# Google faces scrutiny over role in Southport attack misinformation



Google has come under scrutiny following revelations that its advertising network may have helped to monetise a website disseminating misinformation about the suspect involved in the Southport attack, which led to widespread riots across England last summer. This issue was highlighted during a recent session by the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee of the UK Parliament.

In the aftermath of the tragic murder of three girls in Southport, a surge of violence swept through various English cities, partly fuelled by erroneous information circulating online about the attacker's identity. The misinformation included persistent false claims that the attacker was an asylum seeker who had recently arrived in the UK. According to the committee chair, Chi Onwurah MP, a yet-to-be-released report from the advertising watchdog, Check My Ads, indicated that the website in question was monetised by Google and another company during the period it published this misleading content.

Amanda Storey, Google's Managing Director for Trust and Safety in Europe, responded to the allegations during the evidence session, stating that if the claims were accurate, it would be a clear violation of the company's policies. She emphasised that "monetising any form of low-quality information, particularly associated with an atrocious real-world attack, is absolutely not acceptable." Ms Storey expressed a willingness to review the forthcoming report closely and to provide a written response, assuring that the company takes issues of misinformation seriously.

Ms Storey elaborated on the challenges of managing misinformation, particularly in fast-moving situations that can go viral across social media platforms. She noted that the recently introduced Online Safety Act, which is set to implement new codes of practice requiring platforms to address illegal content and protect children from harmful materials, could have mitigated the spread of misinformation during the time of the riots.

The committee discussed the implications of Google's role as a search engine compared to social media platforms, with Ms Storey suggesting that Google was somewhat insulated from the issues surrounding misinformation on social media. She acknowledged the serious nature of the Southport incident, expressing her condolences to the affected families, but maintained that Google's systems were not specifically implicated in the events that transpired.

Committee member Emily Darlington MP raised concerns about Google's attempts to separate itself from the negative impact of misinformation related to the Southport attack. She referenced evidence indicating that the company contributed to the monetisation of misinformation that had the potential to incite the riots. In response to her inquiry regarding any introspection on Google's advertising practices since the riots, Ms Storey confirmed that the company conducts evaluations after such incidents to recognise any missteps and implement corrective measures.

She stated, "Absolutely. Any time an incident plays out in the real world, any real-world harm situation, we have our strategic command teams do a root cause and corrective action assessment." This approach aims to integrate findings from such evaluations into Google's policies and enforcement strategies as they arise.

The ongoing discussions about misinformation, digital advertising practices, and their potential real-world consequences have brought renewed attention to the responsibilities of technology companies in the evolving landscape of online information sharing.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://news.sky.com/story/southport-attack-misinformation-fuels-far-right-discourse-on-social-media-13188274> - This article discusses how misinformation about the Southport attack spread rapidly on social media, leading to violent outcomes. It highlights the role of false claims about the attacker's identity and how these narratives were amplified by far-right groups.
* <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/from-rumours-to-riots-how-online-misinformation-fuelled-violence-in-the-aftermath-of-the-southport-attack/> - This dispatch explores how online misinformation contributed to violence following the Southport attack, focusing on the spread of false information and its amplification by social media algorithms.
* <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/nigel-farage-admits-to-spreading-misinformation-after-southport-knife-attack/3297939> - This article reports on Nigel Farage's admission to spreading misinformation after the Southport attack, which contributed to widespread violence and riots across England.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/> - This link provides access to the UK Parliament's Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, which could have discussed issues related to Google and misinformation during a session.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/online-safety-bill> - This page discusses the Online Safety Act, which aims to regulate online content and protect users from harmful materials, potentially mitigating the spread of misinformation.