

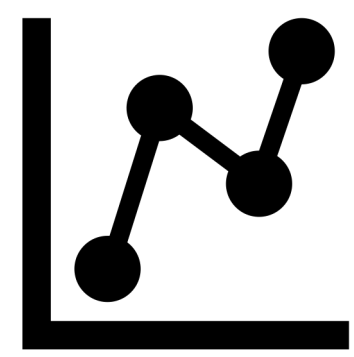
ABSTRACT

In Spring 2020, the murder of George Floyd catalyzed calls for racial justice across the United States, ushering in a series of organizational and institutional responses. One response from Yelp, a popular review-based platform, included its addition of a searchable Black-owned attribute, a tag intended to signal its solidarity with Black businesses and communities. Analyzing a repository of over 300,000 Yelp reviews from Black and non-Black-owned restaurants in Los Angeles, CA, USA and Detroit, MI, USA, we pose the question: *How did the addition of the Black-owned tag impact the online reputation of Los Angeles and Detroit Black-owned restaurants on Yelp?* To examine this, we use restaurant review counts and average star ratings as proxy measures for online reputation and track these metrics over the year following the platform design intervention. We find that the addition of the Black-owned tag did not create positive, sustainable change for Los Angeles and Detroit Black-owned restaurants. In all, we call attention to the disparate impacts of platform design features on users and communities, especially for Yelp and digital platforms seeking to effect racial justice through novel platform design interventions.

Do Black-owned Restaurants Matter?: Yelp and Platform Visibility Amid a Racial Reckoning

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Background



We draw on Luca (2016) to quantify online reputation in the context of Yelp as the combination of **Average Star Ratings** and **Number of Reviews**.^[1]



On **June 18th, 2020**, Yelp announced the addition of a searchable Black-owned attribute in solidarity with Black-owned businesses and communities.^[3]



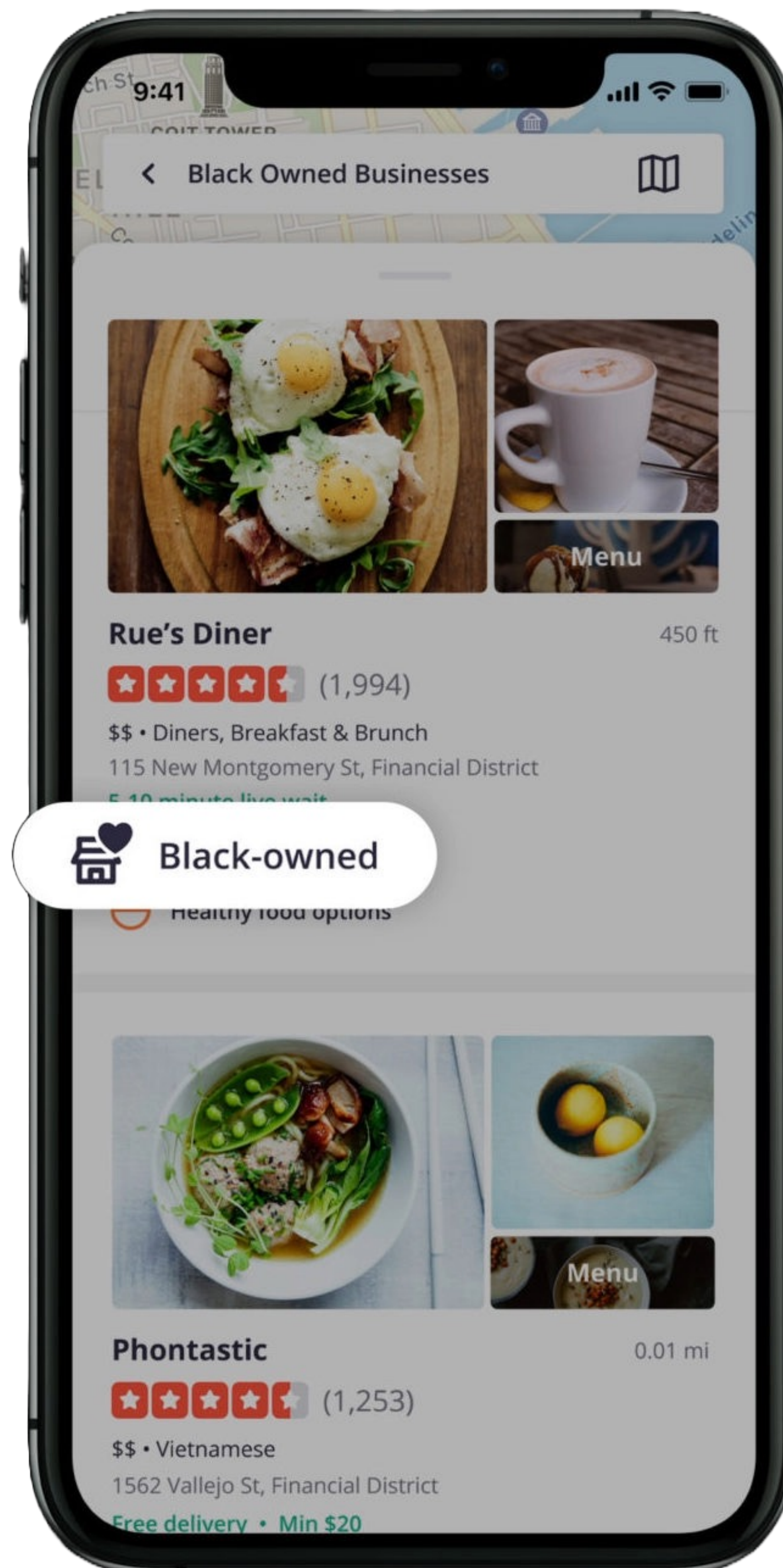
In January 2022, Yelp reported over **45,000 businesses** had utilized the Black-owned attribute with an average **33% consumer interest** increase after identifying as Black-owned.^[2]

