

The question mark lets you make up anything you like

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Raymond Chen

A trend I've noticed in journalism is to make some sort of outrageous statement, but then stick a question mark at the end to disavow any responsibility for the statement. By changing it to a question, you're avoiding actually having to back up what you write. "I'm not saying this is actually true. I'm just raising the question." For example, a headline might read "The sign of something new?" The author doesn't want to actually back up the claim that the subject is the sign of something new, so he'll just say it with a question mark. Now the responsibility to support or refute the claim has been shifted to you, the reader. The question itself doesn't need to have any merit whatsoever. In fact, you can just make up the craziest stuff imaginable; as long as you put a question mark after it, you're home free. And it doesn't even need to take the form of a question! Made-up examples:

- "Is Bill Gates the Leader of an Underground Cult?"
- "Does exercise kill you?"
- "Is Tiger Woods a Sex Addict?" Oh wait, I didn't make that one up.
- "Is Microsoft's Kinect racist?" Okay, that wasn't made-up either. But making it a question relieves the reporter of actually investigating the report. Fortunately, Consumer Reports did the legwork to debunk the charge. Even better: The article that started it all uses the weasely statement-question-mark: "Kinect has problems recognizing dark-skinned users?"

Perhaps I should've titled this article "Journalists are just making up stuff and printing it as if it were news?" **Bonus journalistic head-scratcher:** The word "official" appears to have taken on a meaning I was previously unaware of.

| It's official: The Microsoft Zune has gone the way of the Kin, the Courier, and Bob.

If you actually click through to the article's source, and then click through to that article's source, you'll see that the source is a person "who declined to be identified because the decision hasn't been announced." So let me see if I understand this. They're saying that a statement is "official" because it comes from an anonymous person who doesn't wish to be identified because no official statement has yet been made.

(I think my copy of Gödel, Escher, Bach just exploded.)

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