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# Exploring the link between Smartphone Use, Violence, and Social Sharing in 50 case studies

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## Abstract

The increasing prevalence of violence recorded and shared through smartphones in today's digital age has raised concerns about the underlying reasons driving such behaviour. However, the lack of experimental studies and scientific evidence exploring the relationship between smartphone use and acts of violence has hindered our understanding of this phenomenon. To bridge this gap, the present study aimed to investigate the potential link between smartphone usage and the perpetration of violence, specifically focusing on incidents where violent acts were recorded and shared publicly.

Given the challenges associated with directly observing such occurrences and the limitations of self-reporting due to social desirability bias, the study adopted a novel approach by analysing major news outlets. Cross-referencing the most recent cases involving 50 episodes of violence accompanied by smartphone-recorded videos, the research aimed to gain insights into the role and outcomes of content dissemination. The findings revealed a concerning trend, indicating a rise in violence perpetrated with the aid of smartphones, where subsequent sharing on social networks and instant messaging platforms contributed to the viral spread of such content. This study provides valuable insights into the connection between smartphone usage, violence, and the sharing of violent content. The implications of these

findings highlight the need for further research and the development of tools to detect and address violence-related issues in the digital space. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of responsible social media usage and collective efforts to curb the spread of violent content and foster a safer online environment.

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## 1. Introduction

Violence and aggression are intriguing subjects within the realm of Social Psychology, a branch of psychology that focuses on understanding how an individual's environment, exhibited behaviors, and interpersonal relationships interact (Bushman, 2016). In today's digital age, the prevalence of smartphones and the internet has extended the scope of violence, providing new avenues for its expression (Powell & Henry, 2017). The combination of social psychology and technology highlights the need to examine the intricate interplay between human behavior and smartphone-mediated violence, fostering a deeper comprehension of the evolving complexities of human interactions in the digital era (Knihová, 2018).

Violence exists in the media in various forms (Cantor, 2000):

- *"Entertaining" Violence:* Found in cartoons or videos, for example, where the protagonist undergoes a dangerous test of bravery but without any consequences (Funk et al., 2004);
- *Beating Videos* (smack cam, slap cam, happy slapping): Particularly common among teenagers who film themselves being beaten or injured and then share the videos on their cell phones or the internet. Thus, in addition to physical pain, victims experience humiliation when they see the violence shared online and among friends. In the final video, it is often impossible to tell if it is a staged act or a genuine beating;
- *Extremist Violence:* Posts, videos, or musical works containing propaganda content from far-right, far-left, or Islamic ideologies (Olteanu et al., 2018);
- *Incitement to Hatred:* Posts or comments containing discriminatory content or hostility towards individuals or groups (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). Hate incitement is often found on social networks, instant messaging, forums, or video portals.

- *Violent Games*: Representations of violence are common in online videos and games. The peculiarity of this case is that, thanks to the latest technologies, the images become increasingly realistic (Kirsh, 2011);
- *Violent Films*: Violence is often present in the film industry in thrillers, action movies, war films, or horror films (Anderson et al., 2003). The latter has a particularly interesting effect on young people;
- *Violent Songs and Music Videos*: Music plays an important role in helping young people find their identity, belonging, and emotional experiences. Songs and music videos may contain material that incites or glorifies violence in various genres, such as rap, black or heavy metal, punk, and goth. In this context, songs often represent a direct or indirect incitement to violence.
- *Violent Pornography*: So-called hardcore pornography includes pornographic images of sexual acts involving minors and animals (rape, assault, sexual abuse, sexual coercion with violence, or violations of physical integrity) (Mestre-Bach et al., 2023). (Illegal) pornography is easily found on the internet, arousing the curiosity of many teenagers;
- *Real Violence and Snuff Videos*: One can find images of real violence (crime, war, terrorism) or victims of natural disasters, especially in the news and newspapers (Noble, 2021). Additionally, there are circulating videos, such as snuff videos containing scenes of murders (though it is unclear if they are real). Islamic groups constantly publish films of executions and torture.
- *Self-inflicted Violence*: Thanks to the opportunities provided by digital media, self-harming behavior among young people (e.g., cutting the skin) has reached a new level. They also use forums and instant messaging services to incite each other in case of anorexia, bulimia (Mento et al., 2021) or suicidal thoughts (Mento et al., 2020).

The violence perpetrated with the help of smartphones is increasing and their spread becomes nowadays easily viral. These videos are in fact posted on social networks and shared on instant messaging apps and platforms (Kubravi, 2021). Unfortunately, these actions are often reinforced by hundreds of supporters who, in some cases, incite the perpetrator of the violence to continue (Ward, 2002).

