



Quora

Thinks I'm Vegan

Dylan Rabin

SI 110 Section 003

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Vegans

Veganism

Vegetarianism

Health

Food

Quora



Why does Quora think I'm vegan?

[Answer](#)[Request ^](#)Following **2**Comment **1**

Downvote



This question I actually asked on the health forum of Quora. And while I received some answers like this:



Bradford White, Mech. Engineer Specializing in HVAC and Energy (1977-present)



Answered Mar 18

I wasn't aware that Quora had an opinion about you.

You might want to stop worrying about what anyone thinks of you and nosh on an Oreo. Oreos are vegan.

And this:



Laura Olson, Voice Actress (2011-present)



Answered Mar 18

If you ate an avocado with your phone next to you the government may be sending you subliminal suggestions.

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I also received this answer:



Xander Singer, Instructor, Graphic Design, Adobe Illustrator ACE
Answered Mar 18



Quora is a website/portal designed for people to ask and answer questions of varying interested. It doesn't *think* the way people do. But, Quora does have algorithms that check your personal interests, the questions you often answer, and the people you follow, so it forms a general summary of your interests.

Quora does have algorithms that check your personal interests, the questions you often answer, and the people you follow, so it forms a general summary of your interests.

Xander brought up a very interesting point. Many of Quora's affordances, algorithms, and user interactions depend on its network externality because "the value of the product to one user depends on how many other users there are" (Shapiro & Varian, 13). Quora's platform requires regulating and motivating users to ask and answer questions on its platform in order to increase its network externality.

In this evaluation of Quora, I intend to elaborate on this thought and discuss the affordances, interactions, and design of Quora's health community. I will introduce what Quora is, discuss my experience with Quora's health community, mention my goals and if I passed them, and present my perspective on Quora after occupying the platform for two months. Through this social experiment, I have recognized that the architectural code of Quora's platform has hindered my ability to ask meaningful questions and to provide thought-provoking answers, and therefore, I would not recommend Quora to others as a question and answer website.

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What is Quora?

[Answer](#)[Request](#)[Follow](#) 140[Comment](#) 1[Downvote](#)

Quora is “a fast growing social Q&A site where users create and answer questions, and identify the best answers by upvotes and downvotes with crowd wisdom” (Patil et al, 1). Quora is different from other question and answer websites because it attempts to establish social connections through its platform. Not only can users ask and answer questions, but they can also follow other users and their questions, like and dislike answers, and edit comments to fit specific needs. Individuals online choose to utilize social question and answer websites for many reasons, such as finding answers quickly, weighing different expert opinions, and joining communities of individuals with similar interests. While some people decide to complete their own research online, other users online do not have the time and expertise in finding, understanding, and summarizing relevant information online. As a result, users utilize Quora to find answers quickly rather than searching multiple webpages. Additionally, many experts provide background of their credibility in their answers, and users can determine which answers are best to comprehend. Quora users may visit a social Q&A site and post a question, “expecting experts would give them answers” (Patil et al, 1). Moreover, Quora also encourages social connections through its communities. Each keyword has its own community where users can follow the keyword and meet other users that actively post and follow the same keyword.

For my investigation, I followed the ‘health’ community, a community with 27,400,000 followers, 235,300 questions, and 550 edits. I decided to follow the health community because I wanted to analyze how members prove their credibility for proper healthy lifestyle suggestions. As a University of Michigan college student who has taken nutrition courses, I believe I have some credibility when discussing nutrition and its relation to fitness. However, the topic of health is not merely the study of eating habits and exercising, but also it contains mental health, sleep, medicine, and global health.

