

Adult games platform policy tracker, 1994 to 2026

V. Wright

Veilwright Studio · hello@veilwrightstudio.com

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Abstract. This report describes a dataset of 45 dated, sourced events that changed what adult video games can be sold, how they can be paid for and who can see them, from the founding of the Entertainment Software Rating Board in September 1994 to the Android developer verification rule of September 2026. The events cover store rules, membership platforms, card networks and payment processors, age verification requirements, court rulings and ratings decisions. Each event is recorded with its date and the precision of that date, the actor, the type of event, the region, a one-sentence summary and one public source. The dataset is published as CSV and JSON under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence. This report states the method, defines the fields, summarises the data, sets out its limits and lists every event with its source.

1. Purpose

The record of how adult games have been restricted, permitted and paid for is scattered across platform announcements and news reports. Each event was reported on its own, and anyone writing about the subject has had to rebuild the sequence from scratch. This dataset puts the sequence in one place, in a form that can be sorted, filtered and cited.

2. Method

Events were collected from the platforms' own announcements where they exist and from dated press reports and reference works where they do not. An event is included when all three of these are true: it changed, or publicly sought to change, what adult games may be sold, how they are paid for, or who may see them; it can be dated to at least the year; and there is a public source for it. A few events outside games are included because they explain what followed. Nothing is inferred: a row states what its source states.

3. Fields

Field	What it holds
id	A stable identifier built from the date, the actor and the event type
date	The date in ISO form: YYYY-MM-DD, YYYY-MM or YYYY
precision	How exact the date is: day, month or year
actor	The company, body or group that acted

Field	What it holds
actor_type	The kind of actor, such as store, membership platform or card network
event_type	The kind of event, such as restriction, relaxation or payment change
region	Where it applied
summary	One sentence on what happened
source_title, source_url	The source and its address
source_type	Primary if the source is the actor's own announcement, otherwise secondary

4. Summary of the data

The dataset holds 45 events. 19 of them fall in 2025, and no other year has more than 4. 9 events rest on a primary source and 36 on a secondary source. The counts below are counts of recorded events. They are not a measure of how much content was affected, which no platform has published.

Type of actor	Events
Store	20
Membership platform	8
Ratings board	4
Court or legislature	3
Card network	3
App store	2
Streaming platform	1
Payment processor	1
Regulator	1
Campaign group	1
Industry body	1

Type of event	Events
Restriction	11
Rule	8
Payment change	7
Law or ruling	4
Relaxation	4
Statement	4
Regional block	3
Campaign	2

Type of event	Events
Age verification	2

5. Limits

The dataset is not complete. It records the events the studio has found and sourced, and changes that were never announced or were reported only in forums are missing. It leans on English-language sources, so events in Japan are thinner than they should be. Most rows rest on secondary sources, and older rows in particular rely on Wikipedia; where a row rests on a press report or a reference work, the date and wording are that source's. The concentration of events in 2025 partly reflects how closely that year was reported. Dates vary in precision. The dataset does not show cause: two events being close in time does not establish that one led to the other. It is not legal advice.

6. The events

Date	Who	What happened	Source
16 September 1994	ESRB	The Entertainment Software Rating Board is founded. Its original ratings include Adults Only (AO).	[1]
20 July 2005	ESRB	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is re-rated from M to AO after hidden sexual content is found. Walmart, Target, Best Buy and Circuit City stop selling it.	[2]
June 2006	ESRB	The ESRB begins requiring publishers to disclose content that is on the disc but not normally reachable.	[1]
27 June 2011	US Supreme Court	In <i>Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association</i> the Court strikes down a California law restricting sales of violent games to minors and holds that video games are protected speech.	[3]
November 2012	IARC	The International Age Rating Coalition is established, giving digital storefronts a free questionnaire that produces ratings for several boards at once.	[1]
March 2014	Patreon	Creators of sexual content can no longer be paid through PayPal on Patreon.	[4]
May 2015	Twitch	Twitch bans the streaming of AO-rated games.	[5]
July 2016	Patreon	PayPal payments return for adult creators on Patreon.	[4]
October 2017	Patreon	Patreon introduces new restrictions on adult content, followed by protest from adult creators.	[4]
June 2018	Steam	Valve announces it will allow everything on Steam except content that is illegal or trolling.	[6]
June 2018	Patreon	Patreon suspends some adult content creators.	[4]
September 2018	Steam	Steam introduces content filters and the Adult Only Sexual Content descriptor, hidden by default.	[7]
September 2018	Steam	The first fully uncensored adult game on Steam is withheld from 28 countries by its developer.	[8]