Research Question

How did the addition of Yelp's Black-owned attribute impact the online reputation of Los Angeles and Detroit Black-owned restaurants?

Methods

We scraped and cleaned over 100,000 Yelp reviews from Los Angeles (n=115) and Detroit (n=71) Black-owned restaurants, and a comparable 300,000 Yelp reviews from Los Angeles and Detroit non-Black-owned restaurants. We used this dataset to create a running review count and average star rating total and plotted the results.



Preliminary Results

- 1) Los Angeles and Detroit Black-owned restaurants' **number of reviews increased at a linear rate**, while their average **star rating declined or remained even** in the year following the addition of the Black-owned attribute (Figure 1).
- 2) The increased visibility afforded to Black-owned restaurants through the Black-owned attribute **failed to create sustainable, positive change to their online reputation**.
- 3) Black-owned restaurants are **reviewed at a lower rate and have fewer reviews**, on average, initializing an inequitable disadvantage to Black restauranteurs.

Conclusions

Through this work we uncover disparate impacts of well-meaning design interventions, call attention to the limitations of the quantification of online reputation, and further examine sociohistorical understandings of user behavior and racial inequality.

Future work looks to understand the impact of individual user behaviors and design features on online reputation through textual and qualitative analysis.

References

- [1] Lewis, P. & Kaila (2020). Here are 600+ Black-owned businesses to support in the Metro Detroit area.
- [2] Spence, N. (2022). Yelp's 2021 update on Black-owned Businesses.
- [3] Stoppelman, J. (2020). Yelp Teams Up with My Black Receipt to Support Black-owned Businesses.

