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The Antecedents of Videogame Platform Trust and Their Sociodemographic Profile: The Key Role of Awareness and Ease of Use

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Abstract

This study examines the formation of awareness, perceived ease of use and trust in the most widely used videogame platforms, in the context of increasing digital engagement. Based on a sample of 317 participants who had made purchases on one or more videogame platforms, this study employed a quantitative methodological approach using statistical techniques such as *t*-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis to assess the proposed relationships. The research explores two main objectives: to analyse the causal impact of platform awareness and ease of use on trust in videogame platforms and to examine how sociodemographic characteristics may influence these constructs. The results confirm that platform awareness and perceived ease of use are key determinants of trust, while gender, age, educational level and income do not significantly affect it. However, age and income do appear to play a causal role in awareness of the platform and perceptions of usability. Overall, the findings provide valuable guidance for advancing towards a more user-centred videogame industry.

Keywords: videogame platforms; gamer behaviour; trust; awareness; ease of use; user experience; digital consumer behaviour

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid growth of digital entertainment has positioned the videogame industry at the forefront of consumer technology, particularly through online and console-based platforms. Video game platforms can also be understood through an ecosystem perspective, where technological components, user communities, and institutional frameworks interact dynamically; this conceptual approach will be further developed in the literature review section. In this context, the most prominent videogame platforms in market include major console ecosystems (e.g., Nintendo, PlayStation Network, Microsoft Game Pass), PC-based services (e.g., Steam, Epic Games, Ubisoft, EA, Blizzard) and mobile app stores (e.g., Apple App Store, Google Play), along with newer marketplaces such as Eneba. These platforms have created ecosystems in which trust, awareness and ease of use play a crucial role in shaping users' behavioural intentions, particularly those of gamers.

Videogame platforms have not attracted the same degree of scholarly attention as other digital services [1]. Despite their remarkable growth and widespread adoption across

diverse user groups, there remains a significant gap in research that comprehensively examines the influence of trust, awareness and usability within this thriving sector. Although previous studies have investigated these dimensions in contexts such as e-commerce, websites and streaming services, there is still limited understanding of how these constructs manifest and operate within videogame platforms.

This is particularly relevant in relation to gamers' sociodemographic characteristics [2–6]. Traditional approaches applied in other fields of study often attribute variations in trust, awareness and ease of use to sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, educational level or income [7–9]. Nevertheless, recent reviews suggest that, even in e-commerce, the influence of sociodemographic factors such as gender remains underexplored and the scientific gap is arguably even greater in videogame platforms, where few studies address sociodemographic influences [10,11].

Accordingly, the main objective of this study is twofold. First, it aims to examine the causal role played by awareness and ease of use in shaping trust toward videogame platforms. Second, it seeks to analyse how sociodemographic characteristics influence trust, awareness and ease of use, considering potential bivariate causal relationships. Therefore, empirical evidence in the field of videogames remains limited, highlighting the need for specific research that examines these relationships in greater depth.

The study aims to deepen understanding of these constructs within the context of videogame platforms, while also offering practical guidance to inform the development of marketing strategies and the design of more user-centred gaming environments. Furthermore, it seeks to contribute to the extension and adaptation of technology acceptance models to the context of videogame platforms.

To achieve these aims, the article is structured as follows: First, it presents a review of the relevant literature on the constructs of ease of use, awareness and trust in the context of videogame platforms, identifying the theoretical foundations and thereby justifying the fourteen hypotheses proposed. Next, it describes the employed methodology, based on a non-probabilistic sampling method combining convenience and snowball sampling techniques. Subsequently, it analyses the results obtained through EFA, Student's *t*-tests and ANOVA, also providing a summary table indicating which hypotheses were accepted and rejected. Finally, it draws on the discussion and the main conclusions, highlighting new findings, practical applications and proposals for future lines of research (Figure 1).

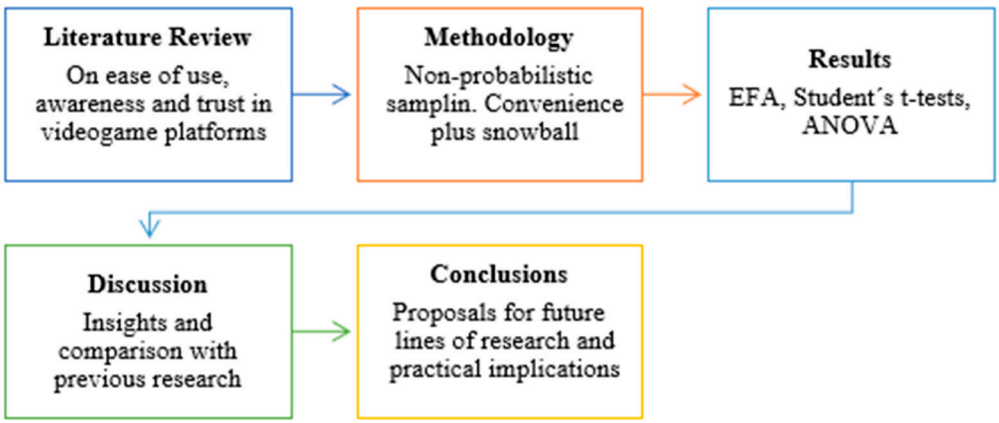

Figure 1. Article structure. Source: Authors' elaboration.

2. Literature Review

Contemporary innovation studies and systems theory increasingly argue that understanding videogame platforms as dynamic ecosystems—rather than isolated technologies—provides critical insights into their operation. This ecosystem lens reveals how interdepen-

dent actors, artefacts, activities, and institutional frameworks interact, aligning with the structural approach to innovation ecosystems [12]. Although the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains technology adoption at the individual level, its linear and reductionist design does not address the complexity of videogame ecosystems [12]. Scholars now stress the need to supplement models like TAM and UTAUT2 with user-centred design and platform ethics perspectives. This study's main argument is that by validating the applicability of TAM to videogame platforms and extending it through an ecosystem-based lens and variables from UTAUT2, the explanatory scope of technology adoption in these complex contexts is significantly broadened.