Date	Who	What happened	Source
2019	Steam	Steam is reported not to show adult-only games to users in China.	[9]
10 December 2020	Mastercard and Visa	Mastercard and Visa stop card payments to Pornhub after a newspaper report about unlawful videos on the site.	[10]
22 December 2020	Steam	Steam blocks adult-only games for users in Germany, reportedly because its age check does not meet German requirements.	[11]
August 2021	OnlyFans	OnlyFans announces a ban on sexually explicit content, citing its banking partners, and suspends the plan within a week.	[12]
15 October 2021	Mastercard	Mastercard's tightened standards for adult content merchants take effect: age and identity verification of everyone depicted, written consent, and review of content before publication.	[13]
11 May 2023	DLsite	DLsite places a temporary restriction on publishing AI-generated content.	[14]
15 February 2024	DLsite	DLsite lifts its restriction on AI-generated content, with a revised guideline and a separate space for selling it.	[14]
March 2024	DLsite	Creators on DLsite report being asked to change the descriptions of their works to satisfy card companies.	[14]
April 2024	DLsite	DLsite's operator announces that its platforms have suspended payments by Visa, Mastercard and American Express.	[14]
February 2025	US Senate	The Fair Access to Banking Act is introduced. It would bar card networks and large banks from refusing lawful customers for reputational reasons. Not enacted.	[15]
3 February 2025	Apple	The first native adult content app for the iPhone becomes available in the EU through an alternative marketplace permitted under the Digital Markets Act.	[16]
March 2025	Patreon	Patreon's guidelines allow nudity and suggestive imagery on pages marked Adult/18+, with consent requirements.	[4]
10 April 2025	Steam	The game No Mercy is withdrawn from Steam worldwide by its developer after a petition by Collective Shout and its removal in the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada.	[17]
27 June 2025	US Supreme Court	In Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton the Court upholds Texas law HB 1181, which requires age verification on websites where more than one third of the content is sexual material harmful to minors.	[18]
July 2025	PayPal	PayPal stops being available on Steam for most currencies after one of its acquiring banks ends its processing of Steam transactions. Valve links the decision to concerns about content.	[19]
July 2025	United Kingdom	The Online Safety Act's duties to protect children from harmful content take full effect, requiring highly effective age assurance on services that allow sexually explicit content.	[20]
11 July 2025	Collective Shout	Collective Shout publishes an open letter asking PayPal, Mastercard, Visa, Paysafe, Discover and JCB to stop processing payments on Steam and itch.io.	[21]
16 July 2025	Steam	Steam adds a rule against content that may violate the rules and standards of its payment processors, card networks and banks, and removes a set of adult games, mostly with incest themes.	[22]

Date	Who	What happened	Source
17 July 2025	Valve	Valve confirms it was notified that certain games may violate its payment processors' rules and says it is retiring them to avoid losing payment methods.	[22]
24 July 2025	itch.io	itch.io deindexes all adult content from its browse and search pages, naming Collective Shout's campaign to its payment processors as the cause.	[23]
28 July 2025	itch.io	itch.io says it is reaching out to other payment processors that are more willing to work with adult content.	[23]
29 July 2025	IGDA	The International Game Developers Association says it is alarmed by vague enforcement and asks for written guidelines, reasons for each action, an appeals process and transparency reports.	[24]
31 July 2025	itch.io	itch.io reindexes free adult content. Paid adult content stays deindexed. The post quotes Stripe as unable to support sexually explicit content because of its banking partners.	[25]
1 August 2025	Mastercard	Mastercard says it has not evaluated any game or required restrictions on game platforms. Valve replies that processors cited Mastercard's rule 5.12.7 and risk to the Mastercard brand.	[26]
1 August 2025	GOG	GOG and several publishers launch FreedomToBuy.games, giving away 13 games for 48 hours in protest at legal games being withdrawn from sale.	[27]
29 August 2025	Steam	Steam begins requiring UK users to store a valid credit card on their account before seeing pages for mature games, to comply with the Online Safety Act.	[28]
6 October 2025	DLsite	DLsite launches a payment method linked to accounts at the Japanese digital bank Minna no Ginko, bypassing card networks.	[29]
19 December 2025	DLsite	The group behind DLsite announces its own JCB-branded credit card.	[30]
March 2026	SubscribeStar	SubscribeStar changes its terms to ban several fictional themes, including incest and rape, then tells creators it will rework the wording.	[31]
16 March 2026	Patreon	Patreon publishes its finalised policy update: explicit work must stay behind the paywall, characters must appear unmistakably adult, and incest, bestiality and sexual deepfakes of real people are banned everywhere.	[32]
9 September 2026	Steam	Steam begins asking Australian users for a valid Australian credit card before showing games classified R18+, citing the Age-Restricted Material App Distribution Services Code.	[33]
30 September 2026	Google	Android developer verification takes effect: apps must be registered by a verified developer to install normally on certified Android devices.	[34]

Licence and citation

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