Quality of Health Answers in Social Q&A

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Purpose of the Study

- To investigate perceptions regarding the quality of online health answers that people share in social contexts.

Research Questions

- How good is the quality of health answers in social Q&A?
- To what extent do librarians, nurses, and users differ in their assessments of the quality of health answers?

Method

- A total of 400 health answers in Yahoo! Answers were evaluated by three groups of participants: librarians, nurses and users of Yahoo! Answers.

- Participants assessed the quality of the 400 health answer using 10 criteria in Figure 1, scoring on a Likert scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) with an option of Not Applicable.

- Librarians and nurses received a $30 Amazon.com gift card, while users received a $10 Amazon.com gift card.
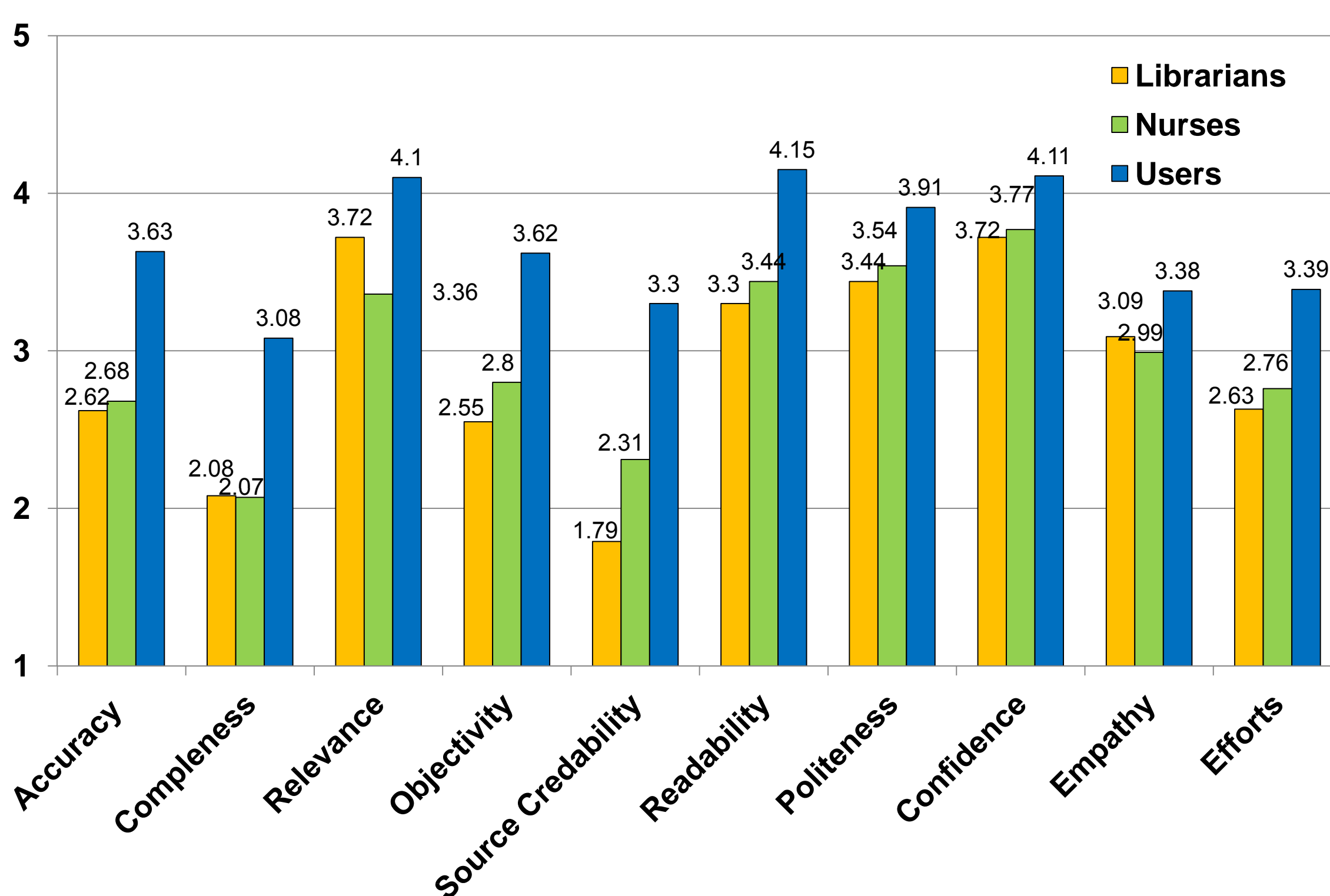
Results

Figure 1. Comparison of the means of quality ratings for librarians, nurses, and users

- There was no significant difference of the quality ratings between librarians and nurses. There was, however, significant difference in most of the ratings between those two expert groups (librarians and nurses) and users.

- Librarians and nurses rated the quality of answers lower on most of the evaluation criteria than users.

- There were no statistical differences significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level for ratings of *politeness* and *empathy*. Participants across the three groups may share common understanding of how an answerer is polite or shows empathy in answers.

- There were no significant differences in most of the ratings between librarians and nurses, except *source credibility*; nurses rated this criterion higher than librarians.

- There were no statistical differences in all of the criteria by gender.

- For librarians and nurses, there were no statistical differences in the criteria by age. For users, there were statistical differences in *accuracy*, *relevance*, and *readability*, but no other criteria. Younger users rated higher than older participants in *accuracy*, *relevance* and *readability*.

Discussion

- Use of socio-emotional criteria may be important to all because of common recognition of the value of the social nature of health answers.

- Gender difference is not reflected when evaluating the quality of information, but may be reflected when creating answers.

- Educational efforts to reduce the gap between experts and users in evaluating health answers, should be made, helping users better use health answers when making their health decisions.

Conclusions

- In the methodological point of view, the current study is unique in that 1) experts in search (librarians) and subject (nurses) were invited, and their evaluations were compared to users, and 2) it took a further step from exploration to evaluation of the quality of health answers.

- In future, an in-depth analysis will be followed by comparing the criteria ratings in accordance with demographic information and the characteristics of the answer content.