Although both TAM and UTAUT2 have been widely applied, they encounter important limitations in complex digital ecosystems. TAM has been criticised for being overly simplified and overly focused on individual-level perceptions, which limits its capacity to account for contextual and structural determinants of technology adoption [13]. Similarly, UTAUT2 has been noted for its strong emphasis on individual intentions, with insufficient attention to collective or community-level dynamics. Furthermore, it tends to overlook ethical, cultural, and user-centred design dimensions that are increasingly crucial in platform-based environments, while its applicability can vary across different cultural and demographic contexts, necessitating adaptation [14]. However, TAM continues to be regarded as a robust and widely accepted model for assessing consumers' willingness to adopt information and communication technologies (ICTs) [13]. Likewise, UTAUT2 enriches this perspective by introducing additional constructs—such as hedonic motivation, habit, and perceived cost—that better capture usage dynamics in consumer contexts, thereby extending its relevance beyond institutional or workplace settings [14]. Taken together, while TAM and UTAUT2 remain valuable theoretical frameworks, their explanatory power can be enhanced by integrating socio-technical and ethical dimensions, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of user behaviour in complex digital ecosystems.

Furthermore, in this study, we extend the TAM framework by integrating it into an innovation ecosystem perspective, recognising the systemic interaction between technological artefacts, institutions and communities [12,15,16]. In line with the ecosystem perspective presented in [16], we conceptualise gaming platforms as systems of interdependent components oriented toward joint value creation. Ref. [17] explained that these ecosystems involve a broad range of participants—users, developers, platform providers and content creators—as well as technological infrastructures, user interfaces and user-generated content; all these elements evolve together. Formal and informal institutions, such as licencing systems, community standards and reputation mechanisms, further shape their dynamics [15,17]. These systems are not static. Instead, these ecosystems are organised around co-innovation processes and aim to create new value propositions [18]. Within this context, a systemic explanatory framework developed in the context of innovation ecosystems exposes that various components interact through complementary and substitutive relationships (CS-relations) [15,19]. For instance, a graphics engine like Unity or Unreal and a monetization system complement each other in the development process, while digital distribution platforms like Steam and Xbox Game Pass may act as substitutes, competing for the same users (gamers). These CS-relations reflect the dual logics of cooperation and competition among actors and artefacts in a technological environment. According to [15], CS-relations offer a more comprehensive lens for understanding how innovation ecosystems create, share and sustain value.

Trust in digital platforms, such as those related to videogames, has long been recognised as a key factor in fostering active consumer engagement, particularly in contexts involving the handling of sensitive data and online interactions [20]. Fundamental models, such as the integrative framework presented in [21], conceptualise trust as the willingness

to be vulnerable to another party, based on expectations of their actions, even without control or monitoring [21]. In online settings, trust depends not only on past experience but also on structural cues, such as technology and platform reputation, which shape how trustworthy the platform appears [22]. Digital trust develops from a mix of personal, contextual, and institutional factors [21]. The concept of "initial trust" is particularly important in digital environments, as it arises when users face high uncertainty and little familiarity. Models such as [23] integrate technology acceptance and trust, showing that while trust can reduce perceived risk and aid online purchase intentions, it is not always essential—for some, external control systems can serve as substitutes [22]. Overall, the fundamental role of trust has shaped our understanding of digital engagement.

Trust can be defined as users' willingness to accept a situation of vulnerability about the platform, based on the expectation that the platform itself, its underlying technology and the actors involved will act consistently with what has been promised and in the user's best interest, without the need for direct control [24]. Among its main determinants are perceived security, transparency, technical quality and user support. Likewise, trust encompasses three dimensions: trust in the platform provider, trust in the supporting technology and trust in interactions between users themselves [24]. In videogame platforms, trust is not limited solely to technical aspects such as data protection or system stability. However, it is also connected to the quality of the gaming experience and the responsible management of personal information. Cognitive trust, based on the gamer's rational belief in the platform's competence and reliability, precedes and reinforces affective trust, which reflects emotional attachment and identification with the platform [25]. Moreover, it reduces perceived risks, such as potential financial or security losses and facilitates the safe and temporary exchange of resources. In this sense, trust constitutes an essential element that underpins interactions both between users and the platform. It helps to overcome the uncertainty inherent to interactions among strangers and enables the system to function and develop [26].

In the context of videogame platforms, awareness refers to the extent to which users are familiar with the platform and recognise its features. This awareness is significantly reinforced by a strategic presence on social media and within gamer communities, especially when messages are tailored to specific audiences [27]. It includes exposure to marketing communications and to user-generated content such as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which has been shown to positively influence both platform awareness and trust perceptions [28,29].

Moreover, ease of use is defined as the perceived effort required to interact with a digital platform and has been identified as a key determinant in building trust in technology [30]. In gaming contexts, this concept encompasses interface clarity, ease of navigation, personalisation options and the accessibility of functionalities. According to Flow Theory, a smooth experience tailored to the user's skills enhances engagement, satisfaction and continued presence in the virtual environment. User Participation Theory also emphasises that ease of use reduces perceived uncertainty and promotes memorability and loyalty [31,32]. Evidence from serious games such as Re-Mission suggests that ease of use is one of the strongest predictors of attitudes and intention to play, even surpassing perceived usefulness [33].

It is worth noting that trust in videogame platforms derives not only from their technical assurances but also from users' perceptions of their legitimacy and authenticity, which are conditioned by the platform's awareness. Strategic exposure through social media and gamer communities reinforces this awareness, generating awareness and reducing uncertainty. According to models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2), awareness constitutes

a fundamental antecedent that shapes user expectations regarding the competence and integrity of the platform [24,34]. This awareness supports cognitive trust, which in turn facilitates affective trust towards the platform [25].

Moreover, various studies have highlighted that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) contributes to building awareness and trust by reinforcing perceptions of transparency and consistent performance [28,29]. These effects are amplified in gaming ecosystems, where gamers often rely on reputation systems, ratings and peer recommendations to evaluate the trustworthiness of platforms [26]. As demonstrated by [27], targeted exposure within gamer networks substantially improves platform awareness, which serves as a foundation for trust.

H1: The videogame platform awareness determines gamers' trust.

Features such as clear instructions, an intuitive design and an attractive visual appearance can significantly enhance consumer trust in digital environments. In parallel, ease of use reduces the cognitive effort required to operate a platform, facilitating trust by strengthening the sense of competence and reducing perceived risk [30]. In line with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), a more intuitive, customisable and accessible platform promotes positive attitudes towards technology adoption [35]. Flow Theory further suggests that an experience adapted to the user's skill level increases satisfaction and encourages continued engagement, thereby strengthening trust [31,33]. In addition, an easy-to-use interface may also create positive emotional responses that foster affective trust, complementing cognitive trust mechanisms.

