

What Reviews in Local Online Labour Markets Reveal about the Performance of Multi-service Providers

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Abstract: This paper deals with online customer reviews of local multi-service providers. While many studies investigate product reviews and online labour markets with service providers delivering intangible products “over the wire”, we focus on websites where providers offer multiple distinct services that can be booked, paid and reviewed online but are performed locally offline. This type of service providers has so far been neglected in the literature. This paper analyses reviews and applies sentiment analysis. It aims to gain new insights into local multi-service providers’ performance. There is a broad literature range presented with regard to the topics addressed. The results show, among other things, that providers with good ratings continue to perform well over time. We find that many positive reviews seem to encourage sales. On average, quantitative star ratings and qualitative ratings in the form of review texts match. Further results are also achieved in this study.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the analysis of online customer reviews. Namely, the subject of interest are reviews from the English-speaking, American version of Amazon in the category of Home & Business Services¹ (AHS). Here, customers can buy and rate services that are fulfilled by service providers. Examples are “TV Wall Mounting”, “Desk Assembly”, “House Cleaning” and outdoor services such as “Tree Trimming” (Amazon, 2017).

User-generated, for anyone accessible reviews inherit an important role in e-commerce (Kokkodis and Ipeiritis, 2016). They are part of online feedback mechanisms (Dellarocas, 2003) that can be described as word-of-mouth networks. These refer to the informative communication between consumers about opinions and experiences with goods or services and their providers (Hu et al., 2006; Esch, 2017).

Providers without reviews are less likely booked than those with many positive reviews (Lin et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies show that positive reviews, especially positive average ratings (Anderson and Magruder, 2012; Luca, 2016; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006) and a high number of reviews are positively associated with sales (Duan et al., 2008). Other

research partly supports or challenges these findings or takes another point of view when it comes to customer reviews and sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Hu et al., 2006; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). Generally, scholars show that customer reviews on average are either very positive or negative (Hu et al., 2006), while being generally important to purchase decisions (Park et al., 2007).

Apart from the named uniform products and services, there are so-called “online labour markets” (OLM(s)), where providers offer tailor-made solutions to their customers. Such solutions include the production of designs, software and so forth (Lin et al., 2016; Kokkodis and Ipeiritis, 2016). OLMs deliver experience goods. For consumers, it is not possible to foresee work quality and satisfaction, because reviews cover past transactions only (Kokkodis and Ipeiritis, 2016). The sold goods are tailor-made for the customers while being produced after closing a contract, not prior to that (Lin et al., 2016). Most providers in OLMs use multi-tasking even though this is in general said to be harmful to success in business (Goes et al., 2018).

While scholars investigated OLMs such as Upwork (Horton and Golden, 2015; Kokkodis and Ipeiritis, 2016; Lin et al., 2016; Agrawal et al., 2015; Lehdonvirta et al., 2014; Berinsky et al., 2012), OLMs with multi-service categories such as AHS are yet not researched. The difference is that the first

¹The category Home & Business Services can be found at <https://www.amazon.com/Amazon-Home-Services/b?ie=UTF8&node=10192820011/>.

mainly deliver intangible products that often are used as input for business processes and include a bidding process (Lin et al., 2016) while the second offers manual services, often done at a person's house or apartment (Amazon, 2017) without bidding. Here, the appropriate term is multi-service categories, as there are categories where many different services belong. For example, "TV wall mounting" means that hundreds of different TVs may be installed in utterly different apartments according to the customer's needs (more dimensions are possible like different room/wall types, attachments). Users review providers according to their corresponding services. The reviews cannot be found at a specific article such as a smartphone but at providers with their different possible services. Apart from the general inspection of such cases, there are further open questions.