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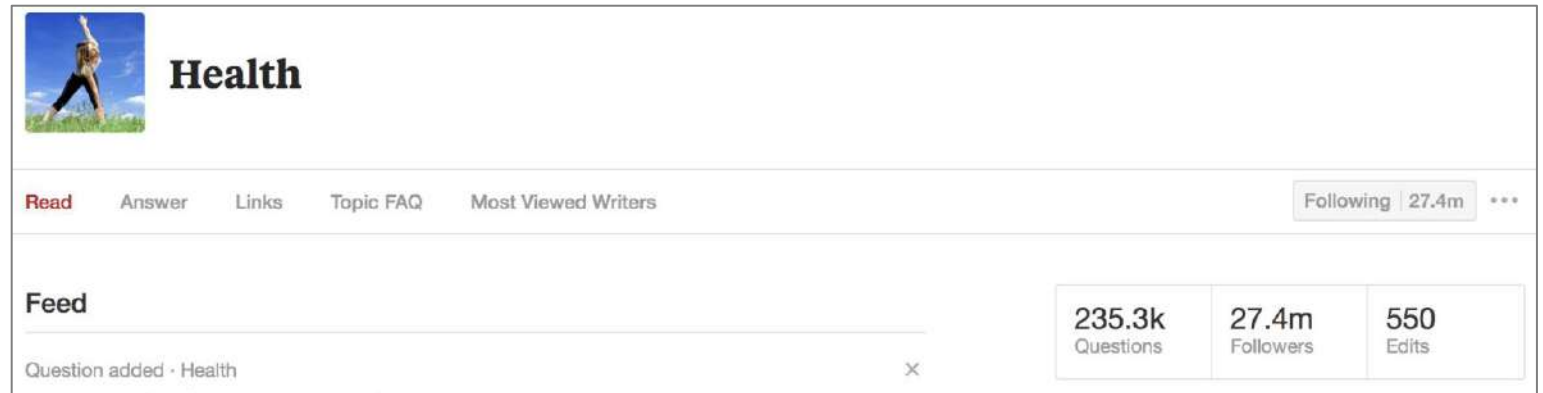
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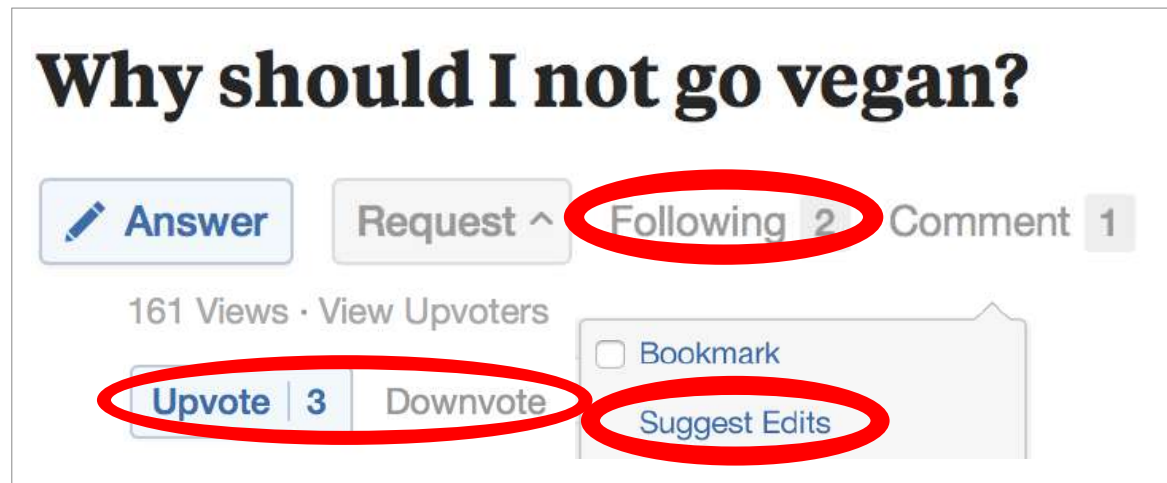
Quora Thinks I'm Vegan

Takeaways



The screenshot shows the Quora 'Health' topic page. At the top left is a profile picture of a person in a green field. To its right is the word 'Health' in a large, bold font. Below this is a navigation bar with links: 'Read', 'Answer', 'Links', 'Topic FAQ', and 'Most Viewed Writers'. On the right side of this bar is a 'Following' button with '27.4m' and three dots. Below the navigation bar is a 'Feed' section. On the right side of the feed, there are three statistics: '235.3k Questions', '27.4m Followers', and '550 Edits'. At the bottom left of the feed, it says 'Question added · Health'.

Through a close inspection of the health community on Quora, I have acknowledged the significance of Quora's affordances. Affordances can be defined as "the particular properties or characteristics of an environment [...] that sheds light on what people can leverage or resist in achieving their goals" (Grimmellmann, 140). These affordances are essential to the organization of Quora's platform because "networked publics create new challenges and opportunities in persistence (the durability of online expressions and content); visibility (the potential audience who can bear witness); spreadability (the ease at which content can be shared); and searchability (the ability to find content)" (Grimmellmann, 141). Some of Quora's affordances in the health community include its follower economy, upvotes, and edits. These affordances suggest that "social appreciation is an important metric for Quora's repository of knowledge" (Paskuda et al, 375).



