

Differences in online reviews between different communities: An empirical study on Amazon and Goodreads

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SUMMARY

Many book buyers rely on online book reviews to make their purchase decisions, particularly the reviews on Amazon and Goodreads. However, multiple sources claim that there are notable differences between Goodreads and Amazon reviews, which can be confusing for readers. Here, we examined whether such differences exist between Amazon and Goodreads in average ratings and the number of raters, based on quantitative data. In addition, we investigated how these differences vary by book genre, specifically fiction and nonfiction. We hypothesized that 1) Goodreads has more ratings, or raters, than Amazon for the same book, 2) Goodreads has a lower rating for the same book, 3) the average difference of the number of raters between Goodreads and Amazon is larger for fiction books, and 4) the average rating difference between Goodreads and Amazon is larger for fiction books than nonfiction. We analyzed data collected from both online platforms, including ratings and number of raters of 400 books, with two-sample *t*-tests and regression analysis. We found that while ratings on Amazon were higher than those on Goodreads, the number of raters on Amazon was lower than those on Goodreads. Our findings suggest that the overall rating and rater differences between Amazon and Goodreads are significant. Additionally, our findings indicate that rating and rater differences are larger for fiction than nonfiction books. These findings will help buyers and practitioners in the book market correctly understand consumer reviews on online platforms and the potential quality of books.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) has been increasing for the last decade. Approximately 2.77 billion consumers buy on e-commerce platforms, generating \$6.01 trillion in industry revenue in 2024 (1). E-commerce revenue is expected to increase continuously and reach \$8.91 trillion in 2030 (1). One of the reasons for the rapid growth is electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM), which plays a critical role in determining product purchase on e-commerce platforms (2). Online reviews from previous consumers enable other consumers to evaluate products' potential quality and benefits as well as reduce uncertainty about the products they consider buying. However, online reviews often confuse consumers because they provide differing opinions about the products. This discrepancy is more profound between various online platforms, introducing significant confusion to potential consumers (3).

Amazon is a major shopping website used all over the world. It sells a variety of products, including books. Goodreads

is a branch of Amazon. It assists people in different ways, including recommending books based on what readers have read recently. It is also an online community where people connect over literature. When purchasing books, buyers rely primarily on Amazon and Goodreads for information, using these platforms to discover books recommended by others (4). According to a survey of 355 book readers, Amazon is the most widely used platform, chosen by 76% of readers, followed by Goodreads at 64% (5). This is reasonable, as Amazon dominates the online book retail market and provides extensive user reviews, while Goodreads maintains the largest community of users among dedicated book-review platforms (6, 7). However, existing literature claims that there is a notable difference between Goodreads and Amazon book reviews in average ratings and the number of raters (8, 9). For instance, the book *Sixth Grade Alien* has a rating of 4.7/5.0 on Amazon, while it has 3.6/5.0 on Goodreads. This discrepancy likely causes confusion, given that a rating over 4.5 has been found to highly encourage consumers to buy, while a rating below 4.0 has been shown to strongly discourage readers from buying (10).

We investigated online review discrepancies between different e-commerce platforms using online review data collected from Amazon and Goodreads, the two most popular online book review platforms (4, 5). Particularly, we examined whether there are significant differences in the average ratings in the five-star rating system and the number of reviewers who have rated a book (hereafter, rater number) between Goodreads and Amazon as well as whether these differences differ by other factors, such as book genre. First, we hypothesized that Goodreads would have more raters than Amazon for any given book (*Hypothesis 1*). On Amazon, to leave a review, reviewers must first buy the book on Amazon, while they may leave a review on Goodreads if they have read the book by any means. Due to such fewer requirements to leave ratings on Goodreads than Amazon, Goodreads would likely have more raters. We also hypothesized that the Goodreads rating for a given book would be lower than the Amazon rating (*Hypothesis 2*), as the primary users of Goodreads tend to be heavy book-readers with higher standards and knowledge and are therefore more likely to leave lower ratings (11). Thirdly, we hypothesized that the average difference in raters between Goodreads and Amazon would be larger for fiction books (*Hypothesis 3*). In terms of the difference in reader age groups, the main readers of nonfiction books are adults who can share their opinions on Amazon. In contrast, although children are more likely to consume fiction books, they may be less likely to contribute reviews on Amazon because their parents are usually the actual purchasers of the books (12, 13). In addition to platform-