It is unclear which services a particular provider executes while one can assume providers perform differently well in varying areas. It's critical for consumers to know in which areas a provider excels. Apart from difficulties, there are numerous questions to be answered. Firstly, as reviews correspond to past transactions only, do providers with positive reviews in a certain time span continue to perform well and receive positive reviews in the next time span? To answer this question, I compare the **best rated** categories of providers with the other categories over time [Q1]. Secondly, do many reviews and many positive reviews enhance a provider's sales? Here, to develop an answer, it is investigated how the average rating of the **most rated** category per provider compares to the average rating of the other categories per provider over time spans [Q2]. Thirdly, do positive and negative About Me texts² promote or hinder the comparison of the best rated categories? Here, average quantitative ratings of providers with positive and negative About Me texts are confronted [Q3]. Fourthly, do quantitative and qualitative ratings match together? That is, do quantitatively well rated providers receive reviews with on average good sentiments [Q4]? Fifthly, exists an association of the number of offered services by a provider with customer satisfaction and therefore reviews? As an example, it can be seen that a provider with just one service may satisfy his customers more on average than a provider with ten different services. Thus, this paper investigates how the average star ratings of providers with few rated categories compare to those with many [Q5].

The structure of this paper is as follows: The second Section deals with related literature. The third Section presents technical details and informa-

²A text on AHS where a provider describes himself, his company and offered services.

tion about the method. Section number four analyses the data and Section five concludes.

2 SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 Dimensions Used in the Literature

In the following, a systematic overview of the related literature will be given. Here, research gaps will be identified. For systematization, we aimed at finding dimensions that are covered by previous studies. The following table will present studies and dimensions accordingly.

Time spans represent the first dimension, i.e. whether scholars have separated their data according to different periods and surveyed changes. The second dimension, **category specific**, refers to the question whether researchers investigated (and compared) categories (of products, services) within their data. **Average rating** asks whether one or more average ratings were calculated.

The fourth dimension asks for **sentiment analysis** scores. The next dimension asks for a **comparison of qualitative contents**, i.e. text, and **quantitative elements**, i.e. grades. This can be performed by calculating quantitative scores from texts and bringing them together with the quantitative scores. Dimension number six, the **number of services**, refers to the question whether the studies take into consideration that one provider may offer several things such as different services at once. **Quality** is a dimension that assures whether the paper deals with quality as a subject or whether the main subject is related to quality in terms of customer reviews. The last dimension asks whether **prices** were an object of consideration.

2.2 Presentation of Related Studies

The first presented paper (Kokkodis and Ipeirotis, 2016) investigates category specific reputation in an OLM (Upwork) with intangible products. The paper focusses on the design of reputation systems rather than on the gathered data and observations based on them. It neither considers a sentiment analysis, nor a comparison of qualitative and quantitative elements of reviews. The study touches some of the dimensions from Table 1, which this paper uses, but there are great differences in the realisation and questions answered. At any rate, this study is the only one that takes the number of offered services into consideration.

Table 1: Research Areas Touched by Selected Literature.

Studies	Time Spans	Category Specific	Average Rating	Sentiment Analysis	Qual. & Quant. Comparison	Number Services	Quality	Prices
Kokkodis & Ipeirotis, 2016	x	x	x			x	x	
Lin et al., 2016			x				(x)	
Horton & Golden, 2015	x	x	x	(x)	x		(x)	
Berinsky et al., 2012	x	x						x
Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006	x		x		(x)		(x)	x
Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2006		x	x	x	x		x	x
Hu & Liu, 2004				x				
Our Study	x	x	x	x	x	x	(x)	

x = matches completely, (x) = matches partially, empty field = matches not

The second considered study (Lin et al., 2016) deals with the effectiveness of reputation in OLMs. It uses transaction data from a large OLM such as Upwork (the used market place’s name is deliberately not mentioned). As can be seen in Table 1, the study does not consider several dimensions that are used in this paper. The scholars do not use time spans in their investigation, but average ratings. There is neither a sentiment analysis, nor comparison of quantitative and qualitative ratings, nor a usage of prices. The authors see it as the theoretical core of their paper that reputation is a measure for quality, therefore the dimension of quality is included (Lin et al., 2016).

Study number three (Horton and Golden, 2015) deals with reputation inflation. That is, the study uses transaction data from the OLM Upwork (and an affiliate) to investigate the phenomenon of increasing average ratings for providers. Here, the authors suggest that negative feedback is more expensive than positive feedback and that this cost can lead to a state where only positive feedback is given.

