

Broadcasters demand law to halt Google fake news

Simon Duke

Three of Britain's largest broadcasters are calling on ministers to introduce new laws "as a matter of urgency" to stem the spread of disinformation on Facebook and Google.

In a joint letter published on *The Times* website today, the heads of ITV, Channel 4 and Sky say that "statutory regulation of online advertising is necessary, and urgent, given the scale of harm currently being caused to consumers".

Dame Carolyn McCall of ITV, Alex Mahon at Channel 4 and Stephen van Rooyen, Sky's chief executive for the UK & Europe, say that laws should be enacted urgently to hold online platforms and online advertisers to the

same "high standards" as television channels. The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the need for immediate reform, with fake news on the virus "posing a real risk to life", the broadcast chiefs argue. Facebook and Google should "bear the responsibility for the advertising they carry and liability for harmful or misleading ads" as broadcasters.

Legislation needs to spell out clearly how Google and Facebook are to protect consumers from harmful content and must be backed up with large fines, they suggest. Regulators must

Alex Mahon, Channel 4's boss, joined ITV and Sky to make the appeal



have the power to "meaningfully incentivise major online platforms to comply with the rules". The government needs to address not only the symptoms of the epidemic of disinformation but also its cause: the dominance of Facebook and Google in the digital advertising market, they add.

Divisive content is more likely to go viral and produce more advertising income. "The advertising models of the major online platforms reward and amplify many of the very types of content that the government wants to see tackled," the broadcasters say.

Last week the Competition and Markets Authority urged ministers to

create a digital regulator with powers to fine or break up Google and Facebook if the technology groups abuse their dominance in online advertising. The watchdog found that the duopoly, which controls 80 per cent of Britain's £14 billion digital advertising market, charged more than rivals for online ads.

New rules would have to "ensure that it is the platforms that bear the cost of compliance rather than those small businesses reliant on these dominant online advertising platforms. They can certainly afford it," the letter adds.

EXCLUSIVE ONLINE

"The opaque world of online advertising needs some strong light shining on it"
read the letter at [thetimes.co.uk](https://www.thetimes.co.uk)

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