level differences in rater counts, differences in the primary reader groups across genres would further amplify the rater number gap between two platforms for non-fiction books. Likewise, we hypothesized that the average rating difference between Goodreads and Amazon would be larger for fiction books (*Hypothesis 4*). This is because young consumers, who generally prefer fiction books over non-fiction titles, tend to have lower expectations of product quality, causing them to leave more generous reviews with higher ratings (14). Consequently, the combined effects of platform- and genre-level differences in reviewers would lead to larger average rating disparities between the two platforms for fiction books. To test the hypotheses proposed, we analyzed the aggregated data from Goodreads and Amazon with a two-tailed, two-sample *t*-test and multivariate regression. We found that Goodreads had 59642.13 more raters and 0.51 lower average rating per review, supporting Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, respectively. These findings suggest that while consumers favor sharing their opinions on topic-specific platforms such as Goodreads, they tend to apply stricter standards when evaluating products. Regarding their differences by book genres, the rater number difference between Goodreads and Amazon is larger for fiction books by 290.18 raters, while the rating difference between the platforms is larger for fiction books by 0.18 in terms of five-star ratings, corresponding to the predictions of Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4. We attribute these differences to the combined effects of platform differences and different reader groups by book genres. In combination with future work exploring different product categories and rater demographics and motivations, these results contribute to a deeper understanding among consumers and industry practitioners of how review patterns vary between the two book review platforms, thereby supporting more informed decisions in the e-commerce book marketplace.

RESULTS

Overall differences between Amazon and Goodreads

We manually collected the ratings and number of raters who posted a book review on Amazon and Goodreads for 400 books, which were selected based on book genre (fiction and nonfiction). We used a two-tailed, two-sample *t*-test to determine whether the number of reviews and the average ratings differed between Amazon and Goodreads, as well

as whether the magnitude of any observed difference was larger for fiction compared to nonfiction. In addition, we used a multivariate regression to verify the test results.

We observed that books on Goodreads received more ratings than those on Amazon. Books on Goodreads had an average of 63271.43 raters (SD = 277088.16, *n* = 200), where SD is the standard deviation and *n* is the number of books examined (**Table 1**). In contrast, the books on Amazon had an average of 3629.3 raters (SD = 8816.80, *n* = 200), which was 59642.13 fewer raters (**Table 1**; *t* = 3.04, *p* < 0.01). The results indicated that the difference was statistically significant at the 99% confidence level, which supports Hypothesis 1. In terms of ratings, we found that books on Goodreads had lower ratings than Amazon. Specifically, books on Goodreads had an average rating of 4.12 (SD = 0.30, *n* = 200), while those on Amazon had 4.63 (SD = 0.18, *n* = 200), which was greater by 0.51 in terms of the five-star rating system (**Table 1**; *t* = 20.6, *p* < 0.01). Most Amazon ratings were above 4.4, while Goodreads ratings were between 3 and 4.4 (**Figure 1A**). This indicated that Amazon reviewers tend to leave a higher rating than those on Goodreads. Specifically, most Amazon ratings were between 4.6 and 4.8, while Goodreads ratings were mostly between 4.0 and 4.2 (**Figure 1B**). These findings resonated with Hypothesis 2, predicting a higher review rating on Amazon.

To check the robustness of the results from two-sample *t*-tests, we conducted additional multivariate regression tests assessing whether a review published on Goodreads differs significantly in the number of raters or ratings (**Table 2**). For Hypothesis 1, we tested the relationship between the presence of a review on Goodreads and the number of raters, controlling for variables known to impact review statistics, including rating, book age, and its status as a fiction book, cartoon, or teacher's pick (15). The coefficient associated with whether a review on Goodreads has more raters was positive (75549.52) and statistically significant at the 99% confidence level (*p* < 0.01), which supported Hypothesis 1 (**Table 2**). To test whether a review on Goodreads tends to have a lower rating as posited in Hypothesis 2, we controlled for the number of raters as well as the book age and its status as a fiction book, cartoon, or teacher's pick (**Table 2**). Hypothesis 2 was also supported as the coefficient was negative (-0.50184) and statistically significant at the 99% level (*p* < 0.01), indicating lower ratings of Goodreads reviews than those of Amazon

Comparison	Rater Number		Rating	
	Amazon	Goodreads	Amazon	Goodreads
Average	3629.30	63271.43	4.63	4.12
Standard Deviation	8816.80	277088.16	0.18	0.30
Two-sample t-test				
<i>t</i> -value	3.04		20.6	
<i>p</i> -value	< 0.01		< 0.01	

Table 1. Overall rater and rating difference between Amazon and Goodreads. The averages and standard deviations of rater numbers and ratings for 400 books were calculated from the dataset collected from Goodreads and Amazon. Using two-tailed, two-sample *t*-test, the differences in both rater number and ratings between the two platforms were found to be statistically significant at the 99% confidence level (*p* < 0.01).

