Eating Disorder Questions in Yahoo! Answers:

Information, Conversation, or Reflection?

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Goals of this Study

- To identify the information needs of questioners in Yahoo! Answers vis á vis the topic of eating disorders;
- To create a typology of question types in Yahoo! Answers on the topic of eating disorders;
- To contribute to broader models of question-asking in social Q&A.

Background

Eating disorders and teens: A serious health problem

Many teens suffer from eating disorders

 In a survey of 6,728 American adolescents in fifth to twelfth grade, 13.4% of the female adolescents and 7.1% of the male adolescents indicated that they engaged in "disordered eating" (Neumark-Sztainer and Hannon, 2000)

There can be serious complications from eating disorders

- Cardiovascular, hematological, and immune system abnormalities and, for adolescents, long-term problems with bone density, linear growth, and even cognitive function and brain structure (Katzman et al., 2010).
- Eating disorders can have lifetime effects (Rome et al. ,2003, p. 107).

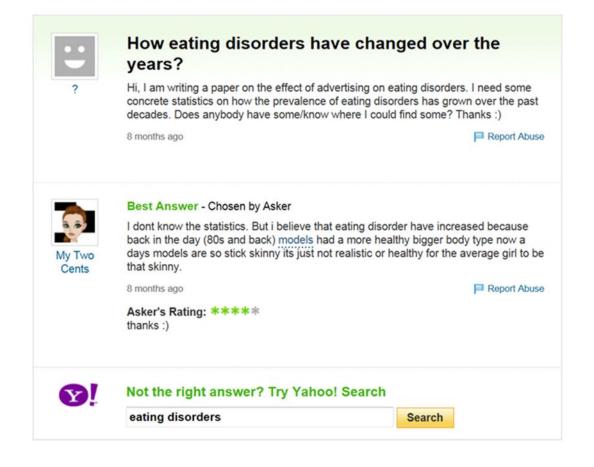
But where do teens find answers to their health questions?

- 90 % of online teens look for health information on the Web! (Rideout, 2001);
- Teens often use the Internet as the primary source of information on sensitive or embarrassing health topics, among them weight-related issues (Eysenbach, 2008, p. 127).
- The social media sites that are increasingly accessed by young people allow for individuals from outside of the medical profession to provide health information. The participatory nature of this health information calls into question the reliability of the sources (Bowler, He, Hong, 2011).

One source for health information...Social Q&A sites

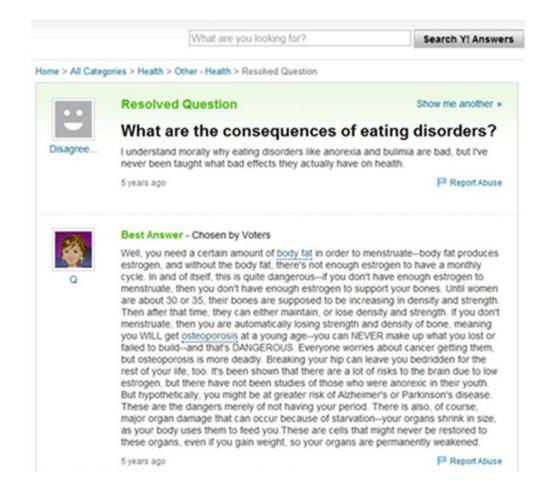
- We decided to look at Yahoo! Answers, as one source where teens might seek answers to their questions about eating disorders;
- Yahoo! Answers is the fifth most visited social media web site, preceded only by the social media power houses of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Pinterest (Dayton Business Journal, 2012).

