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Reddit Enforces ID Verification for UK Users Under New Safety Law

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In a move to align with the UK's Online Safety Act, effective from July 2025, Reddit has rolled out mandatory age verification for its UK users. The legislation, driven by Ofcom's push for tighter online controls, compels digital platforms to shield minors from accessing inappropriate content, particularly material deemed mature or adult-oriented. This marks a significant shift in how social media platforms operate in the UK, raising questions about the balance between safety, privacy, and user freedom.

To comply, Reddit now requires UK users to verify their age using either a government-issued ID, such as a passport, or a selfie processed through Persona, a third-party identity verification service. This mirrors steps taken by other platforms, such as Discord, which recently adopted similar ID and facial scan measures. Persona, tasked with handling sensitive data, ensures privacy by retaining uploaded IDs or photos for only seven days and does not share them with Reddit. The platform stores only the user's verification status and birthdate, streamlining access to restricted content without repeated checks.

The system is designed to protect user privacy while meeting Ofcom's stringent requirements. According to a Persona spokesperson, "We do not access Reddit user data, including subreddit activity, ensuring a clear separation between verification and platform engagement." This approach aligns with standards set by the FIDO Alliance, which promotes secure, privacy-focused digital identity verification. Reddit's decision to outsource verification to a certified third party reflects a growing industry trend towards robust, privacy-conscious solutions.

For now, the requirement applies solely to UK users accessing mature content, but Reddit has hinted at expanding similar measures globally as other countries introduce comparable laws. Additionally, the platform is launching an optional global feature allowing users to submit their birthdate to tailor content and advertising to their age group. This move, while voluntary, suggests Reddit is preparing for a future where age-based restrictions become standard across jurisdictions.

Ofcom, the UK's media regulator, has made it clear that non-compliance with the Online Safety Act could lead to hefty fines—up to £18 million or 10% of a platform's global revenue. Research by Jumio, a digital identity firm, has previously exposed the weaknesses of self-declaration age checks, which many platforms relied on until recently. Ofcom's push for "robust" verification methods signals a departure from such lax practices, bringing online regulations closer to real-world standards for age-restricted services.

The Online Safety Act, championed as a tool to safeguard minors from harmful content, has stirred debate. Critics argue it places undue burdens on platforms and users alike, potentially stifling free expression. The current Labour government's enthusiasm for expanding digital oversight, including initiatives like the Gov.uk Wallet, underscores a broader trend towards tighter control over online spaces. Yet, the effectiveness of these measures in protecting young users without eroding privacy remains contentious.

Reddit's adoption of ID verification is part of a wider transformation in the UK's digital landscape. Other platforms, including adult entertainment sites, are following suit, implementing similar checks to meet Ofcom's standards. As the government doubles down on online safety, the implications for user privacy, platform operations, and content moderation will likely spark further discussion about the trade-offs between security and personal freedom.