When it comes to the dimensions from Table 1, there are several points fully or partially matched. The paper uses time spans for the observations. Besides that, it considers different categories, as well as average ratings. The study constructs some kind of a sentiment score based on the appearance of certain terms in reviews. The approach does not consider a weighting of terms, e.g. giving domain-specific words a stronger impact than others (Horton and Golden, 2015). However, the featured paper brings together quantitative and qualitative ratings, i.e. sentiment scores. Here, they mainly use this feature to connect public and private feedback rather than check whether quantitative and qualitative scores on average fit together or fit to other information. To put it short, even this dimension is used differently than in the present paper. Neither the number of services per provider nor the prices of services are used. As in other studies, ratings are regarded as a measure of quality here (Horton and Golden, 2015).

The authors of the fourth presented study (Berinsky et al., 2012) perform an evaluation of OLMs. The study investigates the general applicability of OLMs to research experiments. Therefore, it is an interesting study for a basic understanding of OLMs. Again, here a market is used that provides intangible products over large distances. The study tackles very few dimensions used in this paper, but does entirely different work and answers entirely different questions.

Study number five (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006) investigates effects of customer reviews on sales. The data consist of review and sales data of books gathered from Amazon and another major book seller from the USA. Including the dimensions from Table 1, the featured study uses time spans in their data, but no categories. The conducted experiments use average ratings, but not sentiment analysis. The study uses the number of reviews per book as a variable. Naturally, there was no number of services considered. The scholars make not only different points, but also have an entirely different subject of investigation.

The sixth study (Ghose and Ipeirotis, 2006) and deals with the design of ranking systems, especially the impact of subjectivity in reviews on sales and reviews quality. The authors use product data and review for conducting a study that does not tackle the research questions proposed by this paper. The considered objects are different. This comes from the fact that products such as audio players and DVD films were used. Apart from that, the authors neither use the polarity in the sentiment analysis, nor compare the sentiment with the seller’s About Me texts, nor compare the sentiment with the quantitative average rating.

The seventh and last study that is being examined was written by (Hu and Liu, 2004). Even though the authors have a different focus, this study should be considered here because it focusses on sentiment analysis and reviews. To put it short, it can be said that the sentiment analysis is the only dimension used from Table 1. The authors perform a totally different study which aims at using natural language process-

ing and data mining techniques to face the high number of customer reviews. The authors of the study focussed on their mining and summary techniques and not on other findings that could be made from reviews.

2.3 Categorisation of this Study

As indicated in the last row of Table 1, the present paper matches almost all categories except for one and another one partially. That is, this study uses different time spans for the data. This paper further pays respect to the fact that there are different service categories offered and views them one at a time. Average ratings for quantitative and qualitative elements of reviews play an important role in the data set and analysis of this paper. A comparison of quantitative and qualitative elements are important, too. Thus, a sentiment analysis is performed as well. The number of services per provider, a dimension that is poorly covered in the related literature, is also taken into consideration in this paper. Quality is not a directly observed dimension here. As other authors have stated, good reviews are an indicator of quality (Lin et al., 2016; Horton and Golden, 2015).

However, all five of the research questions from Section 1 are unique so far. Scholars have neither answered, nor asked the same questions as this paper does. Especially, none of the researchers has taken into consideration a local OLM with multi-service providers. This encourages a practical software implementation in order to answer the research questions.

3 METHOD

For acquiring data, a sophisticated application that collects unstructured data from the dynamic webpage of AHS and saves them in a structured manner to a database needed to be written. This is called a crawler (Abhyankar et al., 2014). For further tasks such as processing natural language, other libraries were used. The acquired data were saved to four database-tables: “categories”, “reviews”, “sellers³” and “sell_analysis.” The analysis table (sell_analysis) is filled in with per provider every category where he has received reviews. Further information like the average sentiment score are added, too. Data fields are, among other things, the IDs of sellers and articles. Both serve to connect the tables with each other.

³Even though the sellers on AHS are providers, Amazon refers to them as sellers. Both words are used synonymously.

Having investigated existing solutions for sentiment analysis, several of such algorithms were implemented in order to choose the most appropriate one. We have further investigated a systematic overview of such algorithms and consequently chose an adequate one. Among others, a self-developed algorithm using SentiWordNet (Esuli and Sebastiani, 2007) was tested. The self-developed method assigns polarity values to each word. Then, an overall score for the whole document is calculated (Esuli and Sebastiani, 2007). The sentiment scores lie between 0 and 1.0. The higher value determines whether a review is positive or negative, i.e. a value of $> 50\%$. Further, rules are used such as adverbs that modify the following adjectives (Singh et al., 2013). The self-developed algorithm was chosen due to its adequate performance on multi-service provider reviews. The other methods, however, performed poor, e.g. by assigning a negative sentiment score to a review that clearly was very positive both in language and quantitative star rating.