Empirical evidence supports that ease of use is positively related to trust in digital environments, particularly in serious games and educational videogames, where it predicts both positive attitudes and behavioural intentions [36,37]. It has been demonstrated that an intuitive, user-centred interface—in other words, one that is easy to use—improves perceptions of security and platform reliability, creating an emotionally favourable environment for trust [38]. In the context of videogame platforms, this concept encompasses interface clarity, ease of navigation, opportunities for personalisation and the accessibility of functionalities. Figure 2 presents the research model on which these hypotheses are based. Within this framework, the second hypothesis of the study is proposed:

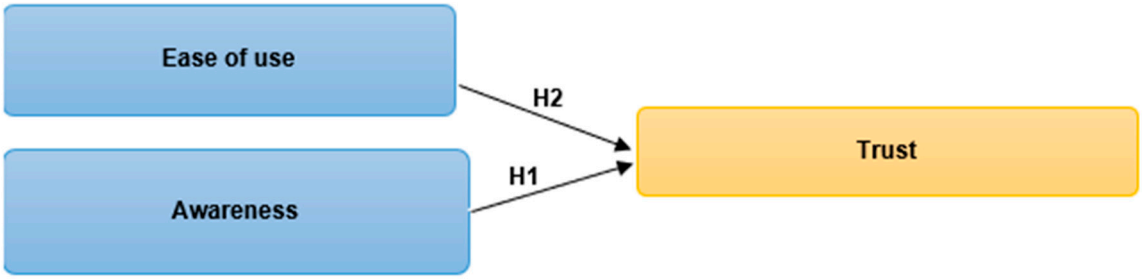

Figure 2. Research model. Source: Authors' elaboration.

H2: The ease of use of videogame platforms determines gamers' trust.

The influence of sociodemographic factors on digital users' experiences has been widely acknowledged. Variables such as gender, age, educational level and income shape patterns of behaviour, interaction and evaluation within digital environments. Ref. [39] found that women report higher usability barriers, older individuals perceive greater complexity and users with higher educational levels demonstrate a better functional un-

derstanding of platforms. These findings support the assertion of the TAM that such perceptions are critical antecedents of both trust and adoption [30]. Similarly, ref. [34] highlight that age, gender, educational attainment and socioeconomic status affect not only access but also digital skills and online participation [40]. Furthermore, ref. [41] indicates that age and income are associated with trust in algorithmic systems, suggesting that these groups perceive greater fairness in automated environments.

In the context of videogames, sociodemographic variables also play a crucial role. Ref. [1] highlight that behaviour during a videogame session reflects not only the gamer's skills, but also their gender identity and certain personal traits, underscoring the relevance of these variables for understanding gamers' perceptions. Thus, gender is associated with stereotypes and differentiated expectations of interaction; female gamers are systematically perceived as less competent than male gamers, even when their skill levels are equivalent [42,43]. Likewise, age constitutes a key dimension in shaping user behaviour, as it influences processes such as memory, prediction and adaptation to technological changes, acting as a predictor of both digital knowledge and trust [44–46]. Therefore, these findings confirm that sociodemographic profiles modulate awareness, ease of use and trust in videogame platforms. Figure 3 presents the research model on which these hypotheses are based. On this basis, the third, fourth and fifth hypotheses of this study are formulated:

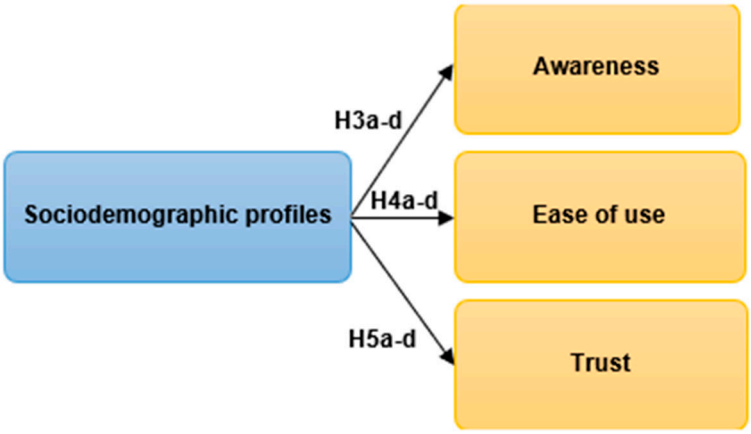

Figure 3. Research model. Source: Authors' elaboration.

H3a–d: Videogame platform awareness depends on the sociodemographic profile of the gamer (gender, age, education, income).

H4a–d: The ease of videogame platform usage depends on the sociodemographic gamer's profile (gender, age, education, income).

H5a–d: The trust in a videogame platform depends on the sociodemographic profile of the gamer (gender, age, education, income).

3. Methods

This research was conducted through a structured survey carried out in Gran Canaria, Spain, between March and April 2025. The study aimed to gather information regarding the purchasing and usage experience of videogame platforms. Table 1 presents the technical specifications of the study. The target population consisted of individuals residing in Spain during the data collection period, all of whom were over 18 years of age and had prior experience in both the acquisition and use of such platforms.

Table 1. Technical sheet of the research. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Methodological procedure	Survey				
Population	Individuals aged over 18 with prior experience in both purchasing and using videogame platforms.				
Geographical scope	Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, Spain				
Contact form	The survey was administered by students from the market research course within the tourism degree programme. Each student was asked to recruit at least three respondents at their homes. Additionally, the authors of this paper distributed surveys in various educational centres and among other university degree programmes. Both the students and the authors followed a strict set of instructions, under the supervision of the manuscript's authors.				
Sample	317				
Sample selection method	Non-probabilistic sampling, combining convenience and snowball sampling techniques				
Sample profile	Gender	Male	Female		
		62.1%	37.9%		
	Age	18–24	25–34	35–49	>50
		69.1%	18.6%	7.6%	4.7%
	Education	Primary	Secondary	Graduate	Postgraduate
		6.6%	57.4%	29.3%	6.6%
	Income	<10.000€	>10.000€	>20.000€	>30.000€
		63.7%	18.6%	11.7%	6%
Quality control	Both direct (student feedback and author supervision) and indirect controls (post-processing of the database) were applied.				
Fieldwork date	March and April 2025				

A non-probabilistic sampling method was employed, combining convenience and snowball sampling techniques. This non-probabilistic approach is suitable for exploratory and hypothesis-generating research but may limit generalisability, such as geographical generalizability. Participants were approached in various contexts, including their homes, workplaces, educational institutions (universities and vocational training centres, both public and private), as well as during leisure activities. The questionnaires were completed manually and in paper format. For this research, a gamer was defined as any individual who had purchased or used a videogame platform, regardless of their occupation, level of experience, or degree of engagement with gaming.