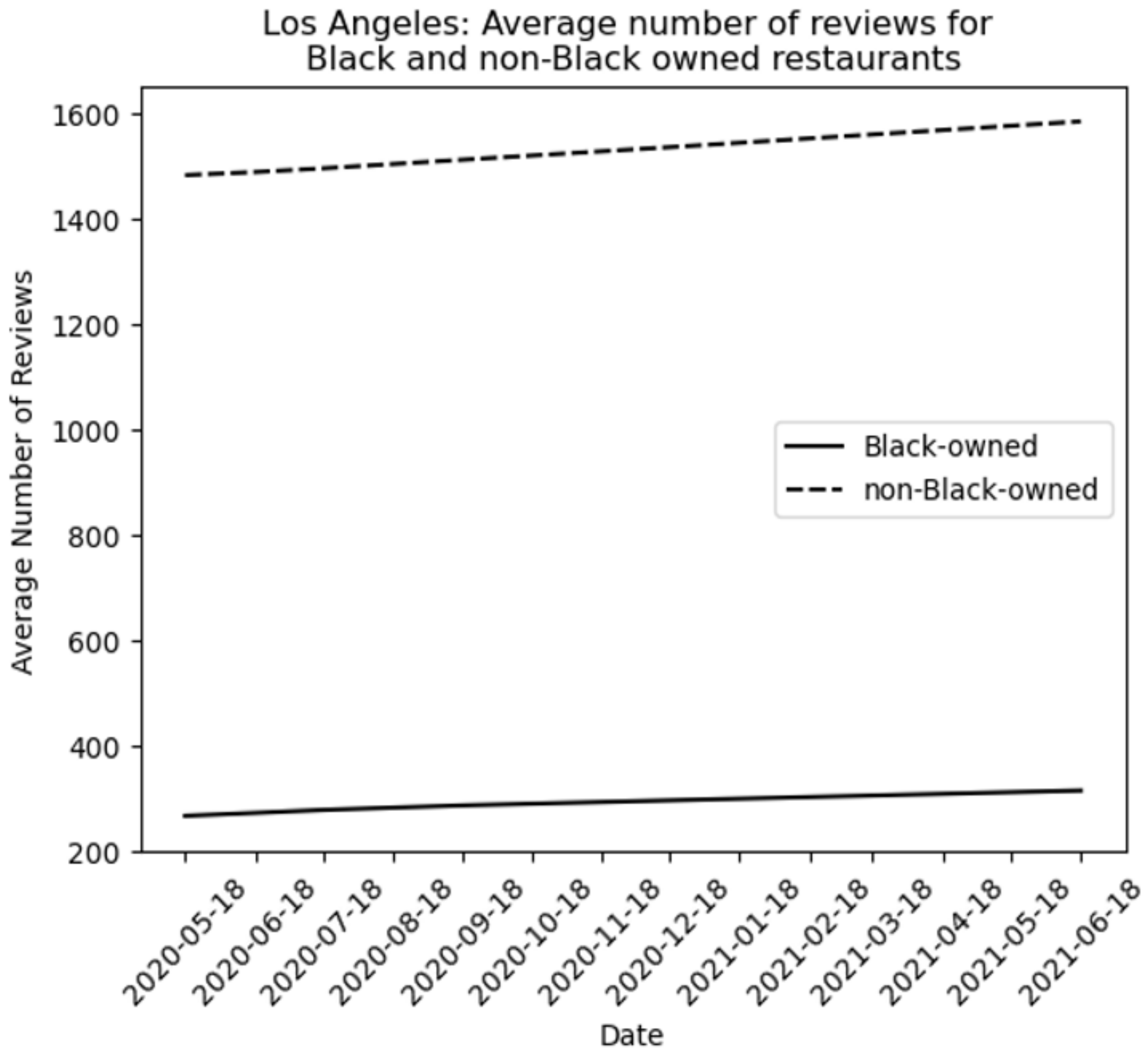


Figure 1. Average number of reviews and star ratings for Detroit and Los Angeles Black-owned and non-Black-owned restaurants