The screenshot shows a Quora question titled "Why should I not go vegan?". Below the title are several interaction buttons: "Answer", "Request ^", "Following 2", and "Comment 1". The "Following 2" button is circled in red. Below these buttons, it says "161 Views · View Upvoters". At the bottom, there are three more buttons: "Upvote 3", "Downvote", and "Suggest Edits". Both the "Upvote 3" and "Suggest Edits" buttons are circled in red.



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Community Health

Community

Health

Quora

Medicine and Healthcare



How was my experience with Quora's health community?

Answer

Request

Following 1

Comment

Downvote



I enjoyed my experience with Quora's health community because I gained an abundance of information regarding health in various contexts. This experiment prompted me to further my research in nutritional science because I attempted to prove my credibility through my answers. I built my credibility in nutrition and fitness in the health community by including my credential in my title, commenting on my background in the answer, and providing links to educational resources.



Dylan Rabin, University of Michigan undergraduate student

Answered Feb 19

After taking a college nutrition class, I have changed my eating habits and constructed my own health values. Here are some below:

For more info check out the link below: Quality counts!

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nut...>

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I also discovered how other individuals prove their credibility, whether they state their degrees of education on their profiles, utilize scholarly sources in their answers, or if they suggest edits to answers based on recent studies.



Charles Harrison, Ph. D. Physical Chemistry, Texas Christian University
(1972)



Answered Feb 21

Ask your Doctor. Read the food labels before you eat them. Watch for things which have Sodium in them like breads that rise from Baking Soda, Biscuits, Cakes, etc. Inform yourself.

One observation I made on Quora is that the length of post varies from a few sentences (such as the one above) to five or more paragraphs with detailed explanations and examples. In the case of the example above answering my question, “How do I decrease sodium intake?” the individual defines his credibility in his title (Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry from Texas Christian University) but his brief explanation does not separate him from other answers. Any individual of any background could have told me to “ask my doctor” and “inform myself.” While some users might appreciate the succinct response because it saves time to read, others, like myself, prefer to receive the best answers possible, even if it takes multiple paragraphs for writers to rationalize.

Another observation I made on Quora’s health community is how users promoted themselves and their products through their answers. I recognized when a specific user was trying to promote his or her business if the answer included some link to his or her website. Quora is a great way to disseminate marketing for information goods because individuals value Quora as a way to improve efficiency in daily routines. For example, when I asked the health community “How does stress affect long term health,” one user described how stress works in the body and then proceeded to advertise his book about stress and happiness.

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Be positive, former Meditation Guide / Author

Answered 11h ago



If u wanna know more detail about stress and depression and wanna learn 3 quick and magical ways of Meditation ..U can refer my book “stress to Happiness : 3 Magical Ways of Meditation For Quick stress relief”

<https://goo.gl/o7aFHj>

This answer had me very skeptical of his book for many reasons. First, this author did not define his credibility at all, despite the fact he wrote multiple paragraphs about stress and the body. Second, the author chose to be anonymous. As mentioned in Westin’s four states of privacy, anonymity is the choice to be “in public but seeks and finds freedom from identification and surveillance” (Rizza et al, 8). If the author decides to be anonymous, there might be revealing information about the author that he or she does not want other users to know about. The anonymity function on Quora specifically is “used exactly for the obvious reason: to distance their civil identity from what is said” (Paskuda et al, 379). Consequently, it is more difficult to report someone if he or she is anonymous. The third reason why I was skeptical of this answer was because of the poor grammar. For example, random words are capitalized and the spelling of ‘you’ is inappropriate in context. The weak punctuation is inappropriate in context because it digresses from the ‘norms’ of Quora. The screenshot below displays the main policies and guidelines in regard to questions asked from Quora’s website. Lastly, a Google link may be a product of phishing, a tactic prompting users to enter personal information from reputable sources. For these reasons, I took Quora’s health forum with a grain of salt and I decided not to click on the Google link.

- Quora requires correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and capitalization to be used in questions. A question should consist of complete sentence(s) and end in a question mark.

