

Members of Parliament Urge Stronger Online Regulation After Southport Misinformation Sparked Violence

July 11, 2025

— Categories: General News



A cross-party group of Members of Parliament (MPs) has called for urgent tightening of the United Kingdom's online safety laws following a surge of dangerous misinformation shared on social media during the 2024 Southport killings. A new report from the House of Commons Science

and Technology Select Committee warns that current legislation fails to prevent the spread of false claims that can incite real-world violence.

Following the fatal stabbing of three children at a dance class in Southport last July, widely circulated online posts falsely claimed that a Muslim asylum seeker was responsible—naming an innocent individual in the process. Within hours, these posts had fuelled riots, including a violent attack on a local mosque. MPs said the rapid spread was amplified by algorithms designed to boost engagement, rather than ensure accuracy.

The report concludes that the United Kingdom's Online Safety Act (OSA) does not go far enough in holding platforms accountable. Currently, content that is false but not illegal falls outside the legislation. Committee Chair Chi Onwurah MP said platforms “actively curate” content through algorithmic promotion and should face financial penalties if they fail to demote or label harmful misinformation. Suggested fines could reach into the tens of millions of pounds in serious cases.

The Office of Communications (Ofcom), which serves as the United Kingdom's media regulator, is currently examining how platforms use recommendation algorithms. However, its remit under the Online Safety Act does not explicitly cover misinformation unless it crosses the threshold into illegal content. MPs warned that this loophole leaves a significant gap in public protection, especially during crises.

The report also highlighted the emerging threat of generative artificial intelligence (AI), which can create misleading content that appears highly authentic. MPs urged that all AI-generated content be clearly labelled and that companies profiting from viral misinformation face financial

penalties. It was recommended that proceeds from such fines be redirected to support victims impacted by online falsehoods.

Although the Online Safety Act introduced a new offence for knowingly spreading harmful disinformation, MPs noted that proving intent is extremely difficult. One individual was arrested for sharing inaccurate information about the Southport incident, yet did so out of genuine concern.

From a centre-right perspective, the committee's findings underscore the importance of safeguarding national cohesion and public order. Free speech should not be used as cover for chaos. Strengthening the Online Safety Act to ensure timely, proportionate enforcement is not censorship; it is common sense.