In order to obtain a sample that was as representative as possible of the general population, key sociodemographic variables such as sex, age, income level and educational attainment were taken into account. An effort was made to maintain a balanced composition of the sample.

The questionnaire was administered by students enrolled in the Market Research course at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC), as well as by the researchers themselves. All participants were informed in advance about the anonymous nature of the study and it was made clear that there were no right or wrong answers, as long as their responses were honest. After excluding five invalid cases, the final sample consisted

of 317 respondents. The final sample size (n = 317) exceeds the minimum thresholds commonly recommended for exploratory studies and multivariate statistical analyses, such as factor analysis and regression, which typically require at least 200 participants to ensure stable results. Furthermore, the non-probability sampling method employed (combining convenience and snowball sampling techniques) is ideal, as it targets specific user groups, such as users who interact with video game platforms. This approach allowed for the efficient recruitment of respondents with relevant experience, yielding a wide range of sociodemographic profiles within the limitations of the geographical scope (Gran Canaria, Spain).

The validated instrument items were translated into Spanish, reviewed by experts and pilot-tested with nine target users, resulting in minor wording adjustments. The questionnaire, available in Spanish, was structured into three main sections: filter questions aimed at determining whether participants had purchased and/or used videogame platforms and a set of statements related to the dimensions of awareness, trust and ease of use. These statements were assessed using 7-point Likert-type scales, combined with dichotomous questions where appropriate. Question 4, focused on awareness, draws on models developed by [47,48]. Question 5, examining ease of use, is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model [49], complemented by usability and user experience principles from [50–52]. Question 6, related to perceived trust, is informed by research on online trust and consumer reviews [53–56]. Additionally, sociodemographic information was collected, including gender, age, educational level, nationality and income (Table 2). Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28) statistical software.

Table 2. Questionnaire scales and items. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Dimension	Nº of Items	Example Item	Source(s)
Platform awareness	3	I am familiar with the platform thanks to its prominence on social media and in advertising	Adapted from [47,48].
Ease of use	6	Navigation on the platform is intuitive and straightforward.	Adapted from [49–52].
Trust	4	I trust the authenticity of the products (videogames) offered on the platform.	Adapted from [53–56]
Sociodemographics	4	Gender, age, education, income	Self-developed

Note: Bold values indicate main categories of the questionnaire.

4. Results

The results of the empirical analyses carried out in this study are presented in Section 4. It is structured into five main parts. First, the preliminary analyses (4.1) examine the dimensionality and reliability of the scales for platform awareness, ease of use and trust through exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Second, the combined impact of platform awareness and ease of use on trust is assessed using a multiple linear regression model (4.2). Third, the influence of sociodemographic variables (gender, age, educational level and income) on platform awareness (4.3), ease of use (4.4) and trust (4.5) is evaluated through Student's *t*-tests and ANOVA. Each subsection details the statistical results. The section concludes with a summary table presenting which hypotheses were accepted and which were rejected.

4.1. Preliminary Analysis

Exploratory factor analyses were performed to examine the dimensionality and reliability of the scales measuring platform awareness, ease of use and trust. Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated satisfactory internal consistency, supporting the reliability of the dimensions under consideration.

Regarding platform awareness, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess the underlying structure of the scale designed to measure this construct (Table 3). The single factor extracted explained 65.20% of the total variance, well above the 50% threshold recommended for newly developed or adapted scales, thereby demonstrating the robustness and consistency of the dimension under analysis. The items showed communalities above 0.49 and factor loadings greater than 0.70, indicators that reinforce the adequacy of the items in representing the construct. The item with the highest communality (0.753) referred to the platform's strong presence across videogame forums and communities, highlighting the key role that participatory environments and online communities play in building brand awareness within the gaming sector. Conversely, the item with the lowest communality (0.495) pertained to awareness driven by advertising and social media; while relevant, this communication channel showed a somewhat lower capacity to capture the essence of the construct compared to the organic recognition generated within the industry and community spaces.

Table 3. Exploratory factor analysis of the statements about awareness. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Comm.	Items	Rotated Matrix
0.495	I am familiar with the platform thanks to its prominence on social media and in advertising.	0.868
0.708	The platform is widely acknowledged within the videogame industry	0.842
0.753	The platform enjoys a strong presence across videogame forums and communities.	0.703

KMO: 0.633; Bartlett: 228.259; degree of freedom: 3; Sig. < 0.001, Explained Variance: 65.196%.

Furthermore, the rotated factor loadings, all of which were greater than 0.70, indicated that the items were highly representative of the underlying factor and made significant contributions to it. The item with the highest loading (0.868) corresponded to prominence on social media and advertising, highlighting the effectiveness of external visibility as a means of generating brand awareness in the videogame sector. The KMO = 0.633 and Bartlett's = 228.259, degrees of freedom = 3, $p < 0.001$, were acceptable, confirming that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis and that a consistent latent structure was present. The results confirm the validity of the platform awareness scale and highlight the combined role of commercial communication and community interaction in strengthening platform awareness. These findings further reinforce the notion of awareness as a unidimensional construct in the context of videogame platforms.

Similarly, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess the underlying structure of the scale designed to measure the ease of use of the platform (Table 4). The results supported a clear unidimensional solution, with a single factor explaining 62.84% of the total variance, surpassing the conventional 50% threshold recommended for exploratory scales. EFA confirms the robustness of the construct under analysis. The items displayed communalities ranging from 0.594 to 0.704, indicating that all elements contributed significantly to the latent factor. The item with the highest communality (0.704) referred to the

appropriateness of the platform's content organisation, highlighting the importance of a clear and logical content structure in shaping perceptions of ease of use.

Table 4. Exploratory factor analysis of the statements on ease of use. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Comm.	Items	Rotated Matrix
0.626	Navigation on the platform is intuitive and straightforward.	0.839
0.594	I can easily find the products I am looking for.	0.796
0.704	The organisation of content on the platform is appropriate.	0.791
0.614	The filters and search tools enhance my shopping experience.	0.784
0.634	The instructions on the platform are clear and easy to follow.	0.773
0.598	The platform's design facilitates my interaction with its features.	0.771

KMO: 0.891; Bartlett: 888.739; degree of freedom: 15; Sig. < 0.001, Explained Variance: 62.837%.