The line graphs in the analysis Section 4 are constituted by taking the first-best, second-best etc. and first-most rated, second-most rated category per every provider. Then, consequently, the quantitative star ratings were averaged along all first-best, second-best categories etc. Here, relative time intervals were used in order to draw a course of lines over the time. The same procedure was used for sentiment scores. Further remarks on the method of graph creation can be found along with answering Q1 in Section 4.2.

4 ANALYSIS

This Section provides the analyses of this paper. It starts with a descriptive analysis and continues with the research questions. However, the method is explained along with Q1.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Having collected the data, all in all, 348⁴ categories are eligible for the investigation. Of 559 qualified categories at first⁵, 211 with no reviews were deducted. Data collection took place between August and September 2017.

The categories contain 32,965 customer reviews and 4,631 sellers. The first review was posted in July 2014, the last collected in September 2017. The distribution of the reviews over the years is as follows:

⁴All numbers in this Section were taken at the end of the period considered in this paper.

⁵Categories for which Amazon did not display all reviews were excluded.

In 2014, there were only 20 reviews, while 3,931 reviews were posted in 2015, 11,709 in 2016 and 17,305 in 2017 (up to the end of September). That is, AHS experienced a high user growth.

A category has on average 94.73 reviews and a provider has 7.11 reviews on average. Providers sell on average in 3.52 categories, while categories have on average 13.31 providers having received reviews. Categories have up to 1,338 reviews. Providers serve up to 78 categories.

When it comes to the star ratings on AHS, it can be said that they are overwhelmingly positive, having on average 4.76 stars. This is interesting as it is consistent with a study finding that quantitative ratings are on average positive (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). In general, the distribution of star ratings is unequal. The absolute majority of reviews is rated with five stars: 29,305. Four stars were given to 1,813 reviews, three to 665, two to 411 and one star was given to 771 reviews in total.

When taking into consideration the data from the analysis table, there are findings to be made. The data consist of the combinations of every provider and every category he has received reviews in. That is, for example, a provider with reviews in ten different categories would appear in ten data rows. Such combinations are from now on called provider-category combinations.

There are 16,306 provider-category combinations in total. Further, there are 11,307 combinations with one review, 2,718 with two reviews and 2,551 with three or more reviews. Thus, there are many providers having served and received reviews in several categories only once. There are 2.02 reviews on average per combination.

For research question five, it is interesting to know how many providers serve in one, two etc. categories. While the average lies at 3.52 categories per provider, taking all provider-category combinations even with less than three reviews into consideration, 2,262 providers have just one category, 814 have two and 407 have three categories. The number drops further, e.g. there are only 43 providers with ten categories. The number quickly becomes single-digit.

Regarding the time at which reviews were given, between the first and last review of the provider-category combinations are on average 242 days, i.e. 8 months⁶. While there is a combination which received all three reviews on the same day, the maximal distance between the first and last review is 1,019 days, i.e. 2 years and 10 months.

When it comes to the sentiment scores, there are different interesting information to be found: On av-

erage, the About Me texts and reviews are ca. two thirds positive. That is, About Me texts are about 69.6% positive and 30.4% negative. Similar values can be found concerning the average sentiment scores or reviews. They are 22.2% negative and 77.8% positive.

The next Sections answer the research questions.

4.2 Q1: Performance of the Best Rated Categories over Time

This Section develops answers to Q1. For dealing with the research questions of this paper, the acquired and aggregated data were further processed. Then, line diagrams were developed. The first research question asks for a comparison of the best rated categories of providers with the other categories over time. Thus, there is a comparison of the best with the next three best categories per every provider.

The best and most rated categories of this Section are those who overall, at the end of the period considered, have the best and most ratings overall (average/total number of all ratings regardless of the time point).

The data of this paper, as Figure 1 demonstrates, are separated into ten relative time intervals which represent ten percent each (x-axis). Further, this paper uses average star ratings (y-axis). That is, the diagram provides an overview of the best rated categories in the form of their average ratings over time.

