

Several years ago, I came across a meme claiming that if you want an answer on a forum, the most effective strategy is not to ask a question, but rather to post a deliberately false statement so that others will rush to correct you. This humorous observation, sometimes referred to as “Cunningham’s Law” https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Cunningham%27s_Law suggests that false assertions may provoke stronger engagement than genuine questions.

Surprisingly, no one has tried to find out (rigorously) if this is true. In this short study, I aim to test whether this claim holds true and before conducting the experiment, I hypothesize that this law is false. More specifically, I'm going to compile statistics from Reddit threads and compare whether topics that begin with questions have more, fewer, or as many answers as those that begin with a commonly accepted false statement.

We'll also then make comparisons with topics where there is no agreed-upon truth.

The first step of this project is to collect the necessary data. I wrote a Python script that scans 20 subreddits known for posts that are either questions or obviously false statements, and collects the URLs of 2,000 topics—100 from each subreddit and save them into a pickle.

https://github.com/mathyisraeli/CunninghamLawblog/blob/main/collect_url.py

The second step is to collect the first post of each topic and classify it .

<https://github.com/mathyisraeli/CunninghamLawblog/blob/main/TopicClassification.py>

The classification is made with a LLM (openai/gpt-oss-120b using groq API)

There are 5 categories in this classification system

- 1 = Genuine, non-rhetorical question seeking a real answer
- 2 = Statement that is clearly and entirely false, according to any specialist in the subject
- 3 = Statement on a topic where there is no clear or absolute truth
- 4 = Statement that is partially true and partially false
- 5 = Other (true factual statement, opinion, or neutral statement)

Here are the results for the 20 subreddits

TodayILearned [0, 30, 12, 20, 36]
NoStupidQuestions [95, 0, 0, 0, 5]
TooAfraidToAsk [90, 0, 1, 1, 8]
ChangeMyView [18, 0, 11, 3, 68]
AskReddit [87, 1, 1, 0, 11]
DoesAnybodyElse [82, 1, 0, 0, 17]
conspiracy [27, 20, 13, 7, 33]
aliens [19, 14, 30, 5, 32]
MandelaEffect [31, 3, 8, 8, 50]
FlatEarth [19, 13, 3, 9, 56]
Paranormal [51, 0, 25, 0, 24]
AlternativeHealth [57, 7, 5, 10, 21]
Nootropics [85, 0, 1, 3, 11]
Skeptic [12, 11, 13, 7, 57]
ThatHappened [6, 7, 11, 1, 75]
thathappenedtoome [0, 0, 0, 0, 0]
PointlessStories [6, 1, 1, 2, 90]
okbuddyretard [10, 3, 5, 0, 82]

AskScienceDiscussion [100, 0, 0, 0, 0]

ExplainLikeImFive [89, 0, 0, 0, 11]

Before going further we must ensure that the automatic classification is correct in the vast majority of cases

for this it is possible to hand-check a sample of 100 topic and see the percentage of correct classification.

or else thanks to the titles of certain subreddits postulate that all the subjects of this subreddit are questions or affirmations.