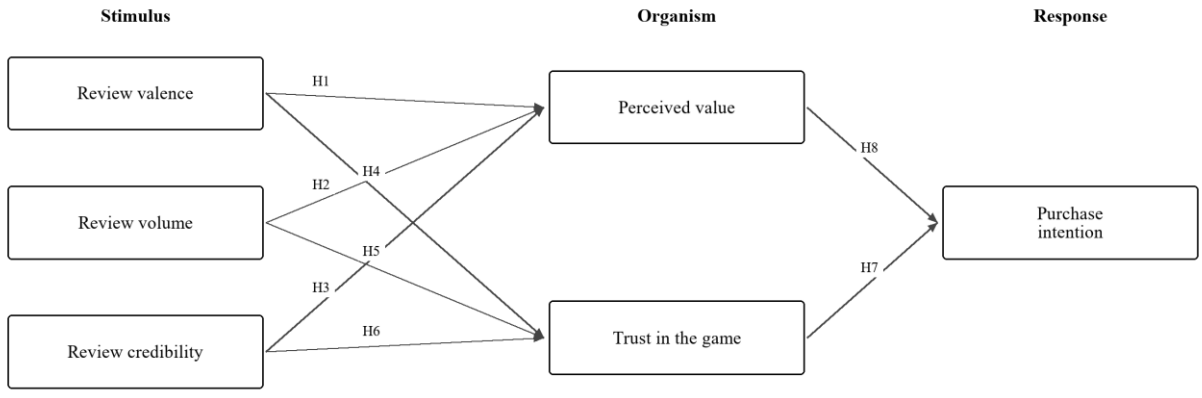
H7: Trust in the focal game is positively associated with purchase intention.

H8: Perceived value is positively associated with purchase intention.

2.5 Conceptual model and indirect associations

Figure 1 summarizes the eight hypothesized direct paths. The analysis also examines six specific indirect associations, formed by linking each review characteristic to purchase intention through either perceived value or game trust. These products of coefficients allow the two routes to be examined separately (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). No directional path is specified between the two organism variables, and the model does not estimate direct review-characteristic-to-purchase-intention paths. It therefore does not establish complete or partial mediation.

Figure 1 Proposed research model



Note. Arrows denote hypothesized associations. Measurement indicators and exogenous covariances are omitted for clarity. No directional path is specified between perceived value and game trust.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and participants

The study used a cross-sectional online questionnaire administered through Wenjuanxing. Purposive recruitment through online gaming and social channels was combined with snowball sampling. Participants were required to be at least 18 years old, reside in mainland China, have used Steam, and have read user reviews of a paid Steam game within the preceding 30 days without having purchased that game. Respondents were instructed to refer to the same focal game throughout the substantive questions. These criteria defined the intended decision setting but did not constitute independent verification of account activity or game ownership.

3.2 Questionnaire and measures

The instrument comprised twenty substantive items measuring six constructs on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Review valence, review volume, perceived value, and game trust each had three items; review credibility and purchase intention each had four. Review measures were informed by prior work on review information and consumer judgments (Filieri, 2015, 2016; Park et al., 2007). Value and trust measures were contextualized with reference to value and online-trust research (Gefen et al., 2003; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Zeithaml, 1988). They were adaptations to this setting rather than claims of verbatim replication of every original scale.

The Chinese questionnaire was developed from English items and reviewed for clarity and construct relevance. Particular attention was paid to separating review credibility from trust in the game. The administered trust wording concerned whether the game could deliver the quality and experience represented in reviews, while value items concerned benefits relative to required resources. Review volume and valence were measured as perceptions, not as scraped review counts or recommendation percentages. Purchase intention referred to the focal game rather than general willingness to buy games.

A separate pilot study reported in the underlying research retained 112 eligible responses. Construct-level Cronbach's alpha ranged from .809 to .870, and all twenty substantive items were retained. Pilot responses were excluded from the formal analytical sample. The formal questionnaire also included an instructed-response attention check and background questions about demographic characteristics, Steam experience, discount status, prior interest, and prior purchase consideration.

3.3 Data collection and screening

Formal submissions were recorded between August 26 and September 5, 2026. Participation was voluntary, and respondents received an information and consent statement. The questionnaire did not request names, account credentials, or payment information. Findings are reported in aggregate, and technical response metadata were used only in quality screening.

Of 417 submissions, three were excluded for failing eligibility conditions. One additional response failed the attention check and displayed an extremely rapid invariant pattern; another was excluded for combined evidence of rapid completion and straight-lining. This left 412 responses, representing 98.8% of submissions. Completion times below approximately 84 seconds, one third of the pilot median, were flags for combined review rather than automatic exclusion. This use of multiple indicators reflects the need to evaluate careless responding from more than one source of evidence (Meade & Craig, 2012). A shared IP address alone was not treated as proof of duplication.