Understanding the intricacies of violence in the digital age, particularly smartphone-mediated violence, presents researchers with formidable hurdles. Two predominant methods for studying this phenomenon, direct observation, and self-reporting with direct questions, encounter significant obstacles (Dahlberg et al., 2005). Direct observation proves challenging due to ethical constraints and the impracticality of witnessing real-time violent acts. On the other hand, self-reporting is marred by the social desirability bias, where participants may alter responses to conform to societal norms or avoid judgment. Additionally, the scarcity of effective tools for detecting violence and the limited success of explicit measures further hinder comprehensive data collection and analysis (Lindén & Moshfegh, 2023). In light of these challenges, researchers are compelled to devise innovative and ethical methodologies to unveil the enigmatic nature of smartphone-mediated violence. By overcoming these research barriers, we can foster a deeper comprehension of the evolving landscape of violence, enabling the development of evidence-based strategies to address this pressing issue in today's technologically interconnected world.

Given the lack of experimental studies and scientific evidence linking the use of smartphones to acts of violence, with concomitant recording and sharing of content in public, a pilot study is necessary in order to identify what may be the main

reasons underlying the act of recording violence. Based on the aforementioned challenges, the primary aim of this study was to investigate the connection between smartphone-mediated violence and its subsequent sharing via major news outlets. To achieve this objective, the research adopted a specific method of analyzing 50 recent cases of violence reported in the media. By cross-referencing incidents where violence was explicitly captured and shared through smartphone-recorded videos, the study aimed to examine uses and motivations.

## 2. Methods

An internet-based search was conducted on major Italian newspapers using keywords such as "violence recorded with smartphones" and a combination of words like "beat/beating", "assault/assaulting", "violence/violating", "threaten/threatening", "injure/injuring", "insult/insulting", "film everything with smartphone", "publish video", "spread video", "post everything on social media" and "video ends up on social media." These cases were tabulated in a table, where the first column indicates the place and date of the event, the second column summarizes the reported episode of violence, and the third column represents a classification of the motivation behind smartphone use and video use.

## 3. Results

The following table presents the results of the search, with 50 cases of violence involving the use of smartphones in Italy.

**Table 1** - Case Studies (N=50) of Smartphone-Related Violence

Place and date	Episode of Violence	Smartphone role
<b>Bologna, 14 January 2017</b>	<p><b><i>"Choose to be with me or I'll show those photos! Ex-boyfriend blackmails former girlfriend."</i></b></p> <p>A 27-year-old man from Bologna has been sentenced to 2 years and 2 months for attempted sexual violence against his 23-year-old ex-girlfriend. He threatened to show those photos and videos to her new boyfriend or publish them on the internet if she didn't engage in sexual acts with him. The girl reported everything to the police, and they managed to arrest him through a fake appointment.</p>	Photos and videos were found inside their smartphones. The man had sent the photos and videos to her via chat to intimidate her. The material was later seized by the police, including smartphones, PC, and a digital camera.
<b>Ragusa, 30 March 2017</b>	<p><b><i>"A young boy forced to dance naked at the bus stop"</i></b></p> <p>In front of a school, a boy was forced to dance by his peers who had a Bluetooth speaker connected to a smartphone. Later, the boy was surrounded by his peers and forced to undress while continuing to dance, as others filmed and posted everything on Instagram, mocking him. Despite not being the first time he had experienced such mistreatment, he decided to inform the school, parents, and law enforcement.</p>	The bullies posted the event on Instagram.
<b>Ravenna, 27 October 2017</b>	<p><b><i>"A 19-year-old girl from Ravenna, unconscious, was filmed being subjected to violence with a smartphone: two individuals arrested."</i></b></p> <p>Two young men [a 26-year-old Roman and a 27-year-old Senegalese] abused a 19-year-old girl who was in an alcohol-induced state of confusion in a restroom. One of the men forcibly abused her while the other filmed the abuse, encouraging violence."</p>	The violence was filmed with a smartphone, and it was the same boy who spoke to the victim about the video. After recalling the incident, the girl reported it to the police, leading to the arrest of the two boys.

