Answer Popularity on Anonymous Q&A Platforms

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Abstract

On Questions and Answer (Q&A) platforms, users post questions with the expectation to receive answers. The Stack Exchange Network and Quora, where users ask and answer questions on math, programming, finance, and history are examples of such Q&A sites. One similar characteristic of these two sites is that users typically declare their expertise. However, a subset of online communities characterized by anonymity, and member expertise is seldom revealed. Examples of such communities are the Reddit sub communities AskScience and ExplainLikeImFive (ELI5). Members vote on the answers provided and the asker is encouraged to pick one answer that is most satisfactory to him/her, and thus has the power to declare the community’s answer. Therefore, it is necessary to establish whether the popular answers collaboratively chosen by users on these platforms are chosen primarily based on their accuracy or by other factors. The questions therefore arise: what are the factors that contribute to the popularity of an answer on a Q&A platform? How does answer accuracy rank, relative to other factors, in determining the popularity of an answer on a Q&A platform?

Drawing on wisdom of the crowd, cognitive load theory, and prominence-interpretation theories, we propose a model predicting the popularity of an answer from its readability, accuracy, length, and earliness. In particular, user expertise has been shown to positively correlate with answer quality. It is unclear whether the display of user expertise or reputation might sway a user’s perception of the quality of an answer. It might be worthwhile, therefore, to examine how answers are selected in the absence of such cues as member expertise or reputation. Previous research has also shown that there is a first-mover advantage in Q&A websites. In a study on the now defunct Answerbag Q&A platform, previous researchers found that on average, the first response to a question receives 17% more points than the second most punctual answer, and that subsequent answers decline in popularity.

We hypothesize that more accurate answers, more readable answers, shorter answers, and earlier answers are more popular. We test our model for answer popularity using randomly selected archived data from the popular Reddit sub community called ELI5, where users post answers anonymously. Findings from pilot data imply that the popularity ranking of answers might not reflect their accuracy ranking.

Including but not limited to insights about areas that we fail to take into our consideration, authors are particularly interested in being introduced to any possible overarching theory in answer popularity or in the broader area of the user generated content.