In contrast, the item with the lowest communality (0.594) pertained to the ease of finding desired products, suggesting that, while this aspect is important, it may be more influenced by other complementary functional factors such as filters or navigation design. The rotated factor loadings all exceeded 0.77, reinforcing the conclusion that each item made a meaningful contribution to the underlying factor. The highest loading (0.839) corresponded to the item concerning intuitive and straightforward navigation, underscoring the central role of navigation ease in users' overall perception of platform usability. Conversely, the lowest loadings were observed for the items related to the clarity of instructions (0.773) and the platform's design in facilitating interaction (0.771), which may indicate that, although these aspects are relevant, users prioritise other functional elements such as navigation and content organisation. The KMO = 0.891 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was highly significant (888.739, degrees of freedom = 15, $p < 0.001$) and excellent, confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis and the presence of a consistent latent structure. Overall, these results support the validity of the ease-of-use scale as a unidimensional construct with robust properties. The findings highlight the importance of platform usability as a key determinant of user satisfaction and trust in digital environments.

Moreover, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess the underlying structure of the scale designed to measure trust in the platform (Table 5). The results supported a unidimensional solution, with a single factor explaining 61.79% of the total variance, surpassing the 50% threshold typically recommended for exploratory scales and thereby confirming the robustness of the construct under analysis. The items exhibited communalities ranging from 0.454 to 0.750, indicating that all elements contributed significantly to the latent factor, albeit with varying degrees of shared variance. The item with the highest communality (0.750) referred to trust in the platform to provide a safe and risk-free user experience, highlighting the importance of perceived security in building trust. In contrast, the item with the lowest communality (0.454) pertained to the influence of other users' opinions and reviews, suggesting that while social validation is relevant, user trust appears to be more strongly determined by intrinsic attributes of the platform itself, such as security and privacy. The rotated factor loadings were all above 0.67, confirming that the items made a substantial contribution to the underlying factor. The highest loading (0.866) corresponded to the item relating to trust in the authenticity of the products offered on

the platform, emphasising the central role of product legitimacy in generating trust within digital environments. The lowest loading (0.674) was observed for the item concerning confidence inspired by other users' opinions and reviews, again indicating that although this element is relevant, users tend to prioritise direct attributes of the platform. The KMO = 0.765 and Bartlett's test of sphericity were highly significant (388.559, degrees of freedom = 6, $p < 0.001$), confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis and the presence of a coherent latent structure. These results support the validity of the trust scale as a unidimensional construct with consistent psychometric properties. The findings emphasise the combined importance of product authenticity, security and privacy in building user trust in digital platforms.

Table 5. Exploratory factor analysis of the statements on trust. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Comm.	Items	Rotated Matrix
0.600	I trust the authenticity of the products (videogames) offered on the platform.	0.866
0.668	The platform ensures the privacy of my personal data.	0.817
0.750	I trust the platform to provide a safe and risk-free user experience.	0.775
0.454	The opinions and reviews of other users on the platform inspired confidence in me.	0.674

KMO: 0.765; Bartlett: 388.559; degree of freedom: 6; Sig. < 0.001, Explained Variance: 61.790%.

4.2. Contrasting Hypothesis 1—The Videogame Platform Awareness Determines Gamers' Trust and Contrasting Hypothesis 2—The Ease of Use of Videogame Platforms Determines Gamers' Trust

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which platform awareness and ease of use jointly predict trust in the platform. The simultaneous inclusion of both independent variables allows for the examination of their specific contribution to the model and the assessment of potential multicollinearity between them (Table 6).

Table 6. Linear regression and standardised coefficients to contrast hypotheses 1 and 2. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable (Q6. Trust)		
	VIF	Beta	t-Value
Q4. Awareness	1.402	0.220	4.176 ***
Q5. Ease of use		0.471	8.969 ***
R2		0.381	
Adjusted R2		0.377	
F change		96.748 ***	
D-W		1.739	
Maximum correlation		0.870 ***	

*** $p < 0.001$; sample size = 317 $f^2 = 0.615$.

The model was statistically significant (F = 96.748; $p < 0.001$) and explained 38.1% of the variance in trust ($R^2 = 0.381$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.377$). In terms of coefficients, both platform awareness ($\beta = 0.220$; t = 4.176; $p < 0.001$) and ease of use ($\beta = 0.471$; t = 8.969; $p < 0.001$) emerged as significant predictors. However, the magnitude of the ease-of-use coefficient

was notably higher, suggesting that perceived usability has a more substantial impact on trust than platform awareness. The multicollinearity analysis showed acceptable VIF values (VIF = 1.402 for awareness and VIF = 1.402 for ease of use), indicating no significant redundancy between the independent variables. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistics (1.739) confirmed the absence of autocorrelation in the residuals, reinforcing the validity of the model. The effect size, calculated as Cohen's f^2, was 0.615, indicating a large effect.

4.3. Contrasting Hypothesis 3—Videogame Platform Awareness Depends on the Sociodemographic Profile of the Gamer (Gender, Age, Education, Income)

A Student's *t*-test was conducted to examine whether platform awareness differs according to gender. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female gamers in relation to platform awareness. Levene's test confirmed the equality of variances (F = 0.683), supporting the use of the result under the assumption of equal variances as the primary reference. The mean awareness score was slightly higher for female gamers (M = 0.002; SD = 1.089) compared to male gamers (M = −0.001; SD = 0.944), although this difference was minimal and not statistically meaningful. These findings suggest that gender does not play a relevant role in determining platform awareness in the context of videogame platforms. This result indicates that gender differences in digital platform awareness tend to be minimal or non-existent when exposure and usage patterns are comparable.

ANOVA analyses were conducted to examine whether platform awareness differs according to age, educational level and income. Regarding age, the results showed statistically significant differences between groups (F = 2.696; sig = 0.046) (Table 7). Gamers aged between 35 and 49 reported the highest mean awareness (M = 0.475; SD = 0.861), while those aged 50 or over showed the lowest mean (M = −0.112; SD = 1.160). The effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.025$, indicating a small effect according to Cohen's benchmarks. Post hoc Tukey HSD ($\alpha = 0.05$) showed a single significant pairwise difference: 18–24 vs. 35–49 (higher awareness in 35–49). No other pairwise contrasts reached significance after multiple comparison adjustment. This result suggests that platform awareness may be linked to life stage, with middle-aged adults demonstrating greater awareness with the platform compared to both younger and older gamers.

