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Visa, Mastercard Pressure Game Platforms After Complaint

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Global payment processors Visa and Mastercard are facing scrutiny after independent gaming platforms Steam and Itch.io removed hundreds of adult-themed games from their services. The action followed pressure from financial providers in response to a campaign led by the Australian anti-porn advocacy group Collective Shout.

Earlier this month, Collective Shout issued an open letter urging companies such as Visa, Mastercard, Stripe, and PayPal to stop supporting transactions on platforms hosting explicit

content. The group alleged that some titles included graphic material involving sexual violence and inappropriate themes.

In response, Itch.io temporarily removed all not-safe-for-work (NSFW) games from its platform, citing the need to protect its payment processing capabilities. The company said the decision was made quickly to prevent broader disruptions to its operations.

“This is a time-critical moment for Itch.io,” a spokesperson stated. “We had to act urgently to protect the platform’s core payment infrastructure.”

The platform acknowledged the move was abrupt and said it was unable to notify game developers in advance. It also denied user reports that previously purchased games had become inaccessible.

Steam, one of the world’s largest gaming platforms with an estimated 132 million monthly users, also removed several adult-themed games. While Steam did not issue a formal statement, changes to its content library were reported in the days following the campaign.

Melinda Tankard Reist, director of Collective Shout, was recently appointed to the advisory board for the government’s age assurance technology trial, ahead of new online safety measures set to begin in December. The group has previously campaigned on issues related to advertising and online content regulation in Australia.

Collective Shout stated that the objective of its campaign was to address specific content that violated the policies of payment platforms, not to prompt a blanket ban on all adult content. Itch.io has since indicated that it will implement new compliance features to allow developers to relist games that align with processor guidelines.

A petition opposing payment processor influence over online content has gained over 147,000 signatures. Public figures, including Elon Musk, have acknowledged the campaign online, though no official position was taken.

Collective Shout defended its actions as aligned with corporate responsibility values and stated that the content of concern often extends beyond national borders.

Payment processors Visa and Mastercard declined to comment, while PayPal reiterated its commitment to enforcing policies that prohibit illegal activity on its platform.