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Stats (Quora feature)

Goals

Quora Usage Data and Analysis

Quora



What were my stats on Quora and did I meet my goals?

Answer

Request ^

Following 1

Comment

Downvote



Before I began occupying Quora's health community, I set some goals for myself while utilizing the platform:

- Ask 10 questions
- Answer 10 questions
- 25 upvotes
- Gain 20 followers
- Make 1 meaningful connection (back and forth conversation)

After my experience with Quora, I can say that I was able to accomplish three of the five goals. I was able to ask and answer at least ten questions and I gave at least twenty-five answers upvotes. On the contrary, I was not able to reach twenty followers and the few back and forth conversations I had were not valuable enough to call them meaningful connections. Attached below are some of my stats from using Quora:

Feeds

Answers 10

Questions 12

Activity

Followers 17

Following 21

Topics 6

Edits 72

Knows About

Edit



Nutrition

6 answers



Health

4 answers

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All Content:

27.5k

IEWS

25.8k

IEWS

1.63k

IEWS

Questions:

Answers:

After evaluating my stats on Quora's health community, I can conclude that questions are more likely to be viewed by users than answers. While I originally believed that I would receive more views for my questions than views for my answers, I did not expect the margins to be as large as they are. Although I wrote two more questions than answers, the average question received twenty times more views than answers. The large gap in views between questions and answers make sense because the intention of Quora's platform is to provide solutions to as many questions as possible. Quora is designed so that the user has more visibility of questions without completing actions on the site, whereas answers must be viewed after clicking on a specific question. Overall, my interactions sparked new ideas and interests in health beyond nutrition and fitness and I am glad that I received the opportunity to further my knowledge on health in multiple contexts.



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Why does my involvement in the Quora health community matter?

[Answer](#)[Request ^](#)[Following 1](#)[Comment](#)[Downvote](#)

When I first began occupying the health community on Quora, I was expecting to address concerns regarding how users define credibility on social question and answer online platforms. What I did not expect was that the physical architecture of Quora would hinder my ability to express freedom and control of the platform. In various scenarios, my experience on the website was altered to fit Quora's content requirements, and the visualization of information was manipulated to allow advertisers and third parties to market products. Additionally, Quora's affordances and algorithms were designed to find associations between users and topics. Because I wrote a lot about nutrition and fitness in the health community, I received a lot of notifications about these topics. However, the majority of these notifications were about veganism. At first, I did not mind the fact that the content I received related to veganism, but suddenly Quora's content review team edited my questions to make them more appealing to vegans. I became frustrated by the constant reminders on Quora about vegan topics and I wanted a broader perspective of what health is on the Quora community. The curation of my feed prohibited my flexibility on the site, and therefore I do not recommend others to use Quora for long-term involvement. Through an assessment of Quora's user interaction design and user behavior/regulation, I propose that Quora associates users with exclusive topics, thus limiting efficiency of use. The way that Quora is designed and how users' content is regulated is why I believe that Quora thinks I'm vegan.

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Efficiency (time management)

Design

Quora



Why does Quora's design limit efficiency?

Answer

Request ▾

Following 1

Comment

Downvote



In order to understand why the design of Quora limits a user's flexibility and efficiency of use, it's important to comprehend how design plays a role in social question and answer sites.

The foundation of Quora's platform is built on interaction design, defined as "designing interactive products to support the way people communicate and interact in their everyday and working lives" (Preece et al, 9). As a website that hosts online communities, Quora values an interactive, supportive, and everyday environment where users can express their thoughts on a variety of topics. The online communities of Quora "provide their members with opportunities for information sharing and learning, for companionship and social support, and for entertainment" (Resnick, 2). The experience members have in these online communities affects the user experience on Quora. A good user experience integrates both usability goals "ensuring that interactive products are easy to learn, effective to use, and enjoyable" (Preece et al, 19) and experience goals "acting as subjective qualities that are concerned with how a system feels to a user" (Preece et al, 20).

While Quora excels in usability because these goals have objective measurements, Quora could better incorporate experience goals because its platform does not have the subjective user's perspective in mind. As a user, I felt that Quora restricted my control because it fails to include design thinking procedures into its product and that my account is carefully regulated by its business model.