<b>Rome, 6 December 2017</b>	<p><b><i>"Rape in the heart of Rome, the scene recorded with a smartphone: 3 arrested"</i></b></p> <p>Two Romanians and a 32-year-old Moldovan man raped a 30-year-old Ukrainian girl found naked and violated near the Baths of Caracalla. Security cameras captured one of them holding a cellphone and recording the assault while the other two were abusing her.</p>	Thanks to the security cameras on Via Ercole Rosa, it was observed how the violent event was recorded with a cellphone by one of the 3 perpetrators.
<b>Santa Maria a Vico, 3 February 2018</b>	<p><b><i>"Teacher disfigured in the face by a student. 32 stitches."</i></b></p> <p>Teacher F.D.B. is in the hospital with 32 stitches, from the lower part of her eye to the upper part of her mouth. Despite being dedicated to her work, she blames herself, saying, 'I should not have pushed that boy, I tried to encourage him to do better, but I couldn't manage.' The student suddenly pulled out a small knife from his pocket, leaving the teacher no time to defend herself from the attack. The boy has been detained by law enforcement.</p>	The violence was recorded by students on their smartphones
<b>Lecce, 12 April 2018</b>	<p><b><i>"A 55-year-old man from Adrano sentenced to 10 years for sexually abusing a 12-year-old girl between 2016 and 2017."</i></b></p> <p>The 55-year-old man from Adrano threatened the 12-year-old girl by sending videos to her smartphone, threatening to publish them if she didn't comply.</p> <p>Intimidated and ashamed, the girl couldn't find the courage to talk about it with her mother. It was the mother who discovered the videos on her daughter's phone and contacted the authorities, leading to the man's arrest.</p>	Abuses were recorded through a smartphone and threatened to be published online.
<b>Castellammare, 26 May 2018</b>	<p><b><i>"12-year-old girl raped by four boys. Confesses to being recorded on a smartphone."</i></b></p> <p>The 12-year-old girl from Gragnano was raped by four boys: two aged only 14, and the other two aged 15 and 16. They are accused of deceiving the girl, who believed she was going to a party.</p>	The violence was recorded on a smartphone. The phones and computers were seized and analyzed for exchanged photos and videos.
<b>Vicenza, 29 September 2018</b>	<p><b><i>"Do not let him escape! Students against the teacher"</i></b></p> <p>A 16-year-old student insults the teacher. The teacher tries to escape by grabbing his bag, but he is cornered by the students shouting, "Block him!" "Do not let him get away!" The student who committed the violence has been expelled from the school.</p>	The video of the incident is sent through the WhatsApp platform to parents and teachers (colleagues of the victim). The footage goes viral."
<b>Viterbo, 29 April 2019</b>	<p><b><i>"A CasaPound councilor and a member of the movement assault and rape a woman: arrested"</i></b></p> <p>F.C. (21 years old) and M.L. (19 years old, a military member) belonging to the neo-fascist movement CasaPound, assaulted and raped a 36-year-old woman after first getting her drunk and then abusing her despite her resistance.</p>	The incident came to light through videos recorded by the suspects during the violence.
<b>Empoli, 14 August 2019</b>	<p><b><i>"Raped by 3 boys in a car. Everything recorded with a smartphone."</i></b></p> <p>The girl filed a report after being raped by 3 boys in a car who were supposed to drive her home. They stopped the car in a secluded area and raped her.</p>	The violence was recorded with a smartphone, and the devices were seized by the police. Additionally, there are chats between the victim and her friends where she narrates the incident.
<b>Cefalù, 29 November 2019</b>	<p><b><i>"A 14-year-old with mild disability mocked and attacked: three reports"</i></b></p> <p>Three 15-year-old boys have been reported for stalking, violence, threats, and defamation. The young boy had been subjected to months of humiliation and psychological as well as physical violence. While one bully acted</p>	The entire incident was documented in a video shot by the bullies themselves and later