All retained cases contained complete substantive scale responses. However, 323 respondents entered “none” or another unavailable response for the focal-game title, leaving 89 responses containing names. Because the former cases passed the behavioral screening and response-quality rules, they were retained in the main analysis. The named-game subset was analyzed separately to assess sensitivity. This procedure does not resolve uncertainty about the actual game considered by each respondent.

3.4 Analytical procedures

Descriptive statistics and correlations were examined before model estimation. Reliability was evaluated with Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability; average variance extracted assessed convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The heterotrait–monotrait ratio provided a supplementary assessment of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling used maximum likelihood, treating the five-point items as continuous. Fit was evaluated jointly using chi-square, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR, rather than relying on a single cutoff (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The three stimulus factors were allowed to covary. Each predicted both organism factors, which in turn predicted purchase intention. The structural specification fixed the residual covariance between perceived value and game trust to zero; this restriction is part of the model and does not establish that the psychological evaluations are independent. No post hoc item-residual

correlations were introduced. Background variables were descriptive and were not included as controls.

The main measurement, structural-path, and subset results are retained from the thesis analysis. To report interpretable precision for indirect effects, the article uses the separately reproduced nonparametric percentile bootstrap estimates from the same 412-case analytical dataset. This analysis used 5,000 resamples and random seed 20260920, with all resamples converging. Table 3 reports unstandardized products and 95% confidence intervals; its interval endpoints need not match a different bootstrap run exactly. An interval excluding zero was treated as supporting the corresponding indirect association (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Cross-sectional indirect associations cannot establish the temporal mediation process implied by a causal interpretation (Maxwell & Cole, 2007).

Procedural safeguards included clear construct targets, neutral instructions, and the attention check. An unrotated single-factor diagnostic and a one-factor CFA comparison were also examined. These diagnostics cannot establish the absence of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4. Results

4.1 Sample characteristics

Among the 412 retained respondents, 52.7% were men and 45.9% were women. The largest age category was 21–24 years (32.8%); 31.6% reported 5–10 hours of weekly PC gaming, and 43.9% had used Steam for one to three years. The focal game was reported as discounted by 67.0%. Mean prior interest in the game type was 3.61 (SD = 1.17), and mean prior purchase consideration was 3.62 (SD = 1.21). These figures describe the sample and should not be treated as population estimates.

Game titles were unavailable for 78.4% of retained responses. Recruitment was also temporally concentrated, with 362 retained submissions recorded on September 5. These features are relevant to the interpretation of the results, independently of the complete scale-item data and acceptable statistical fit.

4.2 Measurement model assessment

Construct means ranged from 3.58 to 3.65 (Table 1). Standardized loadings ranged from .702 to .826, Cronbach's alpha from .783 to .865, composite reliability from .784 to .865, and average variance extracted from .547 to .648. The observed pattern supported internal consistency and

convergent validity. HTMT values ranged from .436 to .585; the value for review credibility and game trust was .475, supporting their empirical distinction within this sample.

Table 1 Construct descriptive statistics and measurement quality

Construct	M	SD	α	CR	AVE
Review valence	3.63	1.11	.847	0.847	0.648
Review volume	3.61	.96	.783	0.784	0.547
Review credibility	3.62	1.00	.865	0.865	0.616
Perceived value	3.58	1.03	.806	0.806	0.581
Game trust	3.65	1.02	.805	0.806	0.581
Purchase intention	3.64	.97	.838	0.839	0.566

Note. N = 412. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted. Values follow the thesis tables and their reported rounding.

The measurement model fit was $\chi^2(155) = 151.77$, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000, 90% CI [.000, .022], and SRMR = .029. Boundary values for fit indices should not be interpreted as evidence of error-free measurement or verified respondent authenticity. Predictor VIF values of 1.36–1.42 did not indicate problematic multicollinearity. The first unrotated factor explained 37.6% of item variance, and the one-factor CFA fit worse than the six-factor model. These results do not eliminate shared-method explanations.

4.3 Structural model and hypothesis testing

The structural model showed good fit: $\chi^2(159) = 193.03$, CFI = .991, TLI = .989, RMSEA = .023, 90% CI [.007, .033], and SRMR = .049. Reported explained variance was 35.2% for perceived value, 46.4% for game trust, and 42.5% for purchase intention. Table 2 presents the standardized paths alongside the named-game sensitivity estimates.

