Google Search can now help verify an image’s origins

Google is starting to roll out its new “About this image” tool, which aims to provide essential background information and context about images in Google Search. The feature was first announced at Google’s I/O developer conference in May, and now it’s rolling out to English users globally. You can access the feature from the three-dot menu that appears in Search and Google Images results. The search giant is also announcing updates to its Fact Check Explorer initiative and AI-powered Search Generative Experience.

The “About this image” tool is designed to show you the origins of an image, including its metadata (when available), and provide vital context about how it’s been described by news and fact-checking sites over time. So you might see the first time the image was indexed by Google Search, and metadata might offer details about whether the image was AI-generated. Google already offers an “About this result” feature to help users vet text-based sources.

a:hover]:text-gray-63 [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63 dark:[&>a]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray”>Image: Google
The release of the feature comes as huge amounts of disinformation are being spread about the Israel-Hamas war, often in the form of unrelated images being shared out of context. If someone goes looking for the origins of an image shared on social media, the idea is that Google’s tool should help provide them with answers.

Unfortunately, there’s no mention in today’s announcement of

being able to search using an image itself via Google Lens to access the “About this image” feature, which Google announced plans for earlier this year. It also said it would make the tool available via a right-click or long-press on an image in Chrome or by “swiping up in the Google App when you’re on a page and come across an image you want to learn more about.” When I asked, Google spokesperson Ned Adriance said these additional ways to access the tool are still in development and testing and will be released in the coming months.

While the “About this image” feature has the potential to be a helpful tool, it still relies on users proactively taking steps to verify the source of an image. But as we’ve seen in recent months, it’s all too easy to share or engage with misleading images on social media (like a swagged-out pope) without even stopping to think if it’s genuine. The “Hurricane Shark” photo, for example, has been going viral in the aftermath of hurricanes for over a decade, despite Google’s top search results for terms relating to the image labeling it as a fake.

As well as “About this image,” Google is also highlighting an improvement it’s making to its Fact Check Explorer. This tool launched in beta earlier this summer and lets you search for image fact-checks by either uploading an image or searching using its URL. Though still in beta, Google says it’s releasing a new API to help fact-checkers and journalists integrate Fact Check Explorer into more workflows.

Finally, Google says it’s also experimenting with using generative AI to offer more information on online sources within its AI-powered Search Generative Experience. These AI-generated descriptions will display in the “About this result” tool and are designed to fill in when existing sources like Wikipedia or the Google Knowledge Graph don’t have information on a smaller website.

Update October 25th, 2:00PM ET: *Article updated response from*

Google on additional, upcoming ways to access the tool.

https://www.theverge.com/2023/10/25/23931384/google-about-this-image-context-sources-fact-checking