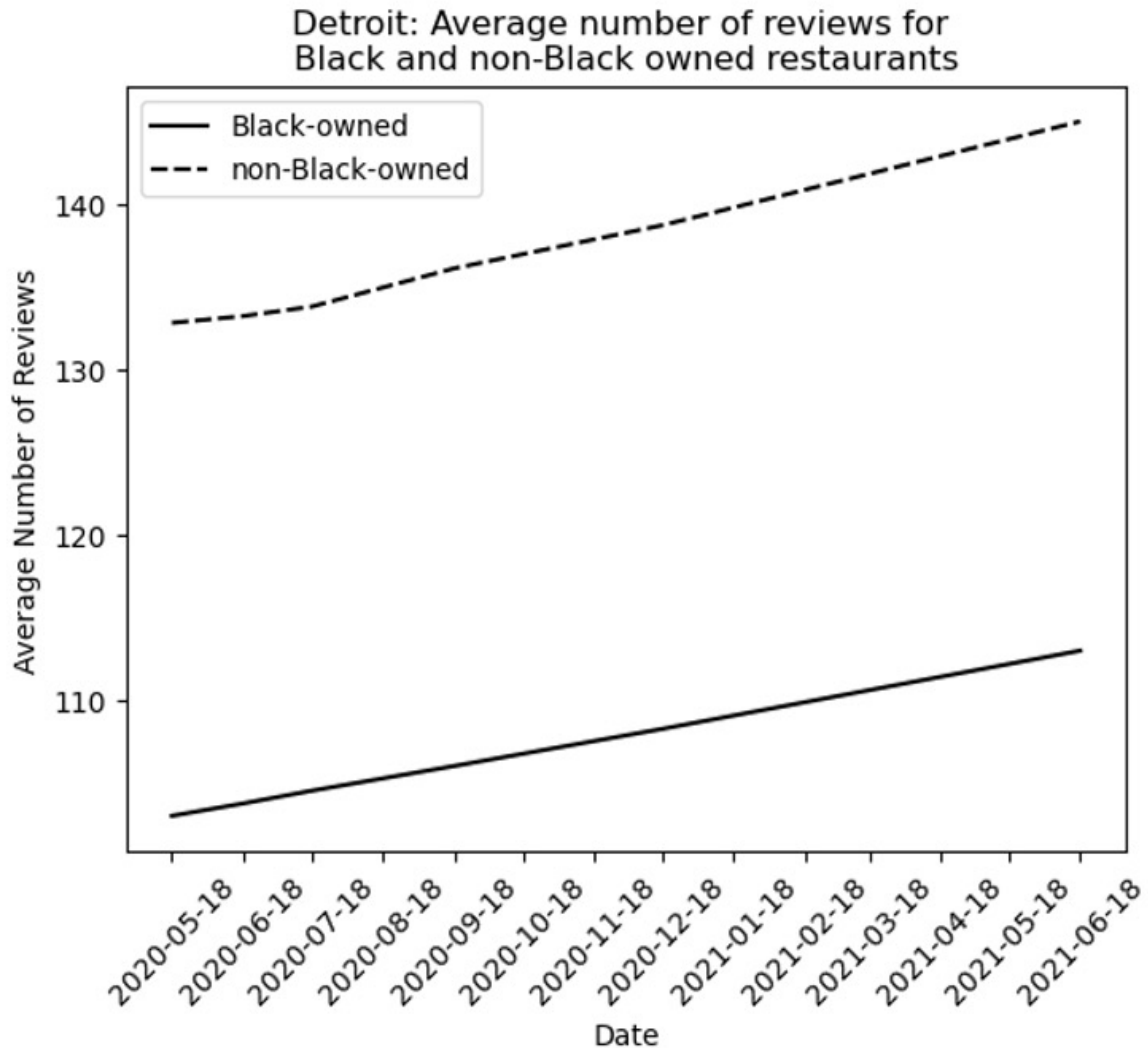


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