	been subjected to months of harassment and psychological, as well as physical, violence. Video and song clips, another filmed, encouraging and inciting the bully not to stop.	memories and later shared on social media.
<b>Catania, 15 February 2020</b>	<p><b><i>"They beat up classmates and post the video online"</i></b></p> <p>Two girls, aged 11 and 14, have been reported for assaulting their classmates after leaving middle school, while filming everything with a smartphone and posting the video on social networks. The victims were hospitalized. The two girls were reported to the Postal Police, but the younger one is not fully accountable due to her young age.</p>	The videos were taken with a smartphone and shared on social networks. Additionally, messages were sent via chat, where the younger girl threatened the victim, saying, "If you report me, you'll have to leave Catania..."
<b>Licata, 26 January 2021</b>	<p><b><i>"Three disabled boys beaten and mocked, while everything is filmed with their mobile phones; three people from Licata arrested."</i></b></p> <p>One of the victims was allegedly beaten with a stick, tied with adhesive tape, and left on the street until a passing woman freed him. The three targeted disabled individuals were reportedly humiliated with paint on their faces and ridiculed on social media. At times, the victims were tied to a chair with a bucket on their heads and beaten. Kicks, punches, beatings, and death threats. A.C. [26 years old], G.S. [23 years old], and A.M.S. [36 years old] have been imprisoned.</p>	The whole incident was filmed with smartphones and spread online, on social media, with mocking titles.
<b>Rome (Cinecittà), 4 February 2021</b>	<p><b><i>"You're the teacher's spy! Boy beaten by seven classmates."</i></b></p> <p>Boys between the ages of 13 and 15 have beaten a 15-year-old boy with sticks and pointed a knife at him, calling him "the teacher's spy." The boy was accused of confessing the names of those who were disrupting the class to the teacher.</p>	They recorded everything with a smartphone and uploaded the video on social media.
<b>Roma, 2 May 2021</b>	<p><b><i>"A 17-year-old boy was brutally beaten by a group of boys, and the entire incident was recorded with a smartphone."</i></b></p> <p>The boy was attacked by a group of 15-year-olds who accused him of sending messages to a girl on Instagram. The perpetrator of the violence appears to be the girl's boyfriend. They cornered the boy at the metro exit and attacked him while the girl watched.</p>	The whole incident was recorded with photos and videos and published in chat groups.
<b>Siena, 30 - 31 May 2021</b>	<p><b><i>"A Genoa football player sexually assaults a 21-year-old woman from Rome in a group."</i></b></p> <p>Genoa football player M.P. has been sentenced to 6 years in prison for group sexual assault on a 21-year-old woman from Rome. Initially, the two of them had gone away together, but they were later joined by other people. The woman resisted, but her efforts were in vain. The football player allegedly offered the young woman 25,000 euros for her silence, which she refused.</p>	The scene was recorded by some smartphones.
<b>Torre Annunziata (NA), 22 June 2021</b>	<p><b><i>"A man attacked because he is gay: there were 7 of them"</i></b></p> <p>A terrible attack on a 34-year-old man who reported the incident to the Carabinieri while remaining anonymous out of fear of possible consequences. There were around 23 people when 7 of them surrounded the victim's car. The girl inside the car managed to escape, but the 34-year-old was left paralyzed as they punched and slapped him, and even extinguished cigarettes on his arm.</p>	A third person recorded the incident with a smartphone, and the video went viral.
<b>Rome, 30 June 2021</b>	<p><b><i>"A gay couple kisses on the bus: attacked"</i></b></p> <p>It happened on the 309 bus line when the couple exchanged a kiss, and a verbal attack broke out. "You gays are disgusting," was said by a passenger.</p>	The entire scene was recorded with a cellphone. In the video, it is evident that one of the two boys tries to defend himself from the attack, but this only leads to a cascade of insults until the couple's



		stop.
<b>Terracina (Lazio), 27 October 2021</b>	<p><b><i>"Group violence captured on video: one suspect denies, while the other remains silent"</i></b></p> <p>Two Indian men have been arrested on charges of group sexual violence with extortion and possession of pornographic material. They sexually abused a woman who was promised to another Indian man. The victim, fearing rejection by her fiancé, did not report the incident. The defendants recorded some scenes, threatening to disclose everything to her fiancé and family. The girl had attempted suicide. One of the suspects denied committing violence, while the other chose not to respond.</p>	The videos were recorded by the defendants who were threatening the girl.
<b>Catania, 10 December 2021</b>	<p><b><i>"Abuse and blackmail over a video taken with a smartphone"</i></b></p> <p>The victim, a 20-year-old girl, reported four boys of her age who forced her to have sexual relations with them. One of the four was the girl's boyfriend. The girl was threatened with the release of a compromising video of her taken in a garage.</p>	The video was recorded by the four boys under investigation.
<b>Milano, 5 March 2022</b>	<p><b><i>"Beating of a Security Guard at McDonald's, and they sign themselves: Four Trappers arrested."</i></b></p> <p>In the video, the most violent scene is not visible. It occurred immediately after, when they managed to attack one of the security guards, overpowering him in numbers, and striking him with kicks to the chest, hitting his ribs.</p>	The four Trappers had made a video of the aggression at McDonald's, which was later posted on the Telegram channel "MilanoBellaDaDio."
<b>Ancona, 10 May 2022</b>	<p><b><i>"A girl brings her phone for repair. Threatened to publish explicit videos with her boyfriend."</i></b></p> <p>Two Bangladeshi brothers (aged 19 and 25), owners of a mobile phone store, are arrested for revenge porn and sexual violence against a 20-year-old woman who had explicit videos on her phone with her boyfriend. They threatened to publish the video if she did not engage in sexual relations with them.</p>	The video was found on the victim's phone.
<b>Perugia, 13 May 2022</b>	<p><b><i>"Perugia: Kicked and Punched, 14-Year-Old Ends Up in Hospital"</i></b></p> <p>A group of peers attacked her in Perugia. Investigations into the assault are underway, and the young girl is hospitalized due to various injuries sustained. Once again, as in several incidents that have occurred in recent months, the attack was recorded with mobile phones by some present teenagers. The videos show the fourteen-year-old being kicked and punched, dragged by her hair by some peers, while other boys around encouraged the violence, until someone shouts to stop and takes her away.</p>	A couple of videos ended up on Instagram, then deleted, and in the chats of young people from Perugia.
<b>Taranto, 26 May 2022</b>	<p><b><i>"Threatened over explicit photos"</i></b></p> <p>When the girl was 13 years old, she sent explicit photos to her best friend, who, in turn, forwarded them to one of the two brothers who committed the crime. From that moment, the girl was forced to endure various abuses. She was threatened with the dissemination of the images and forced to engage in sexual acts with him. After years of silence, the girl managed to confide everything to her parents, freeing herself from this unbearable burden.</p>	The girl sent videos to a male friend, who then shared them with other boys. She is now being threatened by these boys with the use of these photos.
<b>Messina, 10 June 2022</b>	<p><b><i>"A girl from Messina kicks and punches her peer out of jealousy."</i></b></p> <p>A girl from Messina physically attacked another girl of her same age, and the alleged reason behind it was jealousy. The victim has reported the incident to the authorities.</p>	The event was recorded by two other underage peers.
<b>Reggio Calabria, 1st August 2022</b>	<p><b><i>"A brawl during the night, twenty against one. Beaten to a pulp."</i></b></p> <p>A group of boys surrounded a peer of theirs, kicking and punching him, and also using a helmet and a chair to strike him. The incident took place on the seafront of Reggio Calabria. The young man did not file a complaint,</p>	The scenes of the fight were captured on a smartphone and circulated