Yahoo! Answers



Best answer chosen by asker

Yahoo! Answers



Best answer chosen by user community

Methods

Data Collection

- We obtained 2230 unique questions about eating disorders in Yahoo! Answers by using following search queries: eating disorder, anorexia, anorexic, bulimia, binge eating, & purging
- Data were collected on the Yahoo! Answers Application Programming Interface (API)

(http://developer.yahoo.com/answers/)

Datasets

Content-rich dataset (N=180)

- 180 longest questions, no less than 450 words
- To capture the rich descriptors
- Highly descriptive

A five-W's approach to create a 10-category coding framework

Topic-related dataset (N=330)

 330 questions with eating disorder-related keywords in the title to assure the "aboutness" of questions



Reduced to five overarching themes of teens' eating disorder questions

Results

Category	Sub-category
Seeking Information:	1. Factual
	2. Diagnosis
	3. Treatment or Intervention
Seeking Emotional Support	1. Validation
	2. Seeking Comfort
Seeking Communication	1. Conversation starters
	2. Deep Talk
Seeking Self-Expression	1. Confession
	2. Reflection
Seeking Help to Complete a	1. Homework Help
Task	2. Manuscript Ideas

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Seeking Information

Factual	Sample Questions
Questions	from Question Titles
Health Information – Eating Disorders	 How much would an anorexic teen girl weigh if they're 5'2 and of small build? Approximately how many teens in the US suffer from an eating disorder?
Health Information – Diet and Fitness	- Is 1900 calories acceptable for an active teen?
Support services	Does anyone know any Teen Hotlines For Eating Disorders?!?Christian eating disorder clinics?
Web-based resources	 Is there a forum where teens can talk about eating disorders? Is there a blog spot for teens recovering from eating disorders, if so please post the link?
Books	- Books about teens with eating disorders?
Movies	- Do you know any teen movies about anorexia, or bullemia? [sic]
Career & Higher Education	 What is the job description for dietitians who work with eating disorders? Can you go to an ivy league if you have been to rehab for anorexia???

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Seeking Emotional Support

Validation, comfort, and moral support

"My heart is beating so fast, but I know I have to tell her. My whole family suspects that I have an eating disorder, but i have yet to admit it. I know that she suffered form anorexia/bulimia when she was in her teens, and she is terrified of me going through that. Tell me exactly what to say. I'm lost.: (" [sic]

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Seeking Communication

Yahoo! Answers as a communication channel to open a conversation with answerers.

"...being a teen anorexic myself, I need to talk about it but naturally can't tell anyone I know. What are your opinions on teen anorexia? Do you scorn anorexics or pity them or do you just accept them? This is just out of curiosity". [sic]

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Seeking Self-Expression

"...I am also having problems with doubting God. What if there is no God? What is the purpose of me living in depression if I will cease to exist? What if our lives on earth are pointless?... I know you guys don't really care about me but I am not sure who to tell this to..."

[827 word reflection]

> A soliloquy. A question about eating disorders that really functions as a confession or a reflection on life.

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Seeking Help to Complete a Task

Homework help: Topic ideas, proofreading, content for a speech, or completing a survey for a science project.

"Why are more teens anorexic nowadays?...

A detailed answer would be good:)
Its for my science fair project and I am trying to thing of good questions...

Isic]."

- A tangled web of needs, from informational to emotional, sometimes all bundled within the same question.
- Implication: Enriches our understanding of the affective dimension of health information behavior.

- A place to vent emotions or quietly reflect on life.
- Implication: May provide a safe space where some teens can work out problems without risking exposure or conflict with the people most close to them.

- Eating disorders sometimes accompanied by a host of problems – depression, anxiety disorders, drugs and alcohol use, social stability, family chaos – at least according to many of the question-askers.
- **Implication:** For some teens, Yahoo! Answers may not be the right place.

- Many questions are from teens (selfidentified in the questions). Yahoo! Answers is part of the health information ecology of teens.
- Implication: More research needed to discover how teens are interacting with this and other social media tools in service to their own health and wellbeing.

Next Steps

- New study using our data set to investigate how teens assess the accuracy and reliability of answers in Yahoo! Answers;
- Work toward a model of adolescent health information behavior in the context of Social Q&A;
- A set of design recommendations for information systems and services that support the health information needs of young people.

Thank you