

**Exploring the Impacts of Ratemyprofessor.com on Higher Education: A
Literature Review**

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Abstract

This literature review explores the multifaceted role of RateMyProfesor.com in shaping the perceptions and actions of students and teachers in higher education. The objective of this review is to gain a deeper understanding of the platform, evaluate its tangible impacts on students and teachers, and potentially identify strategies for improving its effectiveness as an educational tool. Findings reveal that RateMyProfessor's widespread usage amongst students plays a moderate role in shaping perceptions, academic decision-making, and course selection. One study highlights how online reviews present on RateMyProfessor are capable of shaping students' self-efficacy, perceived control, anticipated grades, and expectations of the course environment, often setting a precedent before even stepping foot in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers with positive reviews have the potential to heighten students' expectations of success, resulting in increased engagement and classroom performance. On the contrary, exposure to negative reviews may dampen these expectations and lead to poorer performance and engagement. To one extreme, an article revealed that even a single negative comment has the potential to shift students' perceptions despite an overall positive rating held by a professor. This impact extends to professors as well; despite a significant preference for formal university evaluations, professors are equally influenced by their RateMyProfessor ratings. Reviews on RateMyProfessor have the ability to alter a teachers sense of professional competence and teaching methodologies. Long term effects could be detrimental to pedagogical choices. The dual effect on teachers and students underscores the need for a balanced approach to student feedback systems. In light of the sources reviewed, this paper suggests enhancements to RateMyProfessor, primarily focusing on refining its feedback mechanism. As we conclude, we emphasize the continued need for additional research into the role these platforms play in educational quality.

Introduction

The rise of the digital era has transformed many facets of everyday life, including social interactions, online businesses, telemedicine, entertainment, and notably, education. Higher education has seen a noticeable shift with the rise of online platforms that aim to augment traditional learning mechanisms and tools. In particular, RateMyProfessor.com has emerged as a pivotal tool in shaping this landscape, influencing not only how students navigate their academic journey but also how educators adapt their teaching practices.

RateMyProfessor is more than a mere outlet for disgruntled students. The platform serves as one of the most widely used tools for student feedback on professors and schools. It has the potential to influence both the classes students choose to take, and the way teachers receive feedback, potentially altering pedagogical choices over time. The platform's extensive scale and sustained use underscore the ongoing necessity for more educational tools in academia. Understanding the reach and impact of RateMyProfessor is vital for informing educational policies, guiding the development of newer, improved tools for students and teachers, and enriching the overall academic environment.

This literature review seeks to explore the consequential impacts of RateMyProfessor.com within higher education, focusing particularly on the behaviors, actions, and perceptions of students and educators. We will explore the existing literature on how the platform influences student and teachers decisions and outcomes in and out of the classroom and learning environment. We will also aim to identify potential strategies to enhance its effectiveness as an educational tool. Lastly, we aim to highlight areas where further research is necessary. The hypothesis underpinning this review asserts that RateMyProfessor, due to its extensive reach and influence within higher education, impacts both students and educators in a multitudes of ways. This review aims to uncover specific areas of the platform that, if enhanced, could lead to better outcomes and impacts for both students and educators.

Overview of RateMyProfessor.com

RateMyProfessor is a website that has been around since 1999. It has long been the leading public platform for students to anonymously leave reviews about their college professors. Many competitors have come and gone, yet RateMyProfessor has stood the test of time. RateMyProfessor enables any registered user to submit reviews for professors or schools. Users can share comments and rate various aspects, including the difficulty level of a professor's course and their overall teaching quality. Similarly, users can evaluate specific facets of schools, such as social life and academic opportunities. Each metric rated on a 5-point scale.

While educators might use RateMyProfessor to gain insights into their teaching practice, the platform is predominantly catered towards students. According to the website's guidelines, their mission is clearly stated as: "providing a safe forum to share classroom experiences to help fellow students make critical education choices." This observation is further supported by the general layout of the platform, which more closely mirrors a product review page than a pedagogical tool for educators to enhance their teaching methods and student engagement strategies.

Despite RateMyProfessors' continued popularity, its ability to be an effective measure of teacher effectiveness has long been contested by researchers Rosen (2018). This skepticism could stem from the platform's lack of mechanisms for verifying student class enrollment, time the class was taken, or even university affiliation. Moreover, the anonymous nature of the platform's online reporting system leaves it susceptible to a wide range of biases.