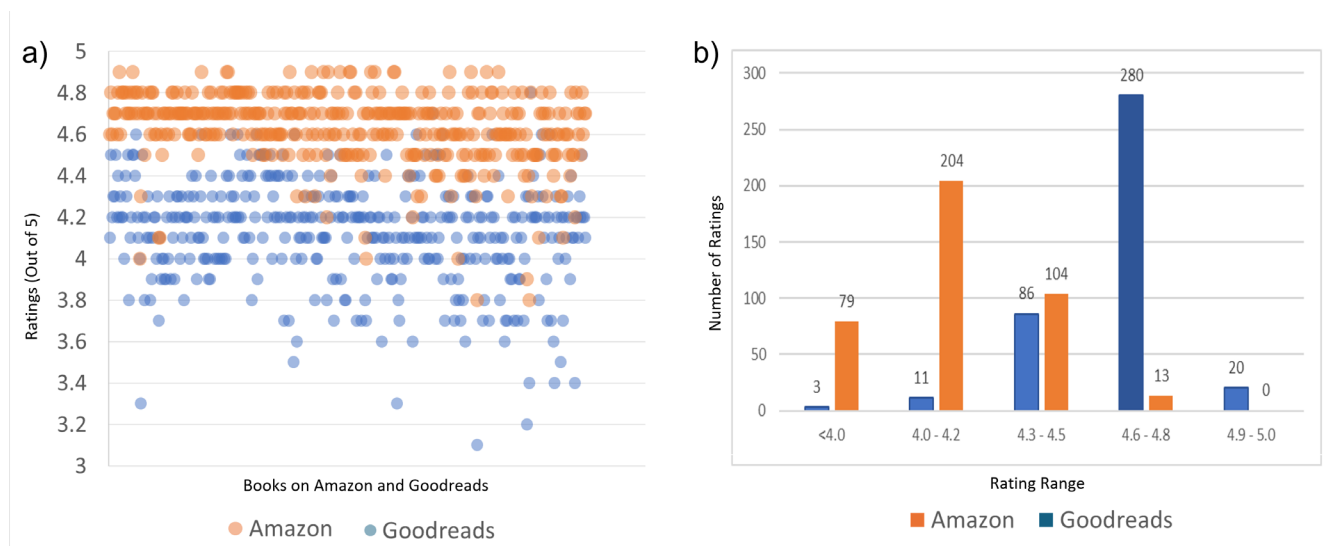


Figure 1. Distribution of ratings. Figures 1a and 1b show the distribution of ratings on Amazon and Goodreads. a) Scatter plot illustrates that the distribution of ratings on Amazon (orange) is higher than that of Goodreads (blue) for 400 books, including both fiction and nonfiction. The books are arranged in an arbitrary sequence along the x-axis. b) Histogram demonstrates that Amazon ratings peak between 4.6 and 4.8 stars, while Goodreads ratings peak between 4.0 and 4.2 stars.

Independent Variable	Dependent: Rater (H1)		Independent Variable	Dependent: Rating (H2)	
	Coefficient	p-value		Coefficient	p-value
Goodreads	75549.52	< 0.01	Goodreads	-0.501840	< 0.01
Control Variables			Control Variables		
Rating	31846.61	0.32	Rater Number	0.000001	0.32
Book Age	6.33	< 0.01	Book Age	-0.000003	0.25
Fiction	37649.47	< 0.01	Fiction	0.008546	0.58
Cartoon	-28991.74	0.04	Cartoon	0.023342	0.14
Teacher's Pick	21035.84	0.15	Teacher's Pick	0.097895	< 0.01

Table 2. Multivariate regression results for overall rater and rating difference between Amazon and Goodreads. Multivariate regression tests including Goodreads as an independent variable, as well as relevant control variables, were performed using the data for 400 books. The positive and significant coefficient of Goodreads for the dependent variable, Rater (75549.52, $p < 0.01$) suggested more raters on Goodreads, while the negative and significant coefficient of Goodreads for the dependent, Rating (-0.50184, $p < 0.01$) indicated lower ratings on Goodreads. In the model testing Hypothesis 1, the control variables including Book Age and Cartoon were statistically significant at the 99% confidence level, while Cartoon and Teacher's Pick were so in the model testing Hypothesis 2.