August 2022	probably out of fear, and when questioned by investigators, he didn't provide any further information about the incident.	on social media.
Florence, 2nd August 2022	<b><i>"Four men rape and film a woman in Florence."</i></b> A 35-year-old Canadian tourist, apparently intoxicated, was sexually assaulted by four men. Two of them filmed the incident. The woman reported the crime and identified her attackers.	The violence was filmed by the perpetrators using a smartphone.
Vittoria (RG), 19 August 2022	<b><i>"They shave a boy's head to the skin and film it."</i></b> A baby gang composed of 5 boys aged between 13 and 15 years old, blocked a young boy and beat him before shaving his head completely. After the incident, the boys fled the scene.	The episode was recorded by the boys using a mobile phone.
Rome, 7 October 2022	<b><i>"A 14-year-old girl slapped in class, classmates record everything, but no one intervenes."</i></b> The teenager is cornered against the wall, and while one boy films (avoiding capturing the aggressor's face but only the victim's), the other repeatedly slaps her. Everyone watches, but no one steps in. Due to the screams, the teacher re-enters the classroom, and the girl points out the one who attacked her.	A 12-second video of the incident was uploaded to the internet and has gone viral.
Rome, 15 October 2022	<b><i>"Child pornography, abuse on 2-year-old daughter recorded with a smartphone."</i></b> A 33-year-old man from Rome has been arrested by the Milanese and Roman law enforcement [CNCPO: Postal and Communications Police Service] for aggravated sexual violence against his 2-year-old daughter. The arrest occurred after a home search.	The abuses were recorded with an iPhone at home and sent to members of an international online pedophile community. The criminal hid behind fictional nicknames.
Pompeii, 16 October 2022	<b><i>"A crying child slapped and punched by bullies."</i></b> Fellow children, including the son of a Camorra boss, bullied a young child with unimaginable violence, taking turns to kick and slap him, while filming the whole event. They showed no mercy even in the face of the poor child's tears.	The incident was recorded using a smartphone.
Bari, 20 October 2022	<b><i>"Sexual violence on WhatsApp in the province of Bari."</i></b> Four boys, two of whom are the perpetrators, record a sexual assault on a 13-year-old. The audio captures the young boy's crying.	The scene is filmed using a smartphone and circulated on WhatsApp.
Frosinone, 22 October 2022	<b><i>"Boyfriend forces his girlfriend to have sexual intercourse with him, beating her while threatening to publish the video on the web."</i></b> Girl forced to have sexual intercourse for 7 hours with her boyfriend, who would hit her whenever she tried to resist. All of this has been confirmed by the medical report and a rapid investigation.	The violence was recorded through the man's smartphone, leading to his arrest.
Rovigo, 26 October 2022	<b><i>"Students shoot a teacher with an air pistol."</i></b> The students fired two shots at the teacher, injuring her in the eye and head. In the video, the first shot can be heard, but the teacher does not react and returns to the blackboard to write something in the register. The second shot occurs with the cameras off. The students have self-reported the incident, and the teacher has not pursued legal action.	The students recorded everything using a smartphone placed near the teacher's desk and then spread the video in chat groups.
	<b><i>"A video shot by some students at a high school in Pontedera, in the province of Pisa, captured a teacher who was punched, not by one who was laughing at him."</i></b>	A video shot by some students at a high school