Regardless of the limitations of RateMyProfessor, its vast amount of publicly available data – encompassing over two million professor profiles, nearly 8000 schools, and tens of millions of reviews – has long-drawn the attention of researchers seeking to understand student perceptions in academia. This stands in contrast to formal university evaluations, which, due to privacy and institutional guidelines, are often challenging to acquire or inaccessible for research purposes.

The considerable scale of the platform, coupled with its long-standing presence in the academic landscape, makes RateMyProfessor a particularly worthwhile subject for exploration. Investigating these aspects is crucial for gaining insights into how we can develop a more effective and beneficial tool for both students and teachers in higher education.

Review of Literature

In the following section, our review of literature will explore the array of research that has been conducted around RateMyProfessor. Our objective is to uncover recurring themes and significant findings from these studies over the years. We aim to explore several facets of this topic in our review: the platform's influence on educators and their pedagogical methods, its sway over students' course and instructor selections, and the subtle ways it impacts both student and educator self-efficacy.

Setting the scope of our analysis, we narrow our focus to the influence that RateMyProfessor exerts on academia rather than its validity as an evaluation tool. As highlighted by Rosen (2018), experts opinions about RateMyProfessor's accuracy in assessing teaching effectiveness vary widely. Despite the varied opinions on review credibility, research overwhelmingly demonstrates that these evaluations significantly influence our academic environment.

Given this context, it is important to clarify our investigation's focus within the broader discourse around RateMyProfessor. This review intentionally omits an exploration of literature around the platform's review validity, ability to measure teaching effectiveness, or potential biases inherent in its reviews (see for example, Reid (2010), Hartman and Hunt (2013), Azab, Mihalcea, and Abernethy (2016), Boring (2017), Rosen (2018), Baker (2019), and Gordon and Alam (2021)). While this perspective is crucial to comprehend what students value in an educator and how they evaluate them, it does not directly highlight the shift in choices and actions in academia as a result of those reviews. Numerous studies emphasize that despite differing views on review credibility or potential bias, the platform's

effects are significant, measurable, and have instigated shifts in decision-making patterns amongst students and educators alike Johnson et al. (2014), Boswell (2016), and Boswell (2020).

Consequently, this review's primary goal is to understand the concrete impacts of RateMyProfessor.com on students' and educators' behavior, rather than dissecting the platform's validity, reliability, or review biases. Thus, we narrow our scope to scrutinize existing literature on tangible shifts in the academic landscape that can be attributed to RateMyProfessor.

In acknowledging the limitations and challenges observed in the reviewed studies, we hope to highlight avenues for more robust and nuanced investigations in the future. It is our expectation that by presenting a comprehensive overview of these aspects and revealing uncharted areas of research, we can bring greater clarity to the complex role RateMyProfessor plays within academia and effectively guide future explorations.

Student Engagement with RateMyProfessor

Numerous studies have consistently highlighted the widespread usage of RateMyProfessor amongst students. A 2009 study by Davison and Price (2009) surveyed 216 students, revealing that 92% were aware of RateMyProfessor, 80% had visited the site more than once, and a notable 95% deemed it a credible source of information. Further supporting these findings, Bleske-Rechek and Michels (2010) showed that amongst their survey of 208 respondents, 84% of students had visited the site and 23% had posted a review. More recently, a study conducted by Chiang (2017) with 166 students from a marketing class demonstrated the continued usage of RateMyProfessor: 84.4% of these students had visited the site within the past two years, and nearly a quarter (24.6%) had actively participated by posting ratings. It is clear from these samples that RateMyProfessor has not only drawn the interest of students, but continued to maintain its popularity throughout the years since its launch.

RateMyProfessor as a Decision-making Tool

The high prevalence of RateMyProfessor usage has encouraged researchers to investigate how this platform impacts academic decisions, notably course selection. Evidence from a survey involving 73 participants, as indicated by Boswell (2020), reveals that students' enrollment decisions can be significantly influenced by exposure to university SETs (Student Evaluations of Teaching) or RateMyProfessor evaluations equally. This base is further strengthened by research from Orlova et al. (2021), which found that student preferences for specific classes are subject to change based on either positive or negative RateMyProfessor evaluations. Reinforcing this idea, another study by Johnson et al. (2014) demonstrated a positive correlation between professor ratings and course enrollment. Collectively these studies suggest that RateMyProfessor plays a moderate role in shaping academic decisions.

