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## Britons Turn to VPNs in Drove as Age Verification Rules Spark Privacy Backlash

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Demand for Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) has surged across the United Kingdom as

citizens seek to sidestep newly enforced age verification checks under the Online Safety Act (OSA). The law, introduced to regulate access to online content deemed harmful or inappropriate for minors, is now raising significant concerns over privacy and personal freedoms.

Starting July 25, 2025, websites and platforms hosting adult content, as well as those featuring material related to self-harm, eating disorders, or suicide, are required to implement strict age verification methods. These include uploading sensitive identity documents or biometric data, measures that many view as excessive and intrusive.

Proton VPN, a Swiss-based privacy-focused provider, confirmed to *TechRadar* that it had seen a 1,400% hourly increase in sign-ups from UK users beginning at midnight on the day the law took effect.

The surge was sustained throughout the day, indicating ongoing interest in VPNs.

“We expect to see further increases over the coming days,” a Proton spokesperson said. “This clearly shows that adults are concerned about the impact universal age verification laws will have on their privacy.”

Data from Google Trends supports this shift, showing that searches for “VPN” have skyrocketed nationwide. Other leading VPN providers are likely experiencing similar surges, as Britons look to preserve online anonymity.

Ofcom, the UK’s communications regulator, has warned against using VPNs to bypass the rules. Speaking to the BBC, the agency emphasised that it would be illegal for platforms to promote VPN usage and cautioned parents that children using VPNs would not benefit from the intended protections.

However, critics argue the OSA’s broad implementation risks undermining civil liberties. Privacy experts have voiced concern that the law could usher in heightened surveillance and pave the way for data misuse or breaches. The requirement extends beyond adult sites to major platforms like Reddit, X (formerly Twitter), Bluesky, and other platforms like

dating apps.

While the intention may be to safeguard children, the reality is that a growing number of adults are choosing digital tools to reclaim their privacy. The OSA has inadvertently turned the UK into a proving ground for government regulation of the internet—raising difficult questions about freedom, security, and trust in the digital age.