<b>Pontedera, 3 November 2022</b>	The 14-second footage captured the situation of discipline that ended with the teacher's outburst of anger. The teacher suddenly turned towards the student behind him, who was allegedly mocking him, and hit him with a punch to the stomach before standing up to confront him defiantly. The 14-second footage captured the situation of indiscipline that concluded with the teacher's outburst of anger. The teacher suddenly turned towards the student behind him, who was allegedly laughing at him, and hit him with a punch to the stomach before standing up to face him with a challenging demeanor.	in Pontedera, in the province of Pisa, captured a teacher who threw a punch, not at someone who was laughing at him.
<b>Chieti, 5 November 2022</b>	<b><i>"Kills his grandfather and films everything with a smartphone."</i></b>  A 15-year-old boy with psychiatric issues was under the care of his 78-year-old maternal grandfather. The grandfather asked the grandson to put down the phone, leading to the suspect attacking him with kicks, punches, chairs, and a vacuum cleaner while filming the scene. The assailant continued to brutalize the defenseless body on the ground. The grandfather's death was caused by cardiorespiratory failure due to severe blood loss from a post-traumatic hepatic laceration caused by the beating, along with cranial trauma, multiple rib fractures, and multiple lumbar fractures.	Homicide filmed with a smartphone and uploaded to WhatsApp.
<b>Artena (Lazio), 9 November 2022</b>	<b><i>"After the murder of a young man, videos of torture on birds and sheep were found on the suspects' phones."</i></b>  M.B. and his brother, who were investigated after the murder of Willy Monteiro Duarte (beaten to death in September 2020), are also being investigated for animal cruelty and the killing of birds. Their father is accused of killing a sheep. All of these acts were filmed with smartphones. This is indicative of high levels of social violence.	The evidence was found inside the suspects' mobile phones.
<b>Milan, 14 November 2022</b>	<b><i>"A girl was raped in a motel in Milan. The three culprits of the event have been arrested."</i></b>  The 23-year-old of Haitian origin was a victim of abuse by three Albanian boys aged 21, 23, and 29. The victim had made arrangements with one of the three boys for paid sexual services at a hotel. Instead, the young man took her to a motel where his brother and cousin later joined. The young woman was held captive all night until the afternoon of the next day when she managed to escape and report the incident to the authorities.	The rape was filmed with a smartphone.
<b>Naples, 2nd December 2022</b>	<b><i>"Disabled girl beaten for likes."</i></b>  A 13-year-old disabled girl was aggressively attacked, beaten, hair pulled, kicked, and punched for likes on social media. The girl was accused of liking a boy who was being courted by the girl who assaulted her. She was deceived into meeting up with them.	The incident was recorded and uploaded to the internet
<b>Acireale (CT), 27 December 2022</b>	<b><i>"He beats the woman for months and records her during their intimate encounters while threatening her."</i></b>  A 60-year-old man from Giarre has been convicted of stalking a 58-year-old woman. The woman reported the man because he repeatedly displayed violent behavior towards her, causing injuries to her lip, etc., which were followed by apologies and tears from the man.	Without the woman's knowledge, the man filmed their intimate moments, using them to threaten her by showing the photos in a square that she often frequents.
<b>Foggia, 18 January 2023</b>	<b><i>"Used like a mannequin: raped and drugged by three men."</i></b>  The 13-year-old girl was blocked and forced by three men (aged between 20 and 21 years) to endure groping, insults, spitting, and threats. The young girl appears to have smoked hashish offered by her attackers in a garage. She admitted, 'I just hoped they would finish soon,' also stating that there were about ten boys who would see her undressed. During a search of the garage, the police found traces of drugs and the victim's bra hanging as if it were a trophy.	Photos and videos of the suffered violence were recorded using a smartphone.
<b>Latina, 18 January 2023</b>	<b><i>"A teacher is struck with a backpack by students: they film everything and post the video on social media."</i></b>  At least five teachers are said to have been targeted in this game, and one of them was directly hit by a backpack.	A game, or rather, a challenge on social media. So much so that the video

