

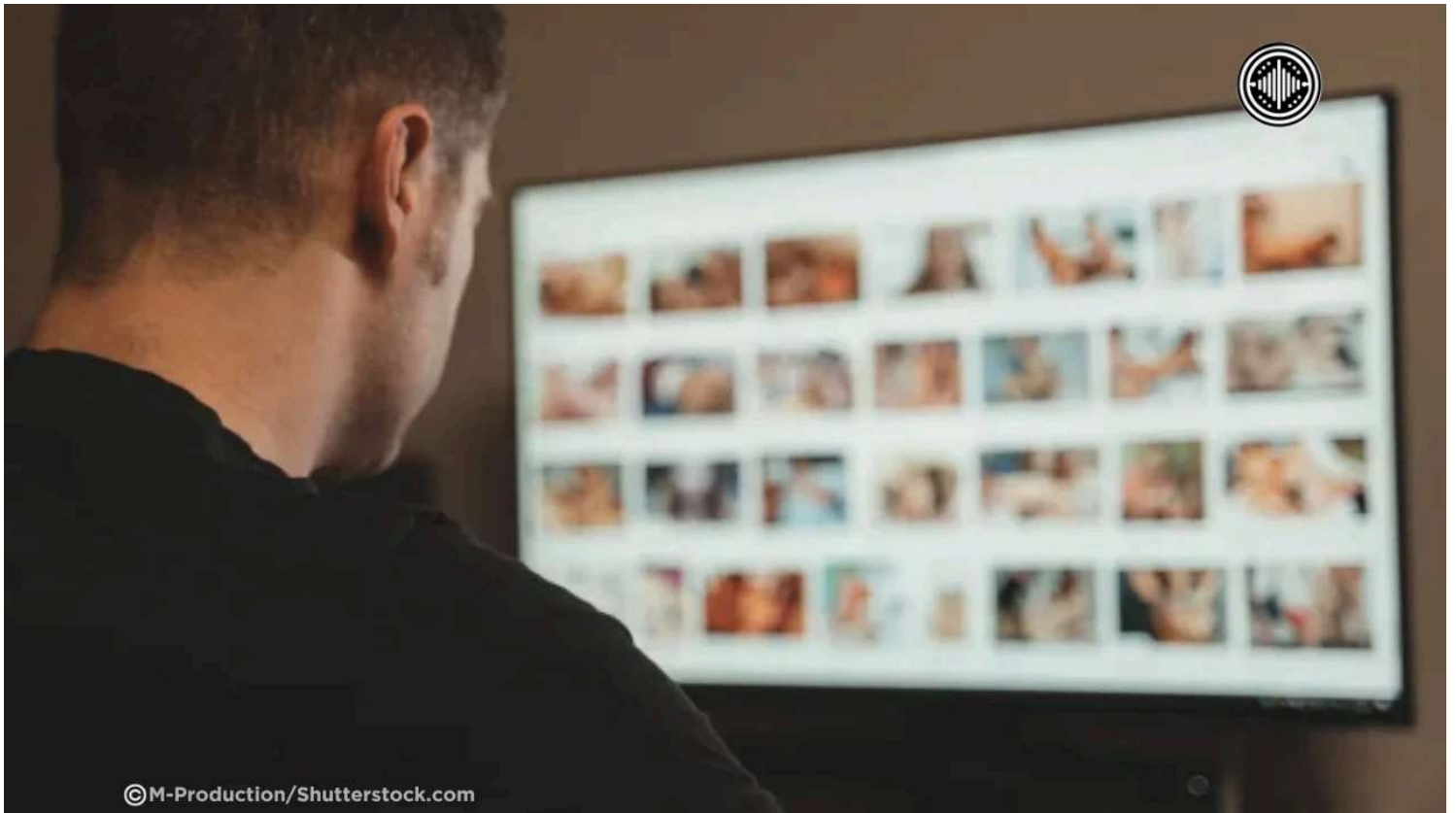
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Porn ID Law Triggers VPN Surge as UK Targets Child Protection

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– Categories: Crime



A sweeping new rule requiring pornographic websites to verify users' ages is now in force across the United Kingdom. As of Friday, adult sites must carry out stringent checks to confirm visitors are over 18, in a move aimed at shielding children from explicit online content. However, the new requirement has sparked concerns over personal data security and a likely rise in virtual private network (VPN) usage as users look for ways to get around the system.

The regulation, introduced under the Online Safety Act and enforced by the Office of Communications (Ofcom), mandates websites to apply “robust” age verification systems. Acceptable methods include credit card authentication, official photo ID scans, and facial recognition technology that estimates age using a selfie. Platforms that fail to comply could face hefty fines of up to £18 million or 10 percent of their global turnover.

Many popular adult websites such as Pornhub, Reddit, and others have already pledged to implement the new checks. Apps like Discord have introduced face or ID scanning options for U.K. users, while Bluesky is testing a variety of verification tools. Still, critics question whether users will actually submit personal data to access such sites, and if these systems are secure enough to handle the sensitive information.

Privacy Concerns Rise

Some users are already voicing deep unease. Tom, a man in his 20s, told the *BBC* he has been watching porn since he was a teenager but now fears the implications of handing over his data. “It’s not a question of if something will leak, but when,” he said, raising concerns about data breaches that could expose private viewing habits and even someone’s sexuality if they are not publicly out.

Shea, also in his 20s, watches porn daily but strongly opposes the idea of uploading identity documents. “Please upload a face scan of your ID and passport? No, thank you,” he said. “It’s just pushing people into the fringe of the extremes. It’s not stopping you from watching porn.”

These anxieties are shared by cybersecurity expert Chelsea Jarvie, who said that while the age checks “are effective at proving someone’s age and include controls to prevent circumvention,” many users remain reluctant to trust websites with such sensitive personal information.

VPNs are now being discussed widely as a workaround. While legal and commonly used for online privacy, Ofcom has stated platforms must not promote or facilitate VPN use to evade age verification. The regulator also advised parents to block VPN access on children’s devices, warning that doing so removes the protections offered by the Online Safety Act.

Despite this, Katie Freeman-Taylor of Internet Matters admitted that “VPN use is only likely to increase when measures come into force later this week.”

Age verification companies have defended their systems. Andy Lulham from Verifymy said adults can bypass the rules by verifying age on behalf of minors, but likened it to someone illegally purchasing an adult magazine for a child. “That would be extremely irresponsible,” he said.

As the July 25 compliance deadline approaches, whether the law will effectively reduce underage access or simply drive more users to the digital underground remains to be seen.