Every review was assigned to a relative time point. Thus, these show at which time the review was given relative to the other reviews of a provider in the corresponding category. An example is a provider who received three reviews in the category "Rowing Machine Assembly" on the following dates: 10th February 2017, 21st February 2017 and 30th February 2017. Here, one time interval (a tenth) is two days long. The first date would mark the beginning of the time (zero in the diagram), the second date is close to the middle (60), while the third review marks the last possible time point (100). As the second review falls into the interval between two time points (50 and 60), it is categorized as the latter, i.e. 60.

In the end, all best, second-best etc. categories' ratings are averaged for every time point. This way of building the diagram is used for all other figures in the following Sections of this Section. Of course, it was adapted according to the current necessities. When there were two best rated categories with the same star rating, one was randomly chosen, as a combination of those delivered an unsatisfying picture. All above remarks apply to the most rated categories, too.

⁶To simplify the calculation, the months have 30 days.

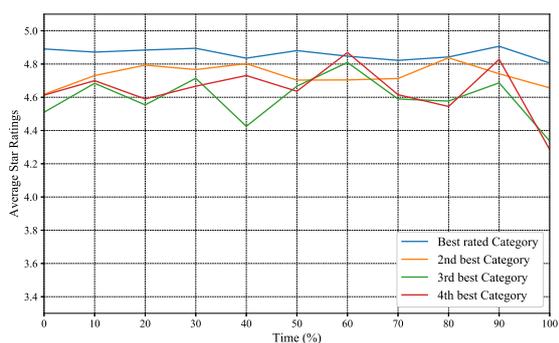


Figure 1: Average Star Ratings over Time for the Best Rated Provider-Category Combinations with at Least Three Reviews.

In the diagram in Figure 1, it can be seen that the best rated categories (blue line) have a considerably better start than the other categories. The second-, third- and fourth-best rated categories, however, mostly improve their ratings in the following periods. The second-best rated categories in form of the orange line reach star ratings close to the blue line and stay there, even touching the blue line at point 80. At the end, the second-best categories get poorer ratings again.

The third- and fourth-best rated categories raise and fall several times, especially at the end. For some reason, the ratings of the third-best categories (green) go from close to 4.5 stars at the beginning, to 4.8 stars after the middle, to less than 4.4 stars at the end. The fourth-best categories reach at some time points better average ratings than the third-best. Of course, the fourth-best rated categories consist of an average that combines every provider’s fourth-best rated category. Though, as indicated in Section 4.1, most providers do not have that many categories (3.52 on average). When there is a provider with four or more categories where the third-best rated has a rating of 4.4 stars and the fourth 4.2 stars while the next provider has 3.8 stars for his third-best rated category and there is no fourth category at all, the average rating of all the fourth-best rated categories is higher (4.2) than that of the third (4.1).

To conclude, the best rated category of every provider continues to perform well over time, while being stable, but performs slightly poorer than at the start. The distance between the best rated category and the rest is in general rather decreased than increased. These findings suggest that a provider has one or two best categories where he performs steadily well. While he here generally performs well, he has more unsteady ratings in the next best rated categories (third and fourth best). In general, the current Figure 1 shows that a provider seems to continue perform-

ing well over time spans in categories where he has received positive reviews before. One possible explanation for this is that a provider has several areas in which he excels, not only one.

Figure 1 was plotted for provider-category combinations with at least three reviews. It was assumed that these exclude such combinations that are less representative due to them having received a rating just once or twice. In order to provide a complete picture and possibly suggest further findings, there is an additional diagram for all combinations, even those with less than three reviews. It can be found in figure 2.

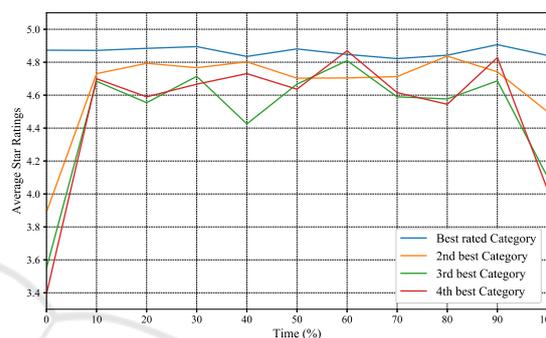


Figure 2: Average Star Ratings over Time for the Best Rated Provider-Category Combinations.

