

Reference: 01974555

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

1 May 2025

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning misinformation and disinformation.

We received this request on 18 March 2025 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the FOI Act"). We sought clarification of one of your questions on 31 March 2025 which we received on 1 April 2025.

Your request & our response

Please provide internal communications, emails, and meeting minutes regarding the definition of misinformation and disinformation as it pertains to the Online Safety Act.

Ofcom does not have a specific definition of misinformation or disinformation which we use for all purposes nor are those terms defined by the Online Safety Act. Whether content amounts to misinformation or disinformation turns on several factors including context and the right to freedom of expression.

However, you may be interested in our [Discussion paper: Understanding online false information in the UK](#), which provides some commentary on that terminology and the potential harms that may arise (see pages 7-9).

Please provide any internal guidance documents or reports created by Ofcom that outline how misinformation and disinformation are defined and identified.

We do not hold this information. However, you may be interested in the following published information:

[Understanding experiences of minority beliefs online](#)

[Misinformation: A Qualitative Exploration](#)

Please provide correspondence (including emails and meeting notes) between Ofcom and major social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) regarding the handling of misinformation and content moderation under the Online Safety Act.

Neither the Online Safety Act nor other legislation under which Ofcom carries out its functions defines 'social media' or 'social media platforms'. We therefore do not hold information categorised in this way.

We can confirm that we hold information relating to providers in scope of the Online Safety Act. However, we are unable to disclose this information as we consider that its disclosure is exempt under the FOI Act. In particular, under section 44 of the FOI Act, information is exempt from

disclosure if its disclosure is prohibited by or under any enactment. In this case, section 393(1) of the Communications Act 2003 (the “Communications Act”) prohibits the disclosure of information about a particular business, which we have obtained in the course of exercising a power conferred by, among other legislation, the Communications Act, unless we have the consent of that business or one of the statutory gateways under section 393(2) of the Communications Act is met, neither of which apply here. Section 44 is an absolute exemption under the Communications Act and does not require a public interest test.

Please provide internal communications and reports regarding Ofcom's response to misinformation related to the origins of COVID-19.

We do not hold this information. However, you may find the following pages on our website of interest:

[Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes](#)

[Broadcast standards during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

[Ofcom Making Sense of Media bulletin: November 2020](#)

[Cutting through the Covid-19 confusion \(Archived Content\)](#)

Please provide internal communications or policy changes that occurred following the Southport attacker case, specifically relating to public statements and media oversight.

Ofcom conducted an assessment of the role that online platforms played in the events surrounding the Southport attack. The conclusions of this assessment, including policy implications for Ofcom's work, were published in a letter from Dame Melanie Dawes to the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology. The letter is available [here](#).

The conclusions in the letter are based on communications with stakeholders that took place in the weeks following the Southport attack. We are withholding the information regarding our engagement with stakeholders as we consider that it is exempt from disclosure under Section 44 of the FOI Act. Under this section, information is exempt from disclosure if its disclosure is prohibited by or under any enactment. In this case, section 393(1) of the Communications Act 2003 (the “Communications Act”) prohibits the disclosure of information about a particular business, which we have obtained in the course of exercising a power conferred by, among other legislation, the Communications Act, unless we have the consent of that business or one of the statutory gateways under section 393(2) of the Communications Act is met, neither of which apply here. Section 44 is an absolute exemption under the Communications Act and does not require a public interest test.

Please provide data on the number of complaints received regarding misinformation since the enactment of the Online Safety Act.

We have interpreted your request to mean complaints relating to online content given your reference to the Online Safety Act. We have received 113 complaints regarding misinformation since the enactment of the Online Safety Act.

Please provide any internal reports or communications discussing patterns or trends in complaints about misinformation and how Ofcom responded.

We do not hold this information.

Please provide any internal communications or reports discussing the risk of double standards in content moderation or misinformation enforcement.

We sought clarification of your meaning of “risk of double standards” on 31 March 2025 and you responded on 1 April 2025, clarifying it as: *“By the risk of double standards I mean misinformation enforcement being enforced one sided, affecting private individuals rather than corporations that have a responsibility.”*

The Online Safety Act imposes duties on providers of online services only, and not private individuals, therefore Ofcom will not be enforcing against private individuals under the Act and we hold no information on that subject.

If the concern is about the way in which online services are enforcing their own Terms & Conditions on misinformation/disinformation against individual accounts, that is something for individuals to raise with the service in the first instance. Services have duties around how they implement content reporting, complaints procedures and freedom of expression under the Online Safety Act which Ofcom is responsible for enforcing.

Please provide any internal reviews or audits conducted to assess the accuracy of Ofcom's own public statements regarding misinformation.

We do not hold this information. However, Ofcom has a robust review process of our external communications.

If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).