<b>January 2023</b>	backpack worn on one shoulder by one of her students, who pretended it was an accidental bump while the others recorded the scene to publish it on social media. The teacher collapsed to the ground after the violent impact with the student's backpack. The students who made the video allegedly threatened the victim teacher, a substitute teacher awaiting stabilization, exploiting the precariousness of her contract."	created by the students ends up on the channels.
<b>Modena, 25 January 2023</b>	<b><i>"Teacher reported for sexual harassment: all taken by a student".</i></b>  The Modena Public Prosecutor's Office hypothesizes a solicitation of a minor. The videos show the teacher an equivocal attitude toward underage children. The principal of the institute denounced this. The intervention of the police has avoided the possibility that the videos ended up on the web and on social media. The teacher has been suspended.	Video taken by a student.
<b>Todi (Umbria), 27 January 2023</b>	<b><i>"A 17-year-old girl raped and filmed in a shelter home."</i></b>  A 26-year-old man from Gambia sexually assaulted a 17-year-old girl in a room at the Caritas facility in Todi. He has been accused of raping the girl on at least five occasions, taking her to a room where he could do as he pleased.	The violence was filmed using a smartphone.
<b>Bolzano, 28 January 2023</b>	<b><i>"Group sexual assault resumed with phones"</i></b>  Three Kasovar boys were investigated for sexual assault against a tourist. In addition to the videos found on the suspects' phones, there are also videos taken by the hotel's cameras.	Videos taken with the smartphones of the suspects
<b>Rimini, 31 January 2023</b>	<b><i>"Rimini, recorded while abusing their dog"</i></b>  In the video, taken by the neighbor, you see the owners of the dog, a Maltese puppy, who tie the balcony railing to the dog, leaving it suspended in the void. The owners declare that their interest was to educate the little dog.	The neighbor shot videos and put them to the attention of law enforcement.
<b>Scalea, 31 January 2023</b>	<b><i>"Aggression goes around the Web"</i></b>  A group of teenagers kicks and punches a 40-year-old in Scalea, in the province of Cosenza.	Violence resumed with the smartphone and sent to WhatsApp.
<b>Marano di Napoli, 9 February 2023</b>	<b><i>"Deputy beaten by two women. Video shock"</i></b>  The deputy of the Greens - Left, F.E.B. denounced the violence suffered against him by three women who beat and humiliated him. The man was slapped, kicked and punched by two women while the third filmed the whole. The violence was not only from a physical point of view but also from a psychological point of view as the women pushed the man out of the window while beating him.	Violence is recorded with the smartphone by one of the three protagonists of the violence. They threatened the man to put the video on TikTok.
<b>Montefusco, 22 May 2023</b>	<b><i>"Kill a kitten and post a video on TikTok"</i></b>  A young man from Montefusco, killed a kitten for fun saying the following words: "You must die a slow and painful death". The young man threw the poor puppy in the air. The young man recovered his face while performing the act of violence, the local police department and I will be able to identify the culprit in a very short time.	Post a video on the TikTok platform while performing the act.
<b>Milan, 24 May 2023</b>	<b><i>"Woman assaulted by 4 agents. Harassed children"</i></b>  With batons and pepper spray, a woman was pinned to the ground by four local police officers. The agents try to block her by pulling her arm, hitting her several times with a baton on the head and body spraying her with spray. The woman tries to defend herself and when the 4 agents seem to move away they return to the woman who is still on the ground. She tries to repair her head and is hit again on the side. She raises her hands in sign of surrender but is again pulled and taken with a baton before being handcuffed and taken away. The person in question is a trans-sexual Brazilian who had suitors, as reported by a nearby school who had seen her undressed and screamed about having HIV. She would also harass some children. She had already been blocked and put in a service car and then fled and assaulted the officers. A complaint by the city against the	The video shot from a building was published and distributed by the website "Milano bella da Dio".

agents is not excluded.

### 3.1 Results of the analysis

The collection of cases provided paints a distressing picture of various acts of violence, harassment, and cruelty that have occurred across Italy. These events span from 2017 to 2023 and are scattered throughout different regions, including Northern, Central, and Southern Italy, and the islands.

The incidents range from physical assaults, sexual violence, bullying, harassment, animal abuse, and even instances of child pornography. These actions represent a wide spectrum of harmful behaviors. The victims in these incidents include children, teenagers, adults, and even animals. The perpetrators, on the other hand, include peers, classmates, students, teachers, strangers, and even law enforcement officers. Both male and female individuals are involved as victims and perpetrators.

The common theme is the use of smartphones to record these incidents. Perpetrators and bystanders often capture these events on their phones, and in some cases, videos are shared on social media platforms, which can lead to the incidents going viral. Technology, particularly smartphones, plays a significant role in these incidents. Many of the events were captured on mobile devices, often shared on social media platforms, and sometimes even used as tools of intimidation or blackmail. Videos and images are shared on social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and more. This amplifies the reach and impact of these incidents, leading to public outrage and potential legal consequences for the perpetrators. Through a qualitative analysis of the reported cases, three main motivations were identified:

1. *Disclosure and virality*: Videos recorded with smartphones are published online, often on social media, and can become viral, rapidly spreading and reaching a wide audience. Virality can amplify the effect of the event, attracting people's attention and contributing to awareness or emotional reactions.
2. *Threats and coercion*: In some cases, smartphones are used as tools to threaten or intimidate victims. For example, compromising videos or photos may be sent for the purpose of blackmail, aiming to control certain behavior or prevent victims from reporting the abuses suffered.
3. *Reporting and evidence*: Smartphones can be used to collect evidence of events, such as abuses or violence. The videos, photos, or messages recorded on the smartphone can be used as evidence in investigations and legal proceedings, helping victims to report the crimes suffered and seek justice.