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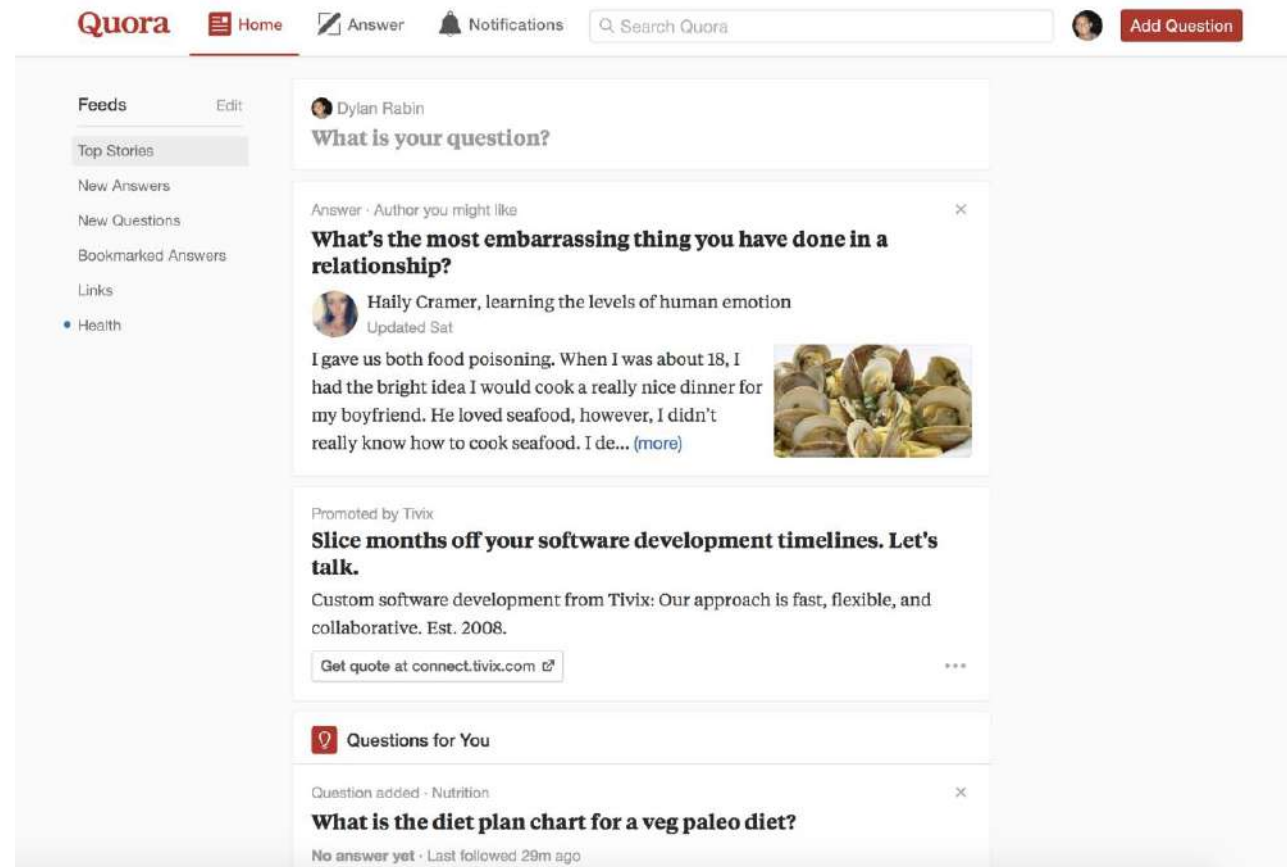
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After I log into my Quora account, my homepage typically looks like this:



While I see that are opportunities for me to ask questions at the top, novice users might not notice that they can type over the placeholder text, rather than clicking the button in the top right corner. This creates confusion for the user and fails Nielsen's "consistency and standards" heuristic (Nielsen, n.p.). The main concern for me is that there is an advertisement right in the middle of my homepage. My intention to use Quora is to gain knowledge from the questions and answers I read about, not to receive software development help. The designers of Quora need to be cautious that their design move users away from "user-oriented" to "business-oriented" content generation because online communities that "serve a commercial interest that is often at odds with our interests" is corrupt personalization (Sandvig, 11).