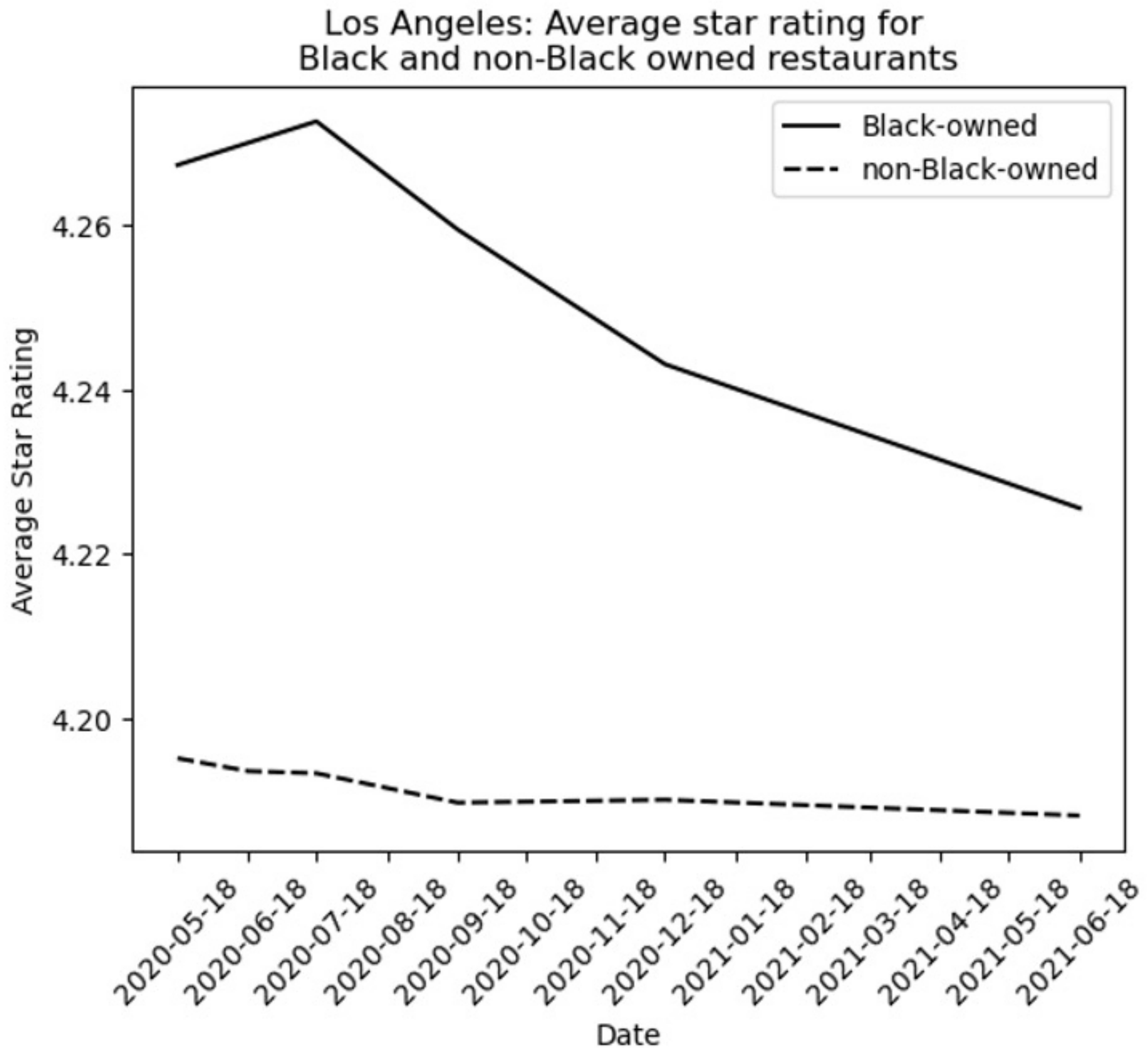