Table 7. ANOVA analysis to test the difference in awareness depending on age. Source: Authors' elaboration.

ANOVA								
		Sum of Squares	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**η2**	**α**
	Between groups	7.960	3	2.653	2.696	0.046	0.0252	0.05
	Within Groups	308.040	313	0.984				
	Total	316.00	316					
Group Statistics								
Age	N	Mean		Stand. Deviat.		Stand. Error		
18–24	219	−0.079		1.011		0.068		
25–34	59	0.128		0.919		0.119		

Table 7. *Cont.*

ANOVA								
		Sum of Squares	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**η2**	**α**
35–49	24	0.475		0.861			0.175	
50 or more	15	−0.112		1.160			0.299	
Total	317	0.000		1.000			0.056	

About educational level, no statistically significant differences in platform awareness were observed (F = 0.268; sig = 0.849). The mean values across the different educational levels were very similar, indicating that educational attainment does not appear to differentiate levels of platform awareness in the context analysed.

With regard to income, statistically significant differences in platform awareness were identified according to income level (F = 3.885; sig = 0.009) (Table 8). Gamers with annual incomes above €20,000 showed clearly higher mean awareness (M = 0.408; SD = 0.837 for the €20,000–30,000 range; M = 0.399; SD = 0.687 for >€30,000) compared to those earning less than €10,000 (M = −0.100; SD = 0.984). The effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.036$ (small). Tukey HSD post hoc tests ($\alpha = 0.05$) indicated one significant pairwise difference: <€10,000 vs. >€20,000 (higher awareness in >€20,000). Other income-band comparisons were not significant after adjustment. This result suggests that higher income may be associated with greater platform awareness, possibly due to increased access to technology or greater exposure to gaming environments.

Table 8. ANOVA analysis to test the difference in awareness depending on income. Source: Authors' elaboration.

ANOVA								
		Sum of Squares	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**η2**	**α**
	Between groups	11.345	3	3.782	3.885	0.009	0.0359	0.05
	Within Groups	304.655	313	0.973				
	Total	316.00	316					
Group Statistics								
Income	N	Mean		Stand. Deviat.		Stand. Error		
<10.000€	202	−0.100		0.984		0.069		
>10.000€	59	−0.040		1.144		0.149		
>20.000€	37	0.408		0.837		0.137		
>30.000€	19	0.399		0.687		0.157		
Total	317	0.000		1.000		0.056		

So, the results indicate that while gender and educational level do not appear to influence platform awareness, differences are observed in relation to age and, particularly, income. These findings link access to and technological awareness with economic factors and life stage.

4.4. Contrasting Hypothesis 4—The Ease of Videogame Platform Usage Depends on the Sociodemographic Gamer's Profile (Gender, Age, Education, Income)

A Student's *t*-test was conducted to examine whether perceived ease of use of the platform differs according to gender. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female gamers about to ease of use. Levene's test confirmed the equality of variances (F = 0.416; sig = 0.519) and therefore, the result under the assumption of equal variances was taken as the primary reference. The mean ease-of-use score was slightly higher for male gamers (M = 0.004; SD = 0.955) compared to female gamers (M = −0.007; SD = 1.072), although this difference was minimal and lacked statistical relevance. These findings therefore suggest that gender is not a determining factor in the perception of ease of use of the platform in the context of videogames. In other words, gender-based differences in perceived usability tend to be minimal or non-existent.

Moreover, ANOVA analyses were conducted to assess whether the perceived ease of use of the platform differs according to age, educational level and income. Regarding age, the results showed statistically significant differences between groups (F = 3.563; sig = 0.015) (Table 9). Gamers aged between 35 and 49 reported the highest mean ease-of-use score (M = 0.566; SD = 0.853), while the youngest group (18–24 years) showed a negative mean (M = −0.095; SD = 0.954). The effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.033$, consistent with a small effect. Tukey HSD post hoc tests ($\alpha = 0.05$) identified 18–24 vs. 35–49 as the only significant pair (higher perceived ease of use in 35–49). No other pairwise differences survived multiplicity correction. This suggests that older users, particularly middle-aged adults, perceive the platform as more straightforward to use.

Table 9. ANOVA analysis to test the difference in ease of use depending on age. Source: Authors' elaboration.

ANOVA								
		Sum of Squares	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**η2**	**α**
	Between groups	10.434	3	3.478	3.563	0.015	0.033	0.05
	Within Groups	305.566	313	0.976				
	Total	316.00	316					
Group Statistics								
Age	N	Mean	Stand. Deviat.		Stand. Error			
18–24	219	−0.095	0.954		0.064			
25–34	59	0.100	1.022		0.133			
35–49	24	0.566	0.853		0.174			
50 or more	15	0.094	1.454		0.375			
Total	317	0.000	1.000		0.056			

About educational level, no statistically significant differences were found in perceived ease of use (F = 1.352; sig = 0.258). The mean scores were very similar across educational levels, indicating that academic attainment does not appear to play a relevant role in shaping users' perceptions of platform usability.

Concerning income, statistically significant differences were identified (F = 3.480; sig = 0.016) (Table 10). Gamers with higher incomes (>€30,000) showed the highest mean ease-of-use scores, whereas those with the lowest incomes (<€10,000) recorded the lowest

scores. The effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.032$ (small), no pairwise differences reached significance after adjustment for multiple comparisons. These results suggest that higher income may be associated with a more positive perception of usability, possibly due to greater access to technology or higher-quality platforms.

Table 10. ANOVA analysis to test the difference in ease of use depending on income. Source: Authors' elaboration.

ANOVA								
		Sum of Squares	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**η^2**	**α**
	Between groups	10.200	3	3.400	3.480	0.016	0.032	0.05
	Within Groups	305.800	313	0.977				
	Total	316.00	316					
Group Statistics								
Income	N	Mean		Stand. Deviat.		Stand. Error		
<€10.000	202	0.956		0.956		0.0673		
>€10.000	59	1.2159		1.215		0.158		
>€20.000	37	0.8826		0.8826		0.145		
>€30.000	19	0.6695		0.6695		0.153		
Total	317	0.000		1.000		0.056		

4.5. Contrasting Hypothesis 5—The Trust in a Videogame Platform Depends on the Sociodemographic Profile of the Gamer (Gender, Age, Education, Income)

A Student's *t*-test was conducted to examine whether trust in the videogame platform differs according to gender. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female gamers about trust. Levene's test confirmed the equality of variances (F = 0.023; sig = 0.879). The mean trust score was slightly higher among female gamers (M = 0.024; SD = 0.995) compared to male gamers (M = −0.015; SD = 1.004), although this difference was minimal and lacked statistical relevance. The findings suggest that gender is not a determining factor in the trust users place in videogame platforms. This result demonstrates that gender-based differences in trust perception tend to be minimal or non-existent.