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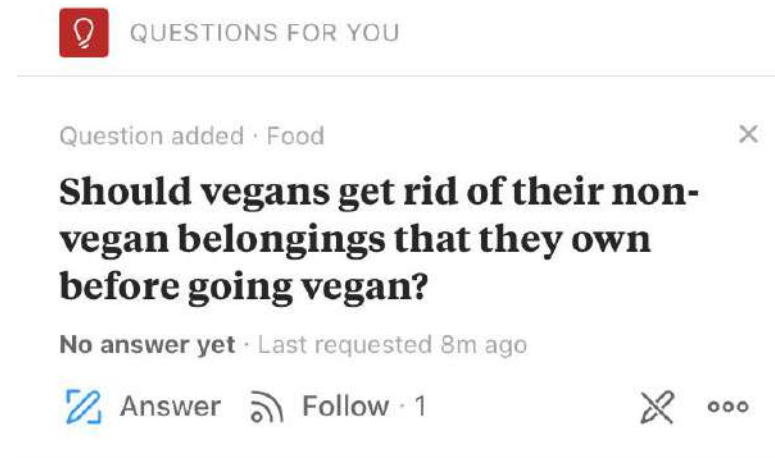
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Another problem I see with Quora's design is how its algorithmic filters associate my presence on Quora with veganism. At the bottom of the screenshot on the previous page, Quora referenced me to answer a question about veganism. I have received many requests to answer vegan-related questions, such as the one below:



As a user, I am frustrated by the fact that the personalization of Quora dominates user experience. This should be alarming to all Quora users because “Your attention is drawn to interests that are not your own” (Sandvig, 11).

Because Quora's affordances cause confusion for some users, and its design displays content that I am not interested in, Quora should re-evaluate its business model to best serve its members. From my understanding, monetizing attention through advertisement revenue seems to be Quora's dominant business model. Rather than prioritizing advertisement revenue, Quora should readdress its concerns from all users.

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Quora Content Review (system)

Content on Quora

Quora User Feedback

Question That Contains Assumptions

Quora



Why is Quora Content Review almost never helpful?

This question previously had details. They are now in a comment.

Answer

Request

Follow 7

Comments 2

Downvote



The irony of this question is that Quora Content Review added the circled topic above “Question That Contains Assumptions.” Quora Content Review is notoriously known for regulating user content, especially if another user reports a question or answer. The reason why Quora needs to be strict towards user behavior is that Quora’s platform requires “an architecture that will perfectly control and make highly efficient regulation possible” (Lessig, 124). While Quora’s architecture and code regulates behavior efficiently, its surveillance also comes with trade-offs, such as personalization algorithms that serve its dominant business model of advertisement revenue, and opportunities for anonymous individuals to promote incivility. The latter also becomes a major concern because “incivility can then be operationalized as the set of behaviors that threaten democracy, deny people their personal freedoms, and stereotype social groups” (Papacharissi, 9).

In my experience of using Quora, Quora Content Review’s ability to alter my questions to make them more appealing to vegan users causes incivility because mass connectivity allows others to assume I am vegan when I want them to think otherwise. My very first question when occupying Quora was “How can I eat protein for breakfast if I don’t eat breakfast meat or eggs?” because I do not like bacon, ham, sausage, or eggs. However, Quora Content Review decided to take out the word “breakfast” to associate myself with veganism and posted the question in the vegan community. After their edit, my question received over 7,000 views, my most popular question to date.

