



UK Under-16 Social Media Ban

Policy Impact, Implementation Implications
and a Child-First Alternative

Investor Briefing | June 2026 | Zootom Ltd



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The UK is creating an age-gated social media market



Policy Announced

On 15 June 2026, the UK Government announced its intention to prohibit social-media access for under-16s. Legislation expected before Christmas 2026.



Market Shift

This is not a content-filtering change — it creates an age-gated market and raises the value of purpose-built, supervised digital environments for children.



Zootom Positioning

Zootom can position itself as a compliant-by-design alternative: age-appropriate discovery, parent oversight, education, games and moderated community.



What Has Been Announced

IN SCOPE

- Social-media services blocked from offering access to under-16s
- TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, X, YouTube
- Harmful features restricted for under-18s: live-streaming, stranger contact
- Romantic/intimate AI companion chatbots intended for 18+

OUT OF SCOPE

- Messaging services: WhatsApp, Signal
- Child/education products: YouTube Kids, Google Classroom
- Status: announced policy — not yet final operational law
- Exact service list and enforcement detail subject to legislative process



Why the Policy Matters



Government Rationale

Reduce exposure to harmful content, bullying, addictive design and inappropriate contact. Shift responsibility from families to platforms.



Public Mandate

9 in 10 parents support a ban. Two-thirds of young people support restrictions on at least some platforms for under-16s.



Regulatory Context

The Online Safety Act already places child-protection duties on platforms. Ofcom's child-safety codes required risk assessments and protective action in 2025.

Sources: GOV.UK fact sheet, 15 Jun 2026; Ofcom age assurance guidance, updated 27 Jun 2025



Public Mandate

The public and young people strongly support action

90%

of parents support
a social media ban

GOV.UK Fact Sheet

66%

of young people support
restrictions on platforms

Youth Survey Data

2027

target year for
protections in force

Government Timeline



Evidence Base: Children's Digital Exposure



Ofcom Measurement

Ofcom's Children's Passive Online Measurement study tracks representative UK online behavior for ages 8-14 across smartphones, tablets and computers — evidence infrastructure that supports policy decisions.



Design Risk Focus

Policy is driven by exposure and design risk, not simply screen time: recommender systems, public interaction, stranger contact, live-streaming and data practices are central concerns.



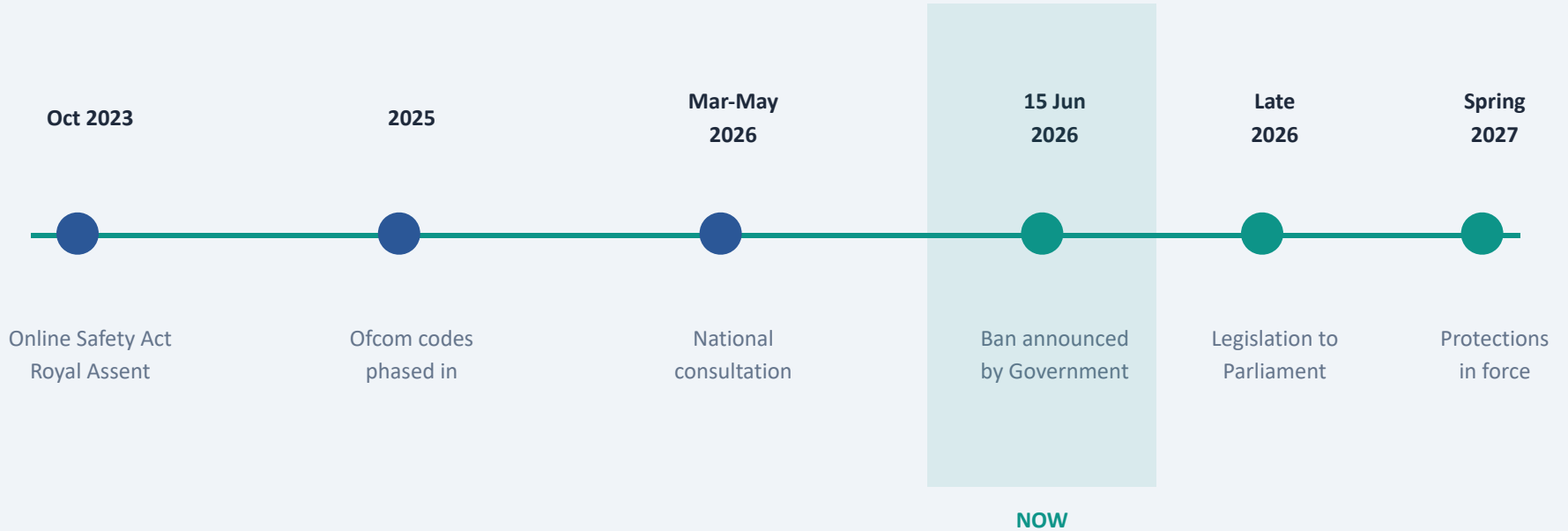
Implementation Risk

A ban may reduce access to mainstream platforms but does not automatically remove risk. Substitution to unregulated services, VPN use and private channels remains a key concern.

Sources: Ofcom Children's Passive Online Measurement, updated 21 May 2026; UK Government fact sheet



Policy Timeline





Stakeholder Impact

How the ban reshapes the landscape for each group



Children

Less exposure to open social networks; potential loss of community and peer support if alternatives are weak.



Parents

Clearer default boundary; still need tools for supervision, digital literacy and safe communication.



Platforms

Age assurance, service classification, product redesign, audit trails and enforcement risk become strategic.