All eight hypothesized direct associations were positive and statistically significant in the main sample. Review valence had the largest coefficient among predictors of perceived value (β = .316), while volume had the largest coefficient among predictors of game trust (β = .333), closely followed by valence (β = .324). Game trust was associated with purchase intention at β = .507 and perceived value at β = .254. These are comparisons of point estimates; no formal test of coefficient differences was conducted.

Table 2 Structural paths in the main sample and named game subset

Hypothesis and path	Main β	Main p	Subset β	Subset p
H1 RV → PV	0.316	< .001	0.398	.004
H2 RVO → PV	0.229	.002	0.256	.216
H3 RC → PV	0.159	.023	0.161	.350
H4 RV → TR	0.324	< .001	0.382	.009
H5 RVO → TR	0.333	< .001	0.024	.913
H6 RC → TR	0.151	.023	0.371	.046
H7 TR → PI	0.507	< .001	0.581	< .001
H8 PV → PI	0.254	< .001	0.317	.006

Table 2 Structural paths in the main sample and named game subset

Note. Main N = 412; subset N = 89. β denotes a standardized coefficient. RV = review valence; RVO = review volume; RC = review credibility; PV = perceived value; TR = game trust; PI = purchase intention. All main-sample paths meet $p < .05$; subset H2, H3, and H5 do not. Values are retained from the thesis analysis.

4.4 Specific indirect associations

The reproduced bootstrap analysis supported five of the six specific indirect associations (Table 3). Valence and volume each had positive indirect associations through both perceived value and game trust. Credibility had a small positive indirect association through value, with an interval lower bound close to zero. Its indirect association through game trust was not supported because the interval included zero. Accordingly, a significant credibility-to-trust direct coefficient did not by itself establish a supported credibility–trust–purchase intention product.

Table 3 Specific indirect associations from the reproduced bootstrap analysis

Indirect path	Estimate	Boot SE	95% CI	Supported
RV → PV → PI	0.0750	0.0365	[0.0186, 0.1602]	Yes
RV → TR → PI	0.1535	0.0499	[0.0692, 0.2664]	Yes
RVO → PV → PI	0.0555	0.0277	[0.0120, 0.1202]	Yes
RVO → TR → PI	0.1610	0.0495	[0.0770, 0.2673]	Yes
RC → PV → PI	0.0381	0.0244	[0.0017, 0.0960]	Yes
RC → TR → PI	0.0721	0.0427	[-0.0031, 0.1643]	No

Note. N = 412; 5,000 nonparametric percentile bootstrap resamples; random seed 20260920. Estimates are unstandardized products of coefficients. All resamples converged. These intervals

come from the independent reproduction using the same analytical data, rather than the rounded original thesis intervals. Abbreviations follow Table 2.

The credibility–value route warrants particular caution because its estimate is small and its interval approaches zero. Although the trust-based point estimates for valence and volume exceed their value-based counterparts, the analysis did not estimate confidence intervals for differences between indirect effects. Neither this numerical ordering nor the count of supported paths establishes a causal mechanism.

4.5 Sensitivity analysis

In the 89-response named-game subset, all eight coefficient directions remained positive, but H2, H3, and H5 were not statistically significant (Table 2). H1, H4, H6, H7, and H8 remained supported. The smaller sample limits precision, and the subset differs from the full sample in its provision of game-title information. Loss of significance therefore cannot be attributed solely to a change in the underlying relationship. Nevertheless, the findings show that support for several stimulus paths depends on the analytical sample definition. The name field alone also does not establish that a listed title satisfies every eligibility condition.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of the principal findings

The results are consistent with a model in which review cues are associated with purchase intention through separate value and trust evaluations. The positive valence-to-value association suggests that users who perceive the review environment as favorable also tend to see greater benefits relative to the game's costs. This is compatible with value theory, although the data cannot determine whether reviews produced that evaluation or whether existing interest shaped how reviews were remembered (Zeithaml, 1988).

Volume was positively associated with both organism variables in the full sample, but neither path remained significant in the named-game subset. This qualified pattern is consistent with treating review quantity as a contextual cue whose relevance should be tested rather than presumed. Park et al. (2007) demonstrate that responses to review quantity depend on involvement and review quality. The present study did not test those moderators, so they remain possible explanations for future investigation rather than findings of this analysis.

Game trust and perceived value were each associated with purchase intention when considered together. The larger trust coefficient suggests that confidence in the expected experience may deserve particular attention in this sample. This interpretation extends the general relevance of

trust in online commerce to a product-focused evaluation, while recognizing that vendor trust and game trust have different targets (Gefen et al., 2003). A direct test of their relative importance would require a coefficient contrast and stronger design evidence.