(Table 2). These results were consistent with those from the two-sample *t*-tests, confirming the robustness of the results.

Differences between Amazon and Goodreads by fiction and nonfiction

To examine whether book genres affect rater number and rating differences between the two platforms, we compared the difference in the number of raters and the ratings given between fiction and nonfiction books using a two-sample *t*-test. We found that the average rater number difference between Amazon and Goodreads was larger for fiction books than nonfiction books. The average rater number difference between the two platforms for fiction was 70101.50 (SD = 30914.89, $n = 200$), while the difference in nonfiction was 19771.25 (SD = 6374.29, $n = 200$) (Table 3). This indicated that the rater number difference was larger for fiction books

by 50330.25. The difference was statistically significant at the 99% confidence level, lending support to Hypothesis 3 (Table 3; $t = 22.55$, $p < 0.01$). Similar to the number of ratings, the difference between Amazon and Goodreads ratings for fiction was significantly higher than the difference for nonfiction (Table 3; $t = 37.95$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, the difference between the two platforms for fiction ratings was 0.59 (SD = 0.06, $n = 200$), while the average for nonfiction was 0.41 (SD = 0.03, $n = 200$) (Table 3). This demonstrates a larger rating difference in fiction books by 0.18.

Similarly, we performed multivariate regression tests to check the robustness of the findings from two-sample *t*-tests. The coefficient pertaining to whether the average difference in raters between Goodreads and Amazon is larger for fiction books was positive (75706.60) and statistically significant at the 99% confidence level ($p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis

Comparison	Rater Number Difference by Book Genre		Rating Difference by Book Genre	
	Fiction	Nonfiction	Fiction	Nonfiction
Average	70101.50	19771.25	0.59	0.41
Standard Deviation	30914.89	6374.29	0.06	0.03
Two Sample t-test				
t-value	22.55		37.95	
p-value	< 0.01		< 0.01	

Table 3. Rater and rating difference between fiction and nonfiction. The average and standard deviations of the differences in rater number and ratings for 400 books were calculated from the dataset collected from Goodreads and Amazon. The rater number difference between Goodreads and Amazon was larger for fiction books by 50330.25. The rating difference was also larger for fictions book by 0.18. Both differences were found to be statistically significant at the 99% confidence level in a two tailed, two-sample t-test.

3 (Table 4). Hypothesis 4 was also supported because the coefficient associated with whether the average rating difference between Goodreads and Amazon is greater for fiction books was positive (0.041410) and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), which indicated that rating differences between Amazon and Goodreads were higher for fiction books. The results align with those of the two-sample t-test, indicating that the results were robust.

DISCUSSION

This study explored cross-platform differences in user evaluations of books on Amazon and Goodreads. To understand the differences, we tested four hypotheses: first, that books receive a greater volume of raters on Goodreads than on Amazon; second, that average ratings are generally lower on Goodreads; third, that disparities in the number of raters across the two platforms are more pronounced for fiction books; and fourth, that fiction books also exhibit larger differences in average ratings than nonfiction ones. Using data on ratings and number of raters for 400 books collected from both platforms, we conducted two-sample t-tests and regression analyses. The results provided support for all four hypotheses.

For Hypothesis 1, the analysis result for overall rater number difference indicates that Goodreads has more raters for books (Table 1). The difference may have occurred because raters need to meet fewer requirements to leave a review on Goodreads than they do on Amazon. On Amazon, reviewers need to buy a book to leave a review about it. In contrast, they can leave a review on Goodreads if they have read the book by any means and would like to share their opinions. Therefore, Goodreads would tend to have a greater rater number for the same book. For consumers and practitioners in the book market, this result suggests that consumers may prefer posting their reviews on online platforms specialized for a specific topic, which is Goodreads in this study. Therefore, practitioners in the book industry, including sellers, publishers, and authors, may need to pay more attention to such platforms to understand more diverse feedback from book readers, rather than simply relying on a general e-commerce platforms like Amazon.