It is possible that these are not the only motivations or categories representing the purpose for which smartphones are used during violence. An example is represented by those who share recordings of violence to seek justice, for instance, to identify the perpetrators. This could lie on the boundary between using smartphones to gather evidence for reporting and sharing images on platforms to gain consensus.

## 4. Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the connection between smartphone-mediated violence and its subsequent sharing on social media. To achieve this objective, the research adopted a specific method of analyzing 50 recent cases of violence filmed and reported in the media. The relationship between violence and smartphone use is a complex and ever-evolving topic. On one hand, excessive smartphone use can lead to a range of problems, such as addiction (Pivetta et al., 2019), anxiety, depression (Elhai et al., 2019), and social isolation (Rizzo et al., 2015), which may contribute to an increased likelihood of violent behaviors (Alia-Klein et al., 2020; Schiller et al. 2022). Furthermore, smartphone use can be associated with violent behaviors, such as cyberbullying and the dissemination of inappropriate content, which can cause psychological and social harm to victims. On the other hand, smartphones can also provide a means to contact help in dangerous situations and report instances of violence. In general, smartphones can be used to perpetuate violent behaviors, although in some cases, they can also be used as a tool to seek help and report violence. However, it is important for individuals to use smartphones responsibly, and for authorities to take action to prevent and address violent behaviors.

Hence, it is important to note that smartphone use is not the primary cause of violence. Violence is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by various factors, including economic and social circumstances, culture, mental health, and individual predisposition. The act of recording violence with smartphones can have various psychological aspects, both for the person recording and the victim. Regarding those recording violence, there may be several motivations. Some individuals may do it to document the incident as evidence for authorities, while others may do it to publish the video on social media to gain attention and views. Still, others may do it as a form of revenge or intimidation towards the victim (Short et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, there have been several reported cases involving violence and smartphone use. One of the most well-known cases is cyberbullying, where victims are attacked online through social media or other digital platforms. Online bullying can cause psychological and social harm to victims and may have negative consequences for mental health (Stevens et al., 2021). For the victim, being recorded during an act of violence can cause shock, shame, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Krystal & Krystal, 2015). Additionally, becoming a public figure on the internet can lead to negative social consequences, such as the spread of offensive comments or loss of privacy. In general, recording violence with smartphones can have a negative impact on the mental health and psychological well-being of those involved. It is important to consider the right to privacy and dignity of individuals and to address the issue of violence effectively, without resorting to methods that may worsen the situation. For example, we found cases of sexual violence where the aggressor recorded their actions with a smartphone and then shared the video on the internet. This behavior is considered a form of revenge porn, exposing the victim at a public level (Bates, 2017). There have also been cases of domestic violence where the aggressor controlled the victim's phone, limiting their freedom and access to support resources.

According to the literature, the lack of empathy can be a contributing factor to violence (McPhedran, 2009). Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, and thus, it is essential for building healthy and respectful relationships. Those lacking empathy may have difficulties understanding the pain and suffering of others, making them less inclined to prevent or avoid violence (Mento et al., 2016). In some cases, lack of empathy, risk-taking, and low fear of

punishment may be associated with personality disorders, such as antisocial personality disorder. Furthermore, lack of empathy can also be related to other issues, such as aggressiveness, impulsivity, tendencies towards manipulation, and dishonesty, i.e., maladaptive schemas (Tremblay & Dozois, 2009). These behaviors can contribute to perpetuating situations of violence and abuse.

## 5. Conclusions

Limitations of this study must be also pointed out. First, the study analyzed only 50 recent cases of violence, which might not be representative of the entire spectrum of smartphone-mediated violence incidents. Second, the study discussed the relationship between smartphone use and violence but did not establish a causal link. Other confounding variables that could contribute to violent behaviors were not fully controlled.

To our knowledge, this is the first study focused on technological aspects (smartphone-related violence and violent video use and motivations) providing valuable insights and a research starting point. By identifying patterns and psychological aspects, the present study contributes to understanding the multifaceted nature of smartphone-related violence. Moreover, the recognition of smartphones as tools for both perpetuating and combating violence emphasizes their dual role. This study underscores the importance of responsible smartphone use, awareness, and intervention strategies to address and prevent violent behaviors.

The case studies underscore the necessity of fostering a culture of respect, empathy, and accountability. Comprehensive education on respectful behavior, both online and offline, is crucial to preventing and addressing such cases. It is a call to action for society, institutions, and individuals to collectively work towards promoting safety, well-being, and ethical use of technology, while holding perpetrators accountable for their actions and advocating for the rights and dignity of all beings affected by violent behaviors.

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