Figure 2 shows comparable line courses to Figure 1. A considerable contrast between the two Figures 1 and 2 is that the second-, third- and fourth-best categories, here as orange green and red lines, are more volatile. The beginning shows that they start much lower and increase their ratings to time point ten. In fact, they start partly as low as 3.4 stars on average, which is slightly over a neutral rating of circa 3.0 stars.

Figure 1 here answers Q1 equally as Figure 2 does, but further demonstrates that the number of ratings per provider-category combination can reveal important findings as well, because Figure 2 has got 4,663 reviews in the best rated category at time point zero, where 1 has over 500 reviews. The next research question deals with the most rated instead of the best rated categories.

4.3 Q2: Performance of the Most Rated Categories over Time

Q2 asks for an investigation of the most rated categories and their ratings over time. This is performed as it is not known whether many reviews and many positive reviews improve a provider’s sales. Figure 3 provides an overview of the data for this question.

Interestingly, all four lines in Figure 3 are close to each other. Furthermore, they seem to rotate around

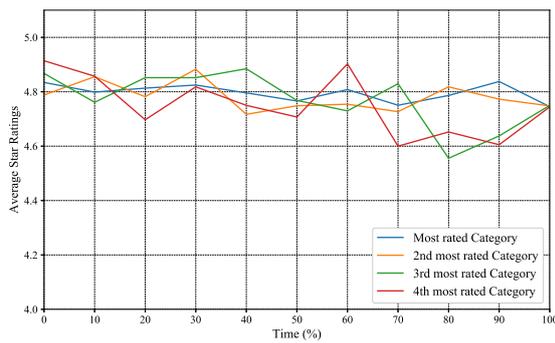


Figure 3: Average Star Ratings over Time for the Most Rated Provider-Category Combinations with at Least Three Reviews.

each other, as their average star ratings are volatile. The first finding to be made is that the most rated categories all have high average ratings.

This finding can especially be seen when comparing the lines in Figure 3 to the two Figures 1 and 2 from the previous Section. Even though the previous Section deals with the best rated categories, the most rated ones achieve in part better star ratings or at least comparable values.

That is, taking the data of this paper in consideration, Figure 3 demonstrates that most reviews, especially the most rated categories per provider, are strongly positive. At any rate, the picture in Figure 3 does not show a clear picture like other diagrams. The most rated categories, here in blue, do not outperform the others. Other categories such as the third-most rated even outperforms the most rated for several time intervals in a row, here between time points 20 and 40. All in all, the most rated categories have volatile ratings that may fluctuate around 0.3 stars maximum. The fluctuations seem to be stronger after half of the time, i.e. after time point 50. Overall, the average star ratings seem to decrease slightly over all time points. Generally, it can be stated that the most rated categories perform well over time spans. A possible explanation is that many reviews and many positive reviews enhance providers sales. Even scholars suggest that providers with many good reviews often can make more follow-up sales (Lin et al., 2016).

4.4 Q3: The Association of Best Rated Categories with About Me Texts

Q3 deals with the average star ratings of the best rated categories over time from the previous Section 4.2 in combination with the sentiment scores of the providers' About Me texts. That is, this Section aims at finding out how providers' best rated categories perform when viewing only those with positive or

negative sentiment scores of the providers' About Me texts.

Figure 4 shows the best rated categories over time with at least three reviews and negative About Me texts. Again, the best rated categories seem rather stable compared to the others. At any rate, the values here are much more volatile.

In this Section, the fourth-best rated categories were excluded due to too few values. The most rated categories showed comparable values to the best rated regarding the current topic and thus were excluded. If the sentiment Score of the About Me text is 0.5 positive or higher, it will be categorised as a positive text, otherwise as negative.

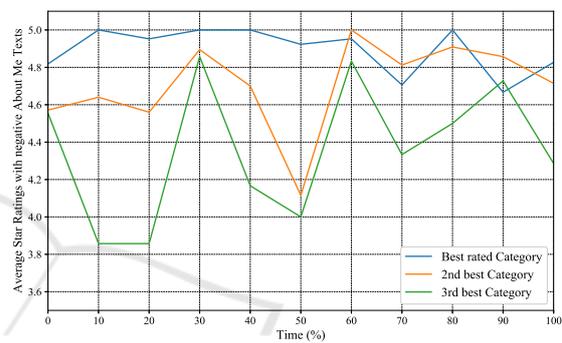


Figure 4: Average Star Ratings over Time for the Best Rated Provider-Category Combinations with at Least Three Reviews and Negative About Me Texts.