The analysis result for Hypothesis 2 illustrates that Goodreads users tend to leave lower ratings than Amazon users (Table 1). This difference may have happened because the primary users of Goodreads tend to be serious book

readers, who generally have higher standards and knowledge and would therefore be more likely to rate more harshly (16). This finding aligns with those of a previous study, which found that the knowledge level, expertise, and experience of consumers negatively impacted their evaluation of products (13). This finding also suggests a greater presence of paid reviewers and bots on Amazon who leave extremely positive ratings because Amazon allows anonymity while Goodreads displays detailed profiles of reviewers, including reading histories, friends, and activities (17). This finding indicates that serious reviewers with higher expectations, who are Goodreads reviewers in this research, tend to give lower ratings. Book buyers and sellers need to consider this tendency when assessing reviews on online platforms to correctly understand the potential quality of books.

Support of Hypothesis 3 suggests the rater number difference between Amazon and Goodreads is larger for fiction books than nonfiction books (Table 3). This difference may have occurred because the readers of fiction books tend to be younger than nonfiction readers (12, 18). On Amazon, teens are less likely to leave a review because age requirements hinder them, and young adults are less likely to leave reviews in general (16, 19). On Goodreads, because the age requirement is lower than on Amazon, all teens are allowed to leave ratings (20). In addition, young Goodreads users may actively leave reviews on fiction books to support their favorite books and authors, which may also increase the number of fiction raters on Goodreads (21). In contrast to fiction, the main readers of nonfiction books are older adults who do not have any age restrictions in accessing review platforms (22). Older book readers are more likely to share their opinions on online review communities regardless of platform, which may explain the smaller rater number difference between Amazon and Goodreads for nonfiction books (13). For book sellers, this result suggests that the less mature reviewers, who are more heavily represented in the reviewers of fiction books, may provide more positive feedback than mature reviewers. Therefore, the practitioners need to consider the review tendency of users on different platforms to understand their reviews correctly.

The result for Hypothesis 4 suggests that rating difference between the two platforms is larger for fiction books (Table 3). This difference potentially happened because the main readers of fiction books tend to be children and young adults (12, 18). Because younger consumers tend to have lower

Independent Variable	Dependent: Rater Difference in Fiction (H3)		Independent Variable	Dependent: Rating Difference in Fiction (H4)	
	Coefficient	p-value		Coefficient	p-value
Fiction	75706.60	< 0.01	Fiction	0.041410	< 0.01
Control Variables			Control Variables		
Rating Difference	-73081.43	0.22	Rater Difference	0.000001	0.21
Book Age	13.06	< 0.01	Book Age	0.000010	0.01
Cartoon	-47338.69	0.09	Cartoon	0.042402	0.07
Teacher's Pick	43779.58	0.12	Teacher's Pick	-0.018938	0.42

Table 4. Regression results for higher rater and rating differences for fiction. Multivariate regression tests, including Fiction as an independent variable, were performed using the data for 400 books. Given the positive and significant coefficient of Fiction for the dependent variable, Rater Difference (75706.60, $p < 0.01$), rater difference was found to be larger for fiction books. Similarly, the positive and significant coefficient of Fiction (0.041410, $p < 0.01$) for the dependent, Rating Difference indicated higher rating differences in fiction books between Goodreads and Amazon. In the model testing Hypothesis 3, the control variables including Fiction and Book Age were statistically significant at the 99% confidence level, while Fiction was so in the model testing Hypothesis 2.

quality expectations due to limited consumption experience, they are more likely to leave generous reviews with higher ratings in online review contexts (14). Furthermore, fiction book readers typically read for fun or joy (23). As a result, fiction readers tend to feel more positive emotions after reading a book, which can amplify the generosity of their reviews. In addition to the reader differences by book genres, Goodreads reviewers tend to be more experienced and serious reviewers, who are likely to leave less generous reviews (14, 21). The combined influence of platform-level and genre-specific differences among reviewers would result in greater average rating discrepancies between the two platforms for fiction books. More specifically, Amazon ratings for fiction books tend to be more positive than Goodreads ratings for the same books. Therefore, book sellers and buyers should recognize that rating differences across platforms may be more pronounced for fiction books than for non-fiction titles when interpreting readers' perceived book quality from the ratings.

As with other studies, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis results are based on the broad categories of fiction and nonfiction books on Amazon and Goodreads. Therefore, the findings of this study may be different for other specific genres of books, including the more than 80 categories listed on Amazon. Second, the sample size used for this study is relatively limited given the number of books available on the two platforms, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings. Future studies may employ a more comprehensive dataset, incorporating a larger sample of online review data across a wider range of book genres, to further validate the findings of this study. Third, regarding the differences in the average ratings and rater numbers by fiction and nonfiction books, the findings may require further research to verify whether the differences occurred due to the different tendencies of young and old consumers. Due to the lack of demographic data indicating the age of reviewers by book genre, we could not verify the effect of reviewer age on rating tendency. Future research may examine how online reviewing behaviors vary across age demographics by conducting surveys or interviews with book readers.