The unsupported credibility–trust indirect association adds an important qualification. Believable information does not necessarily generate sufficiently strong confidence in the product to produce a clearly detectable indirect relationship with intention. Credibility may help users assess benefits and shortcomings without guaranteeing favorable product expectations. This interpretation is compatible with research separating information trustworthiness and diagnosticity from subsequent decisions (Filieri, 2016; Filieri et al., 2018). Sampling uncertainty and measurement adaptation are alternative explanations that the current design cannot exclude.

5.2 Theoretical implications

The study specifies the objects of information credibility and product trust within an S–O–R application. Their distinct measurements and positive but moderate relationship suggest that they should not be combined simply because both involve confidence. This distinction helps connect review research with product evaluation while retaining conceptual clarity.

The parallel treatment of value and trust also offers a focused account of the organism stage. Both evaluations contribute to the modeled response without imposing a serial ordering between them. However, the fit of this specification does not show that it is superior to every alternative ordering, and the zero residual covariance restriction merits examination in future work. The findings support the usefulness of distinguishing the evaluations; they do not settle their temporal relationship.

Finally, the differing indirect associations show why general statements about “the effect of reviews” can be too broad. Review characteristics are not interchangeable predictors, and the routes linking them with intention may differ in strength and stability. This is a context-specific contribution that should be evaluated through replication rather than generalized to all platforms or markets.

5.3 Managerial implications

For platforms, the findings motivate presenting review valence and volume with context that helps users evaluate the evidence. Review period, recent changes, game version, and the experiences described can help users interpret aggregate summaries. The purpose should be to support an informed match between the game and the buyer’s expectations. The present study did

not experimentally test interface features, so these proposals are priorities for evaluation rather than proven conversion interventions.

Credibility-related design should make relevant evidence easier to assess. Platforms can consider clearer disclosure of review conditions, informative filtering, and transparent moderation. A credible information environment should also allow legitimate criticism to remain visible. A balanced negative review may help a user avoid a poor match, even when it does not increase immediate purchase intention.

For developers and publishers, communication should address both confidence and value. Performance requirements, known technical problems, update information, and representative gameplay descriptions can clarify what buyers should expect. Responding to recurring review concerns and explaining concrete fixes may provide evidence for evaluating product dependability. Such communication should be supported by the actual product experience rather than by attempts to manufacture favorable sentiment.

Value communication should explain the benefits offered at the current price and the likely time commitment. Discounts alone do not establish that a game fits a user's preferences. Publishers could evaluate whether product pages help prospective buyers judge both expected experience and resource requirements. Changes should be assessed with subsequent behavioral outcomes, such as purchases and refunds, because the current study measured intention only.

5.4 Conclusion

5.4.1 Overall conclusion

Among 412 retained survey responses from adult Steam users residing in mainland China, perceived review valence, volume, and credibility were positively associated with perceived value and game trust, and both organism variables were positively associated with purchase intention. The structural model explained 42.5% of the variance in intention. Five reproduced bootstrap indirect intervals excluded zero, while the credibility–trust pathway did not. These findings support a differentiated account of review-related evaluations, subject to substantial limitations in sampling and focal-game identification.

5.4.2 Limitations

The main limitation concerns the unavailable game titles in 323 responses. Behavioral screening and response-quality checks do not independently establish which game respondents considered or whether each game met the eligibility criteria. The weaker paths were not uniformly supported

in the named-game subset. Thus, statistical coherence should not be equated with complete verification of the response-generating process.

Purposive and snowball recruitment, the concentration of submissions within a short period, and the single-platform setting limit generalizability. The cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal order, rule out reverse associations, or demonstrate causal mediation (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). Common method bias remains possible despite the reported diagnostics. Existing interest, discounts, genre, and prior purchase consideration may also contribute to the relationships, but were not controlled in the main model.

Measurement and model choices impose additional boundaries. Five-point items were treated as continuous, the product-trust scale was adapted to the game context, and the parallel organism residual covariance was fixed to zero. Alternative estimators and specifications were not comprehensively compared. Finally, the outcome was intention rather than a verified transaction, so the findings cannot quantify sales effects.

5.5 Future research

Future surveys should improve focal-game identification through store links or title confirmation and document recruitment procedures more fully. Larger and more diverse samples could examine whether relationships vary across game genres, prices, discount conditions, and levels of player involvement. Longitudinal studies should separate review exposure, internal evaluations, and purchasing outcomes in time. Experiments could manipulate review cues while holding the game constant, and model comparisons could evaluate alternative relations between value and trust. These steps would help determine whether the observed associations translate into changes in actual purchasing behavior.

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Competing interests
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