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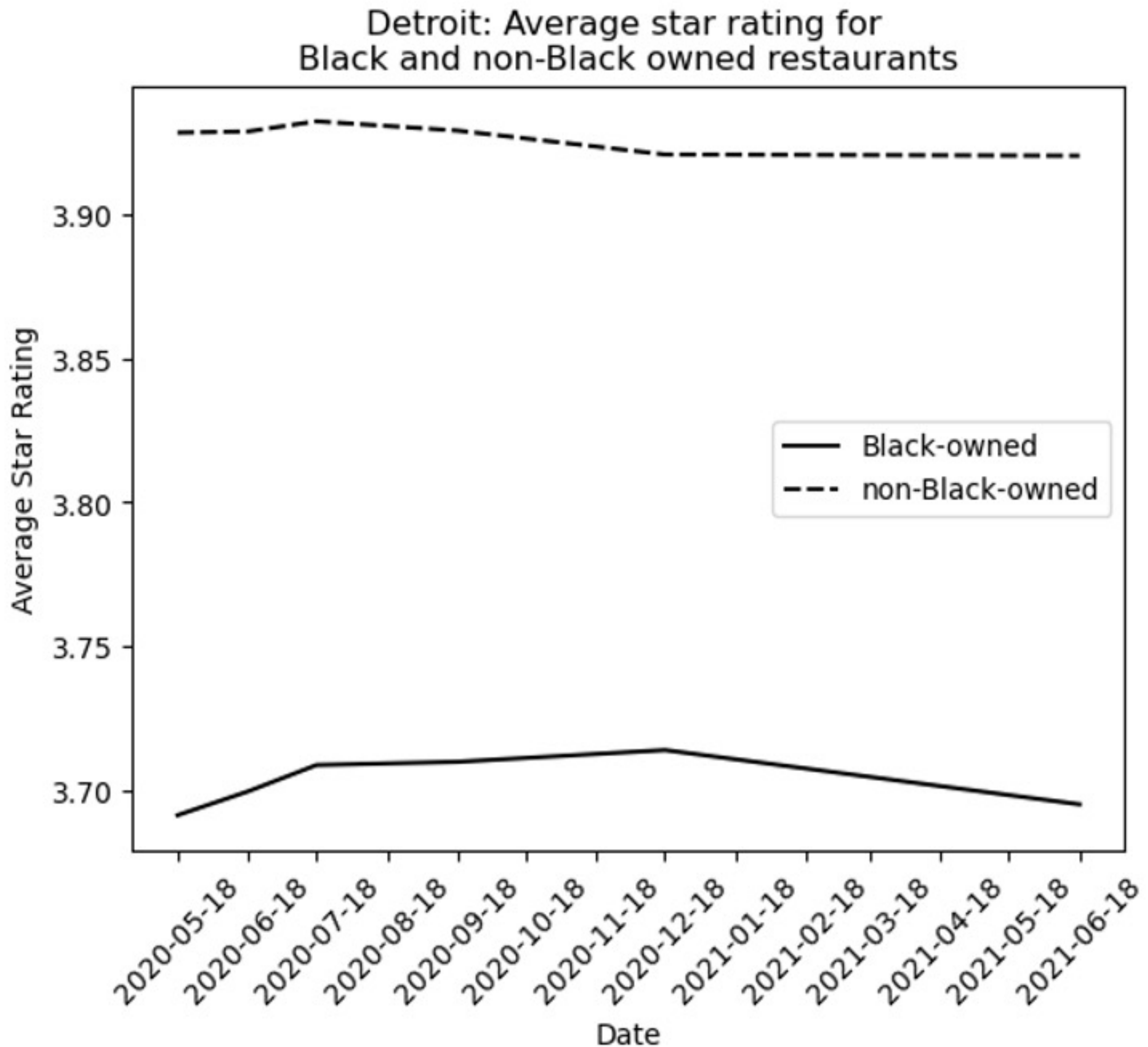


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