The values vary from about 3.8 stars on average to 5.0 stars. The best rated categories show with their blue line many high rated reviews reaching as high as 5.0 stars on average. The data set of the best rated categories was split into those with negative About Me texts and with positive texts, which can be found in Figure 5. Interestingly, the values here are still volatile, but not as much as in Figure 4. This figure does not differ too much in its appearance from Figure 1 in Section 4.2. Figure 5 has e.g. over 400 values at time point zero, while Figure 4 has slightly over 100.

When it comes to the best rated categories and the About Me texts' sentiment scores, the following general observation can be drawn: Those provider-category combinations whose provider has an About Me text with a negative sentiment have highly volatile average ratings. This high volatility partially comes from a low number of reviews. Even though all ratings are positive, some of them are comparatively low positive even reaching close to the neutral area of about 3.8 stars on average.

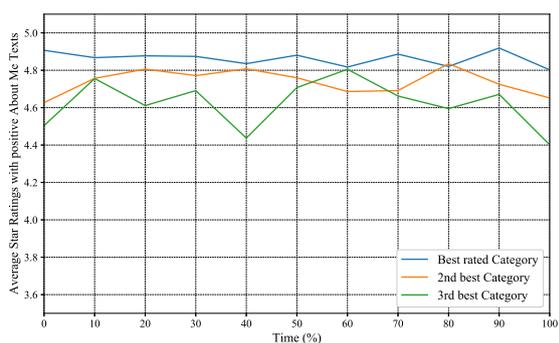


Figure 5: Average Star Ratings over Time for the Best Rated Provider-Category Combinations with at Least Three Reviews and Positive About Me Texts.

4.5 Q4: Quantitative Average Ratings and Average Sentiment Scores in Comparison

Q4 deals with a comparison of quantitative and qualitative ratings. In the introduction in Section 1, it was questioned whether average star ratings match the sentiment of the corresponding textual reviews. A possible scenario is a review that has five stars but where the reviews only addresses weaknesses of the provider’s performance in the text. However, this Section will answer the question of whether quantitative and qualitative ratings match.

Figure 6 presents a diagram with two y-axis. While the left y-axis presents the average star ratings of the best rated categories, the right y-axis presents the average sentiment score of the corresponding reviews. Only the positive sentiment scores are shown.

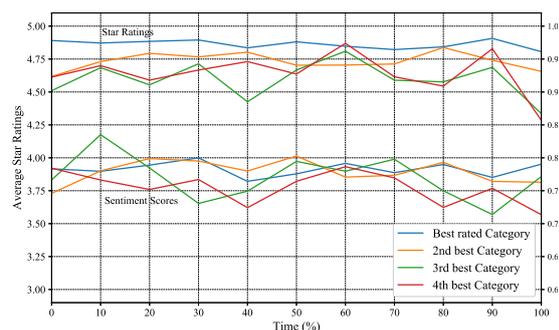


Figure 6: Average Star Ratings and Positive Sentiment Scores over Time for the Best Rated Provider-Category Combinations with at Least Three Reviews.

The lines in the upper part are known from Figure 1 (Q1). Underneath, there are the corresponding sentiment scores for which the y-axis is on the right with its measurement units.

It is the aim of this Section to generally clear whether well rated categories have review texts with positive sentiments. However, in general, one can see in Figure 6 that all well rated categories have comparatively good sentiment scores. With sentiment scores way over 70% and as high as 80%⁷, the best rated categories have very positively written review texts.

When taking a closer look at the lines’ courses in Figure 6, it is visible that the courses in the lower part are not the exact same but close to those in the upper part. For example, the blue lines are quite stable and do not show volatile values, though the lower blue line is fluctuating more than the upper one. At any rate, the sentiment lines are comparably high like the star lines in the upper half and therefore, Q4 can be answered positively. That is, quantitatively well rated providers receive reviews with good sentiments on average. This can possibly be explained by the idea that customers who rate very positively also write good comments just supporting the star rating.