Schools

Greater need for safe, curriculum-aligned spaces and verified communication channels.



Investors

A new category emerges — trusted, age-appropriate digital ecosystems with demonstrable safeguards.



Children & Parents



For Children

- Reduced exposure to harmful content, bullying and stranger contact
- Potential loss of community, creativity and peer support
- Need for positive, age-appropriate digital alternatives
- Risk of displacement to unregulated platforms



For Parents

- Clearer default boundary for child internet use
- Less burden of individually negotiating platform access
- Still need tools for supervision and digital literacy
- Demand for parent-controlled environments increases



Platforms, Schools & Investors



Platforms

Age assurance, service classification, product redesign, audit trails and enforcement risk become strategic requirements. Non-compliance carries regulatory and reputational cost.



Schools & Youth Organizations

Greater need for safe, curriculum-aligned digital spaces and verified communication channels. EdTech demand rises as social platforms become restricted.



Investors & Founders

A new category emerges — trusted, age-appropriate digital ecosystems with demonstrable safeguards. First movers in compliant design gain structural advantage.



Implementation & Risk Matrix



Age Assurance

Age estimation, ID checks or third-party verification; must minimize data collection and provide privacy-preserving routes.



Coverage Clarity

Classification of platforms and exemptions must be clear; ambiguous products create compliance uncertainty.



Circumvention

VPNs, false age declarations and migration to smaller services may weaken outcomes for children.



Equity

Avoid excluding children who rely on online communities, accessibility tools or educational content.



Measurement

Track harmful-contact reports, exposure incidents, complaints, age-assurance error rates and displacement indicators.



Illustrative KPI Framework

Policy monitoring metrics for management use

Metric	Baseline	Target	Owner
Under-16 accounts age-gated	Establish 2026	≥95% verified	Platforms / Ofcom
Stranger contact reports (minors)	Establish 2026	Downward trend	Platforms / Ofcom
Parent confidence in child safety	90% support	Maintain / improve	Government
Age-assurance error rates	Establish	Published & declining	Providers
Displacement signals (VPN migration)	Establish 2026	Monitored, mitigated	Ofcom / Govt

Targets are illustrative, not official Government targets. Source: GOV.UK fact sheet, 15 Jun 2026.



Zootom: Strategic Opportunity

A compliant-by-design alternative for the age-gated market

- ✓ Designed for under-16s with parental monitoring as core premise
- ✓ Well aligned to emerging child-first regulatory direction
- ✓ Protected environment: education, audiobooks, games, moderated social
- ✓ Age-appropriate AI and parent controls built in
- ✓ Serves parents, schools and partners seeking a positive destination

POSITIONING

"A safer, supervised digital world where children can learn, play and create — with parents in control."



Product Proposition



Educational Content

Curriculum-aligned learning resources and audiobooks/e-books for age-appropriate discovery.



Safe Games

Curated, age-banded games in a controlled environment with no predatory monetization.



Age-Appropriate AI

Transparent AI boundaries with no behavioral advertising to children and safe recommendations.



Moderated Social

Community features with pre-moderation, no unsolicited stranger contact and trusted-adult controls.



Parent Controls

Full parental oversight: time controls, content filters, activity reports and consent management.



Privacy by Design

Minimal data collection, auditable consent, age bands and privacy-preserving verification.



Compliance-by-Design: Foundation

1 AGE ARCHITECTURE

- Verified parent/guardian onboarding for 6 - 12 age group
- Child profiles with no name mentioning
- Minimal-data collection
- Auditable consent flows
- Privacy-preserving age verification

2 SAFETY ARCHITECTURE

- Pre-moderation and post-moderation workflows
- Reporting and escalation systems
- Trusted-adult controls
- No unsolicited stranger contact by default
- Safeguarding lead and incident response



Compliance-by-Design: Execution

3 PRODUCT

- Activity tracker
- Time controls and safe recommendations
- No behavioral advertising to children
- Transparent AI boundaries

4 GOVERNANCE

- UK child-safety risk assessment
- DPIA and safeguarding lead
- Transparency reporting
- Independent safety testing

5 GO-TO-MARKET

- Parent trust campaign
- School partnerships
- UK compliance advisory board
- Pilot with measurable outcomes



Commercial Logic

Why a compliant alternative is a market opportunity, not just a regulatory response

1

New Market Category

Trusted, age-appropriate digital ecosystems become a distinct market segment with regulatory tailwinds.

2

Parent Demand

90% of parents support restrictions — creating massive demand for verified, safe alternatives they can trust.

3

First-Mover Edge

Early movers in compliant design gain structural advantage as legislation narrows the competitive field.



Conclusion & Decision Asks

The proposed ban makes child safety a market-structure issue, not a feature checklist.

IMMEDIATE DECISIONS

- Appoint UK regulatory counsel
- Create a compliance gap assessment
- Define age bands and moderation SLAs
- Prepare a UK pilot and impact dashboard

Success is not simply access for children — it is demonstrably safer, developmentally appropriate participation.



References & Sources

1. UK Government, "Social media to be banned for under-16s...", 15 Jun 2026
2. UK Government, "Fact sheet: New rules to protect children online", 15 Jun 2026
3. Ofcom, "Age assurance duties under the Online Safety Act", updated 27 Jun 2025
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5. UK Government, Online Safety Act collection
6. Mehta et al. (2026), "Online Safety Regulation Increases Privacy Risk", arXiv:2606.05273

All URLs accessed 23 Jun 2026. Use official sources for policy decisions.

Policy status current as of 23 Jun 2026. Regulatory alignment is an assessment, not legal advice.