ANOVA analyses were conducted to examine whether trust in the platform differs according to age, educational level and income. Regarding age, the results showed no statistically significant differences between groups (F = 0.736; sig = 0.531). Although gamers aged 35 to 49 recorded the highest mean trust score (M = 0.236; SD = 0.729) and those aged 25 to 34 the lowest (M = −0.107; SD = 1.207), these differences lacked statistical relevance.

In relation to educational level, no significant differences in trust were identified (F = 0.238; sig = 0.870). The mean scores were very similar across educational levels, suggesting that education does not act as a differentiating factor in the level of trust placed in the platform. Concerning income, the results again showed no statistically significant differences (F = 0.842; sig = 0.472). Although gamers with incomes above €30,000 showed the highest mean trust score (M = 0.306; SD = 0.719), these differences did not reach.

Taken together, the results suggest that trust in videogame platforms does not appear to be influenced by the sociodemographic variables analysed (age, education, or income).

This reinforces the idea that trust is more closely linked to functional factors and direct user experience with the platform rather than to user profile characteristics.

Likewise, the analysis revealed that platform awareness and ease of use significantly determined gamers' trust, thereby supporting H1 and H2. In terms of sociodemographic variables, age and income were found to influence both platform awareness (H3a and H3d) and ease of use (H4a and H4d), whereas gender and educational level did not show significant effects on these constructs (H3b, H3c, H4b, H4c). Regarding trust, none of the sociodemographic variables analysed (gender, age, education, income) demonstrated a significant association, leading to the rejection of H5a, H5b, H5c and H5d. These results highlight the role of platform-related factors over user profile characteristics in shaping trust within videogame platforms (Table 11).

Table 11. Summary of hypotheses testing results grouped by research objectives. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Research Objectives		Hypotheses	Result
R.O.1: Examine the causal role played by awareness and ease of use in shaping trust toward videogame platforms.	H1	The videogame platform awareness determines gamers' trust.	Accepted
	H2	The ease of use of videogame platforms determines gamers' trust.	Accepted
R.O.2: Analyse how sociodemographic characteristics influence trust, awareness and ease of use, considering potential bivariate causal relationships	H3a	Videogame platform awareness depends on age.	Accepted
	H3b	Videogame platform awareness depends on gender.	Rejected
	H3c	Videogame platform awareness depends on education.	Rejected
	H3d	Videogame platform awareness depends on income.	Accepted
	H4a	The ease of use of videogame platforms depends on age.	Accepted
	H4b	The ease of use of videogame platforms depends on gender.	Rejected
	H4c	The ease of use of videogame platforms depends on education.	Rejected
	H4d	The ease of use of videogame platforms depends on income.	Accepted
	H5a	The trust in a videogame platform depends on gender.	Rejected
	H5b	The trust in a videogame platform depends on age.	Rejected
	H5c	The trust in a videogame platform depends on education.	Rejected
	H5d	The trust in a videogame platform depends on income.	Rejected

5. Discussion

This study contributes to the scientific literature on videogames by providing empirical evidence on the role of platform knowledge in videogame purchasing. This area has not been explored until now. In addition, it conceptualises video game platforms as dynamic ecosystems composed of actors, technological artefacts, activities and interdependent

institutional frameworks, in line with the systemic perspective proposed by the literature on innovation ecosystems [20,21,23].

Firstly, the results confirm that both platform awareness and perceived ease of use are key factors in generating trust in these services. These findings highlight that gamers value functional and experiential attributes when assessing their confidence in digital gaming environments. This is in line with the assumptions of the TAM and previous studies on digital consumer trust [19,20]. The present study also integrates TAM with a systems-based perspective, drawing on cooperative game theory and ecosystem dynamics [12,15]. Overall, the findings validate the robustness of TAM in a novel domain (video game platforms). They also extend TAM by integrating ecosystem dynamics and UTAUT2 variables into the analysis. This integration enables a more comprehensive understanding of platform trust by going beyond linear assumptions. It encompasses cooperative dynamics among platform elements [12,15,20]. This approach extends TAM's applicability to gaming platforms, a context where its use has been scarce. It accounts for the interplay between technological components, communities, and governance mechanisms.

Secondly, the results indicate that trust is not influenced by gender, age, educational level or income. This suggests that trust judgments are primarily grounded in functional, technical and experiential features of the platform, rather than in users' sociodemographic attributes. This finding is particularly relevant. The non-significant effects, despite being consistent across models, suggest that demographic variables may play only a marginal role in digital platform trust once ease-of-use standards are homogenised. This finding should be interpreted as evidence of structural equalisation in gaming ecosystems rather than mere statistical absence. Prior literature has repeatedly suggested a moderating role for factors such as gender, education or income in the formation of trust [44,56]. In this respect, it is innovative to establish that sociodemographic characteristics do not significantly affect user confidence in the specific context of interactive entertainment platforms. This divergence can be attributed to several factors. The increasing standardisation of usability features, the availability of freemium access models, and cross-platform interface designs may have reduced barriers traditionally associated with demographic disparities. These results also resonate with digital inclusion research, suggesting that in mature platform ecosystems, functional and experiential attributes—such as perceived security, ease of navigation, and transparent communication—outweigh demographic predictors of trust. However, the absence of demographic effects should be interpreted with caution. For example, the underrepresentation of older gamers (only 15 participants aged 50 and above) limits the statistical power to detect differences in this subgroup, although their proportion mirrors that of the general gaming population. Future cross-cultural and stratified-sample studies could clarify whether these findings generalise to markets with more pronounced digital divides. Considering incidents such as the 2011 PlayStation Network security breach, these results further reinforce that user confidence is closely linked to platform security, transparency, and the fulfilment of promises, rather than to the users' sociodemographic background [57].