Content

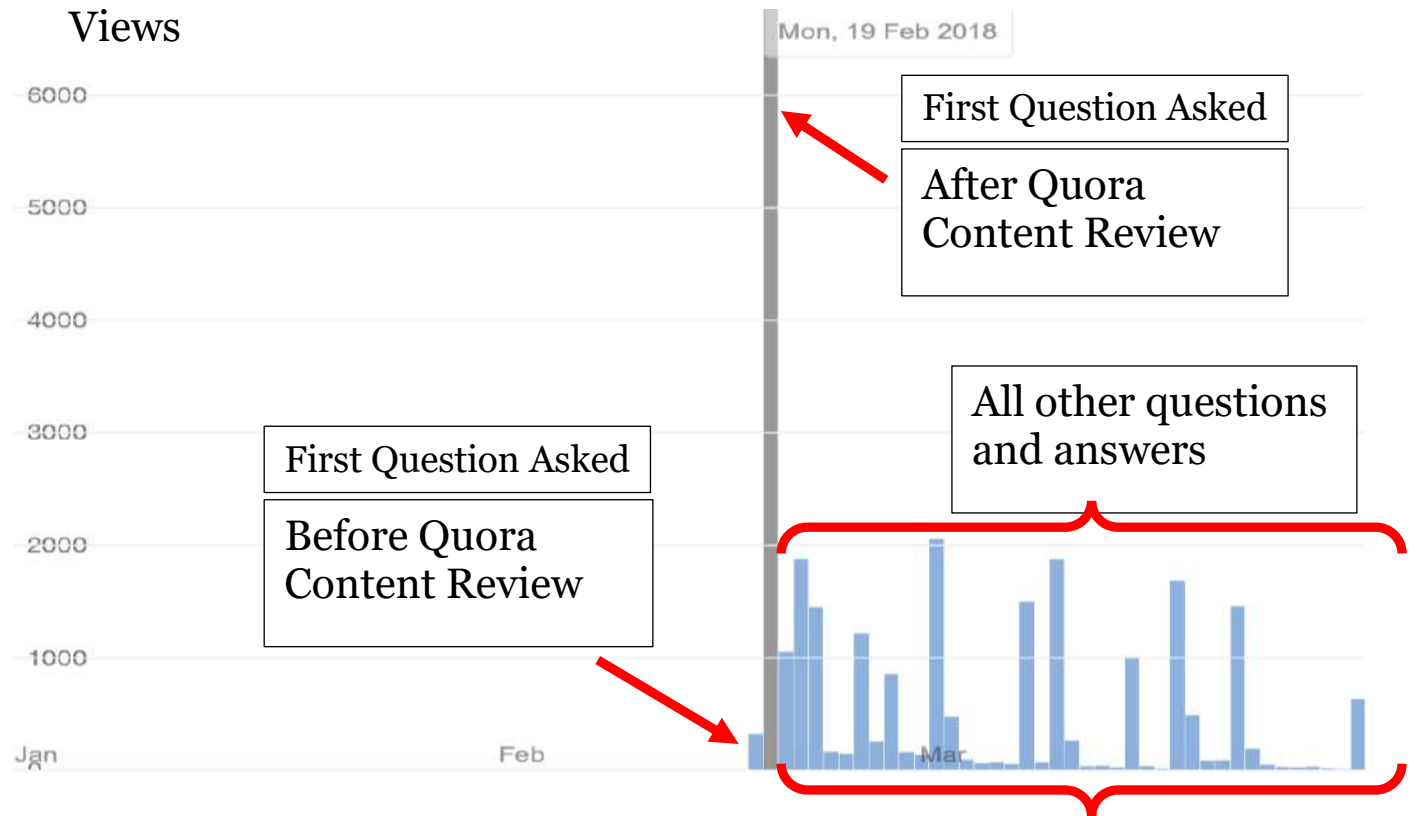
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How can I have protein for breakfast if I don't eat meat or eggs?
Question text edited.

How can I have protein for breakfast if I don't eat **breakfast** meat or eggs?

My request to change back to original question

How can I have protein for breakfast if I don't eat meat or eggs?

Answer Request Following 5 Comment Downvote

21 Answers

How the question is currently posted



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User Behavior

Vegans

Information

Life Lessons

Design

Quora



What are the takeaways from this experience?

Answer

Request

Following 1

Comment

Downvote



Despite the fact that I would not recommend Quora for long-term use because of its manipulative design and restricted behavior, I am glad that I received the opportunity to gain new knowledge about Quora's platform and health in multiple contexts. Bulleted below are my main takeaways for investigating Quora's health community:

- Quora is a social question and answer site that encourages making connections with other users with similar interests through its affordances.
- There is no one correct way to define credibility on question and answer websites, however, it is easy to detect when credibility is not achieved.
- Questions on Q&A sites are more visible and spreadable than answers because more questions answered can lead to a more positive experience on the platform.
- Quora's business model of generating revenue through advertisements serves as a priority over the users' interests and can harm their reputation in the long run.
- Quora's design and algorithmic filters attempt to find correlations between users and topics but are not always successful and can cause more harm than good.
- Quora's Content Review Team can be overbearing when it tries to control user behavior and consequently creates incivility on its platform.

Through this experience, I was able to apply important course concepts to a social networking platform. If Quora redesigns its platform to put its users first, more users would be attracted to the website. Likewise, if Quora did not associate me as a vegan, maybe I would consider using this site again too.

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