



Zero Stars

Description

The ubiquitous star ratings that accompany listings of hotels, books, films, restaurants, apps and blogs reveal the human propensity constantly to evaluate the world, and to share our opinions with others.

Anyone can rate a product by scoring it from 1 to 5, though of course not everyone does, and there are unaccounted biases. Though random and malicious ratings are usually filtered out, the rating process is open to manipulation, including by friends and supporters of the product under scrutiny, as well as its rivals.



Proprietor-defined star rating at toilets,
Chott el Jerid, Tunisia

Star ratings usually exist in consort with supporting text, ie reviews. As every iPhone user knows, app star ratings and their reviews might be out of date, applying to a state of the product prior to its latest (improved) release. In a different sphere, thanks to customer reviews, many B&B owners have to suffer the indeterminately enduring consequences of a missing bathplug or soiled carpet. See [Trip Advisor](#).

Star ratings were first popularised in the Michelin tourist guides in the 1930s, in which company appointed experts decided ratings according to criteria. Now of course anyone can proffer their assessment. Unlike early restaurant and theatre guides, online star ratings are regularly summated and averaged, in the manner of a vote. We are more likely to trust an average than the single opinion of a

random and unaccountable source. Products get compared and listed according to such ratings.

Some aggregator sites such as www.rottentomatoes.com present ratings from multiple sources, expert and amateur, leaving it to the reader to assess ratings and accompanying reviews. Tactics emerge for evaluating the status and track record of reviewers. For example, you can check the performance of [Amazon](#) reviewers across a range of reviews and thereby test their biases.

The field of star ratings is subject to the vicissitudes of a nested cycle of interpretations. Not only do thoughtful consumers evaluate products, but they also evaluate those who do the evaluating.

Online star ratings also produce some interesting side effects. Not least is the dominant category of 'zero stars'. [West End Whingers](#) have a website dedicated to the lowest rated London theatre productions. But there are also those hotels, books, films, restaurants, apps and blogs that have no ratings at all, even though such evaluations are invited. Not all things of value are assessed by opinion polls. Some objects, events, services and systems pass unnoticed. Some are circulated within communities that are more circumspect about summarising their opinions as a single figure score. There's a certain fixity to star ratings that denies the dynamism of more sophisticated modes of judgement and interpretation.

References

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