Thirdly, the research reveals significant differences in platform awareness and perceived ease of use, depending on age and income. This suggests that life stage and economic resources influence awareness and perceptions of usability in gaming platforms, consistent with arguments regarding digital literacy and resource availability as determinants of technology use [51]. However, the effect sizes associated with these differences were small (η^2 ranging from 0.025 to 0.036), suggesting that while age and income contribute to perceived awareness and ease of use, their influence remains limited. These results indicate that demographic influences are present but are secondary to the design and functional attributes associated with the platform. On the other hand, neither gender nor educational

level appears to influence platform awareness or ease of use, which contradicts much of the previous literature documenting gender and educational gaps in digital and gaming environments [39,56]. One possible explanation is the progressive homogenisation of video game content and the prevalence of intuitive design principles, which can blur the differences previously attributed to gender or educational level. In this sense, the convergence of digital literacy levels among different user segments could be levelling the perception of usability. Consequently, the idea is reinforced that gender is not a relevant determinant in the context of gaming platforms, representing an innovative finding with the potential to challenge gender stereotypes in this sector.

6. Conclusions

This research supports the view that functional attributes outweigh sociodemographic variables in establishing trust. It also recognises the causal effect of age and income on platform awareness and ease of use. This unexpected result is a potentially novel contribution. It encourages future research to incorporate additional variables that may better explain these perceptions within the videogame ecosystem. Furthermore, this research indirectly extends the Technology Acceptance Model by validating its applicability within the videogame industry. This contributes to a more detailed understanding of this framework in interactive entertainment contexts. Accordingly, it may be worthwhile to incorporate additional variables—such as awareness of the platform and social media community dynamics—that are relevant in these interactive contexts. In addition, the findings reinforce the applicability of the UTAUT2 to videogame platforms. Awareness and ease of use jointly influence trust. This integrated perspective opens new avenues for research, such as exploring the effects of game genre, playing frequency, or community participation on trust formation. Employing probabilistic sampling and replicating the methodology across multiple countries would enable robust cross-cultural comparisons and greater generalisability. This would validate the stability of these relationships across diverse socio-economic and technological contexts. Such efforts would advance theoretical understanding and offer actionable insights for platform developers and policymakers in the interactive entertainment sector.

Moreover, future research could explore how CS-relations—such as cooperation between technical infrastructures—influence trust as well as long-term user loyalty and engagement. Conceptualising video game platforms as co-evolving ecosystems encourages examination of governance mechanisms, value flows, and user agency within these systems. However, future studies should also address the limitations inherent to this research design. First, reliance on self-reported data may not fully capture actual behavioural patterns of platform usage. Second, use of a non-probabilistic convenience sample limits the external validity of the findings, underscoring the need for replication with probabilistic or stratified sampling strategies. Additionally, longitudinal designs would provide a more dynamic understanding of how awareness, ease of use, and trust evolve over time. Incorporating behavioural indicators (e.g., clickstream data, eye tracking, or facial coding) would further enhance the robustness of the results. Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach—integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or focus groups—could capture experiential and contextual factors that remain implicit in statistical models, thereby enhancing explanatory depth and interpretative validity. These methodological extensions would enable researchers to assess whether the structural equalisation effects observed in this study are stable across different populations and cultural contexts. Overall, while the findings offer practical insights for platform developers and marketers, their applicability to other regions should be considered with caution. Differences in market maturity, cultural preferences, and technological infrastructure can influence the relative

importance of knowledge, ease of use, and trust in video game platforms. Therefore, these results should serve as a basis for comparative studies in other geographic contexts, rather than as universally generalisable conclusions.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study suggest that developers and marketers of video game platforms should prioritise awareness and ease of use. This involves designing clear, accessible, and customisable interfaces that are easy to use. Strengthening communication strategies to increase platform visibility is also important. These elements are crucial for building trust among players. Segmentation strategies based on sociodemographic variables, such as gender or educational level, are likely to be ineffective and can even generate resistance. Gender was not identified as a significant factor in determining trust. Furthermore, the results underscore the importance of community management as a key factor in promoting awareness, ease of use, and trust. Developers and administrators should invest in structured communities and creator-led initiatives that expand visibility and foster trustworthy environments. This can be achieved through transparent governance practices, such as clearly communicating security protocols and regularly publishing performance metrics. These actions reinforce awareness and trust in the platform. The study also provides guidelines on digital inclusion. The absence of significant gaps in trust based on gender or education suggests that design and accessibility standards are helping to level the playing field. However, the modest effects of age and income indicate that certain barriers remain. Overcoming these requires age-sensitive onboarding strategies, low-cost options, and accessibility-oriented models for users with limited resources.

Similarly, adopting low-cognitive-load navigation flows would further strengthen usability for these profiles. The findings encourage a review of segmentation strategies, shifting the focus from sociodemographic categories—irrelevant to trust—to behavioural and experiential variables, such as play frequency, gender preferences, or community participation patterns. Trust initiatives should focus on strengthening usability, ensuring transparency in governance, and protecting reputations, rather than tailoring approaches to demographic profiles. Additionally, cross-cultural investigations would be valuable in determining whether these patterns are consistent across other geographical markets. Although the sample consists exclusively of residents of Gran Canaria (Spain), which limits the generalisability of the findings to other geographical and cultural contexts, this territorial focus also offers a controlled framework that reduces the influence of heterogeneous external factors. Such a geographically bounded sample is particularly suitable for establishing a robust and replicable methodological foundation for examining the relationships between awareness, ease of use, and trust in videogame platforms.

This approach provides a solid basis for expanding the research in future studies by applying the same design in different regions and sociocultural contexts, thereby enabling meaningful comparative analyses. From a methodological standpoint, it is important to note that heterogeneity in subgroup sizes within ANOVA analyses—particularly the small size of the 50+ cohort—could affect the robustness of non-significant findings. Variables were transformed to maximise the number of cases per category, maintaining a minimum threshold of approximately 25, whenever possible, except for the 50+ group, which was preserved due to its analytical relevance, despite the lower count. While these limitations must be acknowledged, the observed patterns suggest that certain design and business model strategies—such as inclusive interfaces, uniform service standards, and consistent security protocols—may help neutralise sociodemographic disparities in trust, offering valuable insights for platform managers seeking to broaden their user base. Ultimately, this paper highlights that trust in gaming platforms is determined less by who the users are

and more by how the platforms operate and interact with them, suggesting that awareness and ease of use may be key levers for fostering trust in digital entertainment ecosystems.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
UTAUT2	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology

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