Effect of Ratemyprofessor on Student Self-efficacy and Perceptions

The influence of professor ratings on students has the potential to shape their classroom experience before it has even started. Not only do these ratings guide course selection, but they also mold students' expectations about their potential success within a class. For instance, Boswell (2020) found that evaluations, be they positive or negative, have a profound impact on students' self-efficacy. This in turn affects their confidence in grasping the course material and meeting expected learning outcomes. A similar sentiment is echoed by Kowai-Bell et al. (2011), who demonstrated that evaluations from RateMyProfessor notably influence students' perceived control, grade expectations, and overall attitude toward the class.

Revealing the importance of these ratings further, Scherr, Müller, and Fast (2013) emphasized how even a solitary negative comment on RateMyProfessor can dramatically alter students' perception of the course environment, even if other ratings are predominantly positive. This demonstrates the potent power of online reviews in shaping student perspectives, which can then ripple into their academic performance, course choices, and overall contentment with their education.

Building on this, Reber, Ridge, and Downs (2017) discovered that students exposed to positive evaluations not only reported higher engagement in their classes but also better performance as compared to their counterparts who encountered negative reviews. This suggests a self-fulfilling prophecy at play: students who encounter positive evaluations develop a heightened sense of confidence and engagement, leading to superior academic outcomes.

Effect of RateMyProfessor on Teacher Self-efficacy

The impact of RateMyProfessor is not confined to students alone; it also presents implications for teacher as well. Even though professors often view university SETs as a more accurate form of evaluation compared to RateMyProfessor evaluations, they are still significantly influenced by the latter, despite perceiving it as less accurate Boswell (2016). Boswell (2016) further found that teachers' awareness and perception of their online ratings influenced their sense of professional competence and effectiveness in the classroom. Negative reviews, in particular, were associated with decreased teacher self-efficacy, which could alter teaching practices and pedagogical choices over time. Further discussion is warranted whether this could lead educators to adopt a 'crowd-pleasing' approach rather than focusing on educational quality.

Discussion

The literature reviewed herein provides compelling evidence of the significant influence RateMyProfessor.com exerts on higher education, particularly concerning students' course choices and perceptions of course difficulty and faculty effectiveness. Simultaneously, it showcases how educators' pedagogical strategies and self-perceptions are affected by their online evaluations.

RateMyProfessor.com's influence is not just limited to immediate behaviors but may also have long-term effects that shape the educational journey of students and the professional development of educators. For instance, the reported impact on student self-efficacy could potentially affect students' academic performance, future course selections,

and overall satisfaction with their education. A similar long-lasting effect might be observed amongst educators whose teaching styles may evolve based on feedback received on this platform.

However, these assertions remain speculative until further empirical research is conducted. While existing studies offer insights into the immediate consequences of RateMyProfessors.com on the behaviors and attitudes of students and educators, they tend to overlook its longitudinal effects. Evaluating changes in students' academic trajectories or shifts in teachers' pedagogical methods over time could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the platform's influence.

Future research might delve into whether teachers on RateMyProfessor improve with time, or if accumulating negative reviews contribute to lower self-efficacy, leading to poorer subsequent evaluations. This kind of investigation could shed light on how educators utilize feedback from the platform for their professional development and assess whether RateMyProfessor can serve as a tool for enhancing teaching quality beyond simply appeasing students.

In conclusion, we suggest that subsequent research delve into the long-term impacts of RateMyProfessor.com on higher education, thereby bridging the current gap in understanding. These investigations will be essential in fully capturing the multifaceted influence of this platform on shaping the dynamics of teaching and learning within academia.

Summary

This literature review consolidated existing research to analyze the influence of RateMyProfessor.com on both students' and educators' perspectives and behaviors within higher education. The findings underscore RateMyProfessor.com's significant role in shaping students' course selections, self-efficacy, and perceptions of their education, as well as influencing educators' pedagogical strategies and professional self-perceptions.

The widespread use of RateMyProfessor.com amongst students is evident, with it serving as an important platform for decision-making regarding course selection. The site's

evaluations significantly impact students' confidence and anticipated success in the classroom. Even a single negative comment can notably affect students' perception of the course climate.

For educators, awareness of their online ratings on RateMyProfessor.com has been found to contribute to their sense of professional competence. Negative reviews, in particular, can lead to decreased teacher self-efficacy, potentially impacting teaching practices and pedagogical choices.

While this review did not delve into the validity or reliability of the ratings on RateMyProfessor.com, the measurable effects of the platform on students' and teachers' actions are evident. By elucidating these effects, this review contributes to our understanding of how digital platforms can shape higher education and points to areas for future research.

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