Fourth, although the two platforms are independent, it is possible that some reviewers submitted reviews on both. Future research may consider this possibility to investigate differences in ratings and the number of raters between the two platforms. Lastly, online book ratings on Amazon are often affected by non-content related factors, such as delivery and package quality, while those on Goodreads are mostly about book contents. However, this study could not account for this difference in comparing ratings on the two platforms. Future research may utilize text analytics to exclude such an influence and compare rating differences between the two platforms.

This study investigated the differences in ratings and rater numbers between Goodreads and Amazon, adopting 400 book review data collected from the websites. Based on two-sample *t*-tests and multivariate regressions, this study identified significant differences in ratings and raters between the two platforms. Additionally, it found that the differences are more substantial between fiction and non-fiction books. The overall findings suggest that online consumers including book buyers need to understand such discrepancies when evaluating the potential quality of products in their consideration set, ensuring an apple-to-apple comparison. The findings also suggest that researchers investigating online reviews should consider such potential differences when using data collected from diverse review platforms. For instance, they should not integrate online review data from multiple sources for analysis, which can lead to a misunderstanding of online review dynamics. In sum, these findings emphasize that consumers, sellers, and researchers should account for platform- and book genre-based variations in online reviews to ensure valid book assessments and research conclusions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data collection

Data from specific genres of books was manually collected from Goodreads and Amazon from 5/25/24 to 6/17/24. Information for each book was carefully inspected on Amazon before inclusion in the dataset to ensure its relevance to this research. The variables assessed include book rating, the

number of ratings per book, book publishing date (book age), and book genre (e.g., fiction/nonfiction, cartoon/non-cartoon). Books for data collection were selected from the first page of each category (genre) on Amazon and then matching books and their reviews were found on Goodreads. This approach ensured the representativeness of books within each genre, while ensuring sufficient rater numbers to construct reliable average ratings. Data for 200 fiction and 200 nonfiction books were collected to ensure fair comparison. In total, 400 data samples were collected for this research.

Statistical analyses

A two tailed, two-sample *t*-test was performed to test the proposed hypotheses. This is one of the most popular approaches to test whether an average difference between groups is statistically significant. The data constructed for this study is appropriate for the *t*-test, as the two groups being compared are independent, approximately balanced in size, and exhibit patterns consistent with normality. In this study, the average and standard deviation of raters and ratings were calculated for books collected from Amazon and Goodreads. The averages and standard deviations were used to estimate *t*-values and *p*-values for testing the hypotheses using the equation below (Equation 1, 24). In the equation, *x* denotes average, *s* stands for standard deviation, and *n* is the number of observations in the sample.

$$t = \frac{(x_1 - x_2)}{\sqrt{\frac{(s_1)^2}{n_1} + \frac{(s_2)^2}{n_2}}} \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

For Hypotheses 1 and 2 regarding rating differences between Goodreads and Amazon, 200 reviews from each platform were directly compared to test the hypotheses. For Hypotheses 3 and 4, random sampling was performed to create 50 sets of 50 values out of 200 observations for rating and rater number differences. First, the averages of the randomly-sampled 50 sets were calculated, and then, the average of the sets' averages and standard deviations were calculated. These estimated values were used to test Hypotheses 3 and 4. Support for the hypotheses was determined using a 99% confidence level ($p < 0.01$).

To verify the hypothesis test results, multivariate regression analysis was performed. A multivariate regression generally provides more robust analysis results than a two-sample *t*-test as it can include other control variables that can potentially affect the dependent variable, which is not allowed in a two-sample *t*-test. The regression models for Hypotheses 1 and 2 include the control variables Rating, Raters, Book Age, Fiction, Cartoon, and Teacher's Pick (**Table 2**), whereas those for Hypotheses 3 and 4 include Rating Difference, Rater Difference, Book Age, Cartoon, and Teacher's Pick (**Table 4**). We selected the controls regarding book genres due to their potential effects on ratings and rater numbers of online reviews (15).

Microsoft Excel was used to collect, construct, analyze, and visualize data. The manually collected data were inputted into an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed using Pivot tables and functions for descriptive statistics, two-sample *t*-tests, and multivariate regressions. Visualized materials in this manuscript were created using Excel's scatter chart and bar chart functionality.

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