# Calls for accountability as Google faces scrutiny over misinformation following Southport tragedy



Following the tragic murder of three girls in Southport last summer, civil unrest erupted across England, driven largely by a deluge of misinformation that was allowed to spread unchecked online. In a time when the nation was already reeling from the tragic events, it appears that technology giants like Google played an unacceptable role, accused of monetising a website that served as a vehicle for these dangerous falsehoods, as raised by MPs on the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee.

During a recent evidence session focused on misinformation, committee chair Chi Onwurah MP highlighted serious concerns after reviewing a document from digital advertising watchdog Check My Ads. This document alleged that Google's advertising network not only supported but profited from the dissemination of misleading information regarding the identity of the attacker responsible for the Southport attacks.

In the aftermath of the murders, violence and rioting inundated several communities, largely fuelled by incendiary rumors that claimed the assailant was an asylum seeker who had only recently arrived in the UK. Such unfounded assertions did considerable damage, catalyzing unrest and chaos across the country.

Amanda Storey, Google’s managing director for trust and safety in Europe, has claimed to recognise the seriousness of the situation. In a disconcerting display of accountability, she stated that monetising any form of low-quality information linked to such a grave incident is "absolutely not acceptable," conveniently glossing over the role her company played in allowing the misinformation to thrive. While she expressed a willingness to investigate these claims, one must question whether more decisive actions should be taken to prevent similar situations in the future.

Storey stressed the broader problem of misinformation dissemination, drawing attention to social media's speed in spreading falsehoods. However, at this juncture, the responsibility of tech giants like Google should come under intense scrutiny given the implications of their advertising practices, especially in the wake of national tragedies.

Emily Darlington MP from the committee raised alarm bells regarding Google's unwillingness to take full responsibility. She pointedly remarked, “You’ve been presented evidence here where you helped to monetise the creation of misinformation – a key piece of misinformation – that was used to incentivise the riots.” This kind of discourse underlines the urgent need for accountability and reform in the digital advertising sphere, particularly from those platforms that have too long been allowed to operate without sufficient oversight.

When questioned about any sober reflections Google may have undertaken to reassess its advertising model’s possible contributions to misinformation’s spread, Storey assured that they routinely evaluate incidents for lessons learned. However, vague reassurances will not suffice; the tech industry must face tangible repercussions for its failures when its practices catalyze social turbulence.

As Google attempts to navigate the tricky terrain of misinformation and advertising ethics, the implications of these testimonies seem indicative of a larger issue that demands urgent political attention. The call for renewed vigilance and accountability is crucial, underlining the necessity for political messaging advocating for a robust and transparent regulatory framework – a message that resonates deeply with those who are increasingly frustrated with the current government’s failure to address the chaos and unrest brewing in our communities.

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

## References

* <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/en/article/anti-immigration-riots-are-escalating-in-the-uk-heres-how-misinformation-spurred-violence/klg25tml4> - This article corroborates the claim that misinformation about the Southport attacker's identity led to anti-immigration riots across the UK. It highlights how false claims about the attacker being a Muslim immigrant incited violence.
* <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2024-august-7/> - This report supports the assertion that disinformation about the Southport attacker fueled far-right protests. It mentions that false claims about the attacker being an undocumented asylum-seeker were spread online, leading to widespread unrest.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Southport_stabbings> - This Wikipedia entry provides details about the Southport stabbings and the subsequent riots, including how misinformation about the attacker's identity spread online and led to violence.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the source article itself, discussing the role of technology giants like Google in monetizing misinformation related to the Southport attacks.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/> - This link to the UK Parliament's Science and Technology Committee could provide context on the committee's activities, including sessions focused on misinformation, though specific details about the Southport case might not be available.