UK government to introduce strict measures to protect children from accessing online pornography

All websites that display pornography will be legally required to verify the age of those accessing their content under a new provision of the Online Safety Bill.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Digital Minister Chris Philp has announced, on Safer Internet Day, that the Online Safety Bill will be significantly strengthened with a new legal duty requiring all websites that publish pornography to ensure their users are at least 18 years old. Age-verification technologies and third-party services are likely to be used to qualify a user for access.

The tightening of legislation comes as <u>research</u> finds that 61% of 11-13 year olds describe their first viewing of online pornography as mostly unintentional.

Chris Philp has said that "it is too easy for children to access pornography online. We are now strengthening the Online Safety Bill so that it applies to all porn sites to ensure we achieve our aim of making the internet a safer place for children."

A new legal duty

The new provision ministers are adding to the proposed legislation will require providers, who publish or place pornographic content on their

services, to prevent children from accessing that content. This will capture commercial providers of pornography as well as sites that allow user-generated content. Any pornography site accessible to people in the UK will be subject to the same strict enforcement measures.

The onus will be on the companies themselves to decide how to comply with the new legal duty. Ofcom may recommend the use of a growing range of age verification technologies available for companies to use that minimise the handling of users' data. The bill does not go as far as to recommend a specific solution, in order to enable the continued development and use of more effective technology in the future.

Ofcom, the independent regulator, will be given powers to fine websites up to 10% of their annual worldwide turnover, or block their UK accessibility, if they fail to comply with the legislation. Bosses of such sites could also be held criminally liable if they fail to cooperate with Ofcom.

Data protection

There are obvious concerns around data privacy; however, age verification technologies do not require a full identity check. Instead, currently available solutions include checking a user's age against details held by their mobile provider, completing a credit card check, or cross-referencing an identity against data held by the government.

All companies that use or build age verification technology are required to adhere to the UK's strong data protection regulations or face enforcement action from the Information Commissioner's Office.

Innovation in the AI-facial recognition space has been strong in recent years, with London-based online ID specialists _Onfido_ receiving £80M in funding from TGP Growth in 2020. Onfido provides simple and secure identity verification solutions for digital access and is currently helping to solve the issue of verifying real people in the digital world.

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