Adam Clayton Dissertation Proposal 2025:

**Evaluation: “Good, not strong enough to be awarded”**

Rationale for overall evaluation:

The study examines an important and interesting question of the consequences of private label entry by Amazon on outcomes for other products in the category. The approach is detailed well, and sounds reasonable, but there are some challenges in inference, and some important aspects underexamined.

Weaknesses:

The challenges to credible causal inference are many here. While some are detailed, many others are not clearly thought through and addressed. I understand given data limitations it might be challenging to address some of these, but they should nevertheless be openly discussed, so the reader is well informed.

1. The synthetic difference in differences method can accommodate unobservables, but requires that unobservables that impact treatment be stable over time. I think carefully detailing what kinds of practical violations this would rule out is important.

2. In response to entry, we might also expect product descriptions and visuals etc. to be altered by the sellers. Would be useful to empirically examine this issue. I appreciate the DML heterogeneity, but that looks at heterogeneity, not temporal changes.

3. The proposal briefly mentions sales rank, in my view that should be a central part of the analysis plan, especially since it has been well studied in marketing now.

4. Recommendations form an important part of the Amazon consumer search and purchase process. However, we don’t know much about how Amazon would recommend their own private label.

Strengths:

1. This is an important question, given the importance of platforms and self-preferencing.

2. The outcome variables and constructs (Price level and range, Review volume and valence) are relevant, their conceptualization seems reasonable in the empirical setting.

3. The methods of synthetic DID and double ML seem appropriate to study the question at hand. The critical assumptions behind the methods could be better explained as above.

4. The findings are also interesting, and relevant to product manufacturers as well as rival platforms.

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. An important aspect is to study sales as the outcome, using sales rank as proxy, done earlier in the literature.

2. I would suggest separating out the effects in Table 2 and 3, by the effect on Amazon’s brands versus the effect on other brands. I think we could learn quite a bit.

3. Quality perception is defined, but value perception is not clearly defined, I think.

4. Because they have to reduce prices, would third party sellers also reduce service levels? I think looking at the sentiment of product versus delivery service or other aspects of value might be helpful. You can also compare those fulfilled by Amazon versus those shipped by third party sellers.

References:

Etro, F. (2024). e‐Commerce platforms and self‐preferencing. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, *38*(4), 1516-1543.