4.6 Q5: Indications of the Number of Offered Services per Provider

This Section answers Q5. It is not known whether a provider’s number of offered services is associated with customer satisfaction and therefore reviews. It would be an interesting finding whether providers with few categories (specialization), for example, have very good ratings while those with several categories have less good ratings. However, to answer this research question, it is further worth taking a look at indications of the number of reviews per provider-category combination.

Figure 7 shows the average star ratings (y-axis) of providers who offer services in one, two etc. categories (x-axis) and who have received at least three reviews there. The axis labels in this figure show gaps, as there were e.g no providers having 26 – 38 categories, but one with 39 categories. Providers have on average 3.52 categories only.

As can be seen in Figure 7, the average star ratings of providers with different numbers of categories are volatile. No clear trend is discernible. At any rate, they are generally as high as 4.8 stars, a highly positive value. It is not observable that a provider with less categories has better ratings. This can possibly be explained by the fact that there seems to be no association between the number of offered services and customer satisfaction.

⁷However, such values are very high as many positive words have, according to SentiWordNet, even a certain negative score percentage.

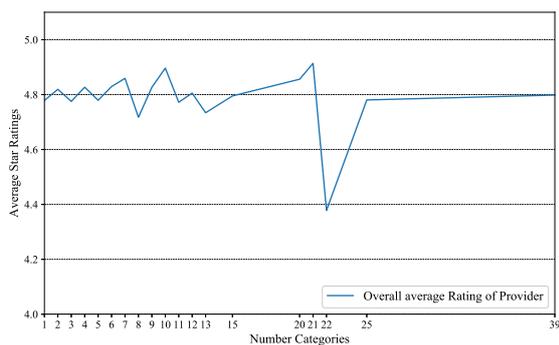


Figure 7: Average Star Ratings and Number of Categories per Provider with at Least Three Reviews.

5 CONCLUSION

This Section draws a conclusion about the present paper.

All aims of this paper have been reached as the five research questions were answered. Additionally, in order to ensure adequate results, different means of looking at the data like excluding categories with less than three reviews have been used. Further, several other ideas have been tested before deciding how and which data to use in this paper.

Amazon did not display all reviews of several categories with many ratings. Therefore, some categories were excluded from the investigation, which I regard as a limitation. Furthermore, the total number of reviews available on AHS, a few ten thousands of reviews, is generally quite low so far. After all, the presented foundations and related literature are satisfying in their scope and findings. As research so far has neglected local multi-service providers, this paper closes an important research gap whose findings can help develop a completer picture in areas such as customer review research, OLMs and online service providers. It is a surprising finding that even non-local service providers with multiple service categories have been studied little so far. It is further noticeable that local multi-service providers with good ratings perform, though the nature of their services is intangible and hardly comparable, almost equally well over time [Q1] (even though their ratings drop slightly). This can be caused by the fact that Amazon selects sellers eligible for selling on AHS and they may exclude poorly performers after some time.

Apart from the best rated categories, the most rated perform almost equally well over time [Q2]. A possible explanation is that many reviews and many positive reviews stimulate sales. Another is that many positive reviews encourage customers to float with the crowd and give rather positive reviews.

When taking a look at the introduction, this behaviour seems likely (reviews are either very positive or negative). However, providers with a negative sentiment in their About Me texts are not only scarcer but have highly volatile ratings compared to those with negative About Me texts [Q4]. Possibly, those provider who control their self-description and are engaged to provide a positive image are not only careful and quality-conscious with their self-description, but also with their work in general. Further, the qualitative and quantitative ratings match [Q4] and thus, the review texts match the star ratings. Interestingly, though multi-tasking is harmful as stated in the introduction, a higher number of offered services does not come with a poorer provider performance [Q5]. That is interesting as one might expect better ratings due to specialization in few categories.

What is more, is a self-developed sentiment analysis method was chosen as it performs well on reviews for multi-service providers. However, when dealing with a comparison of sentiment scores and quantitative star ratings, it arises a new question of an adequate matching between both scales.

In general, the data, analyses and findings presented here not only are satisfying but can also be further used for future research. Platform operators can benefit from the findings in this paper. They can gain an insight in how their platform compares to AHS and local multi-service providers. For research, another small part for the big picture is added.

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